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Life (and language teaching) is full of debates and decisions. Tea or coffee? Instagram or TikTok? Sweet or savoury? For language educators, deciding whether accuracy is more important than fluency (or the other way around) is one of the big questions that always provokes debate in classrooms and staffrooms. This blog post, therefore, explores the two key concepts, outlines their importance for language learning, and attempts to conclude which might be most important. We also highlight how educators can develop targeted lesson interventions that help all students to improve both skills. And detail how Sanako solutions can help educators to improve both skillsets. What is accuracy in language learning? Accuracy is often what we think about when we are learning a language. The term refers to how correct learners’ use of the language system is, including their use of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Accuracy, for example, demonstrates a learner’s ability to use the correct verb forms (past tense, present tense, and so on), articles (a, an, the), and prepositions (in, on, from, at). These are, of course, important skills to learn and the accurate use of language is particularly important in written communication as errors and mistakes tend to stand out more when written down. Such mistakes in all walks of life (particularly in academia or business) can also cause misunderstandings and reflect badly on the writer, suggesting poor attention to detail or even worse, general incompetence. It takes lots of practice for language learners to become accurate in their target languages and it’s something that’s developed through many small steps. Alongside grammar exercises, definitions, gap fills, and drills, teachers often use controlled practice activities to help students work on their accuracy. These enable repeated practice of the target language, with little variation or room for creative misusing of the language. As the answers are either right or wrong, teachers usually correct mistakes near the end of the activity. What is fluency? Fluency refers to the ease with which a learner can explain themselves. In other words, how well can they communicate without pauses or hesitations, without needing to search for words or phrases, and without having to think about what they are about to say/write. When a language learner has good fluency, it means that they can produce and engage with language in a smooth and effortless way. Of course, they might make mistakes, but they’re able to easily communicate their thoughts and ideas in both spoken and written form. In all settings, language fluency is incredibly important. After all, it’s not much use knowing all of the vocabulary if you cannot use the words to communicate! Building fluency enables learners to explain their views and engage in conversation with peers and/or native speakers. Outside of the classroom, the ability to communicate fluently will help smooth your entry into a foreign culture, making it easier for you to make yourself understood and to fully enjoy your international adventure! Paul Nation (2003) suggests that the following conditions need to be in place for educators to deliver effective fluency activities for their learners: All language items involved are already familiar to students, The focus is on communication (not grammatical structure) in real-time, and Supports are in place for students to outperform their normal proficiency. Fluency activities, therefore, tend to focus not so much on how students are communicating but on what they are communicating. Examples of fluency-building language learning activities include peer or group conversations, roleplays, debates, projects, and presentations. What’s more important: Accuracy or fluency? All of the research and experts across all commonly taught languages conclude that both accuracy and fluency are vital components for student success and language competency. Yet the practical challenge for educators is all about balance, particularly given that the skills are effectively at the opposite ends of the teaching spectrum. A conversation exercise, for example, is designed to help students practice fluency, teachers shouldn’t be regularly interrupting to correct their mistakes. So how should teachers prioritise and proceed? From Sanako’s international language teaching experience, the focus has to be on the learner and understanding their motivation for taking the course. Apart from formal academic language courses, the majority of learners are focused on using their language skills outside of the classroom. In that context, the answer to the “Which is more important – accuracy or fluency?” question is clear – it’s fluency! As long as students are accurate enough to be understood, then building fluent, confident and competent communicators are more important. But how can this be easily delivered in a language classroom? Firstly, it’s worth reiterating that accuracy should always be a major part of any language teaching course. Without an accurate knowledge of their target language, students will never be able to be understood. However, it’s a good rule of thumb that accuracy activities come before fluency activities. This is common sense – there’s no point in building fluency with incorrect forms or incorrect words. Get the basics right and then speed it up. To that end, be clear about whether activities are designed to build accuracy or fluency and stick to your plan. If fluency is what you’re after, then don’t keep stopping your students if they make mistakes! Wherever possible try and ensure that lessons incorporate opportunities for students to develop