the ESPecialist, vol. 33, nº 1 (25-44) 2012 ISSN 0102-7077

THE TENSION BETWEEN ACCURACY AND FLUENCY OF L2 SPEECH: EVIDENCE FROM COMMUNICATIVE TASKS
A Relação entre Acurácia e Fluência na Fala em L2: Evidências de Tarefas Comunicativas

Maria Carolina Porcino (Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, Brasil)
Kyria Rebeca Finardi (Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, Brasil)

Abstract
The study is based on the assumption that communicative approaches foster the development of L2 fluency more than that of accuracy. The impact of repeated communicative tasks on the speech production of five learners was analyzed in terms of accuracy and fluency of L2 speech. Two instruments of data collection were used in a pre/post-test design: an unfocused speaking task to elicit fluency and a focused speaking task to elicit accuracy. Data were transcribed and analyzed mostly qualitatively, although a comparison of test scores was made. Results of the study suggest trade-off effects between accuracy and fluency of learners' L2 speech production.

Key-words: *L2 speech production; accuracy; fluency; trade-off effects.*

Resumo
O estudo se baseia no pressuposto de que abordagens comunicativas beneficiam o desenvolvimento da fluência em L2 mais do que da acurácia. O impacto de tarefas comunicativas na produção oral de cinco aprendizes foi analisado em relação à acurácia e à fluência da fala em L2. Duas tarefas comunicativas foram usadas para coletar dados num formato pré/pós: uma tarefa oral não focada para a fluência e outra tarefa oral focada para a acurácia. Os dados foram transcritos e analisados preponderantemente de maneira qualitativa, ainda que uma comparação entre as notas dos testes também tenha sido feita. Os resultados sugerem trocas entre a acurácia e a fluência da fala em L2.

Palavras-chave: *produção oral em L2; acurácia; fluência; efeitos de compensação.*

1. Introduction

Despite the contribution of studies on possible variables affecting second language acquisition and use[1], several questions remain unanswered. One of these questions is how a second language (hereafter L2) can be best taught and learned. While some researchers were concerned with finding the right method[2] to teach a L2 during the 1970s and 1980s, research nowadays seems to have moved away from the search for the best approach to attempt to describe and understand different pedagogical techniques and their implications for L2 learning and use.

Despite the many L2 methods proposed[3], the communicative language teaching (hereafter CLT) approach seems to have gained more popularity than other methods, as can be attested by its wide use especially in the context of private language institutes in Brazil. Although many such institutes claim to use this method, few can define what it is all about and ideas on how to implement the method and the results produced by it seem to be ill-defined.

One characteristic of this method which seems to be less debatable is its aim at developing learners' communicative competence, defined by Ellis (1994: 13) as the speaker-hearer's "linguistic and pragmatic knowledge" of the language. As put forward by Littlewood (1992), the CLT approach aims at enabling learners to focus on meaning in the largest range of communication situations, by helping them circumvent attention to grammatical forms during communication.

This emphasis on communicative competence has not gone without criticism. Hammerly (1991), for example, suggests that a strong focus on fluency may have as a consequence the neglect of learners'

1. For a comprehensive review see Ellis, 1994 and 2008.

2. The terms *approaches* and *methods* seem to have received different definitions along the years and will be used interchangeably in this study, referring to both the assumptions about language and the plans for teaching L2, whereas the term *technique* will be used to refer to the implementation of these plans. For a complete review of these terms refer to Richards & Rodgers, 1986 – *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching.*

3. For a review of such L2 methods see for example Richards & Rodgers, 1986.

linguistic competence (grammatical knowledge) which could, in turn and in part, prevent students from moving beyond a certain level of proficiency.

When it comes to L2 oral communication more specifically, the concept of communicative competence is usually linked to fluency (usually perceived as smoothness and speed of speech delivery) whereas grammatical competence is more often associated with accuracy and complexity of L2 speech.

