



Fluency and effective interaction in a foreign language: How can we assess them?

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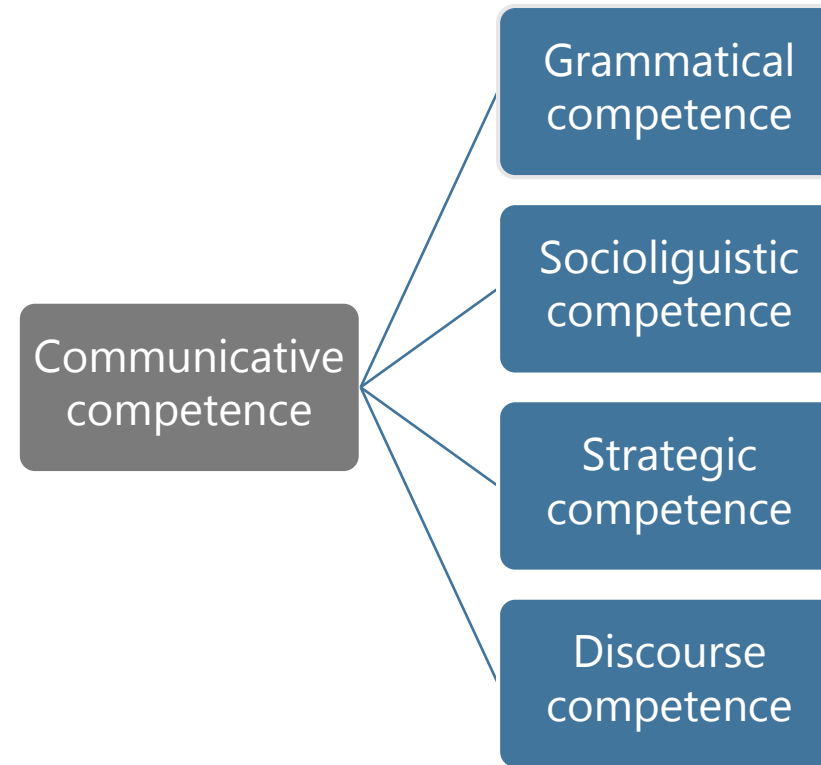
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Speaking complex and multi-faceted skill to assess

Models of communicative competence



Canale and Swain (1980); Canale (1983)

Rating scales

- The rating scale represents the test construct – or the aspects of the spoken performance – that we aim to measure
- The scale typically has descriptors of the performance that test-takers are expected to achieve at different levels
- Raters place the test-taker's performance at a level on the rating scale
- Assessing the speaking construct is subjective (McNamara, 1996)
 - Enhancing inter-rater reliability important

Qualitative aspects of spoken language use

(Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)

The chart in this table was designed to assess spoken performances. It focuses on different qualitative aspects of language use.

	RANGE	ACCURACY	FLUENCY	INTERACTION	COHERENCE
C2	Shows great flexibility reformulating ideas in differing linguistic forms to convey finer shades of meaning precisely, to give emphasis, to differentiate and to eliminate ambiguity. Also has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms	Maintains consistent grammatical control of complex language, even while attention is otherwise engaged (e.g. in forward planning, in monitoring others' reactions).	Can express him/herself spontaneously at length with a natural colloquial flow, avoiding or backtracking around any difficulty so smoothly that the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.	Can interact with ease and skill, picking up and using non-verbal and intonational cues apparently effortlessly. Can interweave his/her contribution into the joint discourse with fully natural turntaking, referencing, allusion making etc.	Can create coherent and cohesive discourse making full and appropriate use of a variety of organisational patterns and a wide range of connectors and other cohesive devices.

(Council of Europe, 2001, p. 28)

What is fluency?

- Broad or narrow conceptualization of fluency (Lenon, 1990)
 - Broad: **fluency = proficiency**
 - “mastery and ease of acquired second language performance” (Faerch et al., 1984)
 - Narrow: **fluency = flow of language**
 - “temporal variables related to quantity, rate, pausing, and language repairs” (Blake, 2006)

CEFR

“Can express him/herself spontaneously at length with a natural colloquial flow, avoiding or backtracking around any difficulty so smoothly that the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.”

Why focus on fluency?

