Assessing functional adequacy: The applicability of a rating scale for oral and written L2 performance

Folkert Kuiken, Ineke Vedder
University of Amsterdam, Netherlands

In this paper we will present the findings of two studies set up for assessing the functional adequacy of L2 performance, by means of a new rating scale, inspired by the conversational maxims of Grice (1975). The rating scale distinguishes four components of functional adequacy: 1) relevance of content, 2) task requirements, 3) comprehensibility, 4) coherence and cohesion. The rating scale was tested out for oral and written L2 performance, in two different languages (Dutch and Italian). The rationale underlying the research is the assumption that the assessment of linguistic performance in L2 is not possible without taking into account the functional dimension, next to the complexity, accuracy and fluency (CAF) of L2 output (Pallotti 2009).

The first study was conducted among 32 L2 learners of Dutch and 39 L2 learners of Italian, with a proficiency level between B1 and B2. Four non-expert raters (i.e. native speakers of Dutch and Italian, but no language instructors) were asked to assess the functional adequacy of a set of argumentative texts (Kuiken & Vedder, 2016). In the second study, conducted among 22 intermediate learners of Dutch L2 and 26 of Italian L2, the rating scale was tested out for oral production. We administered the same argumentative tasks in speaking that had been used in the written modality. The speech samples were assessed by a group of four non-expert raters (native speakers of Dutch and Italian).

In the presentation the findings of the two studies will be reported and we will discuss the applicability of the scale, with respect to the following issues: (i) interrater reliability scores; (ii) correlations between the four scale dimensions; (iii) similarities and differences between the two languages; (iv) comparison of the oral and written modality; (v) implications for future use of the rating scale.

Keywords: written L2 proficiency, rating scale, functional adequacy, oral L2 proficiency.