both their accuracy and fluency. Creating exercises that replicate real-world situations is a great way to achieve this whatever language you’re delivering. How can Sanako help language teachers to develop students’ fluency and accuracy? With customers in 114 countries and our products in use in over 50,000 classrooms globally, Sanako has significant experience in supporting educators to build accuracy and fluency in their students. In fact, our solutions have been specifically developed to support language learners to build their skills in these areas. Our popular Sanako Connect product, for example, is perfect for building language fluency. Educators can easily divide students into pairs or small groups for live conversation practice and role plays. This takes place in real-time, so each group of students can talk simultaneously without distracting each other. Teachers can listen in or talk with different groups to assist as required. All conversations can be easily recorded and downloaded and reviewed for feedback after the event, rather than interrupting live conversations. Educators can also use Connect to develop activities that improve students’ accuracy. It’s easy to use the platform to create and share tasks addressing specific grammar or vocabulary. These include model imitation, oral assessments, online tests, or fill-in-the-blanks exercises – all of which can be created by educators in minutes. Check out the video below to find out how well Sanako Connect can help language educators to deliver effective and efficient language lessons. If you’d like to find out more about how Sanako’s language teaching products could help your educators to improve the accuracy and fluency of their students, please contact us now to arrange your FREE demo! References used in this article: Nation, P. (2003). Materials for teaching vocabulary. In B. Tomlinson (Ed.), Developing materials for language teaching (pp. 394-405). London, England: Continuum. Accuracy in ELT (English Language Teaching) refers to the ability of students to use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation in their written and spoken language. It is the degree to which the student’s use of language is accurate in terms of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and syntax. It’s a measure of how well the student is able to produce and understand the correct forms of language and convey their meaning effectively. In ELT, accuracy is an essential component for effective communication and is a key goal of language instruction. It’s a fundamental skill that students need to master in order to be able to communicate effectively in English.How to Encourage Accuracy in Your Classroom?Use Regular Writing Assignments and Assessments: Encourage students to practice their writing skills by assigning regular essays, journal entries, or creative writing pieces. By regularly practicing their writing skills, students will become more comfortable with the conventions of the English language and will be able to use them more accurately.Incorporate Grammar Exercises and Quizzes: Use exercises and quizzes to help students identify and correct grammar errors, or work on sentence structure and punctuation. By regularly practicing these skills, students will become more aware of the conventions of the English language and will be able to use them more accurately in their own writing.Encourage Active Participation in Classroom Discussions and Debates: By actively participating in discussions, students will be able to practice their spoken skills and will become more comfortable with using correct grammar and pronunciation.Provide Constructive Feedback on Student Work: By providing feedback on grammar and punctuation errors, students will be able to identify and correct their mistakes. This will help them to become more accurate in their writing and speaking.Use Technology to Promote Accuracy: Using tools like grammar checkers, spell checkers, and online resources can help students to identify and correct errors in their writing. Also, providing access to online dictionaries, thesauruses, and grammar guides can help students to improve their vocabulary and grammar skills.Emphasize the Importance of Accuracy in Your Classroom: By making accuracy a priority in your classroom and explaining why it is important, students will be more motivated to improve their skills and will understand the importance of using correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation in their written and spoken language. English is an international language which people from all over the world learn in order to communicate with each other. Accuracy and Fluency are two factors which can determine the success of English language students in the future. 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Language teachers who concentrate on fluency help their students to express themselves in English. They pay more attention to meaning and context and are less concerned with grammatical errors. Typical fluency activities are role playing and more communicative activities where English is used as a medium of communication rather than an end in itself. Accuracy vs Fluency Taken as a given that students’ needs should always dictate what you teach them, the question of whether it is more important to work on accuracy or fluency in the language classroom remains. Many teachers believe that fluency is a goal worth striving towards only with students who are at a fairly advanced level. Other teachers, strong in the belief that the learning of a language is about communication, feel that fluency should be the main goal in their teaching and that it should be practiced right from the start. More