- Predicts holistic perceptions of proficiency levels (Ginther et al., 2010)
- Suggests task difficulty
- Indicates the process of grammatical, phonological, and lexical speech production

	RANGE	ACCURACY	FLUENCY	INTERACTION	COHERENCE	PHONOLOGY
C2	Shows great flexibility reformulating ideas in differing linguistic forms to convey finer shades of meaning precisely, to give emphasis, to differentiate and to eliminate ambiguity. Also has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms.	Maintains consistent grammatical control of complex language, even while attention is otherwise engaged (e.g. in forward planning, in monitoring others' reactions).	Can express him/herself spontaneously at length with a natural colloquial flow, avoiding or backtracking around any difficulty so smoothly that the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.	Can interact with ease and skill, picking up and using non-verbal and intonational cues apparently effortlessly. Can interweave his/her contribution into the joint discourse with fully natural turntaking, referencing, allusion making etc.	Can create coherent and cohesive discourse making full and appropriate use of a variety of organisational patterns and a wide range of connectors and other cohesive devices.	Can employ the full range of phonological features in the target language with a high level of control – including prosodic features such as word and sentence stress, rhythm and intonation – so that the finer points of his/her message are clear and precise. Intelligibility is not affected in any way by features of accent that may be retained from other language(s).
C1	Has a good command of a broad range of language allowing him/her to select a formulation to express him/ herself clearly in an appropriate style on a wide range of general, academic, professional or leisure topics without having to restrict what he/she wants to say.	Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare, difficult to spot and generally corrected when they do occur.	Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language.	Can select a suitable phrase from a readily available range of discourse functions to preface his remarks in order to get or to keep the floor and to relate his/her own contributions skilfully to those of other speakers.	Can produce clear, smoothly flowing, well-structured speech, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.	Can employ the full range of phonological features in the TL with sufficient control to ensure intelligibility throughout. Can articulate virtually all the sounds of the TL; some features of accent retained from other language(s) may be noticeable, but they do not affect intelligibility at all.
B2+						
B2	Has a sufficient range of language to be able to give clear descriptions, express viewpoints on most general topics, without much conspicuous searching for words, using some complex sentence forms to do so.	Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control. Does not make errors which cause misunderstanding, and can correct most of his/her mistakes.	Can produce stretches of language with a fairly even tempo, although he/she can be hesitant as he or she searches for patterns and expressions, there are few noticeably long pauses.	Can initiate discourse, take his/her turn when appropriate and end conversation when he/she needs to, though he/she may not always do this elegantly. Can help the discussion along on familiar ground confirming comprehension, inviting others in, etc.	Can use a limited number of cohesive devices to link his/her utterances into clear, coherent discourse, though there may be some "jumpiness" in a long contribution.	Can generally use appropriate intonation, place stress correctly and articulate individual sounds clearly; accent tends to be influenced by other language(s) he/she speaks, but has little or no effect on intelligibility.
B1+						
B1	Has enough language to get by, with sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some hesitation and circumlocutions on topics such as family, hobbies and interests, work, travel, and current events.	Uses reasonably accurately a repertoire of frequently used "routines" and patterns associated with more predictable situations.	Can keep going comprehensibly, even though pausing for grammatical and lexical planning and repair is very evident, especially in longer stretches of free production.	Can initiate, maintain and close simple face-to-face conversation on topics that are familiar or of personal interest. Can repeat back part of what someone has said to confirm mutual understanding.	Can link a series of shorter, discrete simple elements into a connected, linear sequence of points.	Pronunciation is generally intelligible; can approximate intonation and stress at both utterance and word levels. However, accent is usually influenced by other language(s) he/she speaks.

