

# Fluency and Accuracy in the Spoken English of Japanese High School Learners

Kouichi Ano (Waseda  
University)

CZK10331@nifty.com



# 1. Introduction

- ❁ The Course of Study (1994,2003)
- ❁ Grammar focused teaching
  - Communicative language teaching
- ❁ Observation of students' English in classes
  - fluent but inaccurate



❁ Too much emphasis on oral communication skills

teachers force students to speak English without paying enough attention to accuracy (Takashima 2000)

❁ No grammar class in curriculum



❁ Students cannot communicate appropriately because of lack of grammatical knowledge



## ❁ Debate among teachers

Which is more important, communication or grammar?

## ❁ Grammatical knowledge is a must for appropriate communication



❁ Instruction about language use is not enough in terms of communication in English education in Japan (Imai 1998)



❁ “The aim of FonF studies is to determine how learner approximation to the target can be improved through instruction that draws attention to form but is not isolated from communication.” (Doughty and Williams 1998)



- ❁ “Teaching grammar lessons out of context, as paradigms to be rehearsed and memorized, is also insufficient.” (Swain 1998)
- ❁ Grammar can be acquired while the learners attention is on meaning . (Beretta 1989)



❁ Overall Objectives of The Course of Study  
(2003)

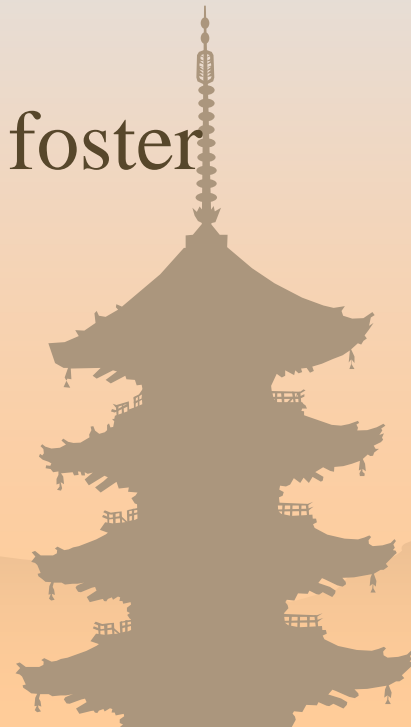
❁ “To develop students’ practical communication abilities such as understanding information and the speaker’s or writer’s intentions, and expressing their own ideas,...”

the balance of fluency and accuracy



# The aims of the study

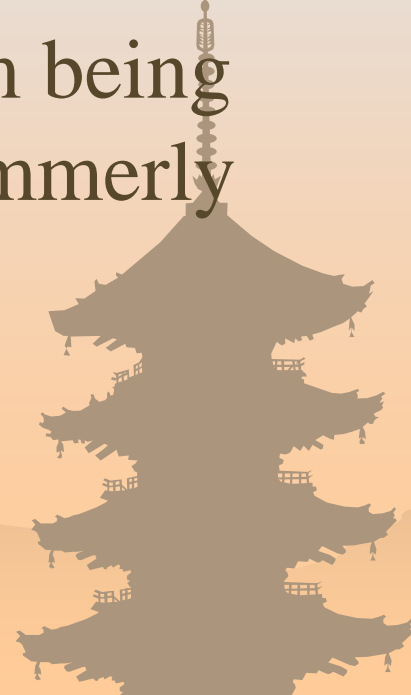
- ❁ To analyze the utterances of high school learners
- ❁ To investigate the relation between fluency and accuracy in their utterances
- ❁ To reconsider the teaching methods to foster the learners' communication ability



## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1 Fluency and accuracy of foreign language learners

- ❁ The study of immersion programs
- ❁ - Immersion students become quite fluent but their utterances are sometimes far from being accurate (Swain and Lapkin 1995, Hammerly 1987,1991)



❁ The criteria of foreign language proficiency tests

=Fluency and accuracy are the main factors in ACTFL and SST, etc.



