

Authentic speech: Looking past accuracy vs fluency

Marijke Wertheim
(marijke.wertheim@utoronto.ca)
Woodsworth College & SCS,
University of Toronto

Agenda

- a new look at communicative competence
- redefining accuracy: “learning to mean”
- the components of fluency
- student contexts
- a yardstick for oral fluency
- teaching performative competence

Accuracy vs fluency

- what is the yardstick? who is the model?
- EIL context: who do students sound like? who do they *want* to sound like?
- immigrants: oral markers of otherness
- deficiency model of communicative competence

Performative competence

- empowerment vs *disempowerment*
- unique voice and ownership
- Byram (2008): grammar of practice; the *how* of procedural knowledge vs the *what* of propositional knowledge
- accuracy & fluency in the service of authenticity

Accuracy

- speaking isn't writing
- features of oral language:
 - purpose-driven
 - repairable
 - suspension
 - indeterminacy
- authentic speech is idiosyncratic, unpredictable & inaccurate

The translingual (Canagarajah)

- authentic speech measured by mutual comprehensibility
- EIL: translinguals negotiate, don't expect uniformity, exploit the context, are consensus-oriented, and co-construct norms
- learning & use are fused
- focus on context vs cognition, pragmatics vs grammar

Sample a (spoken):

Teacher: "Where are you from?"

Student: "I came from Korea."

Teacher: "I *come* from Korea."

Sample b (written):

*As a Hawaiian native historian, Trask **can able** to argue for her people.*

*Most of the new universities' students are facing new challenges...I **can** say that these are the "obstacles" to success. If a student **can able** to approach each situation with different perspectives than the one he brought from high school, I **may** conclude that this student has climbed his first step to become a "critical thinker."*

Sample c (written):

There were calls for the resolution to be rescinded and the background document recalled. Some blasted CCCC for abdicating its responsibility and pandering to “wide-eyed” liberals...Others accused CCCC of a “sinister plot” to doom speakers of “divergent” dialects to failure in higher education...A few simply said that CCCC had done lost they cotton-pickin minds.

On the other hand, there were many who embraced the spirit of the resolution...Some complimented the organization for its “moral and professional courage.” A few simply asked CCCC why it took yall so long.

Six of one

On the board, write up twelve examples of language that has just been used by learners in the class. Explain that six of the examples are 'successful' and six could be improved. In pairs or small groups, learners decide which are successful and which need improvement, then compare with another pair or group, offering suggestions for improvement. Someone in each group then shares their conclusions with the class. At the end, you explain which original samples you thought were successful and discuss the suggestions for improvement.

Fluency

- traditional view: appropriate speed & pausing, minimal disfluency, automaticity
- new view: use of chunks/formulas, link turns smoothly, use of interactive and reactive words/phrases
- all parties seen as responsible for creating & maintaining flow of conversation

Sample a:

Dad: Antiques Roadshow's on in a minute.

Son: Oh yeah?

Dad: Barbara's mother's here; why don't you go through and say hi?

Son: No. [pause]

Dad: So, everything alright, is it?

Son: Can't complain. [pause] Nice bit of cake.

Dad: Did you hear the thunder last night?

Son: No.

Dad: Slept right through it then?

Son: Must have done.

[Son leaves]

Dad: Bloody hell, he's hard work, isn't he?

Sample b:

Greta: I'll take the computer over because I've got my work stuff on computer. Dad can play with the Internet.

Claire: I should give Phillip my computer and I'll keep the laptop. I love it.

Greta: I took it into work to see whether they could load work stuff up on it. The guy looked at me and said, how old is this? It's about four years old, but in computer terms that's ancient.

Alice: I've got a laptop that's older than Apple. You can't write, but it's not worth fixing. Throw it out.

Memory stars (*Teaching unplugged, Thornbury*)

Draw a 5-pointed star on the board and write one sense for each point of the star: *sight, sound, touch, smell* and taste. Learners should copy the star, adding a word or phrase in each point that evokes a memorable experience involving that sense, e.g. for *sight* – *fireworks display*. In pairs or small groups, learners share their stars and ask each other questions about the experiences, focusing on sensory memory. At the end, each group can choose one or two experiences they found particularly interesting to share with the class.

Authentic performance

- ability to manipulate language choices to be judged favourably in one's context (Byram, 2008)
- knowledge of speech acts (*scripts*) to create flow
- ability to play with scripts, to “own” them, to reflect a unique voice

Activity: Have you got a match?

On the board, list some of the words/phrases that have been used during the class. In pairs, learners should choose two they would like to try to match to situations they encounter between now and the next class. This may be a situation where they hear or use the same word/phrase, and they should note when, where and in what context they found their match. In the next class, the pairs reconvene and share their findings, then share with the class.

Alternative: assign words/phrases to students.

Yardstick for oral proficiency

- can I make my meaning clear?
- can I rephrase/improvise to clarify?
- do I help to keep the conversation moving?
- do I react to and interact with what others say?
- do I try to understand language that is new to me?
- ***do I sound like me?***

Teaching performative competence

- build lexis/collocations & *notice* their use
- compare spoken & written language
- focus on interactive nature of speech
- teach speech acts: scripts & formulas – and analyze alternatives
- teach vague language!
- encourage/promote creativity & ownership
- use NNS models