traditional teachers tend to give accuracy greater importance; more liberal teachers tend towards fluency. Often a rigid educational system where tests and exams are the focus, will have students (and their traditional teachers) believe that language accuracy is what matters most, and giving the “correct” answers often becomes an obsession. Students who have been taught this way can complete any grammar gap-fill you care to give them, but will struggle to order a coffee in a real English speaking situation. On the other hand, a more communicative approach will produce students who can converse at length on almost any subject but could well make horrendous spelling and grammatical mistakes in their writing. In the end, however, it really boils down to the needs of the student. Methodologies in Practice As far as teaching methodologies are concerned, very broadly speaking the communicative approach is the one that favours fluency the most, while the audio-lingual and grammar-translation approaches favour accuracy. Typically, at beginner level when the students don’t have enough language to worry about fluency, teachers tend to focus on accuracy. This carries on through to pre-intermediate when fluency activities like discussions and debates are introduced. Later, when the students are reasonably independent language users, a mix of accuracy and fluency is used, with the focus shifting to fluency as students advance. One important point to bear in mind, however, is that too much bias one way or another is never a good. Accuracy without fluency is not useful in the way that fluency without accuracy is also not useful. A good mixture – biased towards the needs of the student – is the ideal way to go. Tests and Exams Excelling in tests represents but a small part of language competence and of a student’s ‘needs’ relate to performing in situations that are non-exam focused. However, English competence exams do drive a lot of the ELT industry and contribute to perpetuating the supremacy of accuracy over fluency (for example, tests like IELTS and TOEFL are very much focused on accuracy). Benchmark testing on the other hand is a great example of tests that are not accuracy based (though a higher degree of accuracy obviously accompanies a higher level of fluency). This website uses cookies to improve your experience while you navigate through the website. Out of these, the cookies that are categorized as necessary are stored on your browser as they are essential for the working of basic functionalities of the website. We also use third-party cookies that help us analyze and understand how you use this website. These cookies will be stored in your browser only with your consent. You also have the option to opt-out of these cookies. But opting out of some of these cookies may affect your browsing experience. Part and parcel of being an English as a Foreign Language teacher is lesson planning, which, unfortunately, is a necessary evil. In the EFL classroom, there are a lot of different factors to consider when making a lesson plan best suited to your students. It can be tricky to know which activities are optimal to achieve the aims of your lesson. One consideration that often trips us up is when we should be focussing on accuracy or fluency. So, accuracy and fluency: what’s the big deal?When you’re teaching English as a foreign language there are a lot of balls you need to juggle. You need to: have a solid grasp of English grammar, an understanding of teaching techniques and theories of learning, a good idea of best practices when it comes to classroom management, a good dose of creativity, and bucket-loads of patience. It’s not surprising to know that there are certain aspects of the job which we can still find as puzzling which is precisely why we’re here! Let’s look at the difference between accuracy and fluency in the EFL classroom – so you can be more confident in your teaching skills, and together we can conquer the world, one just teacher at a time.

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The language construction to ensure that the language item is produced 100% accurately – grammar exercises, gap fills, drilling or noticing activities. These usually take place in the controlled practice stage of the lesson. There is not a lot of variation in these activities, as there is a right and a wrong answer. For many EFL learners, accuracy is considered very important, and one of the main responsibilities of an EFL teacher is thought to be to correct errors and ensure the highest level of accuracy. While of course a certain degree of accuracy is needed for all communication, classroom tasks should not be geared towards more accuracy activities than fluency, because fluency is just as important.Fluency refers to how well a learner communicates meaning rather than how many mistakes they make in grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary.In other words, the ease with which a learner can speak and how well they can communicate without pauses or hesitations, without needing to search for words or phrases, without having to consider the language of what they are about to say. It’s important to note that a person who is fluent may not necessarily be 100 % accurate but they are generally still comprehensible. Fluency activities focus not so much on how the students are communicating but what they are communicating. Examples of fluency activities are conversations, roleplays, debates and projects. In many EFL classrooms, the free practice stage is the last in the lesson. Most of the lesson time is dedicated to presenting the target language and ensuring the students are able to produce it accurately and appropriately. The free practice