In communicative approaches teachers tend to show more tolerance for students' grammatical errors (showing lack of accuracy) than for learners' lack of fluency (Ur, 2010). Indeed, Yule (2006) has pointed out that the tolerance for students' grammatical errors is a feature of communicative approaches which treat errors as "crosslinguistic influences" or "overgeneralizations" or simply as part of the learner's interlanguage[4] system (Selinker, 1972) rather than as obstacles for L2 development.

Regarding error correction and as pointed out by Lightbown and Spada (1990) it is important to state that the repetition of errors, without correction, might cause fossilization[5]. Moreover, if learners are not aware of their error production they may never acquire the correct form and thus stabilize in a certain level of proficiency.

Given the assumption that a strong focus on oral communicative competence (fostered by communicative approaches with emphasis on fluency) may prevent a strong focus on grammatical competence (accuracy), this study investigated the impact of two oral communicative tasks on learners' fluency and accuracy of L2 speech.

4. Yule (2006) and Ellis (1997) describe learner's interlanguage as a "linguistic system" that has characteristics of the learner's L1 and L2 where errors are likely to occur during its development.

5. A process that makes "ungrammatical forms" permanent in learners' interlanguage or not accessible to pedagogical interventions. It is usually associated with the learner's L1 and is reinforced by repetition (Ellis, 1994).

2. Review of literature

Communicative approaches arose in the late 1960s as a reaction against the supposedly weaker and less effective grammar-translation and audio-lingual approaches which were no longer considered effective to fulfill the needs of the "modern" and "globalized" world. It was in this scenario that the Communicative Language Teaching or CLT came as a promise and remedy (Ur, 2010). However, after more than 40 years of CLT, critics and research have shown that no single approach, method or technique can alone account for the complex phenomenon of L2 learning and so research has moved away from the search for the best method to attempt to better understand variables that may be involved in or affect L2 learning and use.

One such variable which has received considerable attention is the effect of different tasks and task conditions on learners' L2 oral performance (Bygate, 2001; D'Ely, 2006; Finardi, 2008; Skehan, 1998, to name but a few). These studies have focused on the impact of different task conditions (repeating the task with or without planning) and task types on learners' L2 speech performance and development.

Bygate (2001) studied the effects of task repetition on learners' L2 speech performance analyzing speech samples in terms of complexity, accuracy and fluency. Bygate (2001) found that in the second encounter with the task learners improved in terms of complexity of L2 speech but lost in terms of fluency. His results were explained in terms of trade-off effects between complexity and fluency of L2 speech. Finardi (2008) also investigated the impact of repeating a task on learners' L2 speech performance and her results corroborate those of Bygate (2001), that is, learners' improved in complexity mainly at the expense of improvements in fluency in the second trial with the task.

D'Ely (2006) investigated the impact of different task conditions and types of planning on learners' L2 performance and found that in general, the planning condition impacts positively on learners' complexity and accuracy of L2 speech. Bygate, D'Ely and Finardi were motivated by Skehan (1998) who, in turn, was based on Information Processing Theory, which claims that people process information

under the constraints of a limited capacity cognitive system. Because of limitations in this system, L2 learners can only devote attention to certain aspects of the task (fluency, complexity, accuracy, etc).

Skehan (1998) investigated the impact of different tasks and task conditions on learners' L2 performance and suggested that the best way to develop language as a whole was to use a healthy diet of communicative tasks (focused on meaning, not on form), some focusing more on fluency, others on accuracy, and task conditions (with or without planning or repetition) so as to enable the learner with a limited capacity cognitive system to focus on different aspects of L2 use and development. As stated in the introduction to this paper, however, most communicative approaches focus more on tasks that develop fluency at the expense of accuracy.

Ano (2004) investigated the relationship between fluency and accuracy of L2 speech in a Japanese High School using a correlational method. The author found no correlations between those two variables and concluded that students who speak more were not necessarily more fluent, because most of the time their speech was full of self-repairs and repetitions, rendering their speech more "dysfluent". Regarding accuracy, Ano suggested that the effort students made to focus on content and meanings led them to make more errors with function words (such as articles and prepositions) than errors with content words (such as nouns and adjectives); also, they made more local errors than global errors[6] and none of them interfered with the communication directly. He concludes by warning teachers that errors must be corrected in order to avoid learning incorrect forms and for him, directing students' attention to grammatical forms is essential to foster language development. Ano's study is relevant to the present investigation insomuch as it sheds some light on how a focus on communication might impact on learners' linguistic development, since it might impede a balance between fluency and accuracy development of learners' L2 speech.