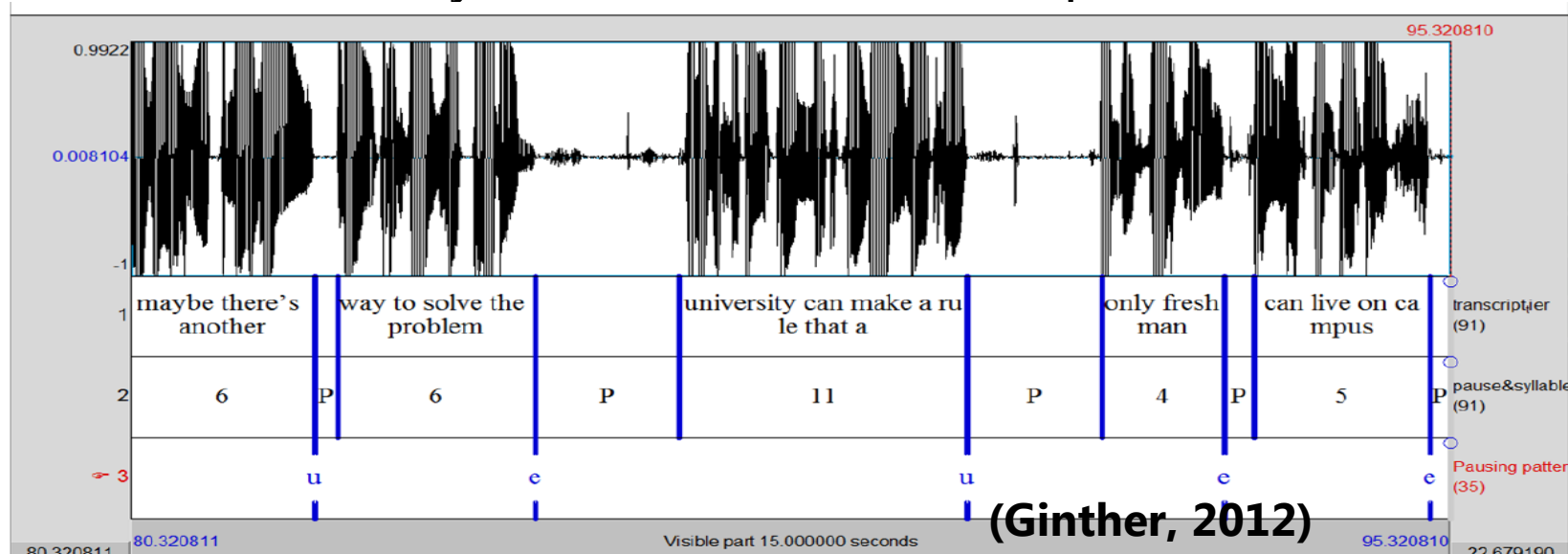
Fluency and holistic perceptions of proficiency levels

- Easy to identify
 - ...even in a language that you do not understand
- Associated with ease or some kind of speech production problem
 - ...even though the listener may not pinpoint immediately what the problem is
- Leading to increased attention or to loss of interest
 - ...slow delivery with many pauses waters down the message

Fluency and holistic perceptions of proficiency levels

Most salient parameters of language fluency:

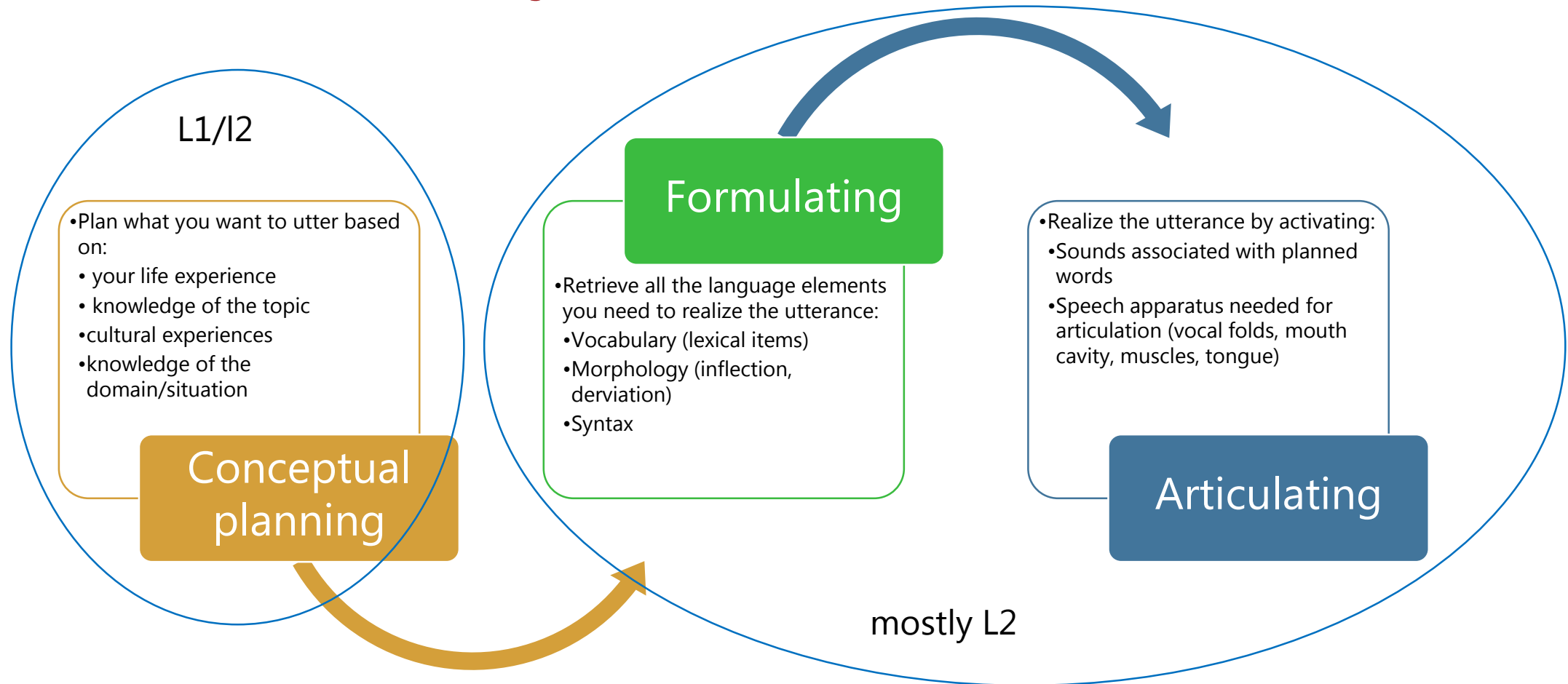
- **Speech rate:** number of syllables/speech time (Lehtonen, 1981; Lennon, 1984; Freed, 1995)
- **Mean length of run:** mean number of syllables between two pauses (Towel et al., 1996)



