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Maximilian Stummer

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Mag. Dr. Gunther Kaltenböck, M.A.

DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I confirm to have conceived and written this thesis in English all by myself. Quotations from other authors and any ideas borrowed and/or paraphrased from the works of other authors are all clearly marked within the text and acknowledged in the bibliographical references.

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Signature

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1 Introduction

The thesis under consideration is a research paper which examines the topic of fluency in spoken English by seeking to find an appropriate definition for the concept, collecting real data in the form of ratings by Austrian English teachers and comparing the findings from the body of knowledge in theory with the outcomes of the empirical research.

After this introductory chapter, where the research interest as well as the guiding research questions and the corresponding hypotheses are indicated, the literature review gives an overview of the academic literature regarding fluency in spoken English, in that it tries to find a definition of the concept and identify certain factors which contribute to it. The third chapter serves to set out the context of the research as well as the methodology that is applied in order to obtain a provisional verification or falsification of the leading hypotheses. Then, in chapter four, there is a detailed analysis of the data collected in the course of the empirical research, where the results of the ratings are described and evaluated. In the end there is a conclusive passage which subsumes all the insights gained throughout the entire thesis.

Presumably there has not been much research about fluency in spoken English. Thus, the main focus of this paper is to find out what actually constitutes fluency and how it is assessed by Austrian teachers. Being a teacher myself already, and given that I teach adult students of English who are supposed to obtain their A-levels in a spoken final examination, I am interested in a potential measurement of fluency, or how this criterion of assessment of spoken English is perceived by different teachers. The final aim is to find out in how far fluency can be an objective parameter in the assessment of spoken English.

Therefore, the **first research question** of this thesis is the following:

Is there a consistency in the perception of learner fluency by teachers of English as a foreign language?

Consequently (and according to my subjective assumption), the first hypothesis of the paper is:

The perception of fluency in spoken language of English learners differs considerably among English teachers.

In other words, the central aim of this paper is to find out in how far the concept of fluency is a relevant (and justifiably objective) criterion of the assessment of spoken English. So the accompanying questions are: Do different raters have different opinions on how fluent a certain speaker is? Or do their ratings overlap to a certain extent? And if not so, what are the reasons for the inconsistency of the ratings?

Furthermore, the **second research question** of this thesis is:

Is there a correlation between the perception of fluency and other competences in spoken English?

The second hypothesis that can be derived from this question is the following:

The perception of fluency in spoken English is mainly influenced by the way grammatical accuracy is perceived.

The latter hypothesis suggests a difference between the concepts of fluency and accuracy. But if accuracy is not an integral part of fluency, the question is which features actually *are* the components of fluency. Consequently, the third research question is:

Which factors contribute to the perception of fluency (or a lack of fluency) in spoken English?

Hence, the third hypothesis of this paper (again, also influenced by my personal appraisal) is:

The perception of fluency in spoken English is mainly influenced by factors such as speed, coherence and the appropriate use of discourse markers and linking devices.

These three questions (indicated in bold letters) form the basis of the entire paper and therefore, all the research – in academic literature as well as in empirical terms – is grounded on their resulting hypotheses. Whereas the literature review (see chapter 2) seeks to define the concept of fluency and focuses mainly on both the second and the third research questions, the empirical part of this thesis (see chapters 3 and 4) asks a certain group of teachers for their individual perception of fluency and for their personal assessment of three samples of spoken English in an oral examination.

2 Literature review

This chapter discusses the concept of fluency in detail, examining the academic state of knowledge. It is divided into three main parts. The first subchapter presents some considerations about the command of a language in general, but also refers to the framework of the global scale of language proficiency which can be found in the Common European Frame of Reference (henceforth CEFR). The second subchapter is divided into two parts. First (see 2.2.1), various dictionary definitions of the terms *fluency* and *fluent* will be discussed, followed by the second part (see 2.2.2) which elaborates on further attempts to define the concept of fluency. The third subchapter (see 2.3) is dedicated to detecting and pinpointing the factors which may contribute to or, as it were, constitute fluency.

2.1 Language proficiency

The first question to be addressed is what it is that makes someone really command a language. According to Cook (2003: 40-41), one traditional approach to language teaching – the grammar-translation method – suggests that if someone knows the exact rules of a certain language, he or she must also be able to use these rules. However, this perception has to be doubted, because knowing the rules does not necessarily make a speaker communicate successfully. Can we call it successful communication if someone knows all the grammatical rules perfectly, but does not speak fast enough? Or what if someone is able to understand what is being said, but still cannot participate appropriately in verbal interaction? Similarly, choosing a wrong tone of voice, failing to recognize a joke or a figurative meaning, or using body language the wrong way can lead to ineffective communication. In other words, it is crucial to know the vocabulary and grammar of a language, but being able to put them into practice requires other types of ability and knowledge as well (Cook 2003: 40-41).

As mentioned above, the CEFR, which was created by the Council of Europe, provides a global scale of language proficiency. The scale consists of six individual stages which represent a speaker's skills. Whereas the level A1 stands for a beginner's level, the stage C2 indicates an almost native-like command of the

language under consideration. In order to assess the speakers of English as a foreign language who are examined in the course of this paper, it is necessary to indicate the description of those skills they are expected to have. The participants at the mock exam (see chapter 3), which is relevant for the thesis at hand, are supposed to reach an upper intermediate level of English, which corresponds to the stage B2 according to the so-called global scale in the CEFR. The description of abilities required in order to be categorized as level B2 reads as follows:

[The speaker] [c]an understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. [He or she] [c]an interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. [He or she] [c]an produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options (Council of Europe 2001: 5).

Concerning the overall topic of the paper at hand, the passage of the CEFR already gives a first impression of how clearly (or rather not quite clearly) the concept of fluency is defined. According to Guillot (1999: 1) fluency is a by-product of the involvement in verbal exchange and she adds that fluency is a largely uninspected concept.

Finding an actual definition of fluency seems to be an almost impossible endeavor, because the explanations given in dictionaries tend to be generalizing and cannot even begin to capture the complexity of the concept. Nevertheless, dictionaries are, by their nature, syntheses of general perceptions and consequently they can be considered a useful starting point (Guillot 1999: 11).

2.2 Defining the concept of fluency

In order to define fluency, there are various sources which are consulted in this subchapter. On the one hand, as mentioned before, dictionaries provide a useful starting point, since their focus is entirely on the word itself and therefore the term is presented in all its possible meanings, completely isolated from any context (apart from some given sample sentences). On the other hand, there is also a great deal of

academic literature, which unfortunately does not refer to the characteristics of fluency very extensively.

2.2.1 Dictionary definitions

When it comes to a definition of the terms *fluency* and *fluent*, most popular dictionaries of the English language seem to provide very similar explanations. First of all, the *Oxford English dictionary* (1933, IV: 357), defines *fluency* as “a smooth and easy flow; readiness, smoothness; esp. with regard to speech” and attaches it to the qualities “absence of rigidity; ease”. More precisely it is referred to as a “readiness of utterance” or the “flow of words”. With the explanation “the quality or state of flowing or being fluent” the dictionary points to the adjectival form of the word. Interestingly, in this book it is related not only to spoken, but also to written language. Thus *fluent* is defined by “flowing easily and readily from the tongue or pen” and “ready in the use of words, able to express oneself readily and easily in speech or writing” (Oxford English dictionary 1933, IV: 357).

In the American *Random House dictionary of the English language* (1973: 547) there is no entry for the noun *fluency*, but there is an explanation for the adjective *fluent*. According to this book, it indicates “facility in or command of something” and stands for being “able to speak or write smoothly, easily, or readily”, being accompanied by the sample phrases “*he spoke fluent French*” and “*a fluent speaker*”. Furthermore, it is stated that *fluent* “suggests an easy and ready flow and is usually a term of commendation” as in “*a fluent and interesting speech*”, and “talking smoothly and hurriedly to cover up or deceive, not giving the hearer a chance to stop and think; it may also imply a plausible, prepared and well-rehearsed lie” (Random House dictionary of the English language 1973: 547).

Another American source, the *Merriam Webster's collegiate dictionary* (1993: 448) gives a very extensive explanation of the terms, arguing that someone who is *fluent*, is “ready or facile in speech” and can give an “effortlessly smooth and rapid” performance.

According to the *Chambers encyclopedic English dictionary* (1994: 473) the term *fluent* means “having full command of a language” and “speaking or writing in an easy flowing style”, while the noun *fluency* only serves as a reference to the explanations for the adjective.

The *Macmillan English dictionary for advanced learners* (2007: 574) describes *fluency* as “the ability to speak a foreign language very well”, further calling it “a clear and confident way of expressing yourself without seeming to make an effort”. The concrete example for the second definition, “*He writes about this period of our country’s history with great fluency*”, illustrates that again it is not only the spoken language that is linked to the concept of *fluency* (Macmillan English dictionary for advanced learners 2007: 574).

One more reference book, the *Longman active study dictionary* (1998: 257) defines *fluency* by the entry “the ability to speak or write a language well, without stopping or making mistakes” giving an example that comes probably from a business context – a sentence that could well be taken from a job opening: “*Candidates must be fluent in two European languages*” (Longman active study dictionary 1998: 257).

In sum, when defining the terms *fluency* and *fluent*, most dictionaries agree on explanations such as smoothness, ease, flow, readiness, rapidity, clarity and confidence. Also, they provide qualities such as facility and (full) command, whereas some of the reference books name, when describing *fluency*, the desirable absence of effort, rigidity, pauses (“stopping”) and mistakes on the part of the speaker. Only one of the dictionaries, however, assigns some negative characteristics to the notion of *fluency*, stating the potential implication of a well-prepared and plausible lie or deceit. Almost all the sources cited in this subsection associate *fluency* with spoken and written language. In the course of this thesis, however, a clear emphasis is put only on spoken fluency.

In line with the aforementioned qualities, Guillot (1999: 26), citing the *Longman dictionary of applied linguistics* (1985), argues that from a teaching perspective, fluency describes a certain level of communicative proficiency that includes effective communication, ease in the production of spoken or written language, speaking continuously without a communication breakdown or any difficulties in comprehension being caused, as well as the ability to command the vocabulary, grammar and intonation of a language well (but not necessarily perfectly). Moreover, Guillot (1999: 26) states that definitions of fluency, such as *native-like*, *effective*, *continuous*, *normal*, *natural* or *easy* require “external value judgements” which are to a large extent subject to individual interpretation. Language teachers as well as native speakers normally tend to associate those qualities with certain requirements,

but due to the fact that these individual perceptions are inherently variable, their value as a part of a comprehensive definition might have to be doubted. Hence, Guillot (1999: 26) calls the notion of fluency largely undefinable.

Furthermore, Guillot (1999: 14) postulates that *fluency* is described in dictionaries as a consistent concept, regardless of any deviations that may occur in various speaking situations. The reason for such definitions might be the etymological origin (the Latin root *fluere* 'to flow') or the fact that dictionary definitions represent an abstract ideal or a norm, which do not necessarily correspond to the practical use. According to Guillot (1999: 14) the definitions found in the dictionary entries (e.g. smoothness, easy flow etc.) may only be adequate for the description of speech acts that are planned, such as lectures or television commentaries.

In a nutshell, the range of definitions of fluency given in ordinary dictionaries is quite ample, but one should bear in mind that these reference books represent a conglomeration of plain, common and context-free definitions.

2.2.2 Academic literature

Having gained an overview of how dictionaries define the term *fluency*, and bearing in mind that these definitions might not serve the purpose of a detailed delineation of this concept, it is necessary to scrutinize the specialized literature, which deals with the topic more extensively.