6. Ano (2004) considered global errors as errors that would affect directly meanings and communication and local errors as errors that would not interfere in meanings and communication.

3. Methods

This is mainly a qualitative study based on the assumption that communicative approaches and tasks may foster the development of fluency at the expense of accuracy. Data consisted of transcripts originating from two oral tasks, one task designed mainly for fluency and another mainly for accuracy, implemented in a pre/post test design following Bygate (2001) and Finardi (2008). Data analysis consisted of observation of task execution, measurement and description of the transcripts originating in this execution.

3.1. Research question

The aim of the present study was to investigate the effects of using communicative tasks on learners' performance in terms of accuracy and fluency of L2 speech. The study was based on the main assumption that communicative approaches and tasks, focusing strongly on meanings and communication, develop learners' fluency more than their accuracy of L2 speech. It was also based on evidence from Bygate (2001) and Finardi (2008), according to which when learners repeat a task they can devote more attention to some aspects (such as complexity) of L2 performance, at the expense of others (for example accuracy and fluency) and consequently improvements in one dimension might cause losses in the other (or others).

Having outlined the general aim of the study, the general research question of what the impact of communicative tasks is on learners' accuracy and fluency of L2 speech was raised, producing the following research questions:

1) Are there differences between PRE/POST test scores in terms of accuracy and fluency of L2 speech of learners exposed to communicative tasks?

2) Did participants exposed to communicative tasks gain in one aspect of L2 speech (fluency) more than in the other (accuracy)?

3.2. Participants and context

Five young adult EFL (English as a foreign language) advanced level participants (four females and one male) were selected for this study and agreed to participate in it, after signing a consent form. No selection criteria were used apart from the proficiency level which was assumed since all participants belonged to the same EFL intact class.

Participants had been studying English for an average of three and a half years and had almost daily contact with the target language outside the class through music, internet and movies. The context in which this research was conducted was a Brazilian private language institute that claims to use a Communicative Approach and where classes are taught in English, teachers are instructed to focus on meaning and not on form. The book used by the group of participants has no grammar section.

The treatment – pedagogical interventions based on the Communicative Approach– was not controlled for, but the teacher in charge of the group informed the researcher that during the interval between pre- and post-task implementation, participants would work on the theme "sleep", which was then used to design the tasks in this study.

3.3. Instruments of data collection

Two instruments of data collection were used in this study, one to elicit mainly accuracy and another to elicit mainly fluency of L2 speech. The instruments of data collection were tailored in a pre/post design and consisted of two speaking tasks which were part of a single major task. Based on information supplied by the teacher, the tasks used in this study were based on the content participants were discussing in their regular EFL class. Although the tasks were tailored so as to elicit mainly accuracy or fluency scores, the two dimensions of L2 speech were measured and analyzed in both tasks so as to enable cross-analysis and data triangulation.

Accuracy task

The accuracy task requested participants to answer four questions about "sleep" and it was administered in an interview format. The accuracy task was focused[7] (Ellis, 2003) and designed to elicit participants' use of some specific linguistic structures such as: auxiliary verbs and connectors (*do you…unless you*), present perfect (*have you ever...*) and *used to*. The aim of this task was to collect data which enabled the analysis of accuracy of those specific linguistic forms. Also this task aimed to trigger students' ideas about the theme (to set the scene or prime students' knowledge to enable more fluency in the second task).

In the post-test three questions (which had not been included in the first trial) were included in the interview as distracters. These questions, although used as distracters, were considered as part of the data, and so transcribed and analyzed.

