Fluency in Native and Non-Native English Speech: Corpus Findings and Language-Pedagogical Implications

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Short summary

The present paper deals with performance phenomena such as repetitions in native and non-native English speech. As performance phenomena are both typical of native speech and responsible for establishing native-like fluency, we use learner corpus findings and their interpretation to discuss how learners may become more fluent.

Abstract

With the completion of the 100,000-word German component of the *Louvain International Database of Spoken English Interlanguage* (LINDSEI-Ger) it is now possible to describe the speech of advanced German learners of English and to compare it with the *Louvain Corpus of Native English Conversation* (LOCNEC), a spoken corpus with comparable native data. In the present paper, the focus is on what has been labelled 'the grammar of conversation' by Biber et al. (1999), i.e. lexicogrammatical features that are characteristic of spontaneous spoken language. More specifically, we will concentrate on performance phenomena such as repetitions, which have been shown to be both typical of native-like speech and important for establishing overall native-like fluency. We will report on the results of various pilot studies based on LINDSEI-Ger and LOCNEC which show that, firstly, there are substantial quantitative and qualitative differences between native and non-native speech with regard to performance phenomena, caused also by the much higher planning pressure in non-native on-line speech production. Note, for example, that while the repetition of *I* at the beginning of (1) is sufficient for the native speaker to plan the rest of the utterance, the learner in (2) produces many more dysfluencies in the entire utterance:

(1) **I I** saw him in an interview with a vampire and thought he was great in that. (LOCNEC)
(2) the customer . or . the wife . **I I** guessed whoe= wherever she is erm . (LINDSEI-Ger)

Secondly, we will show that such differences are related to – and also responsible for – the fact that many learners' output is considered to be less fluent than native speech. Thirdly, we will discuss some compensation strategies which might help learners perform in a more native-like way in planning phases in speech, e.g. the use of discourse markers and formulaic sequences.

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References

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