## 2.2 The definition of fluency

### ❁ Five factors

- (1) Total number of words
- (2) Silent pauses for thinking
- (3) Repetition of words, phrases or clauses
- (4) Repair or reformulation for correction
- (5) Mean length of utterance



## 2.3 The definition of accuracy

- ❁ Grammatical errors
  - ❁ The frequency of errors
  - ❁ The kinds of errors
- 
- ❁ To investigate the learners' accuracy under the instruction of communication based lessons



# 3. Experiment

## 3.1 The purposes

- ❁ To investigate the correlation between fluency and grammatical accuracy in the utterances of high school learners
- ❁ To find the frequency and kinds of errors in terms of accuracy



## 3.2 Hypotheses

### ❁ What to know

- (1) To check whether each variable for fluency has a correlation with any other variable to show fluency using numerical values
- (2) To investigate the observation that fluent learners are not always accurate



## ❁ Null hypotheses

### ❁ Hypothesis 1

Total number of words, the number of silent pauses, the number of repetition, the number of repair and mean length of utterance have a negative correlation with each other



## ❁ Hypothesis 2

Fluency and accuracy in the utterances of high school learners has a positive correlation



## 3.3 Subjects

- ❁ Japanese senior high school learners of English (grade 11)
- ❁ 58 students (boys 10, girls 48) in Oral Communication A classes (speaking class)



## 3.4 Procedure

- ❁ Time of the experiment

Class A – Before the winter vacation

Class B – After the winter vacation

- ❁ Place

Language Laboratory – The subjects recorded their voice individually at the same time



❁ The subjects were asked to answer the following questions in two minutes. The utterances were tape-recorded.

❁ They were given one minute to think before starting to answer the questions.



# The questions

## ❁ Class A

What are you going to do in your winter vacation? / What do you want to do in your winter vacation?

## ❁ Class B

How did you spend your winter vacation? /  
What did you do in your winter vacation?



# 3.5 Analysis

## 3.5.1 Transcribe the spoken data

❁ ( ) silent pause

I want to ( ) buy ( ) shoes and clothes

❁ <r> repetition

<r>I have I have a lot of homework

❁ <R> repair

<R> I enjoy I enjoyed winter vacation

< J > Japanese < L > laughter < C > cough



## 3.5.2 Numerical values of fluency

### ❁ Five variables

- (1) Total number of words in 2 minutes
- (2) Frequency of silent pauses
- (3) Frequency of repetition
- (4) Frequency of repair
- (5) Mean length of utterance



## ❁ Principal component analysis

- integrated the five variables into one value
- = fluency of the subjects



## 3.5.3 Measurement of accuracy

❁ Checked by three native speakers of English

A British ALT (male)

An American ALT (male)

An Australian guest teacher (female)



- ❁ Errors checked by at least one native speaker were investigated

<Judging criteria for errors>

- ❁ Errors taught as misuses at school
- ❁ Errors checked by more than two native speakers



❁ Numerical values of accuracy

= total number of words / (the number of errors+1)

The bigger, the more accurate



# 4. Results

## 4.1 Hypothesis 1

- ❁ Correlations among total number of words, the number of silent pauses, the number of repetitions, the number of repairs and mean length of utterances

=all of them have positive correlations  
(Pearson correlation)