Fluency Task

The fluency task consisted of an oral task designed to elicit participants' fluency, and required participants to talk about the theme (sleep) freely, as much as they could. It was assumed that since this task was done after the accuracy task, participants would have activated (primed) specific vocabulary about the topic (sleep), making it available for faster processing; thus, participants would be able to focus more on fluency than on accuracy (of lexical items, for example).

3.4. Procedures

Before the implementation of the tasks, participants received a sheet of paper with three cartoons, which showed situations that illustrated the theme "sleep" in a light and funny way. Also, on the same

7. As stated by Ellis (2003), a focused task is generally employed to elicit specific structures but participants should not be informed of this focus and consequently the use of the specific structures might be incidental.

sheet of paper, there were some questions (distracters) among which were the questions used in the accuracy task. Participants were given some minutes to read the cartoons, the questions and think about their answers to those questions. After that, they were instructed to speak. They were then interviewed individually and their speech samples were recorded and transcribed.

The same accuracy and fluency tasks were repeated after a month in a pre/post test design but in the post-test other questions (distracters) were included in the accuracy task in order not to resemble the pre-test so much. The interval of a month was intentionally made in order to verify if there was any difference in participants' L2 speech performance after a period of treatment in which they were exposed to communicative tasks based on the Communicative Approach.

Following Finardi and Prebianca (2006), two measures of speech production were calculated, one for accuracy and another one for fluency.

Accuracy Measures

In this study, accuracy was indexed as the production of structurally correct utterances of L2 (Johnson & Johnson, 1998). No distinctions were made between errors and mistakes[8] (Ellis, 1997). In this study errors were considered to be any deviation from the English grammar norm in terms of syntax and morphology. Errors of pronunciation, collocation, intonation or stress were not considered and when learners self-corrected themselves right after they committed an error, these errors were not counted. Omitted grammatical forms were also counted as errors.

Students' accuracy score of L2 oral performance was calculated with a global measure of accuracy in which speech production samples

8. Ellis (1997) states that errors reflect gaps in the learners' linguistic knowledge. This occurs when they really do not know the correct form. On the contrary, he defines mistakes as occasional lapses in the learners' performance. They happen when learners are not able to perform what they know specifically at that moment.

are collected, transcribed and the number of linguistic errors per 100 words is counted (Finardi & Prebianca, 2006). The more errors counted, the less accurate the speech sample was.

Fluency Measures

Despite the multifaceted nature of this concept, and the myriad of definitions for fluency, in this study, fluency was understood as the appropriateness and smooth "flow" of L2 (Johnson & Johnson, 1998). Following Finardi and Prebianca (2006: 239), participant's fluency was assessed "in terms of unpruned speech rate (including self-repetitions and corrections)" which in turn was calculated by dividing the total number of words uttered by the total time in seconds that the participant took to complete the task. Then, in order to find the number of words produced per minute, the result of the division mentioned above was multiplied by 60.

3.5. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed mostly qualitatively, although a comparative analysis of test scores was made. The analysis consisted of the observation and description of apparent differences between each participant's performance in the pre- and post-tests and also between gains and losses between the two dimensions of speech (accuracy and fluency). Each instrument was developed and applied to elicit mainly one of the two aspects of L2 speech investigated in this study (accuracy and fluency). However, for a more comprehensive analysis, both accuracy and fluency were calculated in the whole sample, irrespectively of what they were focused on, that is, in the accuracy task fluency scores were also calculated and vice-versa. In order to calculate fluency scores in the accuracy task, 19 seconds were subtracted from the total time in the pre-test and 22 seconds in the post-test. These time spans represented the time the researcher took to ask the questions. It is important to note that accuracy scores must be interpreted in the opposite way from fluency scores, that is, the higher the accuracy score, the worse the participant's

performance, since it means the participant made more errors, and the other way round is considered for fluency, since participants with higher scores spoke more and were thus more fluent. The scores were then transformed into percentages in order to present the gains and losses in a clearer way.

