

The Development of L2 Fluency

Source: Derwing, T. M. (2017). L2 fluency development. In S. Loewen & M. Sato (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of instructed second language acquisition* (pp. 246-259). Routledge.

L2 fluency refers to the extent to which a speaker can produce talk without many pauses, fillers, false starts, etc. There are more specific types of fluency. For example, Segalowitz (2010) defines **three types of fluency**:

cognitive fluency

This involves factors like one's short-term memory, their ability to retrieve a word, planning, and using appropriate grammar

utterance fluency

This involves temporal characteristics like pace, pauses, hesitations, self-repairs, and false starts

perceived fluency

This refers to a listener's judgement of a speaker's cognitive fluency based on speech samples

Why is fluency important?

Fluency is important because listeners may find highly dysfluent speech tiring or even annoying. Listeners' perception of L2 speakers' intelligence is also strongly associated with how fluent their speech is, suggesting that dysfluent speech can create negative impressions (Thomson & Issacs, 2011).

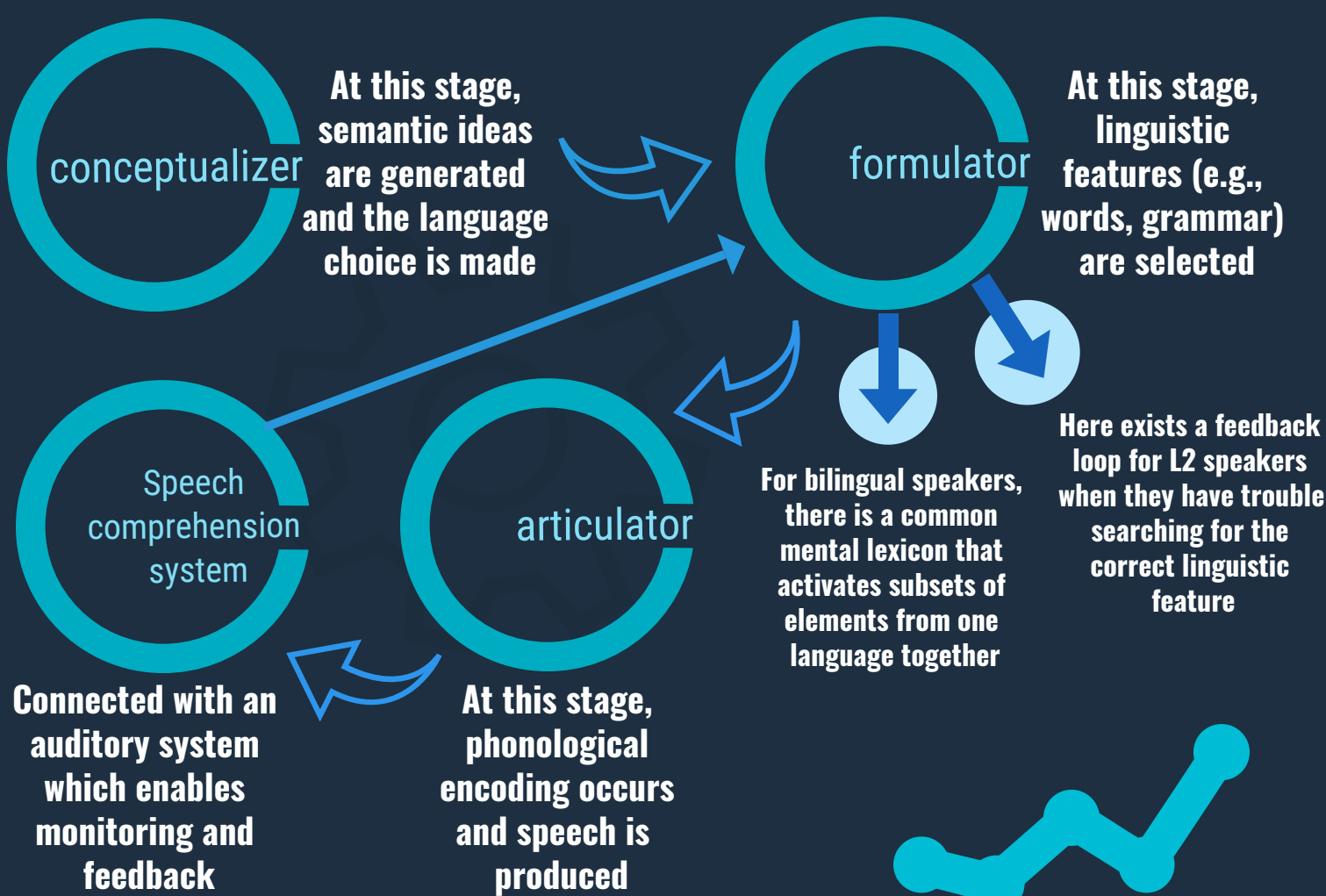
Current Perspectives

Research on L1 fluency

SLA researchers who are interested in L1 fluency found that native English speakers focus on **one-clause-at-a-time** due to cognitive constraints (Pawley & Syder, 1975). One possible way to escape this constraint is by using fixed expressions, such as lexical chunks, collocations, and formulaic expressions. Unlike L2 speakers, native speakers have a rich repertoire of multiword strings they can use at their disposal to help them enhance speech fluency.

From thoughts to speech

Building upon Levelt's (1989) model of the speaking process for unilingual speakers, de Bot (1992) argues that a bilingual speaking process model is necessary as most people today can speak more than one language.



The complex dynamic systems theory perspective

From a CDST perspective, L2 development is viewed as a nonlinear, self-adaptive, and dynamic process that is constantly evolving. A change in one subsystem (e.g., pronunciation) will have an impact on another (e.g., fluency).

Studies conducted from this perspective focus on the development of individual learners, each exhibiting their own unique trajectories. Thomson (2015) argues that this framework offers insights into the interrelationships among many L2 speaking variables, such as fluency, intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness.

Empirical Evidence