Less salient (mixed results)

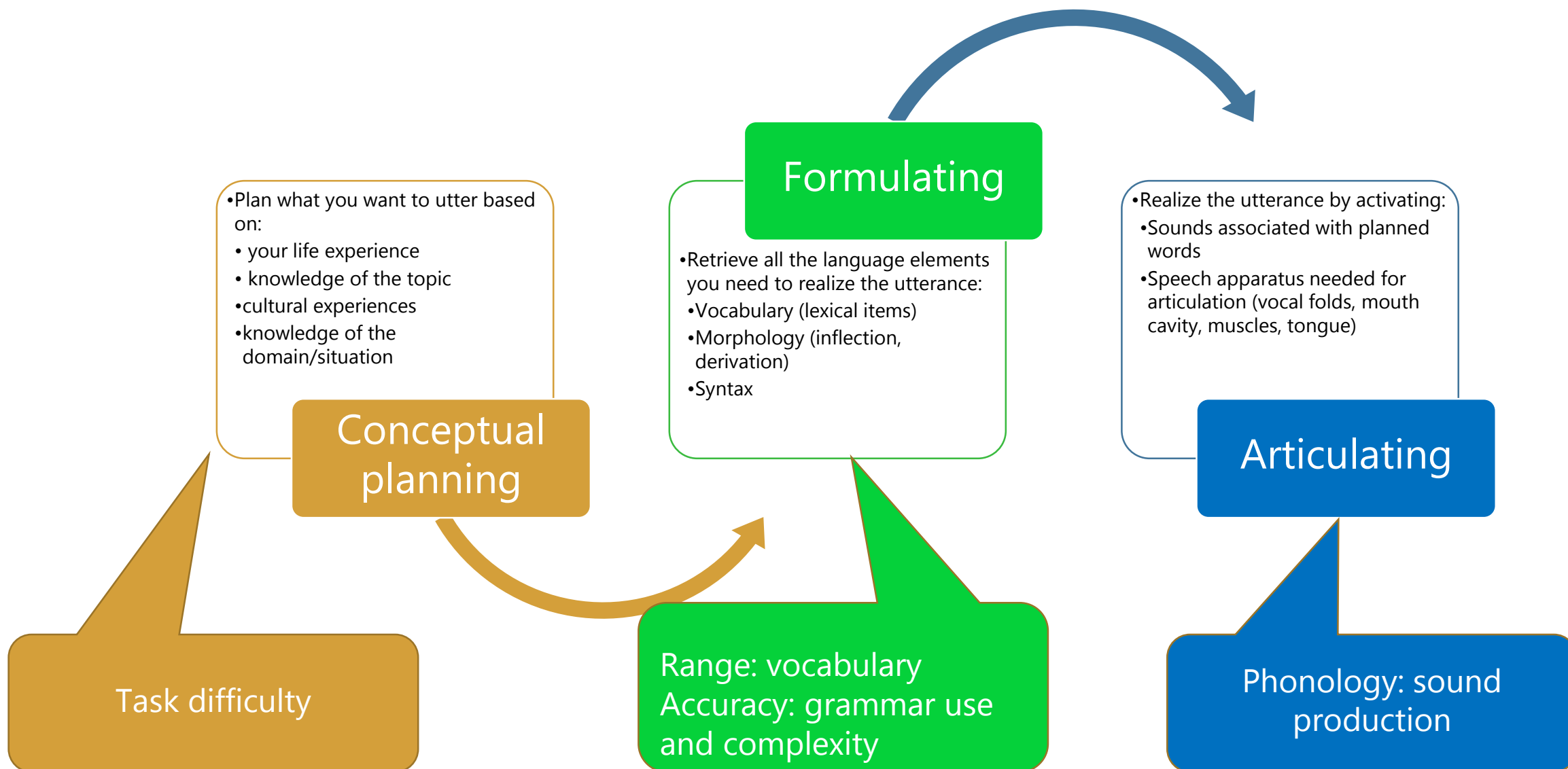
- **Length of number pauses (filled & unfilled)**
 - strong correlations with filled pauses (Rhode, 1985; Lennon, 1990)
 - no correlation with filled nor unfilled pauses (Kormos & Denes, 2004)