4. Results

By observing and analyzing the transcripts and the fluency and accuracy scores of each participant it is possible to make the following assertions:

Participant 1

Participant 1 showed some improvement on accuracy (2.80 in the pre-test and 2.06 in the post-test, a total of 26.4% of improvement). A consideration has to be made in relation to the pre-test, in which two errors (verb tense errors) were repeated right after they were made, twice each ("…the teacher ***talk, talk, talk***…" and "…I just ***fell*** and ***fell*** and ***fell***…"), probably used as a strategy to emphasize. It was also possible to notice that he made different kinds of errors. He made errors of verb tense in the pre-test ("…I just ***fell*** and ***fell*** and ***fell***…", past form instead of simple present) and of plural in the post-test ("…6 or 7 ***hour*** a night…"). His fluency scores showed a very small loss in the post-test (111.3 in the pre-test and 108.7 in the post-test, a total of 6.8% of loss), and it was possible to see a great number of pauses in both fluency tests (14 pauses in the pre-test and 16 pauses in the post-test) and some false starts and repetitions as well ("…I I wake tired and I spend all day, all day tired…and…" ; "Ok…nowadays…ehhh…I think that our sleep…"). In the cross-analysis, he had losses in terms of fluency in the accuracy tests (113.5 in the pre-test and 105.8 in the post-test, 24.0% of loss) and a great gain in terms of accuracy in the fluency tests (3.12 in the pre-test and 0.99 in the post-test, a total of 68.2% of improvement). In both fluency tests, participant 1 repeated errors of verb tense, such as "…it just *kill* me…" in the pre-test and "…nightmares also *disturbs* me…" in the post-test.

Thus, it is possible to conclude that participant 1 improved in terms of accuracy but lost in terms of fluency, since both tests showed considerable gains in accuracy scores and losses in fluency scores. His gains in accuracy were higher especially in the fluency tests; however, his repetition of the same kind of error might be an indication that he already has those incorrect forms internalized. In terms of fluency, he had a little loss in the accuracy tests but a considerable loss in the fluency tests. His gains in accuracy and losses in fluency in the fluency tests may be taken as evidence that participant 1, in order to speak more accurately, was less fluent, thus showing a trade-off effect and somehow corroborating results found by Bygate (2001) and Finardi (2008), who showed that in a task repetition condition the focus on one aspect of L2 speech production led participants to neglect other aspects. Notwithstanding this trade-off effect, participant 1's result goes against the main assumption of this study, because he was more accurate and less fluent.

Participant 2

Participant 2 improved his accuracy scores considerably in the second take (2.67 in the pre-test and 0 in the post-test, 100% of improvement). His errors in the pre-test were mainly of verb tense "…I totally ***fall*** asleep…" (present instead of past) and "…my friend ***were*** like…". In the post-test, he did not make any errors; however, it was possible to observe that he was briefer in his answers in the post-test (112 words in the pre-test and 97 words in the post-test) and possibly he took fewer risks and had less chances to make errors. In relation to his fluency performance, his pre- and post-tests were very similar in terms of pauses, repetitions and scores (143.1 in the pre-test and 148.9 in the post-test, just 4.0% of improvement). The cross-analysis showed that in the accuracy tests, this participant had losses in fluency (126.7 in the pre-test and 103.9 in the post-test, a total of 17.9% of loss) and the same happened in the fluency tests in terms of accuracy (1.20 in the pre-test and 1.47 in the post-test, 22.5% of loss).

Thus, in the case of participant 2, we can see that he had a considerable improvement in terms of accuracy in his accuracy tests perhaps because he was briefer and took fewer risks. However, he had losses in this same aspect in the fluency test. His fluency scores had a very

small improvement in the fluency tests but had a considerable loss in the accuracy tests. Again, it is possible to suggest, in the case of participant 2, that his result might be an indication that there are trade-off effects in terms of accuracy and fluency in the repetition task, because in the accuracy tests although he gained in terms of accuracy he lost in terms of fluency and the opposite happened in the fluency tests.

