

# Studies on Fluency and Interaction in Developing the Students' Speaking Skill

Abdullayeva Shahnoza Akbaraliyevna

Namangan Institute of Engineering and Technology, Teacher of "Foreign languages" Department, Namangan, Uzbekistan

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## Abstract

The article is about the problem of improving the efficiency of teaching oral speech in foreign language lessons, which is directly related to the gap between theory and practice and the passive nature of learning activities, while the educated active person capable of continuous self-education, self-development and self-improvement become the absolute value of society. In my article, I would like to talk about the teacher's communication with students in a foreign language in the classroom and after lesson hours, the communication of students in the classroom under the guidance of a teacher, and the communication of students during extracurricular work in a foreign language.

**Keywords—** :speaking, abilities, skill, exercise system, activities, oral speech, development, grammar, communicative, approach, individuality, motivation, task, formation.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The current research study is based on three main constructs. The concepts speaking fluency, interaction and interactional tasks are outlined according to the views of theoreticians from both international and national contexts. The following diagram illustrates in a general way the existing relationship among the constructs selected for the development of this study and the problem researched:

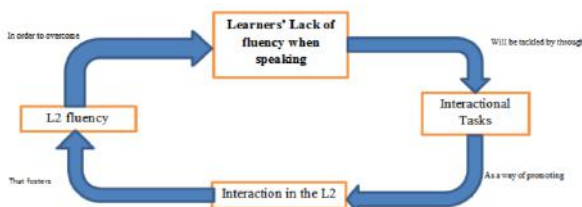


Figure 1. Problem under study and constructs

The concept of fluency has been extensively discussed by different authors in the field of ELT throughout the years and to some extent, it could be considered as a somewhat difficult term to define. Brumfit (1984) sets out fluency as the ability to use the language in a natural way. That is, similarly to how

native speakers of a language communicate in their daily lives. Such naturalness is put forward clearly by Fillmore (1979) in his description of a fluent speaker as an individual who is able to "...fill time with talk", spend a little time thinking "what to say next or how to phrase it" effectively in terms of successful communication. An alternative view on the definition of the concept fluency can be found in Johnson (2009) who regards it as "the skill of being able to do many things correctly at the same time" (p. 270). A more complete and straightforward definition of this concept is put forward by Bailey (2005), who defines fluency as "the capacity to speak fluidly, confidently, and at a rate consistent with the norms of the relevant native speech community". The present research study is based on this definition in the extent it describes the characteristics the teacher-researcher aimed to develop in the participants.

Firstly the ability to speak without making any major or unnecessary pauses, and secondly, to build the necessary confidence to make themselves understood, even with native speakers of the target language. However, Jones' definition of fluency as "being able to express yourself despite the gaps in your knowledge,

despite the mistakes you're making, despite not knowing all the vocabulary you might need" (2007, p. 18) appeals as well to the issue under study in the present paper due to the characteristics of the participants in terms of their language proficiency level. In spite of the undeniable effect that fluency work has on the enhancement of the learners' speaking skill and their ability to communicate naturally, this key component seems to be given a secondary role in the contemporary communicative language classroom. In order to tackle this, Nation (2008) puts forward a set of conditions in order to develop fluency in speaking. Firstly, he considers that the main focus has to be "communication". Similarly, Klippel stated that "...foreign language teaching should help students achieve some kind of communicative skill in the foreign language..." (1984, p. 4). This means that rather than assessing students' oral competence in terms of the accuracy of their utterances, what is really needed is to provide them with meaningful practice and strategies in order to engage in real communicative situations. Finally, learners need to be assigned very easy tasks, to be under some pressure in order to "perform at a higher than usual rate" and more importantly, "lots of practice". (2008, p. 56).

Previous studies on the issue of oral fluency have found out its importance in the process of acquisition of a second language in terms of its differences with accuracy, learners' beliefs, and the judgment of what a fluent speaker is (e.g. Rossiter 2009; Brand & Götz 2009; Seifoori & Vahiri 2011) except Rossiter et al. (2010) where types of fluency instruction are described in order to be integrated in L2 classes. Other studies highlight the significance of developing speaking fluency in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (e.g. Yang 2014) and the use of multimedia-based programs for developing EFL speaking fluency skills (e.g. Diyyab, Eman Aly, Abdel-Haq, Eman Muhamad & Aly, Mahsoub Abdel-Sadeq 2013). In the local Colombian context there are a few research studies focused on fluency in relation to the use of self-directed speaking tasks (e.g. Jimenez 2013), self-assessment (e.g. Duque & González 2014), and Web 2.0. tools (e.g. Castiblanco 2014). Nevertheless, no significant prior research about how to promote oral fluency in the L2 through interactional tasks can be found.