First and foremost, the question is how – in terms of educational systems – fluency as a part of language learning is officially defined. As mentioned before, the CEFR provides scales in order to categorize and determine certain levels of language proficiency. Each level of proficiency (A1 being the lowest, followed by A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2, which is an almost perfect or native-like command of the language) is indicated by means of descriptors. These descriptors have the purpose of giving a detailed list of individual competences which should be acquired by the speaker at the different levels. Apart from the above-mentioned so-called global scale, there are also distinct scales for different aspects of proficiency. Hence, the Common European Frame of Reference (Council of Europe 2001: 3-4) does not only offer one separate scale for each skill (reading, listening, writing, monologic and dialogic speaking), but also scales that which describe the level of proficiency within a particular area of skill. In other words, the productive skill *dialogic speaking*, for

example, is divided into categories such as *formal discussions*, *informal discussions*, *goal-oriented co-operation* or *interviewing and being interviewed*. Furthermore, there are also various categories other than the four basic skills, as for instance *communication strategies* or *communicative language competence*. Within the latter, there are again certain subcategories, such as *vocabulary range*, *vocabulary control*, *grammatical accuracy*, *flexibility*, *coherence* or *spoken fluency* (Council of Europe 2001: 3-4). And this last subcategory is what is discussed in detail in this paper.

The CEFR descriptors included in the subcategory *spoken fluency* are particularly relevant to the attempt to define the concept of fluency, as they represent the official definition issued by the Council of Europe and therefore they can be seen as a common understanding created by a specialist authority. As regards the basic level (A1), speakers can “manage very short, isolated, mainly pre-packaged utterances, with much pausing to search for expressions, to articulate less familiar words, and to repair communication”, whereas on a more advanced level (A2) they can, on the one hand, “construct phrases on familiar topics with sufficient ease to handle short exchanges, despite very noticeable hesitation and false starts”, and on the other hand make themselves “understood in short contributions, even though pauses, false starts and reformulation are very evident”. When it comes to the level B2 – or upper intermediate – that is relevant for the participants of the mock exam (which is the data source of the empirical research in this thesis) the learners “can communicate spontaneously, often showing remarkable fluency and ease of expression in even longer complex stretches of speech” and “produce stretches of language with a fairly even tempo; although [they] can be hesitant as [they] search[...] for patterns and expressions, there are few noticeably long pauses”. Furthermore, they “can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without imposing strain on either party”. On the highest level (C2 – or almost native-like), by way of comparison, the speakers can express themselves “at length with a natural, effortless, unhesitating flow.” Moreover, they pause “only to reflect on precisely the right words to express [their] thoughts or to find an appropriate example or explanation” (Council of Europe 2001: 31).

To sum up, in addition to some descriptions of fluency found in the dictionaries, there are some other expressions mentioned in the CEFR scale regarding fluency. Thus, fluent speakers can interact easily, spontaneously and naturally at an even

tempo without much, hesitation (pauses, repairs) or any kind of effort or strain. At least on the lowest level of proficiency (A1) also pre-packaged utterances (see 2.3.3) seem to be an integral part of fluency.

Guillot (1999: 15), for instance, argues that speech, although perhaps not fluent from an objective point of view, may be perceived as such. The everyday speech act is to some degree discontinuous and fragmented, but nevertheless on the whole it may seem to be quite fluent sometimes. Hence, all potential limits to fluency, such as hesitations, pauses, changes of mind, vagueness or other inaccuracies, have to be considered integral parts of the overall concept of fluency. Conversely, she argues if there is too much planning, accuracy or precision in spoken interaction, the speech act might be regarded as pompous or inappropriate. The common notion of fluency, closely linked to ease, facility or grace only relates to the production of speech, which may lead to the assumption that fluency is solely a matter of self-presentation (and not reciprocity in communication), completely disregarding dialogic (or, as it were, interactional) speech in favor of monologic speech. In this sense, one could define fluency as a term relating to persuasiveness, ostentation or manipulation. That would put the focus on the effectiveness of the speech act only and therefore stress the role of the speaker alone. So if fluency only exists in this monologic sense, then it only applies in unilateral speech acts, such as lectures, television and radio broadcasts, oral tests or job interviews (the last two being situations where interactional factors are largely disregarded owing to the emphasis given to the speech production of one individual). In such a monologic sense, fluency would not be relevant for normal everyday communicative situations (Guillot 1999: 15).

Quite contrarily to what she describes as fluency in a monologic sense, Guillot (1999: 16) states that fluency has something to do with the interlocutor's perceptual expectations regarding readiness, smoothness, facility, flow of words and connectedness. So fluency is not only something that happens in spontaneous speech – which is normally discontinuous and fragmented – but also something that has to involve a speaker (through his or her actual communicative behavior) and an interlocutor (through his or her perceptual reaction).

It is a common belief that someone who speaks fluently commands the language like a native speaker. This “customary though problematic equation ‘fluency = native like’ ” (Guillot 1999: 24) may stem from the common belief that

[...] a fluent speaker is one whose resourcefulness makes him equal to any situation, who is able to adapt his production to the requirements of any situation, including responses of his interlocutor(s) – which presupposes receptive and negotiative capacities (Guillot 1999: 18-19).

Concerning the above-mentioned equation that a fluent speaker has to be able to speak in a native-like way, Riggensbach (1998: 63-64) holds that native speakers in free conversation often lack the qualities that are traditionally assigned to fluency, such as effortlessness, smoothness or automaticity.

According to Brumfit (1984: 53-54) fluency is a difficult term, although it has been used in language teaching for a long time. He cites Fillmore (1979: 93), who proposes to distinguish four different types of fluency. First, there is the “ability to fill time with talk”, which means that the speaker can talk for an extended period of time without making any significant pauses. According to this understanding of the term, the quantity of the talk is much more important than the quality. Second, there is “the ability to talk in coherent, reasoned and ‘semantically dense’ sentences” (Fillmore 1979: 93), which means that the speaker can make use of the syntactic and semantic resources of the language. The third kind of fluency is “the ability to have appropriate things to say in a wide range of contexts” (Fillmore 1979: 93); or, in other words, in an unexpected situation the speaker does not grope for words. The fourth type of fluency is being able to use the language in an imaginative and creative way, which includes jokes, puns, metaphors and different styles. A speaker who disposes of this kind of ability can edit what he or she is going to say beforehand and is very quick in selecting the most sonorous and clever of a wide range of utterances that comes to his or her mind. According to Brumfit (1984: 54) a person who embodies all these abilities would have to be regarded as maximally gifted.

So the overall characteristics of fluency, according to Brumfit (1984: 53-54) relate to creativity, coherence, speed, continuity and context-sensitivity. Thus, the required abilities for a speaker to be fluent would have to be cognitive, aesthetic and psychomotoric; which are inherent in every language user, but to a varying degree.

Leeson (1975: 136) gives a definition of fluency other than on the basis of the required abilities, but more related to the set of rules of a language, stating that it is “the ability of the speaker to produce indefinitely many sentences conforming to the phonological, syntactical and semantic exigencies of a given natural language on the basis of a finite exposure to a finite corpus of that language” (Leeson 1975: 136).

According to Binder, Haughton and Bateman (2002: 2-3) the notion of fluency cannot solely be applied to speaking a language, but also to other skills, such as music or sports. They describe a fluent speaker as an expert performer who interacts accurately, smoothly and quickly, without any hesitation. A decisive factor, they argue, is a useful speed or pace of performance. The comparison to music or sports which is made refers to the recognition of a masterful performance by popular musicians or sportsmen and sportswomen. They perform easily with an adequate combination of speed (or pace) and accuracy (or quality), without any hesitation. So, the comparison between speakers and musicians or sportspeople suggests that real fluency goes beyond mere accuracy. Sometimes even educational assessment cannot differentiate between an accurate but rather struggling performance, and a fluent performance (Binder, Haughton & Bateman 2002: 2-3).

When it comes to a potential measurement of fluency, Guillot (1999: 30) suggests that temporal variables are the most effective method. These variables are for example the speech rate, the frequency of self-corrections and repetitions, the length of fluent speech between pauses, the positioning and the length of *silent* pauses or the distribution and frequency of *filled* pauses (Guillot 1999: 30).

These pauses (but also hesitations, repetitions, false starts, fluctuations, tempo and pitch) can be a deliberate intention of a speaker who wants to achieve a certain rhetorical effect. Sometimes they may serve as a kind of device for gaining time while the speaker is gathering his or her thoughts or selecting and planning what is going to be said (Guillot 1999: 28-29).

As regards the actual perception of fluency, Guillot (1999: 35) claims that the listener normally “has a certain level of tolerance to the effort required”, but that there is a point when the processed speech act becomes too demanding, and it starts to be “perceived as infringing normal processing rhythms” (Guillot 1999: 35).

In line with the aforementioned argument, Hedge (2000: 13), citing Swain (1985: 125-144), states that speakers have to produce comprehensible output through the use of “all language resources they have already acquired”. Whether the output produced is comprehensible or not is clarified by feedback. In learning situations the speaker gets this kind of response from other students or from the teacher. This way the student can refine his or her knowledge of the language system. When being forced to produce immediate, comprehensible output, the learner has to rephrase, clarify or speak slowly.

As for a definition of fluency, Hedge (2000: 54-55), relates the term to the production of spoken language, calling it “the ability to link units of speech together with facility and without strain or inappropriate slowness, or undue hesitation”. She agrees with Faerch, Haastrup and Phillipson (1984: 168), who argue that fluency is a part of communicative competence (where speakers utilize whatever pragmatic and linguistic competence they have), as opposed to strategic competence (that suggests a lack of accessible knowledge).

Moreover, Faerch, Haastrup and Phillipson (1984: 143) indicate three types of fluency: first, the so-called semantic fluency, which combines speech acts and proposition; second, the lexical-syntactic fluency, which brings together syntactic constituents and words; and third the so-called articulatory fluency, which links together different speech segments.

Hedge (2000: 54-55) states that the term *fluency* refers to the ability to respond in a coherent way within conversation, command clear pronunciation with adequate intonation and stress, connect words and phrases, and to do all that in an appropriate regularity.

How this understanding of fluency is normally realized by learners of a language is explained by Hedge (2000: 60), paraphrasing Skehan (1996: 49), who states that students who have to perform a certain activity under time pressure focus on conveying the message in order to achieve the aim of the task quickly rather than paying much attention to completeness and correctness of the language form. The learners might connect lexical phrases and use appropriate communicative strategies in order to utter their ideas. This is called negotiation of meaning and it supports the development of strategic competence and also fluency, but it does not necessarily entail more comprehensible output and a higher degree of accuracy. With the use of convenient but actually inaccurate forms, however, the students might run the risk of developing something which can be called “undesirable fluency” (Skehan 1996: 49).

Last, Hedge (2000: 261) argues that apart from communicative skills, vocabulary and grammar, learners also need to acquire contextual appropriateness and fluency, which are equally important.

This observation suggests that *accuracy* and *fluency* are different categories of language learning. In accordance with that notion, Fulcher (2003: 30) states that “most language teachers have an intuitive understanding of what these terms mean”. Certain activities in various course books claim to be *accuracy-based* or *fluency-*

based. In language teaching, the concept of fluency is often described in negative terms. Thus, non-fluent speakers are said to speak unevenly and slowly with much hesitation and stumbling. In opposition, the positive counterparts mentioned are smoothness and a correct rhythm. The notion of automaticity links the concepts *fluency* and *accuracy*. That is to say, if someone speaks fluently, he or she can plan what he or she says, retrieve the necessary vocabulary and grammar, and speak accurately. As opposed to accuracy, fluency is difficult to delineate because unlike fluency, accuracy can be detected easily by means of concrete examples. For fluency, it is much more complex, because it is something that is open to individual interpretation (Fulcher 2003: 30).

However, Fulcher (2003: 30-31) lists certain phenomena which can help to define the lack of fluency. Accordingly, speakers who are not fluent frequently change words, repeat words or syllables, hesitate (by applying pauses, which can be filled – for example with noises such as *erm* – or unfilled), start a structure in a way that is grammatically predictable, but fail to be consistent enough to finish it correctly, or correct their use of cohesive devices (for instance pronouns). Making many pauses does not necessarily equal a lack of fluency, but maybe a phase of planning or selecting what to say next. The latter aspect of fluency makes the assessment of speaking rather difficult.

2.3 Factors contributing to fluency

After searching for a general definition of the concept of fluency as such, in this subchapter the findings from dictionary entries and academic literature are summarized in a list of features – or factors – that contribute to fluency. The list (see table 1) presents the characteristics a fluent speaker is required to have, as they were detected in dictionary entries and in academic literature. Two factors, namely the appropriate use of discourse markers and the use of linking devices, are not explicitly mentioned in any of the definitions of fluency which were found in the reference books consulted for this thesis. However, since they are mentioned in the third hypothesis of this paper, they are also a part of the list so that their relevance with regards to the concept of fluency can be examined in the course of the empirical research (see chapter 4). The factors are listed in alphabetical order and they are presented in the form of descriptors which are phrases containing certain keywords.

