Fluency and the role of training in second language German

Abstract

Fluency, that is spoken language that flows without interruptions or pauses, is often neglected in favour of other language components as reading, writing, listening and speaking that are being considered as more important (Simensen 2010; Rossiter, Derwing, Manimtim & Thomson 2010). Although fluency falls under speaking skills it is not taught in the second language (L2) classroom and teachers often confuse it with proficiency, that is, that a learner speaks grammatically and lexically accurately (Lennon 1990). Thus, a speaker can still speak fluently while being grammatically inaccurate. Due to the fact that our intelligence, social status and many other aspects are often being judged based on how fluently we speak in our first language (L1) as well as in our second language (L2), this issue deserves further attention (Munro, Derwing, Rossiter & Thomson 2004). The goal of the current study is to determine the extent to which fluency training has an effect on listeners’ ratings of speech fluidity.

A number of 13 intermediate-level university learners of German were provided with five sessions of classroom-based fluency training. A number of 10 intermediate-level learners of German did not receive the fluency training. All students completed the same pre- and post-study tasks that included a narration (the “Suitcase Story”, which is commonly used in oral production studies) a monologue and dialogue. A number of 12 native German listeners rated fluency on the 9-point scale (1-extremely disfluent, 9-extremely fluent) for the picture story and the monologue. The analysis of the dialogue was conducted by me.

The research demonstrates the effect of fluency activities on learners’ fluency as rated by native listeners of German. This study establishes that a speaker can improve his or her fluency through classroom-based training.