- ❁ Hypothesis 1 was rejected

=the five variables can be used for fluency



## ❁ Significant correlation

(1) Total number of words – the number of repetitions

(2) Total number of words – the number of repairs

Repetitions and repairs can be the cause of a large number of words being used



(3) The number of repetitions – the number of repairs

Learners who repeat words, phrases or clauses often repair their utterances



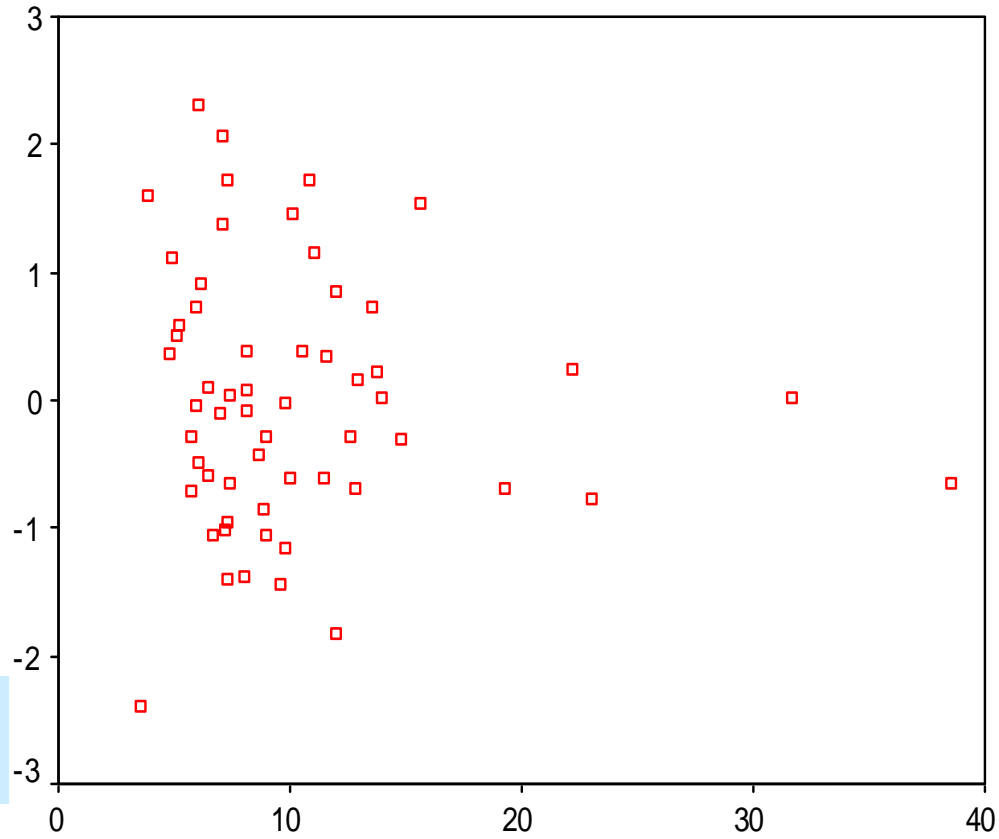
## 4.2 Hypothesis 2

- ❁ The correlation between fluency and accuracy  
 $r = -.088$  (Pearson correlation)
- ❁ No relationship between fluency and accuracy
- ❁ Hypothesis 2 was rejected