Those keywords are indicated in italics and they are discussed in further detail in the following subsections (see 2.3.1 to 2.3.20). In the questionnaire (see appendix IV), which is presented to the raters of the sample speech performances in the course of the empirical research, the participants of the survey are supposed to indicate in how far, according to their personal opinion, each factor contributes to a speaker's fluency.

Those factors which are marked with an asterisk <*>are based on the findings in dictionary entries only and can thus be regarded as common-sense and, to some extent, plain definitions which are not necessarily linked to academic knowledge. All the other factors were mentioned in academic literature and can therefore lay claim to validity as they pertain to that body of knowledge which is shared by expert linguists.

Table 1: Factors contributing to fluency

Factors contributing to fluency

- a clear way of expressing oneself (*clarity*) *
- a *confident* way of expressing oneself *
- ability to use pre-packaged utterances (use of *fixed phrases*/formulaic language)
- ability to talk in *coherent* sentences
- appropriate use of *discourse markers*
- clear *pronunciation* with adequate intonation and stress
- *contextual appropriateness*
- *continuity* of speech (“the ability to fill time with talk”)
- *creativity* (or “resourcefulness”)
- *ease* (or “facility”) of expression, speaking without any difficulties
- *effective* communication *
- frequent use of repetition (see *hesitation*)
- frequent use of self-correction (see *hesitation*)
- interaction without any *effort* or strain on the part of the speaker and listener
- length of fluent speech between pauses (see *hesitation*)
- *native-likeness*
- positioning, frequency and length of pauses (see *hesitation*)
- speaking without stopping, making “few noticeably long pauses” (see *hesitation*)
- *readiness* in the use of words
- smoothness of speech, *flow* of words (absence of rigidity) *
- speaking without making *mistakes* *
- *speed* (or rapidity), speaking without inappropriate slowness
- *spontaneity* of interaction
- connectedness of speech (use of *linking devices*)

Concerning the factors listed in figure 1 there are some considerations to be made. In the following the characteristics are discussed in further detail in the order of their occurrence in the list above (taking into account overlaps as well as synonymous or antonymous relationships among the descriptors). The elaboration of the individual factors in the subsections below seeks to define the respective characteristics and relate them to the overall notion of fluency.

The fact that all the explanations frequently overlap and refer to one another, suggests that the attempt to find a definition of fluency and to identify factors contributing to its development is a rather difficult endeavor and that the concept is only rather vaguely defined in common dictionaries and academic literature.

2.3.1 Clarity*

One characteristic of fluency which is primarily mentioned in common dictionaries, is “a clear way of expressing oneself”. The *Macmillan English dictionary for advanced learners* (2007: 574), when defining fluency, calls it “a clear and confident way of expressing yourself”. According to this same source, the term *clear* equals explanations such as “obvious and impossible to doubt”, “easy to understand”, “easy to hear” and “not confused” (Macmillan English dictionary for advanced learners 2007: 264). This suggests that clarity as a characteristic of a fluent speaker may on the one hand relate to an acoustic, but on the other hand also to a cognitive – or hermeneutic – understanding.

According to Johnstone (1996: 70-71), “clarity has to do with saying exactly what you mean and showing what your ideas have to do with one another.” She argues further that the term principally refers to a speaker’s word choice, making his or her expressions as unambiguous as possible “by overtly displaying the relations among propositions” (Johnstone 1996: 70-71).

2.3.2 Confidence*

Confidence is, again, a factor of fluency which is mainly mentioned in dictionaries. Consequently, it may well be assumed that it is a characteristic of a fluent speaker that does not have any linguistic significance, but it is rather a trait which describes a fluent speaker’s attitude. The *Macmillan English dictionary for advanced learners*

(2007: 307) calls a confident person someone who “believes in their own abilities and so does not feel nervous or frightened”.

The counter question that arises almost automatically in this regard is: Is a nervous or frightened speaker automatically not fluent?

2.3.3 Fixed phrases (Formulaic language)

Throughout academic literature it is not explicitly stated that the use of fixed phrases is an inherent characteristic of fluency. However, there are some hints which lead to the assumption that it might be. For instance, Hedge (2000: 54-55) holds that a fluent speaker is able, among other things, “to connect words and phrases”. Skehan (1996: 49), taking the same line, claims that learners – in order to become fluent – have to “connect lexical phrases and use appropriate communicative strategies in order to utter their ideas.”

In her book *Formulaic language and the lexicon*, Wray (2002: 47-66) comes up with four interrelated features of formulaic language: function-based features (e.g. sentences builders, like *A gave B a ring*), form-based features (as for instance polywords like *for good* or *to blow up*; or phrasal constraints, such as *by sheer coincidence*), provenance-based features (for example verbatim texts like *better late than never*) and meaning-based features (e.g. meta-messages, such as *for that matter* – which sends the message that somebody has just come up with a better way of making a point).

In a later work of hers, Wray (2008: 9-11) argues that the theories about formulaic language differ and that there is no clear definition of the concept. However, she differentiates between collocations, such as *highly complex* or *fully developed* and so-called true idioms, which are basically a set of multiword strings that convey a metaphorical expression of an idea, such as *kick the bucket*. Furthermore, it is suggested that some of the “items become formulaic first, and only later begin to develop the tell-tale signs” (Wray 2008: 9) and that there has to be a distinction between something that is formulaic in the entire language in general and something that is formulaic just for one particular group of individuals. “What is formulaic for one person need not be formulaic for another” (Wray 2008, 11). So, according to the author it depends on the speaker’s and the hearer’s individual interpretation of what is formulaic language.

One hypothesis about formulaic language is that if these fixed phrases are retrieved only from memory, they have to be produced in a more fluent way than utterances which are completely novel. In various studies, where the number of words which are uttered between pauses was counted, the results typically displayed a difference between prepared or rehearsed texts and spontaneous speech acts. Whereas in situations where the speaker had prepared the speech beforehand the pauses occurred at sentence and clause boundaries, many of the pauses in spontaneously uttered texts occurred in so-called non-grammatical places. One implication of this observation is that, in prepared speech, the speaker distributes the pauses in such a way, that the hearer can decode the message more easily, whereas in spontaneous speech this is not necessarily the case (Wray 2002: 35-37).

Moreover, as cited in Wray (2002: 36-37), Raupach (1984: 114-116) argues that pauses or other signs of *hesitation* (see 2.3.12) usually occur at the boundaries of formulaic sequences, so that these fixed phrases can be detected by identifying those strings which are not interrupted by pauses.

2.3.4 Coherence

The factor *coherence* is predominantly mentioned in academic literature rather than in dictionaries. Gernsbacher and Givón (1995: vii), for instance, define the concept as a “property of what emerges during speech production and comprehension.” Moreover, they claim that a text that is produced coherently – may it be in written or spoken form – enables the receiver (i.e. the reader or listener) to form more or less the same representation of the text as the sender (i.e. the writer or speaker) has intended to convey.

The *Longman dictionary of applied linguistics* (1985: 45) argues that coherence is the concept that refers to “the relationships which link the meanings of utterances in a discourse or of the sentences in a text”. Similarly it is stated that a paragraph “has coherence if it is a series of sentences that develop a main idea”. However, Goldberg (1983: 25) holds that coherence cannot be formalized, since it is a property of propositions rather than of locutions (i.e. sentences). Propositions anon can be defined as the meaning of a sentence, which – as opposed to the sentence itself – carries truth value (Bosse 2010).

According to Trabasso, Suh and Payton (1995: 189) coherence is an intuitive and therefore subjective concept. Consequently, it is something that can only be judged personally from the point of view of the eye of the beholder. The basis for the subjectivity of coherence might lie in the interaction between the experiencer and the events.

Werth (1984: 72) classifies coherence as a “superordinate term to which cohesion, collocation, and connection are subordinate”. Additionally it includes both semantic and formal connectedness. Concerning language production, semantic configurations are connected with preceding ones within a proceeding discourse. Concerning language reception, the semantic configurations are logically inferred and the investigation of these configurations in terms of their inter-relatedness leads to coherence (Werth 1984: 73). As for the above-mentioned subordinate constituents of coherence, namely *cohesion* (see also 2.3.20) and *connection* (or, otherwise put, *connexity*), Hölker (1984: 84) claims that they are “inherent properties of texts”, whereas the superordinate concept *coherence* depends on an interpreter. He argues that if an interpreter – by using his pertinent knowledge – can attribute a model to the text “in which only those states of affairs which are mentioned in the text play a rôle, and if all of these states of affairs are relevantly interconnected”, then text may be coherent for him. Put simply, if the entire text makes sense to an interpreter, it can be called coherent (Hölker 1984: 84).

In line with that argument, Hopper (1983: 81) opines that the most necessary and basic aspect of the production of coherence is the cooperative action of interpretation. Interpretation cannot be measured exactly by any of the five senses, but it is rather encompassed by common sense. Hence, interpretation is sense making and therefore builds coherence.

Givón (1995: 60) holds that coherence is a by-product of the production and comprehension of discourse and he agrees with the view of coherence being a collaborative process. According to him, many goals are attempted to be achieved simultaneously by two interlocutors. If those goals are in conflict, the collaboration “toward resolving such conflicts and achieving their respective goals is a matter of degree” (Givón 1995: 60). Taking the same line, Goodwin (1995: 117) argues that coherence is a multi-party activity where understanding is negotiated within human interaction. For him, the accomplishment of coherence is ascertained by deploying systematic discursive procedures. Furthermore, he argues that coherence involves

not merely the relationships between certain linguistic elements within a stream of speech, but also the matching of the content and the action of an utterance, as well as the social circumstances. When speakers are faced with the continuous task of fitting what they say to the instantaneous social configuration, they apply a set of procedures which entail systematic shifts in the linguistic structure of resulting utterances (Goodwin 1995: 118).

Concerning the social configuration of a conversation, Ragan (1983: 157) remarks that conversational coherence normally presupposes that the communicating participants of conversation talk in a non-random, ordered and patterned way, which enables them to make sense and to define the situation. Also, in the building of meaningful, coherent dialogue, the social identities of the participants shape and delineate the conversation. Thus, to some degree, Ragan (1983: 157) agrees with the above-mentioned argument of Hopper (1983: 81) that coherence is sense-making.

According to Ellis (1983: 223) coherence, although considered mainly a semantic concept, is realized in cohesion. He states that the notion of cohesion (see also 2.3.20) refers to the relation between two mutually depending elements, where one element quasi assumes the other.

Coates (1995: 42) mentions on the one hand the coherence approach and on the other hand the cohesion approach. The latter is to establish the cohesive ties which link phrases or words with one another within connected discourse. The coherence approach, by contrast, treats discourse as a process. Consequently, text is viewed as a dynamic expression of meaning which is collectively negotiated by the hearers and speakers and so coherence in discourse comprises more than grammatical and lexical links between elements within the text, involving both the intra- and the extra-textual. In this regard, unlike sentences (which are “context-free abstractions”) utterances are fundamentally context-bound. That is to say that all features of context (i.e. the speaker-roles of as well as the relationship between the participants, and the domain – private or public – where the interaction takes place) “*may or may not* be encoded linguistically in a given utterance” (Coates 1995: 42). However, the relevant features of the context of a particular utterance have to be acknowledged in order to judge whether the utterance is coherent. Coates (1995: 42) provides a concrete example: The utterance *I’ll see you tomorrow* may lead to an answer such as *great* or *fine* (in this case it might be coherent in an informal talk between friends) or to a reply

like *Yes, sir* (in this case it may be coherent in a situation where a teacher is giving a detention to a subordinate).

Another argument in favor of the context-dependent nature of utterances is that spontaneous speech may often seem incoherent, although by the participants it is perceived as successful and therefore coherent (Coates 1995: 41).

Finally, Hawes (1983: 287) ascribes the qualities of truthfulness and appropriateness to coherent conversation. “[T]ruthfulness functions to disclose subjectivity in *my* world of internal nature whereas appropriateness functions to establish legitimate interpersonal relations in *our* world of society” (Hawes 1983: 287).