is stuffed into however many minutes are left in the lesson. If a lesson is running late or the teacher runs out of time, it is this stage which is shortened or even cut entirely. This is problematic for a number of reasons. Not least because it is often the stage the students enjoy the most. And why wouldn’t they? It’s a chance for them to speak freely without worrying about their language. Instead they can focus on the content of what they are saying, which is why we communicate in the first place!At the same time, this focus on accuracy is misguided, as accuracy is by no means more important than fluency. In fact, a student who is more fluent than accurate can be more successful at communication than someone who is more accurate than fluent. This is because communication is a fluid concept. It involves more than one participant. The other participant may still be able to understand the communication even if the rate of accuracy of the speaker is not very high.Our learners want to learn to speak English in order to communicate. If we boil it down to one thing, communication is about being understood. To get all fancy and technical, communicative competence is being able to make use of vocabulary and grammar and their rules appropriately in order to convey a message. While there is a need for a certain amount of accuracy, fluency can be seen to play a bigger role in effective communication. In your EFL lessons, try not to focus on accuracy to the detriment of fluency. Allow sufficient time for fluency activities. This includes time for adequate preparation on the part of your students. You need to scaffold the activity but you don’t need to give them step-by-step instructions for what they should say. If your activity is appropriate and relevant for your students, this should actually come naturally to your students, as they will have a purpose for communicating. Understanding Fluency vs Accuracy Accuracy: Speaking or writing with few errors, focusing on correctness in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Fluency: Speaking smoothly and naturally, with ease and minimal pauses, emphasizing effective communication over perfect accuracy. In the classroom, when planning a speaking activity, consider whether you will be assessing your students on accuracy or fluency and stick to that decision. If you choose to focus on fluency, don’t stop your students if they make mistakes. But if you are aiming for accuracy then make sure your students are producing accurate language.In a nutshell, both accuracy and fluency are important in language learning. They are both necessary for effective communication. While accuracy is the foundation, fluency is the skill that allows learners to use their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary in real-world situations. Fluency is the ability to use language fluently and accurately, without needing to think about the grammar rules or vocabulary words. Fluency is the ability to communicate which is basically why we need a language. On the other hand, would anybody be able to understand us properly without being accurate enough? Proposing the one and only answer to this question means justifying a lack of attentiveness toward one of these two essential components. We feel like the only possible answer here is balance. The responsibility of every teacher is to build a balanced and structured program where every student gets a chance to work on both fluency and accuracy no matter what their priorities are. That is why it is vital for a teacher to decide what goal every task has at the stage of planning a lesson as well as plan how exactly you are going to give your students feedback (is it an instant error correction or delayed?). In addition, teaching in this context is immensely helpful in actualizing accuracy activities. Clearly, there are plenty of things to take into account to reach a never-changing and pretty challenging goal of every teacher – conduct interesting and useful lessons while growing along with your students. Article authors & editors Arina Kravchenko Author Teacher of General English & IELTS 2 Comments April 29, 2024 at 6:42 PM - 5 min readShould Language Teachers Focus on Fluency or on Accuracy?In this article we will explore the complex battle between fluency and accuracy in foreign language pedagogy. Both are foundational pillars within language learning, each bearing its own merits, addressing divergent facets of linguistic adeptness. Fluency is about expressing thoughts in a smooth and continuous way during verbal communication, while accuracy focuses on the proper application of grammar, vocabulary, and correct pronunciation. The Case for AccuracyIn the early phases of language acquisition, the importance of accuracy cannot be overstated. It serves as the bedrock of language mastery, encompassing a thorough grasp of grammar, correct enunciation, and a robust lexicon. Nassaji, H., & Fotos, S. (2011) underline that an emphasis on precision paves the way for learners to establish a language.References:Nassaji, H., & Fotos, S. (2011). Teaching Grammar in Second Language Classrooms: Integrating Form-Focused Instruction in Communicative Context. Routledge.Nation, P. (2007). The four strands: Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching. (11), 2-13.Lightbown, P.M., & Spada, N. (2013). How Languages are Learned. Oxford University Press. June 7, 2024 - 6 min readI conducted lessons in a private tutoring setting for some time as well as taught a second language in a classroom. While most people may feel that private tutoring is the preferred method of learning a foreign language, the two approaches to language lear... April 5, 2024 - 7 min readMany families