

Sandra Götz. *Fluency in native and nonnative English speech* (Studies in Corpus Linguistics 53). Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 2013. 238 pp. ISBN 978-9-027-203588. Reviewed by **Pascual Pérez-Paredes**, Universidad de Murcia, Campus Mare Nostrum.

Researchers at the crossroads of native speaker language description, EFL teaching and learner language analysis find very rare opportunities to read a smooth integration of all these areas into one single piece. Issue 53 of John Benjamins' series Studies in Corpus Linguistics is one *rara avis* that, I must say, reflects not only the work of an inquisitive linguist, but also the maturity of learner language research in the more general fields of corpus and applied linguistics.

In *Fluency in native and nonnative English speech*, Sandra Götz has approached a topic that is as much talked-about by, literally, millions of English language learners worldwide, as under-researched by the corpus linguistics community. The reasons are most likely linked to the fact that the notion of fluency has traditionally been the subject of foreign language pedagogists and, remarkably, because of the many difficulties that researching fluency pose to the quantitative linguist. In the book the reader will find two distinct parts, an Introduction to the topic and a summary chapter. The first part of the book provides a review of the literature on three interrelated topics: Productive fluency (Chapter 2), Perceptive fluency (Chapter 3) and Nonverbal fluency (Chapter 4). In the second part of the book the author offers original research that explores the notion of fluency both in native and in learner language. To do this, the author gives a detailed account of the research methodology (Chapter 5), presents the results of comparative research into productive fluency in learner and native language data (Chapter 6) and, finally, in Chapter 7 discusses perceptive fluency in five advanced language learners. Chapter 8 presents a summary of the main findings as well as some directions for future research.

In Chapter 1 the author offers a preliminary account of the underlying motivation for her interest in fluency. On the early pages, the reader is already introduced to the target research group in the book: advanced English language

learners in an EFL context, in particular, German learners. The learner language discussed throughout the book is precisely the language of this “very special case of learners of English [...] in their 2nd or 3rd year of University studies who major in English and the majority of whom have spent some time abroad in an English speaking country” (p. 5). This is something that most researchers in the field of learner language will find most convenient as it is often the case that the exact nature of the population investigated is omitted or misrepresented, which eventually impedes a full understanding of the claims contained in the studies. This chapter describes the “different variables that contribute to both the general impression of fluency [...] as well as overall oral proficiency” (p. 5) by presenting a theoretical approach that integrates productive and perceptive factors. This theoretical background is based on, among others, Koponen and Riggensbach (2000) and, although this reference is not mentioned in the book, is inspired by Tavakoli and Skehan (2005). Both papers stress the complexity and multi-faceted nature of the concept of ‘fluency’ and make use of combined quantitative and qualitative research methods. Fluency is then composed of ‘fluencemes’ that fall within one of three abstract categories: production, perceptive and non-verbal fluencemes. Productive fluency is fully addressed in Chapter 2, where the author describes the features that “establish fluency on the part of the speaker” (p. 13). These are divided into temporal variables, formulaic sequences and performance phenomena. The first include speech rate, the mean length of runs, unfilled pauses and the phonation/time ratio, while performance phenomena include repeats, filled pauses, self-corrections and discourse markers. All of these are treated from both the native speaker and the learner perspectives, offering, when available, relevant data that set the tone for the general comparative approach that characterizes the book. The inclusion of this set of ‘fluencemes’ is very much a matter of choice. For example, de Jong and Hulstijn (2009) used Giraud’s index, a lexical metric, as a predictor of fluency, while our author includes lexical diversity as a fluenceme of perceived fluency. It is nonetheless true that the set of fluencemes selected by Sandra Götz is well-documented and, to a large extent, mainly rooted in the corpus-linguistics research tradition of the last two decades.

Chapter 3 deals with fluency as perceived by listeners, which includes highly abstract concepts such as accuracy, idiomaticity, intonation, accent or appropriateness (pragmatic features). Lexical diversity and sentence structure are also included in this category. Finally, Chapter 4 explores nonverbal fluency. The author suggests that video-corpora and multi-layer annotation remain in their infancy, which may pose extra difficulties to research this area from a quantitative perspective.