L1 influence

Speakers who are fluent in their L1 also tend to be fluent in their L2, and vice versa (Derwing et al., 2009). L1 has an influence on the development of L2 fluency, for example, Slavic language speakers' English fluency develops faster than Mandarin speakers (Derwing & Munro, 2013).

L2 exposure & WTC

L2 learners who have higher WTC and who deliberately expose themselves to the L2 by watching TV, listening to radio podcasts, and more importantly, having longer interactions with target language speakers on a regular basis, have a better chance at improving their L2 fluency compared to those who don't (Derwing et al., 2008).

Task types & planning time

Picture narrative tasks tend to elicit less fluent speech because fewer lexical choices are allowed; monologues and conversations enable the speakers to avoid difficult structures hence increase their L2 fluency. Rehearsals before speaking can significantly improve L2 fluency as well (Derwing et al. 2004).

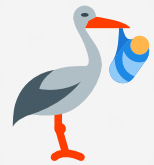
Interlocutors & complexity

The power dynamics between interlocutors and the complexity of the message to be conveyed have an impact on L2 fluency (Derwing et al., 2014).

Pedagogical implications



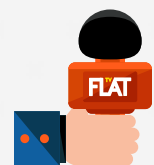
Enhance automaticity by incorporating activities that promote learners' awareness of fluency markers (e.g., transcribing short video clips and analyzing them together), allowing them to rehearse before speaking tasks, and teaching formulaic expressions (e.g., as a matter of fact) and discourse markers (e.g., well, so, you know, like) that learners can use to buy time in lieu of pauses, hesitations, and filler words.



Topic/task familiarity, extensive exposure to L2 input, and producing output can increase L2 fluency (Nation & Newton, 2009). For example, a teacher can ask the students to tell the same story repeatedly to increase their automaticity.



Drama techniques (e.g., problem-solving, role-plays, short performance) in the classroom are more effective in terms of improving L2 fluency across various production tasks (compared to Nation & Newton's [2009] suggestion above, which increases fluency in only one task)(Galante & Thomson, 2016).



Provide ample opportunities for students to interact in their L2, such as conducting in-person surveys, interviews, phone calls, or even volunteering outside of the classroom.



Have students practice formal speaking by preparing notes for a presentation, discuss in small groups for peer feedback, and presenting in front of the class with few notes.