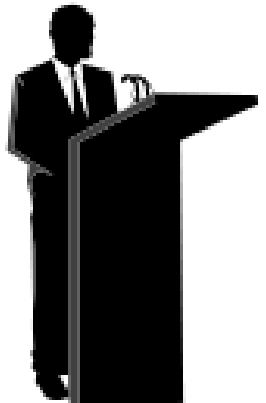# Accuracy & fluency: resolving the tension

accuracy is

- "clear, articulate, grammatically and phonologically correct" (Brown 1994)

- "getting the language right" (Ur 1991)

- "the extent to which a learner's use of the second language conforms to the rules of the language" (Thornbury 2006)

Accuracy is the appropriate use of language given the purpose, context and audience.

Accuracy is standard-like language use, where the standard (ideally) is determined by the learner's communicative needs.

(In the absence of a reliable description of these needs, then the default standard will be those of an educated native-speaker, and/or of a successful user of English as a lingua franca).

Grammatical accuracy

Level	Scale descriptors
Expert	Good grammatical control; occasional 'slips' or non-systematic errors and minor flaws in sentence structure may still occur, but they are rare and can often be corrected in retrospect.
Intermediate	Does not make mistakes which lead to misunderstanding; errors occur but it is clear what he/she is trying to express.
Waystage	Can use some simple structures correctly, but still systematically makes basic mistakes.

Skehan, P. (1998) *A Cognitive Approach to Language Learning.* Oxford University Press.

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment

|	GRAMMATICAL ACCURACY
C2	Maintains consistent grammatical control of complex language, even while attention is otherwise engaged (e.g. in forward planning, in monitoring others' reactions).
C1	Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare and difficult to spot.
B2	Good grammatical control; occasional 'slips' or non-systematic errors and minor flaws in sentence structure may still occur, but they are rare and can often be corrected in retrospect.
	Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control. Does not make mistakes which lead to misunderstanding.
B1	Communicates with reasonable accuracy in familiar contexts; generally good control though with noticeable mother tongue influence. Errors occur, but it is clear what he/she is trying to express.
	Uses reasonably accurately a repertoire of frequently used 'routines' and patterns associated with more predictable situations.
A2	Uses some simple structures correctly, but still systematically makes basic mistakes – for example tends to mix up tenses and forget to mark agreement; nevertheless, it is usually clear what he/she is trying to say.
A1	Shows only limited control of a few simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns in a learnt repertoire.

fluency is

- "natural language use, whether or not it results in native-speaker-like language comprehension or production" (Brumfit 1984)

- "the production of language in real time without undue pausing or hesitation" (Skehan 1998)

- "the capacity to be communicative in real-time conditions" (Thornbury and Watkins, 2007)

'It is evident now that, despite several decades of work, researchers have not discovered universally applicable, objective measures of oral fluency.'

