Measuring Fluency in an Oral Learner Corpus

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Abstract

Fluency in foreign language speech production is a difficult quality to define (Chambers ; Riggenbach 2000). Selecting measurable criteria for fluency in L2 production, and relating these criteria to subjective impressions of learner fluency, is similarly difficult. There is some evidence that certain disfluency markers are better predictors than others of how a learner's oral proficiency will be perceived by native speakers (Lennon 1990, Cucchiarini et al 2000, Freed 2000). Although these studies generally agree that speech rate is a good predictor, they differ on the role to be attributed to length of pauses, repetitions and self-correction. Kormos and Dènes (2004) suggest that there are two senses in which oral fluency can be perceived: low-order fluency, as measured by temporal variables, and high-order fluency, as seen in accuracy and lexical diversity. An additional question is whether markers of (dis)fluency are similar from one L2 to another.

This paper describes the analysis of (dis)fluency phenomena in a parallel oral corpus (the *PAROLE* corpus), containing productions in L2 English, French and Italian, to try to identify which features best distinguish between the perceived fluent speech of more proficient L2 speakers and the less fluent productions of other learners, and which features are more related to individual speaking style.

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