in the world and the United States are headed by adults with proficiency in more than one language. In the U.S., 26% of 5 to 17-year-old children are multilingual, although rates differ by state. (socialsci.libretexts.org) Families are often l... There are many goals English language teachers consider when developing their instructional strategies and deciding on class activities. Considering whether to focus on fluency vs. accuracy is an important one. Is one set of skills more important than the other? Should they be taught separately? Can they be taught jointly? These are all good questions, and we have answers for you. But first, it may be helpful to look at some definitions. Interested in learning strategies to design your course for maximum effectiveness? Learn about instructional and curricular design best practices for the ESL/EFL classroom. The question of whether to focus on accuracy vs. fluency in language teaching is important because, depending on the answer, teachers will emphasize different aspects of the language. For example, they might focus on grammar for accuracy or conversation for fluency. Let’s look more closely at what the two terms mean. Accuracy in English typically refers to grammar rules, vocabulary use, and pronunciation. Defining accuracy and fluency can sometimes be problematic, as definitions for each term may vary slightly. However, there are some common interpretations of both terms. When teachers talk about accuracy, they usually refer to: Knowledge and understanding of grammar rules, vocabulary use, and pronunciation An ability to apply grammar rules and vocabulary in writing An ability to apply grammar rules, vocabulary, and pronunciation in speaking Accuracy can also refer to the awareness of the different registers existing in a language, e.g., formal, colloquial, etc. In other words, an accurate speaker of English will demonstrate an awareness of context and know when to use formal or informal language. The definition of fluency is more challenging. According to the Academic Press article “On Fluency,” one of the aspects of fluency is “the ability to fill time with talk.” The English Language Institute at Victoria University of Wellington’s “Improving Speaking Fluency” paper adds that “Fluency can be described as the ability to process language receptively and productively at a reasonable speed.” So, when teachers talk about fluency, they usually refer to: An ability to speak or write easily An ability to speak or write at a reasonable speed An ability to speak or write with errors that do not impede communication Ideally, accuracy and fluency should advance at the same pace during the language acquisition process, but this is often not the case. Whether students first speak accurately or fluently often depends on the teacher’s instructional style. For example, English language teachers who have adopted a communication-based approach to language instruction will emphasize exposure to the second language (L2) and interaction, rather than accuracy. But does this mean increased fluency comes at the expense of accuracy? Not necessarily. Researchers in the journal article “Need We Sacrifice Accuracy for Fluency?” conducted an experiment with ESL school children in Hungary, comparing the accuracy vs. fluency of children who studied English as a foreign language with a communication/content-based approach with those who studied with a form-based traditional approach. The former were slightly more accurate in their production of grammatical morphemes in an oral interview and were more fluent, confirming that communication-based approaches do not sacrifice accuracy for fluency. Children acquiring their first language often develop fluency before accuracy. Regardless of the instructional style, students may also naturally acquire accuracy and fluency skills at different times. From a developmental point of view, it appears that children acquiring their first language often develop fluency before accuracy. This is partly because not all grammar structures are acquired at the same speed. For example, in English verb conjugation, the third person is acquired after the first and second persons. This does not prevent children from talking in the third person, albeit with mistakes. Neither does it mean that they will forever be unable to use the third person. Similarly, adults may also acquire grammar structures at varying speeds based on a variety of factors, such as learning style, experience with language acquisition, etc. However, many teachers worry that if students don’t acquire the correct grammatical structures from the outset, they will end up building errors in their speech that will stay with them, possibly forever. Not to worry, as some instructional methods may promote parallel growth in both accuracy and fluency. One such instructional method is Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS), which uses storytelling as a teaching tool. This method emphasizes exposure to comprehensible input (CI) and oral production in the L2. According to Karen Lichtman, author of “Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling,” students taught with TPRS compare favorably in test scores and general language proficiency with students for whom accuracy was the primary focus of instruction. The takeaway: It is possible, with the right teaching strategies, to develop both accuracy and fluency within the same class activities, suggesting the skills are not mutually exclusive. Ready to grow your skills in grammar instruction? Learn about Bridge’s Specialized Teaching English Grammar Certificate. Conversation, structured lessons, and classroom games are great ways to gauge students’ fluency and