

INVITED BOOK REVIEW

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Second Language Speech Fluency: From Research to Practice, Parvaneh, Tavakoli and Clare, Wright.

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Second language (L2) fluency has become a topic of increasing importance for researchers and educators internationally. A large body of research now exists which examines fluency from both theoretical and practical perspectives. A volume which brings this body of research together under a single cover and serves as a practical manual that connects L2 fluency research to teaching and testing practices is thus very welcome. The book will be essential for researchers, post-graduate students, and teachers who need a better understanding of this critical area of L2 development to inform research design and pedagogical decision-making.

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The introduction (Chapter 1) addresses key questions for researchers and practitioners alike: What is fluency? How does it develop? What is the relationship between fluency and other L2 competences? It provides a concise and comprehensive introduction to L2 fluency, related research, and the theoretical frameworks that inform this research. Fluency is seen as a dynamic and multidimensional construct and is examined from two perspectives. From a psycholinguistic perspective, fluency is seen in terms of the automatization of the different stages of speech production (conceptualization, formulation, and articulation). From a broader social dimension, fluency is seen in relation to factors such as task demands, testing constraints, and interactional pragmatics.

Chapter 2 provides the theoretical foundation for the rest of the book. The authors examine cognitive models of L2 speech production and key research on L2 fluency from a psycholinguistic perspective. The authors stress the need to consider L2 fluency in relationship to the first language (L1) and the factors that impact the L1. They discuss how neural processes involved in fluent speech and access to linguistic knowledge overlap between the L1 and the L2. They also discuss how learners' individual differences (e.g., working memory and personality traits) impact both L1 and L2 fluency. They argue for a dynamic approach to conceptualizing fluency that considers linguistic, cognitive, psycho-social, and pragmatic factors.

Chapter 3 moves on to research practices and will be of great practical importance for experienced researchers as well as PhD students working in the area of L2 speech fluency. The authors provide an overview of key research exemplifying ways of operationalizing and measuring fluency. The chapter first reviews the developments that have taken place in measuring utterance fluency in terms of speed, breakdown, and repair. This is followed by a synthesis of utterance fluency measures that are most commonly used in second language acquisition research and the challenges that remain in measuring fluency.

Chapter 4 then looks specifically at fluency research in task-based language teaching which is a key area bringing together L2 researchers and practitioners internationally. They examine how task design features (e.g., task structure, information type, cognitive demands, and familiarity) and implementation conditions (e.g., task mode and planning time) affect speech fluency during L2 performance. They also discuss how these features interact with each other to impact L2 speech production processes and L2 fluency development. The authors discuss how fluency develops in line with different communicative purposes, pragmatic considerations, social norms, and cultural expectations.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the role of fluency in L2 pedagogy and testing. Chapter 5 considers fluency in L2 policy documents, textbooks, classroom activities, and teacher cognition. The authors provide recommended activities for teachers and material designers interested in how to develop L2 fluency in their classes and programs. In Chapter 6, the authors discuss testing practices, pointing out the limitations of existing testing practices and stressing the need for objective, accurate and consistent approaches to assessing fluency that draw on research evidence. To this end, they suggest using mixed-methods approaches to examine fluency in language testing to achieve a fuller understanding of fluency on both monologic and interactional tasks.

Chapter 7 looks at future directions in fluency research and practices. The authors emphasize the value of moving away from research on L2 fluency in English and eschewing native-speaker norms of fluent speech. They point out the importance of considering fluency cross-linguistically in different contexts and conducting research on languages other than English.

Overall, this volume presents an up-to-date review of the literature on L2 fluency from a multidisciplinary perspective that will be useful for researchers and practitioners alike. The book includes lists of fluency measures, practical activities for promoting fluency in the L2 classroom, suggestions for a more valid and reliable tests of L2 fluency, and suggestions for future L2 fluency research. It will be of great value to researchers, postgraduate students, materials writers, language testers, and teachers who need a sound theoretical foundation for their practices in teaching, testing, and researching L2 fluency.