Participant 3

Participant 3 had a worse accuracy performance in his post-test (0 in the pre-test and 3.61 in the post-test, a total of 361% of loss), although he spoke fewer words (119 words in the pre-test and 83 in the post-test). The errors committed in the post-test were errors involving the indefinite article ("I'm ***a*** easy person…") and verb tense ("…but yes I ***use***…", present instead of past). Regarding his fluency performance, participant 3 had a loss in the post-test (117.6 in the pre-test and 85.2 in the post-test, a loss of 27.5%), although he had almost the same number of pauses and repetitions in both tests. Conversely, looking at the scores for fluency in the accuracy tests, this participant had gains (125.6 in the pre-test and 160.6 in the post-test, a gain of 27.8%). Also, he had gains in terms of accuracy in the fluency tests (1.98 in the pre-test and 1.02 in the post-test, a total of 27.8% of improvement). It is important to mention that in the fluency post-test, he made an error he had also made in both accuracy tests, an error of verb tense ("use" instead of "used"), which might be an indication that this incorrect form is probably internalized (fossilized).

Regarding participant 3, he improved neither in accuracy (in the accuracy test), nor in fluency (in the fluency test) and his performance in the post-test was considerably worse than in the pre-test. However, the opposite interpretation is possible in the cross-analysis because he had gains in terms of fluency in the accuracy tests and gains of accuracy in the fluency tests. Based on this result, it is possible to see that in the case of this participant, in order to speak more fluently he made more errors and in order to speak more accurately he was less fluent, thus once more showing trade-off effects as reported in Bygate (2001) and Finardi (2008), and as was expected in the study, although not in this direction (improve fluency in the accuracy test and improve accuracy in the fluency test).

Participant 4

Participant 4's excerpts show his accuracy scores improved (1.44 in the pre-test and 0.78 in the post-test, a gain of 45.8%) despite the fact that in the post-test he used a larger number of words (69 words in the pre-test and 127 word in the post-test), but he made the same number (1 in each) and the same kind of error (verb tense) in both tests ("…I ***were*** slept when…" in the pre-test and "…everybody nowadays ***sleep…"*** in the post-test). In terms of fluency, the improvement in the post-test (64.8 in the pre-test and 115.3 in the post-test, 77.9% of gain) could be explained by the smaller number of pauses he made (14 pauses in the pre-test and 3 in the post-test). The cross-analysis showed little gains in terms of fluency in the accuracy tests (98.5 in the pre-test and 104.3 in the post-test, just 5.8% of gain) and great losses in terms of accuracy in the fluency tests (1.49 in the pre-test and 2.85 in the post-test, 91.2% of loss).

Participant 4 improved both in accuracy and in fluency in the accuracy tests, although his gains in fluency were little. Conversely, in the fluency tests, although he had a significant gain in terms of fluency, he also had a considerable loss in terms of accuracy. The result obtained from his fluency tests corroborates the assumption made at the outset of this study, that is, he was more fluent and less accurate. This result also reveals the trade-off effects in terms of accuracy and fluency again. In the case of participant 4 in his fluency tests his losses in terms of accuracy were compensated by his gains in terms of fluency.

Participant 5

Participant 5 had a small loss in the accuracy scores (4.44 in the pre-test and 4.51 in the post-test, a loss of 1.5%) and also a small loss in the fluency scores (132.6 in the pre-test and 116.5 in the post-test, a loss of 12.1%). Regarding accuracy, his errors were varied: he made errors related to the use of the article ("…don't work in ***(the)*** next day…"), preposition ("…troubles ***from*** sleep…") and verb tense ("Yeah I ***sleep*** more because I studied…"). The structure "my father have…" was repeated in both his accuracy and fluency tests, possibly another example of a fossilized form. In the post-test he had fewer repetitions, pauses and hesitations in his speech than in the pre-test; however, it did

not make his speech more fluent. The cross-analysis of his data showed that the opposite occurred, that is, he had gains in terms of fluency in the accuracy tests (103.8 in the pre-test and 120.9 in the post-test, a gain of 16.4%) and losses in terms of accuracy in the fluency tests (3.03 in the pre-test and 5.98 in the post-test, a loss of 37.3%).