accuracy skills. It is certainly possible to speak a language fluently but not accurately. This possibility exists for L2 and native speakers alike. Examples of native English speakers who make grammatical errors when speaking or writing abound. In a delightful little book appropriately titled “Between You and I - a little book of bad English,” author James Cochrane lists examples of common grammar and vocabulary mistakes often made by native English speakers. Among these is the grammatical error cleverly used in the title “between you and I” which highlights the common confusion even among native speakers of the different functions of subject and object pronouns. Another example with which teachers are eminently familiar is the confusion between the verbs “can” and “may,” as in, “Can I go to the bathroom?” Other examples of common mistakes include “its vs. it’s,” “their vs. they’re,” “then vs. than,” and many others. That individuals making these mistakes are native English speakers shows it is absolutely possible to be fluent but not accurate in speaking a language. Need a refresher on teaching English grammar? This article about how to teach English grammar introduces tips, tricks, and proven methods to use in your classroom today. ESL teachers are rightly concerned with encouraging fluency in their students while instilling proper language structures and vocabulary usage. Many teachers also worry that an excessive emphasis on fluency may come at the expense of accuracy. So, how can teachers balance accuracy and fluency in language teaching? Many activities can be used to foster both fluency and accuracy. However, when practicing fluency, it is advisable not to stress accuracy. In fluency-oriented exercises, the teacher should aim for students’ self-expression and be more concerned about content than form. If students feel their speech is being evaluated for correctness, they will become anxious and reluctant to express themselves. Encouraging accuracy in fluency allows students to express themselves confidently and correctly in various contexts, so it’s important to balance these goals appropriately. When the teacher emphasizes content, especially content that interests students, the students will be more eager to participate. In this case, the teacher should refrain from openly correcting students’ mistakes. An unobtrusive way of correcting students is to model the proper form by correctly repeating their sentences. For example, if a student says, “I like go out with my friends,” the teacher can say, “Is that right? You like to go out with your friends?” Are your students feeling anxious about their abilities? Learn 8 strategies to build confidence in your ESL students. Games and fun activities can still be a part of the online learning experience. Some teaching strategies deliberately avoid the fluency versus accuracy dichotomy, preferring to develop both skill sets implicitly and simultaneously. When focusing on accuracy, it is a good idea to do so within the context of conversation or reading. Students who are involved in “interesting” content will be more focused and receptive to explicit grammar instruction. On the other hand, solely focusing on teaching grammar activities in isolation can make for a rather dull lesson. It’s important to design lessons that prioritize both accuracy in fluency and meaningful communication. Here are some sample activities teachers can use to encourage accuracy and fluency that can be tailored to fit your students’ age and skill level. Grammar and pronunciation drills. These are classic activities that foster accuracy. English textbooks typically have an exercise section or a companion workbook with grammar activities and listening drills to practice pronunciation. ESL teachers who don’t use a textbook can easily find online practice exercises for their students. Find the mistakes and correct them. A great way to stimulate students’ attention to grammar rules is to give them sentences with mistakes and ask them to find and correct them. akin to this is asking students to correct each other’s writing. When engaged in this type of activity, students will automatically focus their attention on identifying errors and understanding how the errors diverge from the norm. This is an excellent way to stimulate student reflection on the L2. Fill in the blanks. Give your students sentences with blanks that need to be filled, and provide options with words that look similar but have different meanings, like “spill” and “spell,” or “compliment” and “complement.” This is an effective way to fine-tune their vocabulary accuracy and make them aware of subtle differences in spelling. Topical conversations. Fluency in a language is best acquired through conversation, but the conversation topic should spark the learner’s interest. ESL teachers can prepare a list of topics beforehand and even poll the students to see which topic interests them the most. Co-create stories. The TPRS method is one of the most successful in teaching fluency because it continuously encourages students’ output. In the TPRS class, students co-create stories with the teacher. Once the story has progressed beyond two or three sentences, the teacher can ask the students to describe the situation. In DIS (Describe the Situation), the teacher first describes what has happened in the story, then asks students to practice on their own or in pairs, and finally has students DIS independently. There are infinite variations on DIS that can make the activity more creative and enjoyable. You can ask students to describe the situation from a specific emotional perspective or through different points of view. This also provides an excellent opportunity to