A strategic perspective on L2 speech fluency: Exploring individual repertoires of fluency resources

Pauliina Peltonen
University of Turku, Finland

L2 fluency research has mostly focused on quantitative comparisons between learner groups. High within-group variations found in the use of filled pauses (FPs) and repair features (e.g. repetition; see e.g. Kahng 2014) suggest that these features are multifunctional and affected by individual differences. Instead of being straightforward ‘disfluency markers’, FPs and repairs can even contribute to fluency by reducing time spent in silence. Despite these findings, learners’ individual means for maintaining fluency have received little attention in L2 fluency studies.

To address this gap in research, the present study introduces the Fluency Resources Framework for studying how learners use problem-solving mechanisms to keep the flow of talk going. Fluency resources include stalling mechanisms (e.g. FPs and repetitions) that help in coping with processing time pressure (see Dörnyei & Kormos 1998) and communication strategies (CSs) that aid in overcoming lexis-related problems. Although strategic competence is likely to contribute to fluency, the connection between CSs and fluency has not previously been studied empirically.

In the presentation, I will first briefly discuss general tendencies in the types and uses of fluency resources in dialogue data from Finnish learners of English (20 ninth graders, 15-year-olds, and 30 upper secondary school students, 17–18-year-olds). After that, selected subjects’ individual repertoires of fluency resources will be discussed. In addition to illustrating how learners use various mechanisms to maintain fluency during a problem-solving task, stimulated recall data will be presented to highlight the subjects’ views of their own strategy use.

References


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