As a consequence of this, the present research paper points up the key role of interaction in the L2 as a means of enhancing oral fluency in the local Colombian context. Rossiter, M., Derwing, T., Manimtim, L. & Thomson, R. (2010) call into question how oral fluency has become a

neglected component of contemporary language instruction. This fact is of particular interest having in mind the communicative focus that such instruction claims to have on the paper, but when it comes to the real world it is evident how the focus of instruction is on the formal aspects of the language rather than on promoting effective communication. This issue could be attributable to factors such as limitations in terms of the syllabus, lack of teachers' experience on fluency instruction and even lack of learners' interest in fluency work due to a personal interest on getting good marks, passing exams or just learning the grammar of the language. However, as Segalowitz, Gatbonton, and Trofimovich (2009) point out, instruction is crucial to the process of developing oral fluency since it may ultimately raise learners' awareness of its importance and how to include it effectively into their language learning process. To this extent, helping learners enhance their speaking fluency turns into a matter of primary importance in the EFL classroom. Leaver, Ehrman & Shekhtman (2005) point out the relevance of fluency when learning a foreign language in terms of the effect it has on communication. This is particularly noteworthy in many EFL classrooms where students with an acceptable command of language (in terms of grammar use and vocabulary) fail to carry out tasks that demand real communication due to fact they have no fluency (2005). Rossiter et al., who in a research study conducted in Canada found out that "many ESL classes offer little or no explicit, focused instruction on the development of oral fluency skills" (2010, p.585). This problem is particularly evident in aspects such as the learners' tendency to speak-word-by-word and their long and infrequent pauses, unfilled pauses, and lack of pauses at meaningful transition points. As Thornbury (2005) states, when a speaker is characterized by the previously mentioned features, it does not matter how accurate their utterances are in relation to pronunciation and the use of grammar since in the view of native speakers he will not be considered a fluent one. In terms of working with fluency in the ELT classroom there have been varied approaches and techniques different from interactional tasks addressing fluency work in the classroom. One of them is known as the 4/3/2 technique which is described by Nation (1989): A learner spends a few minutes preparing a talk on a given topic. During this time the learner just thinks of what she will talk about and does not make notes. Then the learner pairs up with another learner and she talks on that topic for four minutes. The listener does not interrupt and does not ask questions. The listener's job

is just to listen. Then they change partners.

The speaker now talks again on the same topic to the new listener, but this time she has only three minutes to give the same information. When this has been done the learners change partners again. The speaker gives the same talk for the third time to her new partner, but this time she only two minutes. So, the speaker gives the same talk to a different partner with less time to do it each time. (p. 378) The technique outlined supports fluency development by means of providing learners with meaningful practice for three main reasons. Firstly, they have a new interlocutor each time; second, the information is repeated which helps learners to gain confidence when speaking in an L2; and finally, the fact the time is reduced every time the learner pairs up with a new classmate works as a major fluency booster since they do not have to think of additional information. Another strategy intended to aid speaking fluency can be found in Cohen et al. (1996)

Speaking Task Battery, which is made up of three speaking activities: Self-description, story retelling, and city description. The self-description and city description are based on previously learned lexis whereas story retelling is focused on the acquisition of new vocabulary through spoken repetition. This strategy helps learners develop their speaking fluency since it can be used by learners “throughout the language learning process” (p. 9) regardless of the level of instruction they are in. Even though the two strategies outlined above are highly beneficial in terms of speaking fluency enhancement, they do not suit the particular linguistic and affective needs the participants of the present research study because of two main reasons. Firstly, the complexity of the tasks might have affected participants spoken output rather than fostered it. Secondly, affective factors such as motivation and confidence would have been affected by the pressure of performing the activities in an acceptable way.

Thus, learners would have focused their attention on carrying out the task well instead of communicating in the L2. Keeping this in mind, the teacher researcher decided to provide participants with meaningful tasks aligned with their actual L2 competence level so they gradually improved their L2 speaking fluency and confidence by accomplishing the objectives set. Finally, another approach to tackle the learners’ lack of speaking fluency can be found in Seifoori and Vahidi’s (2012) seminal study on fluency. In their research study they present task planning as an effective means to help students “to focus their attention at various stages of speech and thereby to foster accuracy, complexity, and

fluency of production”. In this sense, it could be concluded that emphasizing the work on learners’ fluency is a feasible task provided that teachers do not focus excessively on promoting accuracy and language form correctness to the detriment of affecting students’ ability to communicate naturally in the foreign language and reducing the opportunities to implement tasks aimed to fulfill this purpose.

**Conclusion** To sum up, it is crucial to the process of language learning to provide speaking tasks with a high quality of communication in the sense their usefulness and meaningfulness go beyond the limits of the classroom and have a practical implementation in real life situations. In order to accomplish this, the design and development of appropriate teaching materials seems to be absolutely necessary so fluent speaking in English can be enhanced. Interaction is the most important part of the current theories of communicative competence; it involves learners face-to-face or teacher-learners encounters in the classroom. Pair and group interactions provide a basis for language learning in general; it gives the learners practice in community and negotiation of meanings through taking turns, in addition to learning other features that are crucial in any interactive discourse such as how to initiate, respond and end conversations. At the same time, it allows learners to know how they can understand and make themselves understood. Teachers’ talking time must be reduced in classroom interactions as opposed to learners who should increase their talking time. So it is obvious that speaking ability can be enhanced through interactional strategies in classroom situations.

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