Segalowitz, N. (2010) *Cognitive Bases of Second Language Fluency*, London: Routledge, p. 39
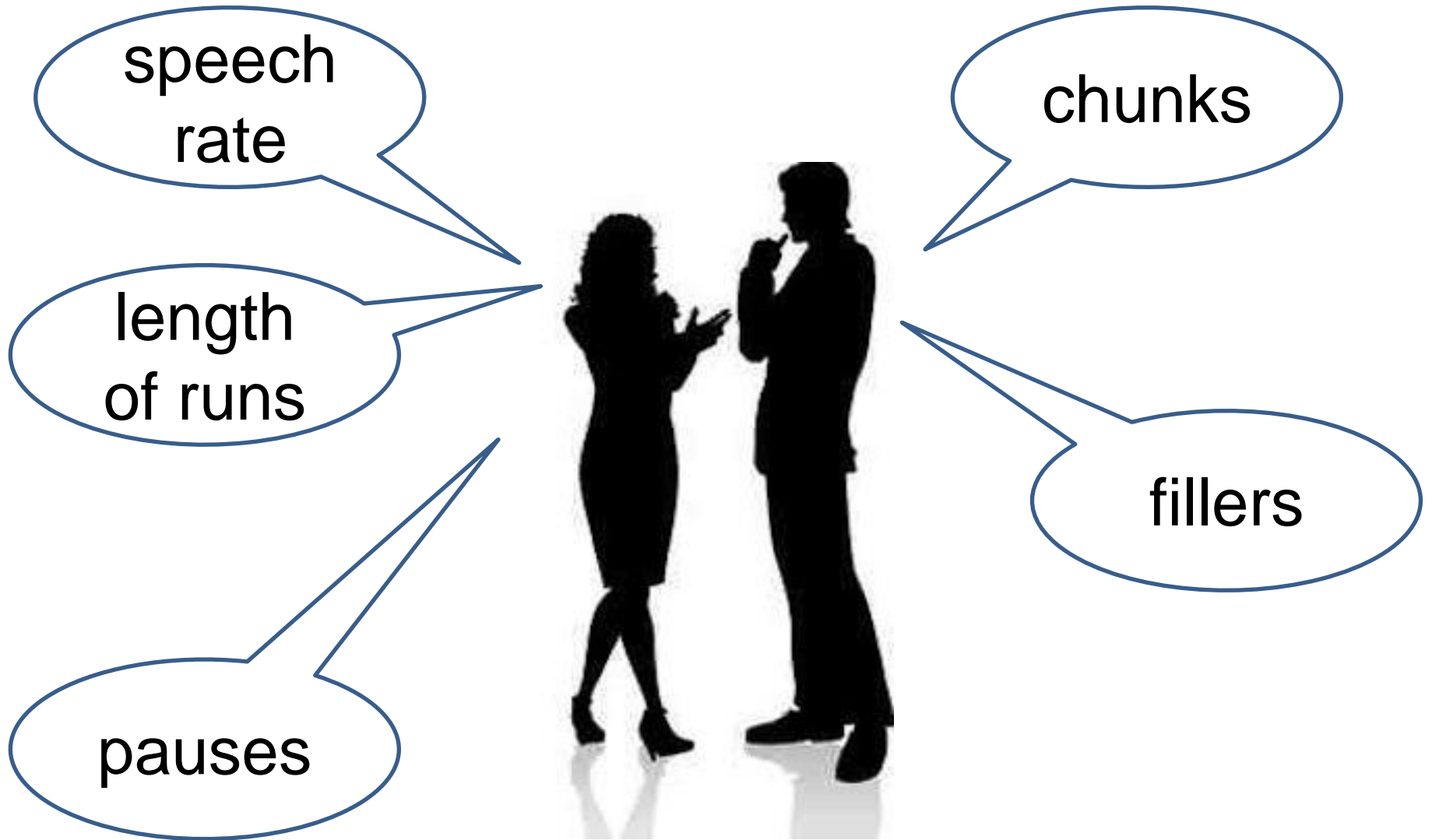
Productive fluency

accent

idiomaticity

pragmatics

non-verbal communi-cation

complexity & range

accuracy

Perceptive fluency

fluency

accuracy

'Judgements of fluency actually embrace linguistic accuracy in some way.'

Chambers, F. (1997) What do we mean by fluency? *System,* 25/4, p.540.

General range

| Level	Scale descriptors
Expert	Can express him/herself clearly and without much sign of having to restrict what he/she wants to say.
Threshold	Has enough language to get by, but lexical limitations cause repetition and even difficulty with formulation at times.
Waystage	Can produce brief everyday expressions in order to satisfy simple needs of a concrete type: personal details, daily routines, wants and needs, requests for information.

Skehan, P. (1998) *A Cognitive Approach to Language Learning.* Oxford University Press.

'It is fluent performance that is probably the overriding determiner of perceived oral proficiency. Other features, such as accuracy, are of lesser importance, and thus easily become subsumed under fluency criteria in assessment.'