It is possible to say that participant 5 had losses in terms of accuracy in the accuracy tests and in the fluency tests, although these losses were higher in the fluency tests. In terms of fluency, he had gains in the accuracy tests and losses in the fluency tests. Clearly, his performances were worse in the fluency tests, since he had losses in terms of both accuracy and fluency. In the accuracy tests his performance shows he had a little loss in terms of accuracy and a gain in terms of fluency.

Looking at the performance of all participants and their tests (accuracy and fluency x pre and post), it is not possible to find a pattern of improvements or losses in the L2 speech aspects investigated in this study. Participant 1 improved in accuracy and lost in fluency for both tests, thus his result goes against the assumption made at the outset of this study. Participant 2 was more accurate in the accuracy tests and more fluent in the fluency tests. His result also showed trade-off effects between the two analyzed aspects and his losses in one aspect seem to have been compensated by the gains in the other aspect. The opposite pattern was observed with participant 3, who had losses in accuracy in the accuracy tests and losses in fluency in the fluency tests, but again there was evidence of trade-off effects between the aspects. Only participant 4 had more improvements in terms of fluency than in terms of accuracy, thus offering a weak corroboration of the assumption that improvements in fluency occur at the expense of improvements in accuracy. Participant 4's results also showed that there are trade-off effects between the two analyzed aspects. Finally, participant 5 had losses in both accuracy and fluency in the fluency tests and in the accuracy tests he gained in fluency but had a very little loss in accuracy. His results showed both aspects going in the same direction in the fluency tests and accuracy tests, again bringing evidence of the trade-off effects previously mentioned. Participant 5 was more fluent and less accurate in the accuracy test, but his losses in terms of accuracy were so insignificant that it is not possible to consider that his result corroborates the main assumption of this study.

Overall, looking at the total of gains and losses in both tests it is possible to suggest that they were fairly similar for both accuracy and fluency. In the accuracy tests, there were 3 gains and 2 losses in terms of accuracy and the same result was observed in relation to fluency. In the fluency test, the same pattern was observed and there were 2 gains and 3 losses for both accuracy and fluency. Thus, if the gains and losses for both tests are added up, the results are very similar: 5 out of the 10 scores show improvement for fluency in both tests and 5 out of the 10 scores show improvement for accuracy.

Within the accuracy tests, there was only one participant (Participant 4) who had gains in both areas; all of the other students demonstrated trade-off effects – if they improved in one area they showed losses in the other area. In the fluency test, only one participant (Participant 5) showed losses in both areas and the rest showed trade-off effects.

Taken together, results of the study seem to indicate that there are trade-off effects between accuracy and fluency in the L2 speech performance of most participants, thus corroborating Bygate's (2001) and Finardi's (2008) findings for this task condition.

The results of participant 1 (in both tests) and participant 4 (just in the fluency test) are contradictory since the former goes against the hypothesis raised at the outset of this study and the latter corroborates it, despite the weak evidence. So, it is possible to say that the results of this study were not conclusive in relation to the main assumption; in other words, in relation to the direction of the gains or losses, that is, there are gains and losses, but not in the direction that had been hypothesized.

5. Discussion

Results of the present study were varied and did not totally corroborate (nor reject) the main assumption, according to which communicative approaches focusing on students' communicative competence foster fluency development at the expense of accuracy. Instead, results provide evidence that there are trade-off effects

between accuracy and fluency, corroborating Bygate (2001) and Finardi (2008).

One possibility to explain the data is the treatment given in the month of interval between the pre- and the post-tests. The treatment used in this study – pedagogical interventions and tasks based on communicative approaches – was not controlled for and so it is not possible to measure or indicate how and to what extent it may have influenced the results of this study.

Another explanation which is also a limitation of this study and which must be acknowledged, since it may have influenced the results, is related to the limited number of participants. Data from just five participants were not comprehensive enough to show a pattern in relation to speech production variations as a result of the use of communicative tasks based on communicative approaches. Therefore, any claims concerning the impact of such tasks and approaches must be taken with caution.