What causes disfluency?



All this happens in less than a second !!!

What causes disfluency?



What to consider?

Task

Topic familiarity is essential

Cultural discrimination affects response

More than one task increases reliability

Preparation time affects fluency

Fluency patterns differ in interactive and monologic tasks

Production

Individual differences in speech production exist

Fluency patterns tend to be transferred from L1 (De Jong, 2012)

The place of disfluency can tell us about the type of difficulty (De Jong, 2012)

Fast speech rate doesn't always mean comprehensible speech (Fulcher, 1987; 2003)

Lack of fluency become apparent when more than one type of disfluency occurs.

Development

Activate topical/situational knowledge

Activate adequate vocabulary

4/3/2 activities: Timed activities that promote fluency

Automatize the speech production process

Spoken interaction in the CEFR

- “In interactive activities the language user **acts alternately as speaker and listener** with one or more interlocutors so as to **construct conjointly**, through the negotiation of meaning following the co-operative principle, conversational discourse.” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 73)
- “**Interaction**, which involves two or more parties co-constructing discourse, **is central in the CEFR** scheme of language use”
(Council of Europe, 2018, p. 70)
- “Interaction is **also fundamental in learning**. The CEFR scales for interaction strategies reflect this with scales for **turn-taking, cooperating (= collaborative strategies) and asking for clarification**. These basic interaction strategies are as important in collaborative learning as they are in real world communication. (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 70)

Interactional competence (IC)

- Communicative competence → interactional competence (IC)
 - Individual, cognitive focus → social view of language competence
- "Therefore, the most fundamental difference between interactional and communicative competence is that IC is not about what *one person knows*; it is about what a participant in a discursive practice *does together with others*." (Young, 2019, p. 98).



Definition of IC

“The ability to co-construct interaction in a purposeful and meaningful way, taking into account sociocultural and pragmatic dimensions of the speech situation and event.” (Galaczi & Taylor, 2018, p. 226)

- Turn management
- Topic management
- Non-verbal behaviour
- Breakdown repair
- Interactive listening

See Figure 1 in Galaczi & Taylor (2018, p. 227) for a visual representation of IC

Interactive speaking test formats

1. Interaction with an examiner/teacher, often in the form of a structured one-to-one interview
 2. Interaction with one or more test-takers/students, including interactive tasks such as role plays and conversations
- In Sweden: mandatory oral national test in English since 1998 in compulsory school (grade 9) and 2000 in upper secondary school
 - The test task: a conversation in which students speak about, develop their thoughts on, and discuss a given topic, on their own and in interaction with others (spoken *production* and *interaction*)
 - See example: <https://www.gu.se/nationella-prov-frammande-sprak/prov-och-bedomningsstod-i-engelska/engelska-6-gymnasiet/exempel-pa-uppgiftstyper-for-engelska-6#Focus-Speaking>

Features of interaction raters are looking at

Topic development moves

- Introduce new topics and connect topics with what had previously been said
- Develop own and partner's ideas
- Ask questions and follow-up questions that help extend topics under development

Interactive listening strategies

- Show listener support and interest
- Provide verbal confirmations and back-channeling
- Ask for and give clarification/explanation; solve problems in interaction

Turn-taking management

- Ability to initiate and maintain discourse
- Intervene appropriately
- 'Conversational fluency'

(Borger, 2019)

Topic development moves

Lower proficiency levels

Test-takers mainly develop their own topics and rarely contribute to the development of their partner's ideas