Hence, quite obviously, the notion of coherence is closely linked to the concepts of *contextual appropriateness* (see 2.3.7), *cohesion* (see 2.3.20) and also *discourse* (see 2.3.5), which is defined in the *Longman dictionary of applied linguistics* (1985: 83) as “language which has been produced as the result of an act of communication” that “refers to larger units of language such as paragraphs, conversations, and interviews”.

2.3.5 Discourse markers

According to Andersen (2001: 39-40), these markers, such as *well, after all, yeah, so, but,* etc. are not arbitrary. They are conventional and their use demands a certain body of knowledge about the native speaker community. These items are said to be highly context-sensitive as they are commonly associated with communicative aspects which lie beyond any propositional meaning. They indicate the speaker’s attitude of endorsement, rejection or the positive or negative evaluation of a proposition; or they serve to foster solidarity or politeness between speakers. Discourse markers, sometimes also called *pragmatic markers*, can facilitate processes of inference, such as identifying speaker intentions and contextual background (Andersen 2001: 39-40). Quite often, discourse markers are those items that serve as fillers of pauses in speech (see 2.3.11).

“The overall point is that, although pragmatic markers can be produced in linguistic isolation, they are never interpreted in contextual isolation” (Andersen 2001: 44).

Due to the assumption that coherence is somehow connected to the notion of discourse, there is also a good case to believe that coherence (see 2.3.4) involves the employment of so-called discourse markers (for instance, expressions like *kind of* or *actually*). According to Aijmer (2002: 2), those markers (she actually calls them *discourse particles*) “seem to be dispensable elements functioning as sign-posts in the communication facilitating the hearer’s interpretation of the utterance on the basis of various contextual clues.” However, discourse particles cannot be regarded as mere meaningless decorations within a discourse which are a sure sign that a speaker is lacking proficiency, but they are better dealt with in pragmatics or in discourse analysis than in semantics. They rather have a certain pragmatic value and they are set apart from other words in a language by their very frequency (Aijmer 2002: 2-3).

Moreover, Aijmer (2002) provides concrete examples of discourse particles, such as the topic-changer *now* that is used in order to draw attention to something new, carrying a certain evaluative and affective meaning. It maintains an indexical relationship with preceding and forthcoming text, serving as a prompter within discourse before new topics or arguments are introduced (Aijmer 2002: 95).

Also the interpersonal particle *just* is very often a discourse particle (Aijmer 2002: 173) as well as the adjuster *sort of*, which is quite similar to *kind of*. These utterances help the speaker and the hearer to create common ground, making it possible for the speaker to induce a certain distance between himself and the words used by him. *Sort of* and *kind of* may also have a polite or softening function, making a conversation more informal. In the latter case the discourse particles *I mean* and *you know* are very similar to the adjusters *sort of* and *kind of* (Aijmer 2002: 209).

Another example of a discourse particle is the expectation marker *actually* that implies a certain gap between reality and what seems to be the case. It may stand in initial position (indicating an interruptive or rhetorical function to mark a justification or explanation and to change the hearer’s attitude) or in final position (weakening or mitigating what has been said by treating it as an evaluation or opinion) (Aijmer 2002: 274-275).

Even the interjections *oh* and *ah* are discourse particles, indicating a reaction to an unexpected circumstance. *Oh*, which is mainly a signal for surprise, is generally stronger than *ah*, which usually expresses satisfaction or interest (Aijmer 2002: 151).

Generally, discourse markers seem to have certain characteristic qualities, as described by Sankoff *et al.* (1997: 9). First, their presence does not change the propositional meaning of the sentence. Second, they do not play any syntactic role within a sentence. Third, discourse markers do not carry the same meaning as their respective non-discursive forms do (e.g. *like*); and last, they are subject to greater phonological reduction than their non-discursive counterparts and therefore “they are articulated as part of smoothly flowing speech production” (Sankoff *et al.* 1997: 9).

In sum, it is safe to assume that a spoken text sounds more coherent (and therefore more fluent) if the speaker shows that within the chronological sequence of utterances the main ideas are developed systematically and if he or she links these ideas of his or her speech by employing discourse particles.

2.3.6 Pronunciation

Another factor which is mentioned quite frequently in academic literature about fluency is pronunciation. Apparently the prevailing opinion also considers clear pronunciation with adequate intonation and stress an important part of fluency in spoken language. But when can a speaker’s way of pronunciation be called clear? And, concerning stress and intonation, what actually *is* adequate?

As already mentioned in subsection 2.3.1, the *Macmillan English dictionary for advanced learners* (2007: 264), among others, offers the following explanations for the term *clear*: “easy to understand” and “easy to hear”. Thus, the factor pronunciation is something which involves not only the speaker, but also the hearer.

As Bond and Garnes (1980: 115) point out, one common misconception about speech perception is that the perception of fluent speech solely includes the use of any available acoustic cues. This assumption grounds on the misbelief that the perception of fluent speech is identical to the one of isolated syllables or words, only that in fluent speech there are simply more syllables in a row to be perceived (Bond & Garnes 1980: 115). On the contrary, “a listener uses not only acoustic information, but also employs strategies of various sorts in order to understand conversation” (Bond & Garnes 1980: 116).

According to Cole and Jakimik (1980: 136), “natural continuous speech is a highly ambiguous stimulus”. Within a connected stream of speech it is not easy to discern where one word ends and another word begins, because its individual

sounds of words feature much greater variability than the sounds of isolated words (Reddy 1976: 136, cited in Cole & Jakimik 1980: 136).

Words uttered in isolation show a relatively stable auditory pattern. For instance, if someone is asked to read a number of certain words from a list, the articulation of these words will be very precise and careful. By contrast, if the same words are used in continuous fluent speech, they will probably not exhibit such stable sound patterns, as they will not be pronounced so carefully and precisely (Cole & Jakimik 1980: 136-137).

Cole and Jakimik (1980: 138) further explain that in addition to the issue of variability, another problem regarding pronunciation is segmentation (i.e. finding word boundaries). In continuous fluent speech there are no consistent indications for the ending and the beginning of a word. Rather, words merely exist in the listener's mind and not in the stimulus. Due to the fact that conversational speech is inherently continuous across word boundaries and, as mentioned before, subject to phonological variation, a given stretch of fluent speech "can usually be parsed into words in more than one way". This can be observed in utterances like *more rice* and *more ice* (Cole & Jakimik 1980: 138).

Thus, the phenomena of variability and segmentation make it rather difficult to understand fluent speech – as opposed to single, isolated utterances. As for the adequacy of intonation and stress, the issue remains unresolved as it is a matter of individual judgement what is adequate (or appropriate) and what is not.

2.3.7 Contextual appropriateness

This potential factor is actually not included in a definition of fluency per se. Rather, it is compared to fluency in a statement by Trisha Hedge (2000: 261), who argues that, apart from other skills, learners also need to acquire contextual appropriateness and fluency, which are equally important. However, it might be worthwhile finding out whether contextual appropriateness can also be an integral part of fluency.

In order to scrutinize this concept it is necessary to define two terms, namely on the one hand the notion of *context* and on the other hand the term *appropriateness*.

What is appropriate and what is inappropriate? In general, according to *the Random House dictionary of the English language* (1973: 103), something which is appropriate is "[s]uitable or fitting for a particular purpose, person, occasion, etc."

Thus, contextual appropriateness in fluent speech is obviously a way of speaking which is suitable for a certain context. Andrews (1993: 92), in his resource book for teachers, offers a graspable example of contextual appropriateness:

If you're chairing a meeting of teachers in your building, but continue to talk to your colleagues the way you talk to the third or tenth graders you teach during the day, you're clearly using language inappropriate to a meeting of professional educators. Similarly, if you are asked to give a brief report to the local school board and you do so using the same language you use with your bridge club or golf foursome, then another context has been violated and the language is distracting (Andrews 1993: 92).

When it comes to a definition of the notion of context, there is a clear distinction that has to be born in mind – namely the one between verbal (i.e. linguistic) context and situational (i.e. extralinguistic) context (Werth 1984: 34).

As for linguistic context, Fetzer (2007: 4), citing Goffman (1986), describes it as a kind of frame which composes the content of a text by delimiting it, while being delimited and framed by adjacent frames. This way, a series of interconnected frames is structured as an entire composition. Furthermore, Fetzer (2007: 4) states that “context is seen as a dynamic construct which is interactionally organized in and through the process of communication”. This argument is supported by Miecznikowski and Bazzanella (2007: 206), who claim that there is a dynamic relation between context and language. In their opinion language is both context-dependent and context-changing. Hence context is used to negotiate and interpret communicative actions. At the same time, by implementing these actions, the context is modified.

Moreover, Fetzer (2007: 5) argues that context is not only dynamic, but also a relational construct in that it links communicative actions with their surroundings and it relates individual participants to their individual surroundings as well as to their communicative actions. Additionally, Fetzer (2007: 5) defines linguistic context (i.e. *co-text*) as a “set of propositions which participants take for granted in interaction” and explains more specifically, that it involves “actual language used within discourse” which is “composed of linguistic constructions (or parts) embedded in adjacent linguistic constructions” creating “a whole clause, sentence, utterance, turn or text” (Fetzer 2007: 5).

Besides verbal context there is also the concept of social context, which – according to Fetzer (2007: 12) – encompasses the context of communicative exchange. Its constituents are the “participants, the immediate concrete, physical surroundings including time and location, and the macro contextual institutional and non-institutional domains” (Fetzer 2007: 12).

According to Fetzer (2007: 14) social context is often used as a synonym of extra-linguistic context which includes the mental and physical dispositions as well as the knowledge or assumptions (general background knowledge and knowledge about the language used as well as about the communicative conventions, intentions and goals) of the participants of communicative exchange. The immediate extra-linguistic context is enclosed in more remote organizational extra-linguistic contexts. However, using social context and extra-linguistic context synonymously is an oversimplification, because “social context subcategorizes into different types of sociocultural context which are defined by a particular perspective on social context” (Fetzer 2007: 14).

As regards the context-dependent notion of appropriateness, Miecznikowski and Bazzanella (2007: 207) argue that the “appropriateness of linguistic choices should not be conceptualized in terms of a simple matching of these choices with a pre-established and rigid set of contextual parameters”. On the contrary, it should be considered a dialogical, intersubjective concept which is dynamic. Hence, whether such a linguistic choice (i.e. an utterance) is appropriate or not largely depends on the actions performed by the speakers, on the potential changeability of the linguistic item itself, and on the actual subsequent conversation events (Miecznikowski & Bazzanella 2007: 207).

Fetzer (2007: 17) states that appropriateness is often contrasted and compared with grammaticality, well-formedness and acceptability. Thus, a sentence is grammatical if it accords with grammar rules, and it is well-formed if it is grammatical and also easy to process. An acceptable sentence is not necessarily grammatical, but it has to be easy to process and comprehensible (Fetzer 2007: 17).

In sum, contextual appropriateness apparently refers to a suitable and acceptable way to apply linguistic and extralinguistic context.

2.3.8 Continuity

The *Macmillan English dictionary for advanced learners* (2007: 320) defines continuity in two ways. On the one hand continuity is “a situation in which something happens or exists for a long time without stopping or changing” and on the other hand – in its adjectival form – continuous is something that is “continuing without stopping or being interrupted”.

This definition seems to suggest that a speaker who can speak continuously – or, as Fillmore (1979: 93) puts it, “fill time with talk” – does not apply any pauses at all during his or her speech; an assumption which might have to be doubted in the light of other potential factors of fluent speech, such as *hesitation* phenomena (see 2.3.12).

2.3.9 Creativity

The factor creativity – or put another way, *resourcefulness* – is another characteristic which is mentioned in connection with fluency. According to the *Macmillan English dictionary for advanced learners* (2007: 346) the term *creativity* refers to “the ability to create new ideas or things using your imagination.”

So the issue raised in this regard is whether or not someone who is imaginative and able to use all his or her language resources, is automatically fluent in speaking.

2.3.10 Ease

Throughout all the definitions of fluency there is one aspect which is mentioned eventually at some point. Apparently it is an inherent characteristic of a fluent speaker to speak with ease or – as also stated by means of the antonym – without any difficulty. The CEFR, for example, states that a rather fluent speaker on a level of B2 “can communicate spontaneously, often showing remarkable fluency and ease of expression in even longer complex stretches of speech” (Council of Europe 2001: 31).