Lennon, P. (1990) Investigating fluency in EFL: A quantitative approach, *Language Learning,* 40/3, p. 391.
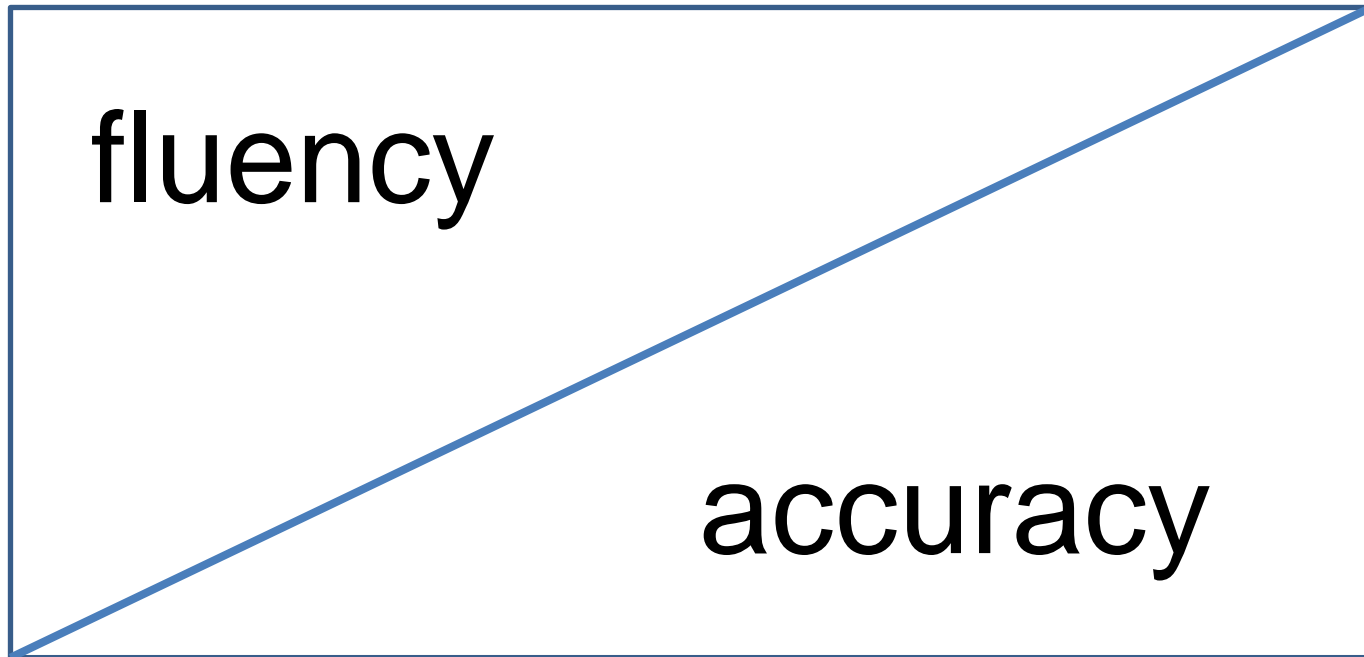
Fluency is the ability to convey the impression of idiomatic intelligibility in real time.