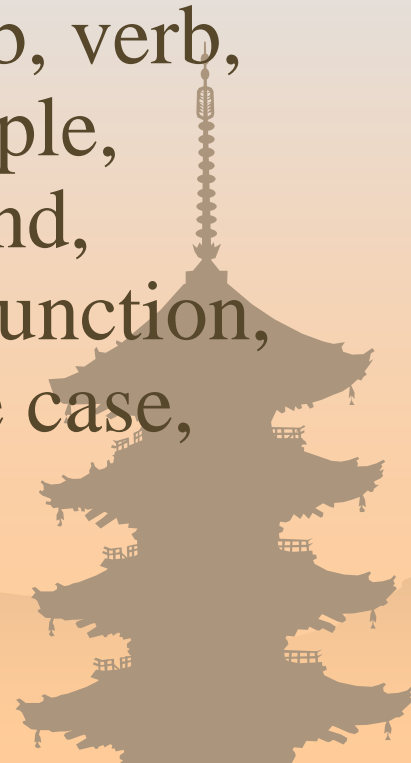
# Scattergram

Fluency

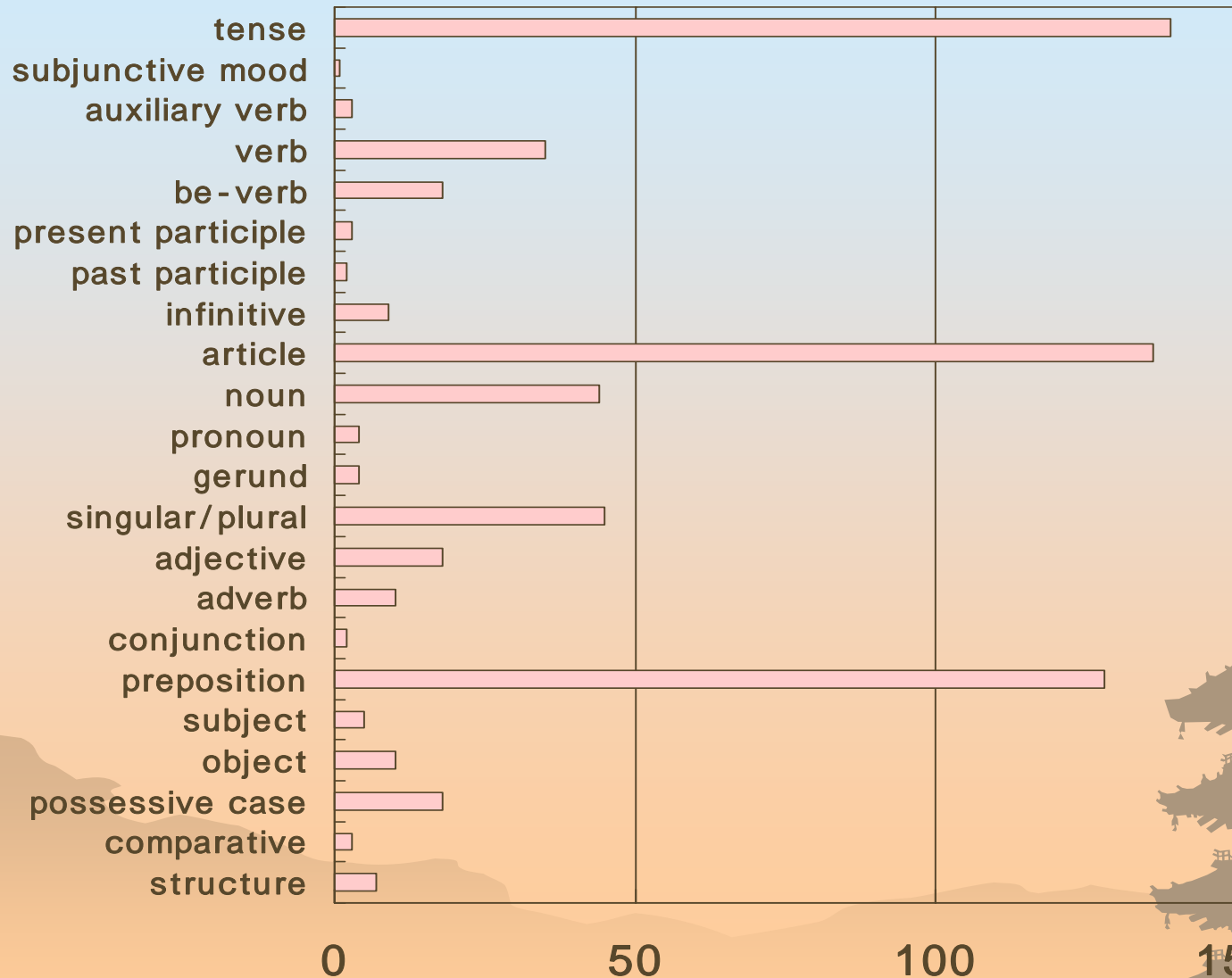


## 4.3 Kinds of errors

- ❁ The total number of errors = 644
- ❁ Classification of errors = 22 categories (classified based on learners' data)
- ❁ tense, subjunctive mood, auxiliary verb, verb, be-verb, present participle, past participle, infinitive, article, noun, pronoun, gerund, singular/plural, adjective, adverb, conjunction, preposition, subject, object, possessive case, comparative, structure



# Frequency of grammatical errors



- ❁ Present tenses were used for past/future
- ❁ Adverbial phrases were used correctly
- ❁ The learners couldn't pay attention to the change of tense of the verbs or auxiliary verbs even though they understood the time



- ❁ Errors of articles and prepositions
- ❁ The learners couldn't monitor function words
- ❁ Unnecessary prepositions were used because of chunks



- ❁ Errors of nouns
- ❁ Confusion of cardinal numbers and ordinal numbers which was influenced by the topic chosen
- ❁ There are some learners that repeat the errors of tense, articles and prepositions



# 5. Educational implications

- ❁ Learners with many utterances are not always fluent
- ❁ Repetition and repair are the factors which produce more utterances than necessary



- ❁ In order to decrease repetition and repair, instruction is needed to control the pace of utterances to increase the amount of substantial content given in the same amount of utterances



- ❁ Repair can be a factor in promoting accuracy
- ❁ Learners repaired their errors correctly in their utterances which is a good chance to reconfirm their grammatical knowledge
- ❁ It can be possible to promote both fluency and accuracy in classrooms



- ❁ Errors of function words > errors of content words      learners attention is on content
- ❁ Global errors < local errors  
    errors might be acquired in the practice
- ❁ Focus on form instruction should be set in classroom activities



# 6. Expectations

To investigate

- ❁ the contents in the utterances
- ❁ the number of topics in a limited time
- ❁ the relation between accuracy and the messages
- ❁ how teachers can make learners' attention focus on grammatical points to foster communication ability



- ❁ To develop teaching methods for both fluency and accuracy
- ❁ To propose activities in classrooms