The *Oxford English dictionary* (1933, III: 15) defines ease as the “opportunity, means or ability to do something” and the “absence of painful effort; freedom from the burden of toil”. The second explanation ties in with the factor *effort* (see 2.3.13),

which is often associated with a lack of fluency. Furthermore, the *Oxford English dictionary* (1933, III: 15) offers the synonym *facility*, “as opposed to difficulty”. The latter term, in turn, is described as “in a way hard to understand; obscurely”, which partly also refers back to the factor *clarity* (see 2.3.1).

2.3.11 Effectiveness*

The factor *effectiveness* comes up only in dictionary definitions of fluency. Therefore, it is safe to assume that the term *effectiveness* does not carry any deeper linguistic meaning, but it rather refers to the ability to bring across the intended message. In line with that argument, the *Macmillan English dictionary for advanced learners* (2007: 473) calls effective something or someone that “works well and produces the result that was intended.”

So when it comes to effectiveness as a factor which is relevant to fluency, one would have to know the communicative result (i.e. the message) that the speaker had intended originally. Though due to the fact that the speaker’s intention is something that cannot be predicted absolutely well and truly by the hearer, it is difficult to say whether a speaker’s performance can be called effective or ineffective.

2.3.12 Hesitation (pauses, self-correction, repetition)

As for *hesitation*, Guillot (1999: 43) argues that these phenomena should not be regarded as “an undesirable by-product of the effort to communicate” or as “foolhardily flaunted proofs of illusory confidence”. On the contrary, Guillot (1999: 43) argues that hesitation can also be a sign of the process of ordering one’s thoughts.

In general, there are various different hesitation phenomena, such as pauses, self-correction or repetition. While academic literature points to “undue hesitation” as a characteristic of the absence of fluency, the CEFR is more specific, stating that fluent speakers on a level of B2 “can be hesitant as [they] search[...] for patterns and expressions”, but without making many “noticeably long pauses” (Council of Europe 2001: 31). In the following paragraphs the three above-mentioned types of hesitation (i.e. *pauses*, *self-correction* and *repetition*) are discussed at length.

When it comes to pauses, the *Longman dictionary of applied linguistics* (1985: 210) calls them “a commonly occurring feature of natural speech in which gaps or hesitations appear during the production of utterances”. Moreover, it is argued that most commonly pauses are either unfilled (“silent breaks between words”) or filled (“gaps which are filled by such expressions as *um*, *er*, *mm*”) and that “people who speak slowly often use more pauses than people who speak quickly”. Apparently, with many speakers, up to 50% of the speaking time consists of pauses (*Longman dictionary of applied linguistics* 1985: 210).

Pauses, as a characteristic of non-fluent speech, play an important part in communication. As mentioned before, pauses can be filled or unfilled, and they can be intentional (in order to achieve a rhetorical effect) or unintentional.

Chafe (1987: 22) explains that during the act of speaking, the person who speaks verbalizes one piece of information after another, each such piece being a so-called *intonation unit*.

An intonation unit is a sequence of words combined under a single, coherent intonation contour, usually preceded by a pause. An intonation unit in English typically contains about five or six words, and new intonation units typically begin about two seconds apart (Chafe 1987: 22).

The question is what happens in pauses of speech. Chafe (1987: 24) presumes that there is a time-consuming cognitive process that requires some effort. This process is a change in the activation of certain information in the mind of the speaker. The fact that such activation processes take place also during a speech act suggests that the pauses which are caused by it are minimal instances of deviation from the ideal, or *disfluency* (Chafe 1987: 24).

Also the length and the frequency of pauses have an influence on the personality of the speaker as it is perceived by the listener. Speakers who tend to make longer pauses are perceived as worrying, suspicious, distrustful, shy, troubled, fussy, worrying or easily upset, but also resourceful (see 2.3.9) or self-sufficient. Sometimes those speakers are even judged as less dominant, less extroverted, less emotionally stable – and less likeable. Filled pauses tend to be associated with negative qualities such as uninteresting, nervous, uncomfortable and disfluent (Böhringer 2009: 13).

Generally, pauses can be a hesitation marker, but they can also be relevant for an interaction, in the form of regulating the turn-taking in a conversation or functioning as speech acts (Böhringer 2009: 26).

If pauses are filled by certain words or sounds, these utterances can be called pragmatic markers, or discourse markers (see 2.3.5). Moreover, pauses in speech are considered elements that are directly involved in the production of oral language. During a pause (particularly with regards to English as a lingua franca) a speaker can mentally take a break, order his or her thoughts and review the input that he or she has just taken in (Böhringer 2009: 58-59).

As regards the second kind of hesitation phenomenon discussed in this paper, namely *self-correction* (or *repair*), the *Longman dictionary of applied linguistics* (1985: 244) describes it as the correction of misunderstandings, errors, or unintended forms by the speaker during a conversation. Geluykens (1994: 17-23), when discussing self-correcting (as opposed to “other-correcting”), makes two basic distinctions in this regard. First, he differentiates between so-called immediate repairs and delayed repairs, comparing the exact point in time of the self-correction. Second, he distinguishes the two categories error-repair and appropriateness-repair. Whereas the former refers to the self-correction of errors (concerning accuracy), the latter is the replacement of a less felicitous item in a particular situation by a more appropriate one. As for both types, these repairs are sometimes initiated by using so-called *editing terms*, such as (most commonly) *that is* or *I mean*.

In general, Geluykens (1994: 55) points out that *repair* is a very frequent phenomenon in unplanned conversational discourse because speakers have to produce and at the same time evaluate a continuous series of utterances as they go along. Moreover, repairs are often preceded by pauses, the pause being the initiation of the repair mechanism. The speaker needs a short period of time to recognize the conversational flaw, and then he or she revises the utterance by applying the self-correction.

The third hesitation phenomenon discussed in this subsection is *repetition*. According to Coates (1995: 45, citing Ochs 1983) repetition refers to “two or more occurrences of identical linguistic material immediately adjacent in talk”. It is seen as an ordinary component of spontaneous discourse and it is often considered a part of the speaker’s attempt to select a suitable utterance as he or she is thinking out an idea.

Tannen (1989: 48) states that repetition facilitates the production of more language in a less energy-draining, more efficient and more fluent way. Through repetition more speaking material is provided and, thus, automaticity is developed, resulting in a more ample talk. Additionally by repetition a speaker can “produce fluent speech while formulating what to say next” (Tannen 1989: 48).

Through this kind of redundancy in conversation the hearer can receive information at approximately the rate the speaker is uttering it. Thus, both speaker and hearer benefit from the relatively dead space as they can use it to think out what to say next and absorb what is said respectively (Tannen 1989: 49).

Lichtkoppler (2006: 11) summarizes some research results from studies about native-speaker/non-native speaker conversations, citing Wong (2000: 407-424) who found out that repetition is a social activity which is part of our normal behaviour rather than a sign of a sloppy or disfluent speaker. Similarly Sawir (2000: 1-32) concludes that rather than indicating poor speaking skills, repetition can be a useful resource for language learners which enables them to take part in conversation in spite of potential language constraints.

To sum up, the hesitation phenomena discussed in this subsection – pauses, self-correction and repetition – are not always an indication of lacking language skills, but sometimes they are rather time-gaining devices serving a specific rhetorical purpose (e.g. thinking through what to say next, coming up with new ideas etc.) and sometimes they can even enhance fluency.

2.3.13 Effort

Whereas in dictionary definitions of fluency the term *effort* (or rather its antonymous adjectival form *effortless*) is frequently mentioned, the CEFR uses the similar though not exactly synonymous word *strain*, as in “[c]an interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party” (Council of Europe 2001: 5).

As for effort the *Macmillan English dictionary for advanced learners* (2007: 474) defines it as “an attempt to do something that is difficult or that involves hard work”, but also “something that someone produces or creates, often something of poor quality”. The *Merriam Webster’s collegiate dictionary* (1993: 368), in turn, defines

effort as “conscious exertion of power: hard work”, “a serious attempt” and “something produced by exertion or trying.” This kind of definition suggests that a fluent speaker who can speak effortlessly, is not supposed to work very hard on his or her ability to speak.

Regarding the quite negatively connoted term *strain*, the *Merriam Webster’s collegiate dictionary* (1993: 1161) gives the following explanations: “excessive or difficult exertion or labor; an unusual reach, degree, or intensity.” The *Macmillan English dictionary for advanced learners* (2007: 1477) puts it similarly, holding that strain is “pressure caused by a difficult situation”.

In sum, the terms *effort* and *strain*, as factors affecting fluency in a negative way, make reference to the notions of *ease* or *difficulty* (see 2.3.10).

2.3.14 Native-likeness

According to the *Longman dictionary of applied linguistics* (1985: 188) a native speaker is “a person considered as a speaker of his or her native language”. In this reference book it is further argued that a native speaker’s intuition about his or her language constitutes a certain basis for confirming and establishing the grammar rules of this language.

Moreover, it is referred to generative transformational grammar, a grammar theory introduced by the American linguist Noam Chomsky. This theory seeks to work out which kind of knowledge a native speaker uses when he or she forms grammatical sentences (Longman dictionary of applied linguistics 1985: 119-120).

According to generative transformational grammar, native speakers dispose of a certain competence that is called *internalized grammar*, which is that person’s ability to understand and create all sentences – even if they might never have heard them before. This type of competence assumes an ideal speaker who is, however, not a real person with a complete knowledge of the entire native language (Longman dictionary of applied linguistics 1985: 52).

Consequently, there are some questions which automatically come up in this regard: Is every native-speaker (and, indeed, every single person is a native speaker of at least one language) automatically fluent in his or her native language? Is it only fluency which makes a speaker of a second language as good as a speaker of a first language?

2.3.15 Readiness

When searching for definitions of the concept *fluency* in ordinary dictionaries, one of the descriptive elements used quite often is the word *readiness* (or its adjectival counterpart *ready*) as in being “able to speak or write smoothly, easily, or readily” (Random House dictionary of the English language 1973: 547).

The very same reference book equates the term *readiness* with the words “promptness; quickness; ease; facility” (Random House dictionary of the English language 1973: 1195). Similarly the *Oxford English dictionary* (1933, VIII: 196) claims that readiness is “the quality of being prompt or quick in action, performance, expression, etc.” or “the quickness or facility with which something is done”. Thus in dictionaries the factor readiness is described in a way that suggests a direct association with other factors such as *ease* (see 2.3.10) or *speed* (see 2.3.18). Moreover, for the term *readiness* the *Merriam Webster’s collegiate dictionary* (1993: 973) offers explanations such as “immediately available” or “spontaneously” (see 2.3.19).

2.3.16 Flow and smoothness*

One factor which is mentioned repeatedly in dictionary definitions (though almost never in academic literature) is the flow of speech; as in phrases like *easy flow*, *ready flow* or *flowing style*. The *Oxford English dictionary* (1933, IV: 351), for example, holds that *flow*, as “opposed to ‘stand’ ” describes a speaker or writer who is able to “glide along smoothly, like a river”. Similarly, the *Random House dictionary of the English language* (1973: 546) describes the verb *flow* by “to proceed continuously and smoothly, as thought, speech, etc.” The *Chambers encyclopedic English dictionary* (1994: 472) defines it as “to come readily to mind” or “in speech or writing a continuous stream or outpouring”.

Apparently the notion of *flow* is connected on the one hand with the ideas of *continuity* (see 2.3.8), *ease* (see 2.3.10) and *readiness* (2.3.15), and on the other hand with the concept of *smoothness*. What is *smooth* is defined in various ways. The *Oxford English dictionary* (1933, IX: 286) differentiates between smoothness of words (defining it as “pleasant, affable, polite; seemingly amiable or friendly; having a

show of sincerity or friendliness”) and smoothness of tongue (“speaking fair or smoothly; using specious or attractive language; plausible, bland, insinuating, flattering”). Furthermore, according to this reference book, someone can be smooth “of style or diction”, which means that his or her way of speaking is “flowing gently or easily; nicely modulated; not harsh or rugged; polished”. In a final remark it is also mentioned that smoothness is “free from, unaccompanied by, obstruction, interruption, impediment, or difficulty” (Oxford English dictionary 1933, IX: 286). So the definitions given here for smoothness also point to the absence of difficulty (see 2.3.10).