accuracy

fluency

A1 →

fluency
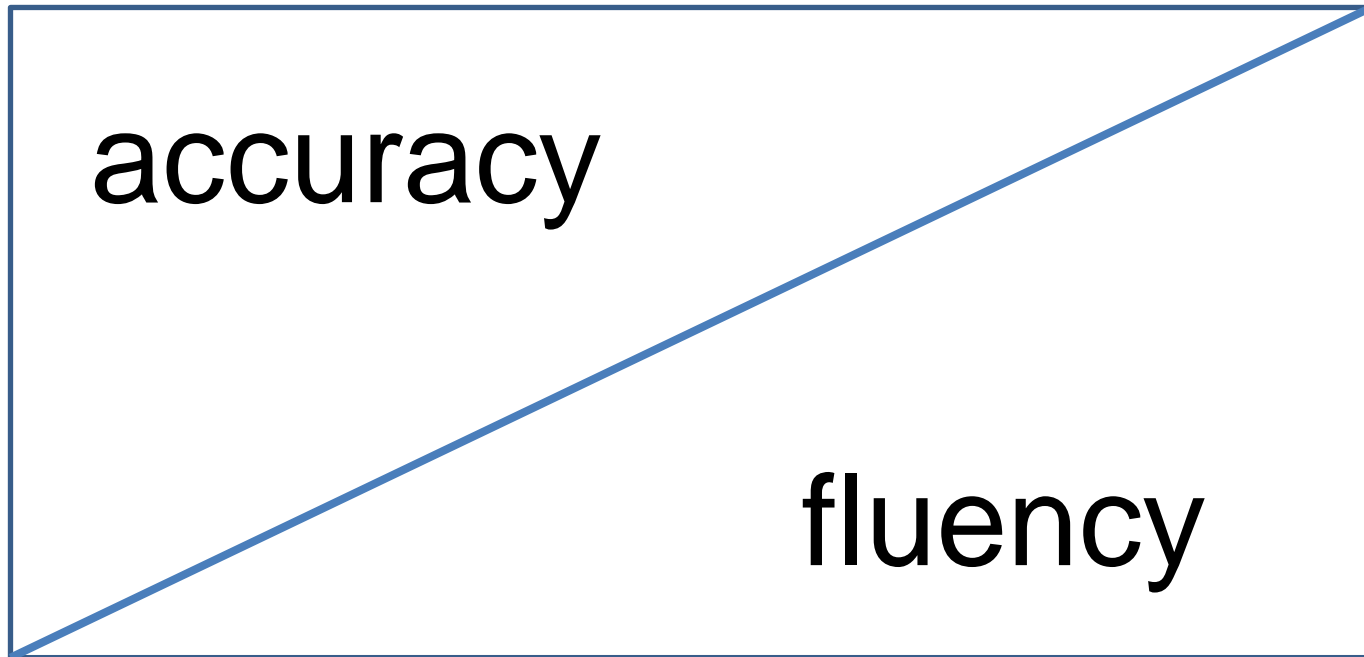
accuracy

A1 →

How do you increase grammatical accuracy?

- learning grammar rules?
- repeating grammar patterns?
- memorizing example sentences?
- task rehearsal and performance?
- task repetition?
- writing?
- **feedback and correction!**

Some research findings on error correction:

1. Teachers are generally tougher on error than non-teachers.

2. Non-native-speaker teachers are generally tougher on error than native-speaker teachers.

3. Teachers do not treat all the errors that occur.

4. Learners often say that they want more error correction than is usually offered.

"There is clear evidence that corrective feedback contributes to learning".

Ellis, R. 2008. *The Study of Second Language Acquisition (2nd edn).* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.885.

What is... the most fundamental guiding principle [to conversational proficiency]? It is this:

Memorize perfectly the largest number of common and useful word-groups.

Palmer, H. (1925) Conversation. Re-printed in Smith, R. (1999) *The Writings of Harold E. Palmer: An Overview.* Tokyo: Hon-no-Tomosha, p. 187)

Skilled performers can:

- work fast, be spontaneous, and cope with unpredictability

- anticipate and plan ahead

- ignore inessentials, and carry out the task using minimal means

- be accurate

- be versatile, i.e. can adapt to different conditions

- be reliable, i.e. perform the task equally well under different, even adverse, conditions

Activities should be …

    1. genuinely communicative
    2. psychologically authentic
    3. focused
    4. formulaic
    5. inherently repetitive

Gatbonton, E. and Segalowitz, N. (1988) 'Creative automatization: Principles for promoting fluency within a communicative framework', *TESOL Quarterly*, **22**, 3.

In communicative activities

• the motivation of the activity is to achieve some outcome, using language;

• the activity takes place in real time;

• achieving the outcome requires the participants to interact, i.e. to listen as well as to speak;

• because of the spontaneous and jointly constructed nature of the interaction, the outcome is not 100% predictable;

• there is no restriction on the language used.

Tolerate silences; refrain from filling the gaps between turns. This will put pressure on students to initiate turns.

Encourage students to sustain their speech beyond one or two sentences and to take longer turns; do not use a student's short utterance as a springboard for your own lengthy turn.

Keep the number of display questions to a minimum. The more genuine the requests for information, the more natural the discourse.

Kramsch, C. (1985). Classroom interaction and discourse options. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition,* 7, 169-183

Pay attention to the message of students' utterances rather than to the form in which they are cast (…). Keep your comments for later.

Make extensive use of natural feedback ("hmm,/interesting/I thought so too") rather than evaluating and judging every student utterance following its delivery ("fine/good"). Do not overpraise.

Kramsch, C. (1985). Classroom interaction and discourse options. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition,* 7, 169-183