The second part of the book is the one which will attract the attention of corpus linguists, ELT pedagogists and applied linguists in general. I greatly appreciate Sandra Götz's care and detail in providing a fully-documented account of both the data and the research methodology used in this second part of the book. Chapter 5 will provide ample opportunities for other researchers to replicate the study using other data sets, i.e. other Louvain International Database of Spoken English Interlanguage (LINDSEI) corpora, and/or fluencemes. This chapter is a must read for PhD students and researchers interested in comparative studies of learner language, researchers interested in building constructs that will later be explored using both quantitative and qualitative methods and, in general, applied linguists that seek to use "the native speaker baseline [...] to calculate statistically and objectively in which respects and to what extent advanced learners still show [...] deviations from [the native speaker norm]" (p. 77). This native speaker baseline is based on a comparable corpus of interviews, the Louvain Corpus of Native English Conversation (LOCNEC), which has been used extensively by learner language specialists. After carrying out a pilot study on three German learners in the LINDSEI Corpus, where findings of the corpus analysis and those of nine native speaker raters were compared, the author concluded that the "overall judgments of the raters are in line with the findings from the corpus analysis of the temporal variables and performance phenomena" (p. 86). Based on a careful analysis of this pilot study, Sandra Götz decided to ask the raters only for their evaluation of the particular fluencemes that cannot be "covered by the corpus analysis" (p. 87) and to use the first part of the interview in the LINDSEI elicitation framework as it offers opportunities for more fluent performance than the picture description used in the pilot study. So, for the analysis of productive fluency (Chapter 6) the author relied primarily on statistical data analysis of temporal variables, formulaic sequences and performance phenomena, while for the analysis of perceptive fluency (Chapter 7) Sandra Götz relied upon the native-speaker perception of five selected learners.

Chapter 6 offers the data analysis of productive fluency of the 50 learners in the German LINDSEI (LINDSEI-GE) and the 50 native speakers in the LOCNEC corpus. For every single fluenceme, speech rate, mean length of runs, etc., we find boxplots, stripcharts, dendrograms and summary tables that are useful for the interpretation of the results. German advanced learners of English yield significant differences in all areas and, most interestingly, this applies to every single individual when compared with the LOCNEC means. Thus, German learners' speech rate is slower, their mean length of runs is shorter and there is an overuse of unfilled pauses. In a similar fashion, fluency enhancing strategies differ significantly from the means in the native speaker data. This time, how-

ever, this only affects all 50 learners in the 3-grams variable, while the 4-grams ‘strategy’ is underused only by 92 per cent of the speakers in LINDSEI-GE. Repeats and filled pauses are overused significantly by learners while discourse markers and smallwords (e.g. *sort of, kind of, quite*) are significantly underused. In the final part of the chapter, the author develops an interesting quantitative (regression) analysis that integrates the above into a temporal fluency score (TF-Score) in order to calculate “each speaker’s individual performance relative to the NS mean for each variable” and to “see if it is connected with the speaker’s performance in the fluency enhancement strategies” (p.129). In native speakers, 4-grams and smallwords have a high predictive power on the speaker’s TF-score but not even these fluencemes are statistically significant. None of the fluency strategies is connected with temporal fluency performance in the case of the learners. Only the time spent abroad seems to play a role here. The chapter ends with a cluster analysis of the fluencemes that allows the author to characterize the speakers into three groups for both native speakers and German learners. This classification will certainly be of use in future research.

Chapter 7 approaches the analysis of perceptive fluency of a selected group of German learners (n=5) from a qualitative perspective. Although the selection is well-justified (p. 147), I wonder if it would have made more sense to select, for example, two learners from each of the three groups in the classification outlined above (Chapter 6). Nevertheless, all five learners were perceived by native speakers/raters (n=50) as deviating from the fluencemes investigated (accuracy, idiomaticity, register, sentence structure, accent, intonation and pragmatic fluency). The results for each learner are discussed in individual case studies, which allow for a great depth in the analysis of the scores. It is interesting that temporal fluency “has a higher correlation with the overall ratings” (p. 159), although it is not statistically significant.

Despite the vastness of the topic, Sandra Götz has been successful in designing and implementing a research methodology that integrates insights and contributions from a wealth of research traditions such as computer-aided learner language analysis, corpus studies and applied linguistics. The research methodology is extremely well-documented and any researcher in the field may replicate the study. The book includes caveats and limitations, which contribute significantly to the scientific quality of the research results. I consider this volume of tremendous interest to the corpus linguistics community as it offers a realistic and feasible use of data-driven research in a very complex and multifaceted area. Those doing research on second language acquisition (SLA) will similarly find the study revealing in different ways. Schmidt (1994: 21) already stated that “the problem of control in second language learning is essentially the

problem of accounting for fluency”, that is, output processing and automaticity are areas of learner performance that affect our perception of learner language. Together with automatic learner language assessment, it is this particular area of SLA that will benefit most from the type of insight provided in this book.

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