Quite similarly, the *Random House dictionary of the English language* (1973: 1346) equals the adjective *smooth* with explanations such as “free from hindrances or difficulties; elegant, easy or polished, not harsh to the ear”.

However, the bottom line is that the concepts of *flow* and *smoothness* seem to be rather vague, which is an observation that is also backed by the fact that these terms are primarily mentioned in common dictionaries and hardly ever in academic literature.

2.3.17 Mistakes*

For some authors in academic literature, mistakes are a decisive factor of fluent speech, while for others they are not. In the research of dictionary entries about fluency, there is one reference book, namely the *Longman active study dictionary* (1998: 257), which states that a fluent speaker can speak “without stopping or making mistakes”.

In turn, Skehan (1996: 49), as mentioned above, argues that if language learners use convenient but inaccurate forms, they might develop an undesirable fluency. Similarly, Fulcher (2003: 30) opposes accuracy to fluency, when he mentions that “unlike fluency, accuracy can be detected easily by means of concrete examples”.

The discussion in this regard remains irresolute. In the questionnaire of this written thesis (see 3.2.3 and Appendix IV) the factor *mistakes* is listed and therefore subject to the raters’ individual interpretation.

2.3.18 Speed

Apparently, many academic sources agree on the importance of a speaker's speed as an inherent quality of fluency. According to those sources a fluent speaker can speak rapidly – or without any inappropriate slowness. According to the *Merriam Webster's collegiate dictionary* (1993: 968) something which is rapid is “marked by a fast rate of motion, activity, succession, or occurrence”. According to the *Longman dictionary of applied linguistics* (1985: 237) the speech rate (also *rate of utterance*) is “the speed at which a person speaks”. Subsequently it is explained that the rate of utterance might depend on various factors, such as the topic, the number of people who are present during the speech act, the speaker's reaction to them, as well as the speaker's own personality. Moreover, the degree to which the speaker is familiar with the language (or dialect) he or she is using is an important issue in this regard. The speech rate is usually measured by the amount of syllables which are uttered per minute, while the measurement of the so-called articulation rate subtracts the time covered by pauses (see 2.3.12). Generally it has been observed that the longer and the more frequent the pauses are, the slower is the rate of speech (Longman dictionary of applied linguistics 1985: 237).

The remaining question is at what speech rate someone can be considered rapid and thus appears fluent.

2.3.19 Spontaneity

Another factor which is, according to academic literature, a decisive characteristic of fluent speech, is the spontaneity of interaction. Also at the mock exam, which is a rehearsal for the actual final exam (*Berufsreifeprüfung*), one of the assessment criteria is the speaker's ability to interact successfully with the examiner. As part of this ability, spontaneity on the part of the test-taker is certainly an indispensable quality. But what constitutes the factor spontaneity?

According to Miller and Weiner (1998: 22) spontaneous spoken language is determined by five distinct key properties. First, spontaneous speech is always uttered in real time, so that there is no opportunity for editing – in contrast to written language, where pauses for editing can be made. Second, spontaneous speech is clearly limited by the short-term memory of both the hearer and the speaker. Third, it

is generally produced in face-to-face interaction within a certain context (see 2.3.7). Fourth, spontaneous speech, by its very definition, involves rhythm, voice quality, amplitude and pitch; and last, it is usually accompanied by facial expressions, eye-contact, gestures and body postures, all of which signal information.

In terms of its linguistic properties, spontaneous spoken language normally features much more coordination and much less subordination than written language. The phrases uttered in spontaneous interaction are typically less complex (compared to written language) and they are generally unintegrated and fragmented (Miller & Weiner 1998: 22).

Also, deictic words play an important role in spontaneous speech. According to Ehlich (1984: 34) “[d]eictic expressions can only be interpreted when the centre of reference is known to which they are linked. This centre is the speech action as such.” When something is said, a new center of reference is automatically established. This center enables the speaker to identify dimensions and objects in his surrounding world in a unique way (Ehlich 1984: 34).

In other words, what is *here* and *there* usually changes with the speaker’s position and who is *I* and *you* switches between the roles of the sender and the receiver of the message (Bühler 1934, cited in Brown 1995: 109).

In spontaneous spoken language the lexical range is generally smaller than in written language, and in addition there are many constructions which do not occur in written language, but they do in spontaneous speech – and vice-versa (Miller & Weiner 1998: 23).

Hence, theoretically all these criteria (simple, coordinate sentences with many deictic expressions) have to be met in order to speak spontaneously. But whether spontaneity equals (or is a part of) fluency, has to be doubted since a speaker can conceivably participate in an unplanned (spontaneous) discourse, yet lacking all the other criteria of fluency.

2.3.20 Linking devices

The last potential factor contributing to a speaker’s fluency is the connectedness of speech. The question is how individual ideas are connected in order to be uttered in spoken English? Usually this is made by the use of linking devices – or so-called *cohesive devices*. The third hypothesis of this paper (see chapter 1) also mentions

the appropriate use of linking devices as a constitutive factor of fluency in spoken English. Surprisingly, this characteristic is not mentioned in the academic literature consulted for this thesis.

As already mentioned in subsection 2.3.4, cohesion is subordinate to the notion of coherence (Werth 1984: 72) and it is the relation between two different elements which depend on (and thus assume) each other (Ellis 1983: 223). According to Coates (1995: 42) cohesive devices (or *cohesive ties*) connect phrases or words with one another. Widdowson (2007: 46) adds that this is done so that the participants of the speaking situation can understand new content “in relation to the context that has been established in the reader’s mind by what has been said before” (Widdowson 2007: 46).

Providing a list of examples of cohesive devices, Mather and Jaffe (2002: 1-2) indicate some simple expressions (such as *and*, *but*, *because* or *however* as well as the sequential expressions *first*, *second*, *then*, *lastly* etc.), but also more formal ones (such as *therefore*, *consequently*, *similarly*, *moreover* or *furthermore*) and multi-word items (such as *for example*, *in contrast*, *in addition* or *in other words*).

Werth (1984: 60) calls cohesion a formal connectivity (as opposed to coherence, which is regarded as semantic connectivity) and he points out that during this syntactic process the sentences in a text are interconnected.

According to Clark (1983: 20) cohesive devices create unified discourse from sentences and, more importantly, there is a certain mutual understanding between the speaker and the listener that the sentences of the text will be connected. “Given this assumption, cohesive devices function as indicators of *how* one sentence is related to another or the others” (Clark 1983: 20).

However, Widdowson (2007: 49) notes that cohesive devices only help to understand and therefore they are only effective because they enable the listener “to construct meaning that makes contextual sense to them”. By that he means that by means of cohesion in a text the listener is enabled to “derive a **coherent** discourse from it.”

Overall, it is safe to assume that cohesive devices are one inherent characteristic of fluency, since they link individual parts to form one coherent whole.

3 Research context and methodology

This chapter describes the context and methodology of the paper at hand. At first, the preconditions of the research as well as my personal involvement in the topic of interest will be explained. Then, the second subchapter provides an overview of the methodology applied in the course of the research process, explaining how the relevant data was collected (audio recordings of adult students of English) and how the recorded data was rated.

3.1 Context

In order to provide an understanding of how the research is carried out, there are some general preconditions which have to be set out. In addition to the studies of the subjects English and Spanish (to become a teacher) at the University of Vienna, I have worked at *WIFI Niederösterreich* in St. Pölten, Lower Austria for three years.

On a regular basis I have conducted courses for adult students in Spanish and English. One of the English courses is basically a preparatory training course enabling the students to obtain their A-levels (Austrian *Matura*) and it is part of an educational program called *Berufsreifeprüfung*, which in general consists of four subjects: German, Mathematics, one eligible subject which is relevant to the students' particular vocational training (for example Accounting or Information Technology), and English.

The students who participate in this type of educational program are approximately between 18 and 50 years old and usually they have finished an apprenticeship (job training and a vocational school) or broken up an Austrian upper secondary school. The gender distribution among the adult students is fairly equal and most of them come from a similar social background (lower middle class), so the groups of students can be characterized as quite homogeneous. Typically one course consists of 15 to 25 students.

The English course, comprising 180 lessons scheduled in 45 group sessions over the time period of about eight months, is basically a preparation for the oral final examination (the actual *Berufsreifeprüfung*). As regards the topical focus of the course there is a clear guideline which follows the official Austrian curriculum for

Berufsbildende Höhere Schulen (BHS) – using the specific syllabus for English of *Höhere Lehranstalt für Wirtschaftliche Berufe* (HLW). In fact, there is a list of topics on which all the English teachers at *WIFI Niederösterreich* regularly agree (in the course of the semi-annual teachers' conference). In particular, the current list of topics includes *social networking* (advantages, dangers, cyberbullying etc.), *health issues* (fitness, obesity and other eating disorders), *addictions* (alcohol, smoking and internet addiction), *tourism* (ecotourism and mass tourism), *the modern workplace* (teleworking, online meetings, workplace bullying, age discrimination etc.), *stress and work-life balance* (symptoms and effects, coping behaviour etc.), *gender issues* (pay gap, gender roles, gender discrimination, glass ceiling, childcare, maternity leave etc.) and *energy and climate* (nuclear power, alternative forms of energy, greenhouse effect, global warming and climate change). All these topics have to be covered with reference to work life, career and corporate culture.

During the 45 sessions of preparation the teacher of the group has to put the focus clearly on the skills of speaking and reading, rather than writing and listening. This is because the final examination (i.e. the *Berufsreifeprüfung*) is usually in oral form (students who enrol in the program at *WIFI* cannot choose between written and oral examination). The level of language proficiency that should be acquired by the time of the final examination is B2 according to the CEFR (see chapter 2). In the examination the students are given a preparation time of 30 minutes, prior to the actual exam interview which takes approximately 12 to 15 minutes. At the beginning of the preparation time the participants receive two texts (of about 500 to 900 words each), of which they have to choose one. Then they read the text and prepare their answers to the comprehension questions which are given below the text. After the 30 minutes of preparation the interview starts. The students are supposed to introduce themselves briefly and then answer the given comprehension questions about the text. In the end they are supposed to respond to some spontaneous questions asked by the examiner. These questions are usually related to the overall topic and aim at the elicitation of spontaneous conversational contributions. The entire examination takes place in the presence of a committee of the chief executive of *WIFI*, a board chairman from the education state authority (*Landesschulrat*) and the examiner (an experienced English teacher).

Normally it is up to the individual teachers how they conduct the preparation courses. Usually the course participants' learning progress is assessed by means of

two grammar and vocabulary check-ups (one after about two months and another after about five months) and two mock exams (one approximately three months before the end of the course and another some weeks before the final examination). These mock exams should serve as a general rehearsal for the actual *Berufsreifeprüfung*. In this manner the students can train under real conditions and experience the procedure beforehand. On the one hand it ought to provide an opportunity to practise, and on the other hand it should decrease the level of the students' nervousness and insecurity. A mock exam, in the way it is implemented in my courses, typically follows the same procedure as the final examination does: There is a 30 minute preparation time where the test takers receive two texts, of which they have to choose one. Afterwards, during the interview, the test-takers are supposed to introduce themselves briefly, answer some given comprehension questions about the selected text and then answer some spontaneous questions which I, as the teacher and examiner, ask. The only difference between the mock exam and the final examination is that the committee is not present. Therefore, the students – in my personal experience – are less nervous and more concentrated on the text and the topic.

As regards the test method of the mock exam, it can be classified as a so-called *performance test* – as it is defined by McNamara (2000: 5-7). According to him, when using such method, the test takers' individual language skills are typically assessed in a communicative act. The focus of this test type is on the elicitation of an extended sample of speech that is performed in a context where an authentic task is simulated. The students are judged in a rating procedure by a trained rater (for example an English teacher). When it comes to the test purpose, the mock exam would have to be classified as a proficiency test – or, in other words, a test that emphasizes the potential future language use. In the academic field of language testing this future use is called *criterion* (McNamara 2000: 5-7).

