The influence of task type and personality on EFL learners' oral fluency

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Main Research Questions:
1) What are the contrasts in utterance and perceived fluency of low proficiency L2 English students between a dialogic and a monologic task type?
2) To what extent is there a contrast in fluency between speakers as a consequence of performance features including anxiety, dominance and involvement?

Fluency is a term often used in relation to second language (L2) speaking proficiency. In general terms, most people have a notion of what the concept of fluency entails, but the literature shows that there is no consensus on what precisely the concept might be (Pinget, Bosker & de Jong, 2014). In the last decade, a growing number of studies have aimed at dissecting fluency by studying the difference between utterance and perceived fluency (e.g. Préfontaine, 2010; Bosker, Pinget, Quene, Sanders, & de Jong. 2012), developing PRAAT scripts to measure fluency (de Jong et al. 2021) and distinguishing monologic from dialogic speech fluency (Tavakoli, 2016).

This study aims to further advance our understanding of factors affecting L2 fluency. Specifically, we focus on the effect of task type and aspects of speaker personality.

The study largely consists of two phases. Firstly, both the monologic and dialogic speech fluency of 33 third level L2 English students who did not pass or barely passed (10/20) an English speaking proficiency examination was analysed to instrumentally measure their utterance/objective fluency. Secondly, the ratings of 41 assessors who listened to 20 short audio tracks each were analysed and compared to the objective fluency results. The group assessing the tracks consisted of three groups of listeners: native English speakers, EFL higher education students, and bilingual speakers of Dutch and English who did not study languages at university or in college.

Results showed that in terms of objective fluency there was no positive effect on utterance fluency nor on perceived/subjective fluency for dialogic speech compared to monologic speech, contradicting previous research. Furthermore, perceived fluency results only partly correlated with utterance fluency results and listener groups seemed to differ in what manner they rated L2 speakers. Results also showed correlation between aspects of personality such as Foreign Language Anxiety and involvement, and speaking fluency.
Further research using different tasks may further contribute to our understanding of fluency and its different components. Additionally, including open questions in the questionnaire would enable us to examine listeners' ratings in a qualitative manner.

Sources

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