Higher proficiency levels

The ability to develop topics in a mutual manner and across several turns increases

(Galaczi, 2014, p. 569)
Conversation analysis of test performances
from Cambridge English speaking tests

Maintain and develop interaction

Negative features noted by examiners

"Provides noticeably brief/minimal responses that do not effectively develop the interaction and/or do not provide reasons"

"Takes an overly passive role and not asking partner questions"

Positive features noted by examiners

"Extends own idea by explaining, elaborating, justifying and/or providing examples"

"Actively invites partner in by asking for opinion"

(Nakatsuhara et al, 2018, p. 24)

Listener support moves

Lower proficiency levels

Test-takers provided limited listener support

Higher proficiency levels

Test-takers had developed their ability to act as supportive listeners by using substantive confirmations of comprehension

(Galaczi, 2014, p. 570)
Conversation analysis of test performances
from Cambridge English speaking tests

Responding to partner

Negative features noted by examiners

"Brief/minimal response to partner/acknowledgment of what partner said"

"Gives own opinion rather than linking/meaningfully responding to/picking up on what partner has said"

Positive features noted by examiners

"Able to respond in a manner which indicates comprehension"

"Links contribution to partner's in a way that develops the topic across turns (co-constructing with partner)"

(Nakatsuhara et al, 2018, p. 19)

Turn-taking strategies

Negative features noted by examiners

"Engages in extended turns that are monologic, rather than dialogic"

"Dominates the interaction, interrupting etc. and making it difficult for partner to fully participate"

Positive features noted by examiners

"Effectively turn-takes; sharing the floor"

(Nakatsuhara et al., 2018. p. 24)

Resource for assessing and giving feedback on IC

- Checklist of IC features
- Accompanying description
- Feedback for learners

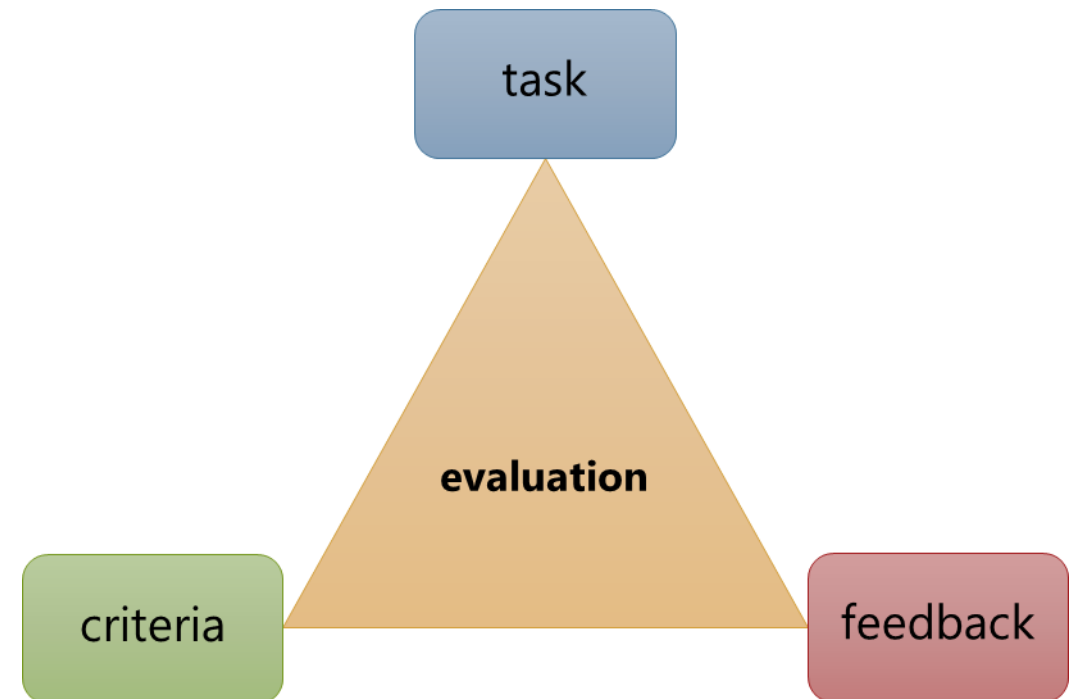
Learning Oriented Feedback in the Development and Assessment of Interactional Competence (Nakatsuhara et al., 2018)



<https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/Images/517543-research-notes-70.pdf>

Conclusion

- Relevant tasks
- Clear and adequate criteria
- Feedback (summative, formative)



- Thanks for listening!
- Questions and comments?

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