In the case of this research paper, the criterion of the final examination (and consequently also of the mock exam) is the proficiency level B2 according to the CEFR. Furthermore, according to McNamara (2000: 9), there are two major constraints on the direct knowledge of the criterion. First, in most test situations only a rather brief sampling period of the candidate's speech act is possible. And second, the behavior of the candidate who is being observed may be changed by the very act of observation. This constitutes a case of the Observer's Paradox.

It is exactly this kind of paradox which influences the students' performances at the final examination, and consequently also at the mock exam. The candidates are supposed to display their proficiency of the language in the simulation of a real-life situation, but they usually behave not in the same way as they do in their real lives outside a classroom.

Moreover, McNamara (2000: 13-15) discusses the *test construct*, which are "those aspects of knowledge or skill possessed by the candidate which are being measured" (McNamara 2000: 13) and the distinction between *discrete point testing* and *integrative tests*. While a *discrete point test* serves to elicit individual, separate aspects of knowledge (e.g. vocabulary, grammar), an *integrative test* features the composition of entire written texts, speaking in spoken dialogues (e.g. interviews) or the comprehension of written or spoken discourse (McNamara 2000: 13-15).

In both the final examination and the mock exam the *test construct* (corresponding to the above-mentioned definition by McNamara) comprises certain categories of the language (see subsection 3.2.3) that the candidates are required to possess. Nevertheless, the examinations can be characterized as *integrative tests* rather than *discrete point tests*, because even though they naturally entail separate language aspects, they focus mainly on the speakers' communicative competence in a dialogue. As already mentioned in chapter 2, knowing the grammar of a language and having an ample range of vocabulary does not mean that someone is able to put that knowledge into practice (Cook 2003: 40-41). What is also necessary are "culturally specific rules of use" which connect "the language used to features of the communicative context" (McNamara 2000: 16).

McNamara (2000: 17) further argues that it is absolutely vital for a test format which is supposed to elicit communicative competence that the source texts (see appendices I, II and III) as well as the tasks (in this case the tasks are the comprehension questions) are as authentic as possible and relate to the test takers' experiences in real life.

3.2 Methodology

The methodology of research applied for this paper basically consists of three steps. First, three dialogues with three different students were recorded in the course of a mock exam. Then the audio files were presented to ten different English teachers who had to rate the speakers with a questionnaire. Last, the questionnaires were collected and the ratings were evaluated and compared with the findings presented in the literature review in chapter 2. The following three subsections demonstrate the methodological procedure in further detail, describing the audio recording (see 3.2.1), the rating (see 3.2.2) and the questionnaire (see 3.2.3).

3.2.1 Audio recording

For the present study the mock exams of three course participants were recorded. Prior to the exam the students were asked for their consent. Likewise approval of the chief executive of *WIFI Niederösterreich* as well as the head of the department was obtained.

According to Underhill (1987: 35-36), recording an oral test has some advantages, but also some disadvantages. One of the most obvious benefits of using a recorded sample is that the rating does not need to be done in real time. The raters can choose any place and time and they can replay any part of the recording easily. Additionally the performance is stored and therefore available whenever it is needed. The most prominent downside of using a recorded sample, however, is that the rater can hear the performance, but he or she cannot see the candidate. Therefore, he or she cannot observe all the visual (nonverbal) aspects of communication, such as facial expression or gesture. Silent phases of a conversation can be particularly meaningful in a testing situation. Moreover, if the candidate speaks with an unclear voice, the rater cannot interfere and ask for clarification. Also the quality of the recording can be poor. Perhaps another problem is that some people do not feel comfortable when their voice is recorded. They might be nervous or shy and speak in a lower voice than they usually do (Underhill 1987: 35-36).

Bearing in mind these advantages and disadvantages three mock exam dialogues were recorded with the help of a student who works as an IT technician. He also provided the necessary equipment, which consisted of an ordinary notebook

computer and a customary microphone. The recording was accomplished with an online freeware program called *audacity*, which converts the voice recordings into an audio file.

As expected, the sound quality was sometimes not very satisfying, but good enough so that it could be enhanced by means of the aforementioned computer program. The lacking sound quality resulted from two problems. On the one hand, the microphone was placed a little too far away from the test takers so that the volume was slightly dissatisfactory, and on the other hand the candidates did not always speak clearly and loudly (apparently because they were aware of the fact that they were recorded and therefore were rather nervous and shy).

The three texts which were the sources of the mock exam cover the topics *gender issues*, *health issues* and *social networking*, and they can be found in appendices I, II and III.

3.2.2 Rating

In order to answer the research questions (see chapter 1) the recorded performances had to be rated by experts. These experts are ten peer teachers (i.e. other English teachers at *WIFI Niederösterreich*) who conduct the same courses and thus are familiar with the particular circumstances and work within the same conditions. Their experience in the job and within the aforementioned circumstances qualifies them automatically as raters for the purpose of this empirical research. They know how the final exam at the institute usually works, so that a rater training is not necessary. The raters are familiar with the examination procedure, with the setting and with the general rating categories (see appendix V).

According to McNamara (2000: 37-38) one problematic issue of the rating process, however, is the inherent subjectivity of the ratings. Such a rating is not only a reflection of the quality of the performance, but it reflects also the raters' qualities of their judgment. Thus rating always involves a certain degree of chance. Usually even trained raters differ considerably in their rating of individual performances in so-called borderline cases. Such cases "will typically show that one rater will be consistently inclined to assign a lower category to candidates whom another rater puts into a higher one" (McNamara 2000: 37-38).

What is even more problematic is that some raters “may not even be self-consistent from one assessed performance to the next” (McNamara 2000:38).

This belief (which is probably even considered common knowledge) is in accordance with the first main hypothesis of this research paper: *The perception of fluency in spoken language of English learners differs considerably among English teachers.*

In the course of the empirical research for the thesis at hand the ten raters were provided with the three audio files (which was realized via the technological support of the free online application called *SoundCloud*) and with an online questionnaire where they were, among other things, supposed to indicate their personal ratings of the student performances. The print version of the online questionnaire can be found in appendix IV of this paper.

3.2.3 Questionnaire

In order to gain some relevant data for the thesis at hand, it was necessary to conduct quantitative research. In the course of the present study a questionnaire was forwarded to the above-mentioned raters.

According to Dörnyei (2007: 32-33) quantitative research, by its nature, is centered around numbers. On the one hand numbers can be considered something powerful, because they reveal certain facts in a precise manner, but on the other hand numbers are also quite powerless, because in research they are meaningless without any contextual background. For instance, if there is a scale from 1 to 5, one has to know what these different variables mean. Hence, numbers only mean something, if the content is defined precisely and if there are exact descriptors for the total range of values which are allowed within the variable (Dörnyei 2007: 32-33).

3.2.3.1 Layout

The layout of a questionnaire, as it is used in the present study, should consist of certain parts. Dörnyei (2007: 109-112) suggests that at first there has to be a title which describes the entire work very briefly. Then, after a general introduction, the main body gives specific instructions (ideally accompanied by examples) and in the end there are final words of thanks.

The questionnaire used here (see appendix IV) applies exactly this suggested basic structure. After the title, which indicates the topic of the survey as well as it reveals the actual purpose of it (*diploma thesis*), there is a general introduction which informs about the researcher and provides the primary instruction on how to proceed. Then, throughout the main body, the instructive elements are as specific as possible. The final words of the questionnaire express the author's gratitude for participation.

Moreover, Dörnyei (2007: 109-112) describes some more formal features of a questionnaire, arguing that it should not be longer than four pages and at the same time it should not require the respondents to dedicate more than 30 minutes to answering it. Therefore, a questionnaire not only has to *be* short, but also *look* short, which means that its pages should not appear too loaded with information and it should be properly sequenced (e.g. into sections or parts). In order to create a sense of variety and prevent the interviewee from just repeating answers, it is advisable to mix the question formats and scales. In general, open-ended questions should appear toward the end of the entire document.

These features are taken into account in the questionnaire of the present research. As illustrated in appendix IV, the form – in its printed version – is three and a half pages long and it is already mentioned in the introductory paragraph that filling in the answers will only take up about 20 minutes (the time required for listening to the speech samples is included). Due to the fact that it is an online questionnaire, it is quite easy to divide it into certain sections. Additionally, the program which was used to set up the questionnaire (i.e. an online application called *umfrageonline.com*), allows the creation of a sequence where the respondents cannot jump back and forth from one question to the other deliberately. Rather, there is a fixed logical progression which cannot be altered by the raters, so that they have to assess the overall performances of the candidates before even knowing that later the survey focuses on fluency. This was done in order to ensure that the raters' judgement would not be influenced by the actual focus of the survey.

3.2.3.2 Wording

Concerning the wording of a questionnaire Dörnyei (2007: 103) argues that “[m]inor differences in how a question is formulated and framed can often produce radically different levels of agreement or disagreement”. This is why it is absolutely vital to

match the wording of all the questionnaire items with the actual research interest and thus with the intended outcome, which is answering the research questions and subsequently the verification or falsification of the hypotheses. Dörnyei (2007: 108-109) further suggests that the items in a questionnaire should be short (consisting of not more than twenty words each) and simple. They should be written in natural and simple language, not containing too many complex or compound sentences, without using colloquialisms, abbreviations, technical terms or jargon. Furthermore, it is advisable not to use negative constructions or loaded and ambiguous language.

In the questionnaire provided to the raters for the research about fluency, the language which is used is not very simple, because there are some specific linguistic terms (e.g. *fluency*, *coherence*, *formulaic language*). However, since the survey was addressed to English teachers exclusively, these terms should not pose any threat to the intelligibility of the questionnaire.

3.2.3.3 Individual items

Regarding the types of data generally yielded in questionnaires, Dörnyei (2007: 102) names three different types of questions. First, *factual questions* are those which aim at the collection of certain facts about the respondents, such as residential location, socio-economic status, occupation, level of education, or demographic data (for instance gender, age or race). Second, *behavioral questions* elicit certain habits, actions, life-styles or personal history of the respondents. Last, the so-called *attitudinal questions* are used to find out people's opinions, beliefs, values, attitudes or interests.

In the questionnaire used for the present study there are mainly *attitudinal* as well as *factual questions* – the former being the main focus of the research and the latter yielding additional information of the respondents, in order to categorize certain answers, and they are entitled *personal questions*. At first, the respondents are asked to indicate their gender. Then, they are supposed to describe their previous teaching experience by giving the number of years they have taught so far and by stating the types of schools they have taught in. The range of possible answers covers elementary school, lower grade (e.g. Austrian *Hauptschule* or *Neue Mittelschule*), AHS (e.g. Austrian *Gymnasium*), BHS (e.g. Austrian *Handelsakademie*) and adult education. In the case of the present thesis all the ten

respondents have at least some experience in the domain of adult education, since they are all teachers at *WIFI Niederösterreich*. The information about the respondents' age as well as teaching experience is retrieved in order to find out whether there are certain inconsistencies among the answers of teachers pertaining to different age groups or different professional careers.

In the following the test-takers' performance is supposed to be assessed by the raters. This is done by a *numerical rating scale*. In such a scale there have to be level descriptors (i.e. formulated definitions of each competence level), which include a so-called cut-point, where the distinction between *good enough* and *not good enough* is made (McNamara 2000, 38-40).

For the sake of convenience the level descriptors follow the conventions of the Austrian school system. Hence, the raters have to assess the performances of the three candidates by using the marking system of one (*Sehr Gut*), two (*Gut*), three (*Befriedigend*), four (*Genügend*) and five (*Nicht Genügend*). Thus, between the latter two there is the cut-point, which makes the distinction between "the performance is good enough in order to achieve the criterion of the test" – the proficiency level B2 according to the CEFR – and "the performance is not good enough" (McNamara 2000, 38-40). A *numerical rating scale* can easily be converted into a so-called *semantic differential scale* – as it is done at the end of the questionnaire (see appendix IV) with the range from *definitely* to *never* (Dörnyei 2007: 106).

The raters engaged in the empirical research of this thesis are supposed to rate the student performances analytically as well as holistically. On the one hand, the holistic rating requires the raters to record their personal impression of the performance as a whole – as it is done in the first question of this section, *general performance*. Analytic rating, on the other hand, refers to the separate assessment of certain aspects of the performance (McNamara 2000, 43-44).