foster accuracy in fluency by encouraging students to speak naturally while refining their language skills. Poster presentations and roleplay. These activities can be used to practice vocabulary and grammar relative to specific topics and foster fluency. Once a topic has been determined, e.g., family, hobbies, etc., the students create posters with images and descriptions. They then prepare a presentation to be given in front of the class. The other students listen and, at the end, are required to ask the presenter questions. The images work as references to help the presenter remember the content to be conveyed. In roleplay, students work in groups to create and memorize a script. Then, they perform the script they have created and memorized. Download this Bridge infographic on fluency vs. accuracy to give yourself a quick reminder of the differences between these important concepts. Bridge Infographic Fluency-vs-Accuracy Accuracy and fluency are both essential components of language instruction and should be emphasized in equal measure. Cultivating both skill sets separately or simultaneously through targeted activities is possible. The most effective strategies to teach these essential skills are those that combine accuracy and fluency in engaging ways that capture students’ interest, increasing engagement and learning capacity. AI-generated AbstractThis paper explores the dilemma in English language teaching regarding the emphasis on fluency versus accuracy. While fluency focuses on smooth and effortless communication, accuracy emphasizes grammatical correctness. The paper argues for a balanced approach, recognizing that individual learner differences necessitate flexible teaching methods. Evidence suggests that both aspects contribute significantly to student motivation and self-confidence. Of course, when we are speaking it is not always enough to be fluent, we often need to be accurate as well. However, we need to be careful not to think of the two as being mutually exclusive. It is possible to be both accurate and fluent. But, in the classroom it is often best to focus on one or the other as it can be difficult to deal with both at the same time. In this article I’ll look at ways of developing and dealing with accuracy in speaking activities. What do we mean by accuracy in speaking? Clearly, by the word accuracy we mean speaking without making mistakes, or at least limiting the number of mistakes we make. But how does an accuracy activity differ from one which is designed to develop fluency? In some cases, there is absolutely no difference in the activity or task type. The difference is on the teacher’s role during the activity and on what the teacher is focusing on. For example, when accuracy is the focus the teacher will note down the mistakes made and may even interrupt the activity to correct the students, whereas in a fluency activity the teacher wouldn’t interrupt and would probably be more interested in the outcome of the activity. However, in some cases an activity is specifically designed to develop accuracy and would not usually be used for the purpose of developing fluency. An example of this would be a drill. For example: Teacher: I like watching TV. Students: I like watching TV. Teacher: playing football. Students: I like playing football. Teacher: eating ice cream. Students: I like eating ice cream. Teacher: don’t Students: I don’t like eating ice cream. If students make mistakes, the teacher can immediately correct them in this type of activity. In terms of meaningful communication there is very little value. Does the teacher always need to control an accuracy activity? No, not necessarily. It’s quite possible to do an accuracy activity in pairs with the teacher closely monitoring to try and pick up on any problems. In this format the students are also responsible for listening carefully to their partner. However, in most accuracy activities the teacher will either keep tight control or monitor so that there is little chance of mistakes (or at least persistent mistakes) being made. Why are accuracy activities important? From a classroom perspective, accuracy is often very important as many tests focus on this aspect of speaking. It is also quite easy to know if a student is accurate or not simply by listening to them speaking. Accuracy can also be extremely important in the real world. This does not only apply to grammatical accuracy but also to formally, register, choice of vocabulary and pronunciation. If someone uses the wrong kind of language in a situation, then it can actually be worse than if they make a grammatical mistake. Just imagine someone meeting the Queen of England and saying ‘Yo! Your highness, how’s it hanging?’ Of course, this is an extreme example, but one that helps illustrate the issue. From a grammatical standpoint, if a student answers a question such as, ‘How long are you here for?’ (referring to the future) with, ‘I’ve been here for six months,’ (referring to the past) it’ll probably be picked up by the person who asked the question as an incorrect response. But, if they respond by saying just ‘Six months’ without the ‘I’ve been here for...’ part, then the questioner will be none the wiser. Quite clearly accuracy is an important factor in both these cases. Activities that focus on accuracy therefore give both the teacher and the students an opportunity to look at what are the norms and acceptable forms of language items. Should the teacher interrupt an accuracy activity if students are making mistakes? In some cases, yes. For example, in a drill where the teacher is tightly controlling the activity, then whenever a mistake is made the teacher needs to correct the mistake and make sure that the student who made it repeats the corrected form. On the other hand, there are some activities where it may not be possible to interrupt the activity. For example, when students are working in pairs there may well be too much going on at the same time for you to stop each pair every time a mistake is made. In this situation it is important to note down any mistakes you hear and can’t deal with immediately and then look at them as soon as the activity has finished. Obviously, if there are a lot of mistakes being made, then you need to do something straight away. If it is one or two students, then you might simply want to work closely with them for a few minutes while the rest of the class carry on with the activity. If, on the other hand, it is a significant number of the students, then it is best to stop the entire activity and go back to a more teacher-centred one where you have more control. What should I do after an accuracy activity? If the activity has gone well, then it is useful to use a less controlled activity, and one that might focus more on fluency, to see whether students can use the language correctly in a situation which is less teacher-centred and/or more like a real life activity. It is quite possible for students to perform well during a controlled activity such as a drill where they know that the focus is on the production of accurate language and then during a freer activity to make as many mistakes with the language as they were before you did the controlled activity with them. If this happens, don’t worry! It simply means that they need more practice. Similarly, if an accuracy activity doesn’t work, then you simply need to re-teach or review the language and use a few more controlled activities until the students can use the language accurately. Can accuracy activities be creative and fun? Of course they can. Even an activity that seems boring and dull such as a drill can be turned into a creative and fun activity without losing its focus on accuracy. One way of making a drill more fun is to allow students to personalize it. This also has the added bonus of making it more memorable as it becomes relevant to each student. Making a drill fun can be done quite simply by having a pattern and giving some alternatives to be used in certain places. For example, imagine you are drilling a sentence like: Last year I went on holiday to Spain. It was great. Now look at the sentence again and see how many words are replaceable: Last year I went on holiday to Spain. It was great. Now we can turn the sentence into something like: (1) _____ I went on holiday (2) _____ It was (3) _____. For each gap we can give a choice of words that students can use in each gap. (1) Yesterday, Last month, A week ago, Two days ago (2) to Thailand, to the moon, with my friends, on my own (3) fantastic, boring, horrible, OK By doing this we keep the structure but give several options, making the activity both creative and more fun. Of course, the next step would be to get students to put in words of their choice. Think about the accuracy activities you do in class. How could you make them more creative and fun? Some practical ideas Apart from drills, there are other activities that can be used for developing accuracy. Here are a few to try: Guessing games / Question games In this kind of activity students need to form questions to guess the answer. The focus can be on the question forms or, alternatively, on short answers. Question games can take the form of Yes/No questions, for example: Teacher: What animal am I? Student: Can you fly? Teacher: No (I can’t). Student: Do you eat meat? Teacher: No (I don’t). Student: Do you live on a farm? Teacher: Yes (I do). Or they can take the form of open questions, for example: Student A: What do you like doing on the weekend? Student B: I like playing tennis. Student A: Where do you play? Student B: In the park. Student A: Who do you play with? If you want this can be more tightly controlled, you can give students the basic form of the questions, i.e. _____ do you like doing on the weekend? _____ do you play? Or by giving prompts, What / like / do / weekend? Chain sentences These are a kind of drill in that they follow a closely-controlled pattern and there is little room for mistakes. A good example of a chain sentence is with the second conditional. You start by saying a sentence, i.e. If I won €1 million, I’d go on holiday. Then a student continues by taking the second half of your sentence and making it the first part (if clause) and then adding second part, i.e. If I went on holiday, I’d go to Thailand. Then the next student takes the second part of that sentence and makes it the first part of their sentence and adds an ending, i.e. If I went to Thailand, I’d... This carries on around the class. In big classes, you can divide the students into groups and then monitor carefully. Describe and draw In this activity, students work in pairs. One student has a picture that they describe to their partner, who draws what is described. They can then check how accurate the description was by comparing pictures. This works very well for practising things like prepositions, i.e. There’s a table in the middle. On the table is a book, etc. A variation of this is that Student B has a set of pictures and Student A is describing one. From Student A’s description, Student B must choose the correct picture (this activity is good for students who don’t like drawing). Finally, another variation is the map game where Student A describes how to get from X to Y and Student B marks the route on his or her map. At the end Student B shows Student A where they arrived and they see if it is the place that A wanted them to get to.