One pedagogical suggestion that can be made in light of the results of this study is to focus on form between trials and communicative tasks so as to foster accuracy development. One way of doing this is by showing learners their transcriptions, correct them and then have them repeat the task to see whether the treatment (focus on form) has any impact on accuracy and fluency of speech.

6. Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to investigate the impact of communicative tasks based on a communicative approach on learner's accuracy and fluency of L2 speech based on the main assumption that communicative approaches improve students' fluency at the expense of accuracy. The main assumption of this study was only partially and weakly supported. The task repetition condition in which participants were tested brought improvements to students' performance in terms of accuracy and fluency, as expected (although not in the direction expected), but these improvements had no pattern among the participants.

What became evident is that there are clear trade-off effects in terms of fluency and accuracy in learners' L2 speech, as suggested by Bygate (2001) and Finardi (2008). Thus, overall, participants were more fluent when they were less accurate and more accurate when they were less fluent.

Notwithstanding the limitations of this study, it is important to bear in mind that it represents an important contribution to L2 pedagogy insomuch as it adds further evidence for the trade-off effects of learners' L2 speech performance. In line with studies which aim at understanding L2 acquisition (for a comprehensive view see Ellis, 2008) and based on the results borne out by the present study, it is possible to suggest that instead of looking for the best approach to L2 teaching, researchers may turn their eyes to variables that affect L2 use and learning, such as task design and implementation.

Recebido em: 09/2011; Aceito em: 05/2012.

References

ANO, K. 2004. Japanese English: fluency and accuracy in the spoken English of High School learners. Paper published in the Proceedings of the 8th Conference of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics. Tokyo: Waseda University Media Mix Corp. pp. 9-16.

BYGATE, M. 2001. Effects of task repetition on the structure and control of oral language. In: M. BYGATE; P. SKEHAN and M. SWAIN (Eds.), 2001, *Researching pedagogic tasks – second language learning and testing.* London: Longman. pp. 23-49.

D'ELY, R. 2006. Task planning conditions on L2 speech performance. Tese de Doutorado, Departamento de Língua e Literatura Estrangeiras (DLLE), Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina.

ELLIS, R. 1994. *The study of second language acquisition.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

_____ 1997. *Second language acquisition.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

_____ 2003. *Task-based language teaching and learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

_____ 2008. *Second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

FINARDI, K. 2008. Effects of task repetition on L2 oral performance**.** *Trabalhos em Linguística Aplicada*, **47.**1: 31-43. Campinas.

_____; and PREBIANCA, G. 2006. Working memory capacity and speech production in L2: evidences from a picture description task**.** *Revista Estudos da Linguagem*, **14.**1: 231-260. Belo Horizonte.

HAMMERLY, H. 1991. *Fluency and accuracy: toward balance in language teaching and learning*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

JOHNSON, K. and JOHNSON, H. 1998. *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Applied Linguistics*. UK: Blackwell Publishers.

LIGHTBOWN, P. and SPADA, N. 1990. Focus-on-form and corrective feedback in communicative language teaching: effects on second language learning. *Studies in second language acquisition,* **12.**4: 429-448.

LITTLEWOOD, W. 1992. *Communicative language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

RICHARDS, J. and ROGERS, T. 1986. *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

SELINKER, L. 1972. Interlanguage. *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, **10**: 209-241.

SKEHAN, P. 1998. *A cognitive approach to language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

UR, P. 2010. *The communicative approach revisited*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

YULE, G. 2006. *The study of language*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Maria Carolina Porcino has a degree in English from the Federal University of Espírito Santo and has been working as an EFL teacher for 3 years. She is currently a candidate for the Master's Program of the same institution in the area of Applied Linguistics. carolina_porcino@hotmail.com

Kyria Rebeca Finardi has a BA, an MA and a PhD in English and Applied Linguistics from the Federal University of Santa Catarina and is a professor at the Education Department and at the Post-Graduation Program of the Federal University of Espírito Santo. kyria.finardi@gmail.com