Using the same numerical rating scale (from one to five), the next question in the survey asks for a more specific assessment of the test-takers' performance. In order to answer the first research question (i.e. *is there a consistency in the perception of learner fluency by teachers of English as a foreign language?*) this question lists five central aspects of language proficiency (vocabulary, grammar, fluency/pronunciation, reaction/interaction, content/ideas) which have to be rated. The reason why the question is arranged in this manner is that the official rating scale (as it is used at the final examinations at *WIFI Niederösterreich*) offers the same rating categories. Thus,

the raters are already familiar with the system and can assess the performances accordingly. The original assessment criteria used at *WIFI Niederösterreich* is based on the one which is designed for the upper secondary school for tourism (*WIFI Tourismusschule, TMS*) and can be found in appendix V. Interestingly, the category of *fluency* is condensed with the aspect of *pronunciation*. This suggests an inherent affiliation of the two aspects and thus may influence the raters' judgement.

Additionally, the separate assessment of the aforementioned five aspects of performance serves to answer the second research question of this thesis, which is: *Is there a correlation between the concept of fluency and other competences in spoken English?* Here, the three test takers' performances regarding fluency are directly compared with the performances in other linguistic aspects.

Next there is an open-ended question eliciting the raters' reasons for their judgement of the speakers' performances in the category of fluency. According to Dörnyei (2007: 107) open-ended questions are generally "not followed by response options to choose from but rather by some blank space" where the respondent can fill in his or her individual answer. Such an open format offers a greater richness than completely quantitative data by allowing more freedom of expression. This way issues which were not anticipated previously can be identified and sometimes the range of potential responses cannot be predicted (Dörnyei 2007: 107).

In this regard Dörnyei (2007: 107) mentions some types of open-ended questions, such as *specific open questions* (which are supposed to elicit concrete pieces of information) or the so-called *clarification questions*, which are often appended to other questions of special importance, offering the respondent an opportunity to specify what he or she means.

The questionnaire used for the present study utilizes five open-ended questions. The first three are all alike, in that they ask for the reasons why the raters assessed the performances of the candidates A, B and C the way they did. These questions clearly have to be categorized as *clarification questions*, since they serve to elicit a more profound description of the raters' individual perception of fluency (see first research question). Then, the fourth open-ended question requires the candidates to define the concept of fluency briefly in their own words. This *specific open question* can be considered the key element of the entire thesis, because it contributes to answering all three principal research questions. By giving a definition the raters' individual perception (see first research question) of fluency, as well as potential

correlations to other language aspects (see second research question) and potential factors contributing to a speaker's fluency (see third research question) can be investigated (or at least inferred). In a way this key question implicitly evokes the raters' answers to the third research question (i.e. *which factors contribute to fluency [or to a lack of fluency] in spoken English?*).

Towards the end of the questionnaire the raters are provided with a list of factors which may, or may not, contribute to fluency in spoken English. As mentioned above, the characteristics listed in this section (see subchapter 2.3) are presented in the form of descriptive phrases containing certain keywords. The respondents have to decide, according to their personal opinion, to what extent these characteristics are factors contributing to a speaker's fluency, and therefore this question evokes explicitly the respondents' opinion concerning the third research question. The range of possible answers for each potential factor extends from *never* (as in *this factor is never relevant for a speakers' fluency*), to *partly* (as in *this factor is partly relevant for a speakers' fluency*) and up to *definitely* (as in *this factor is definitely relevant for a speakers' fluency*). This *semantic differential scale* (see above) is converted into a *numerical rating scale*, ranging from 1 (*definitely*) to 2 (*partly*) and up to 3 (*never*). This is done in order to convert the descriptive elements into a quantifiable set of data.

The last item of the questionnaire is the fifth open-ended question, which is again a *clarification question* according to Dörnyei (2007: 107), because the respondents have to explain their rating – especially the rating of those factors they considered only partly relevant for fluency.

3.2.3.4 Drawbacks

In general, one problem with questionnaires is that “they inherently involve a somewhat superficial and relatively brief engagement with the topic on the part of the respondent” (Dörnyei (2007: 105).

Furthermore, there are some undesirable effects engendered by the application of a questionnaire in a survey. Dörnyei (2002: 8-9) mentions five of these effects which also might have interfered the responses of the raters in the present survey. First, the respondents' answers might not be true, in that they do not report what they truly believe or feel, rather going for the socially acceptable or expected answer. This

effect is called *social prestige bias*. A similar effect is the so-called *self-deception*, where the participants of the survey also give a socially accepted but wrong answer, only that they do it unconsciously. The third negative outcome mentioned by Dörnyei (2002: 8-9) is the tendency to agree with ambivalent or vague statements, just to pick something that sounds good. This effect is called *acquiescence bias*. Fourth, there is the *halo effect*, which describes the tendency to overgeneralize and fifth, the so-called *fatigue effect* is when respondents give their answers randomly just because they are bored or tired. The latter effect especially happens when the questionnaire is monotonous or generally too long.

In terms of the survey applied for the present thesis, some of the potential downsides of a questionnaire might have influenced the given answers. It cannot be ruled out that some of the responses result from the *social prestige bias* or from *self-deception*. Conceivably, the participants of the survey may have answered the questions in such a way that they seem more professional (and therefore more prestigious). Moreover, the *acquiescence bias* might have influenced the answers when it comes to the list of potential factors which contribute to fluency. Even though prior to the actual electronic distribution of the questionnaire some trial runs were carried out successfully, some of the descriptive elements in the list of characteristics may have appeared somewhat vague to the respondents of the actual survey. For instance, the factor *readiness in the use of words* may be interpreted in various ways by different individuals and may therefore need further clarification. Furthermore, the *fatigue effect* may also have played a decisive role. On the one hand, the questionnaire does not seem very long and thus it can be considered manageable, but it cannot be denied that listening to the three audio recordings and answering five open-ended questions takes some time. In fact, one respondent actually gave explicit feedback regarding this negative aspect, when she initiated her answer by writing *Oh that's a lot of work*. The only question is whether or not this tiring effect has actually influenced the answers of the participants negatively.

Another problem which occurred was the sparse overall response to the request for participation in the survey. Out of 21 English teachers in adult education (who are familiar with the concept of *Berufsreifeprüfung* at *WIFI Niederösterreich*) there were only 17 who participated in the survey, but out of these 17 people only ten completed the questionnaire in such a way that it could be evaluated.

Nevertheless, a questionnaire seems to be an appropriate research instrument to meet the objectives of a quantitative research as it is used in this survey, because it is a proven tool to gather a rather large amount of data which can be processed consistently.

4 Data Analysis

In this chapter the data collected in the course of the research conducted for the present thesis is evaluated. With the findings made throughout this analysis the three hypotheses in accordance with the guiding research questions (see chapter 1) are reviewed. Subsequently, this chapter is divided into four sections, where the first one gives some basic information about the overall response and describes the respondents' rating of the overall candidate performances, and in the second subchapter the raters' individual perception of fluency is indicated. This is accomplished by a description of their ratings with regards to fluency (see 4.2.1) and by showing their individual definitions of fluency (see 4.2.2). Thus, the first research question and its according hypothesis can be reviewed. The third subchapter centers around the second research question, whether there is a correlation between fluency and other competences in spoken English (for instance grammatical accuracy, as it is assumed in the second main hypothesis). The last subchapter focuses on the third research question, investigating which of the factors mentioned in the questionnaire (see appendix IV) – according to the raters' opinions – contribute to fluency. Or more precisely, to what extent the factors play a role with regards to fluency.

4.1 General response

As mentioned before, the survey conducted in order to collect the relevant data for the present thesis was answered by ten peer teachers of which seven are female and three are male. Concerning the years of teaching experience of the respondents, the average amount is seven, while the person with the most experience has taught for 14 years and the least experienced teacher has worked in the profession for two years (by the time of the implementation of the survey). Whereas all the survey participants are employed in adult education, some of them have also taught in other educational institutions. In particular, there are three persons who have given lessons at a BHS (*Berufsbildende Höhere Schule*), two who have taught at an AHS (*Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schule*), one who has taught in a lower grade, and one person who has already had some experience in an elementary school. The respondents are all teachers of English and seven out of ten indicated other subjects

they also teach, among which there are some other languages (i.e. Spanish, Italian, Swedish, German and French), philosophy and psychology, accounting and business administration, physical education, and history. Among the remaining three persons two indicated the answer *none* and one person did not give any answer at all. What is also noteworthy is that one of the respondents is a native speaker of English. However, the results collected from this particular respondent did not reveal any particular differences from the other raters.

In the course of the survey the respondents had to rate the general performances (i.e. an overall mark for the entire speaking performance) of the three candidates at the mock exam. The Austrian mark *Sehr Gut* is equated with the value 1, while *Gut* is represented by 2, *Befriedigend* by 3, *Genügend* by 4 and *Nicht Genügend* by 5. In order to discern a general tendency of the ratings, the statistical mean serves to represent an average of the overall assessment of all the raters. According to Ary and Jacobs (1976: 63) the mean is “the most reliable measure of central tendency” and it can be defined as “the arithmetic average of a group of scores”. The mean is calculated by “adding all the scores in the distribution and then dividing the sum of the scores by *N*, the total number of scores” (Ary & Jacobs 1976: 63). Thus, in the evaluation of this survey the rating scores of all respondents are added and divided by ten (i.e. the number of respondents).

When it comes to the performance rating of candidate A the mean was 1.20. Candidate B was rated worst with a mean of 3.90, while candidate C was assessed with an average rating of 2.20. The differentiation between male and female raters in this regard offers a noticeable gap (see figure 1), because apparently male teachers gave better marks than female teachers. However, due to the fact that there were seven women but only three men, the significance of this difference has to be questioned.

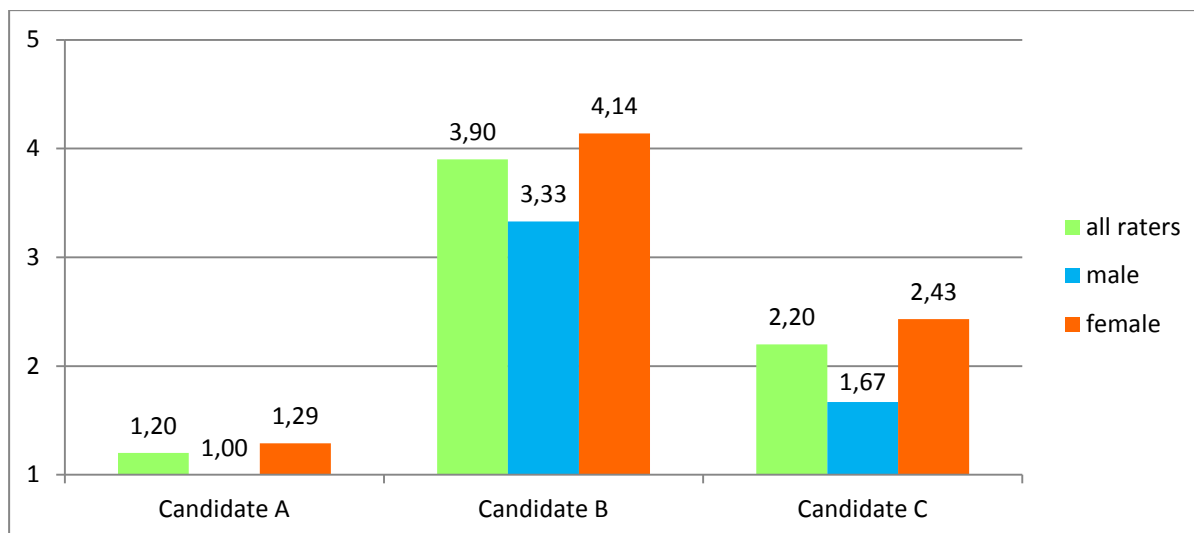


Figure 1: Means of overall performance rating (differentiation according to gender)

Furthermore, while the differences in rating between the more and the less experienced teachers (see figure 2) and between teachers who are exclusively dedicated to adult education and the ones who also teach in other schools (see figure 3) are not particularly significant, there seems to be a noticeable gap between the ratings of those who teach another language as a second subject and those who do not (see figure 4). Evidently, teachers whose second subject is another language are stricter in their assessment than teachers who have other second subjects.

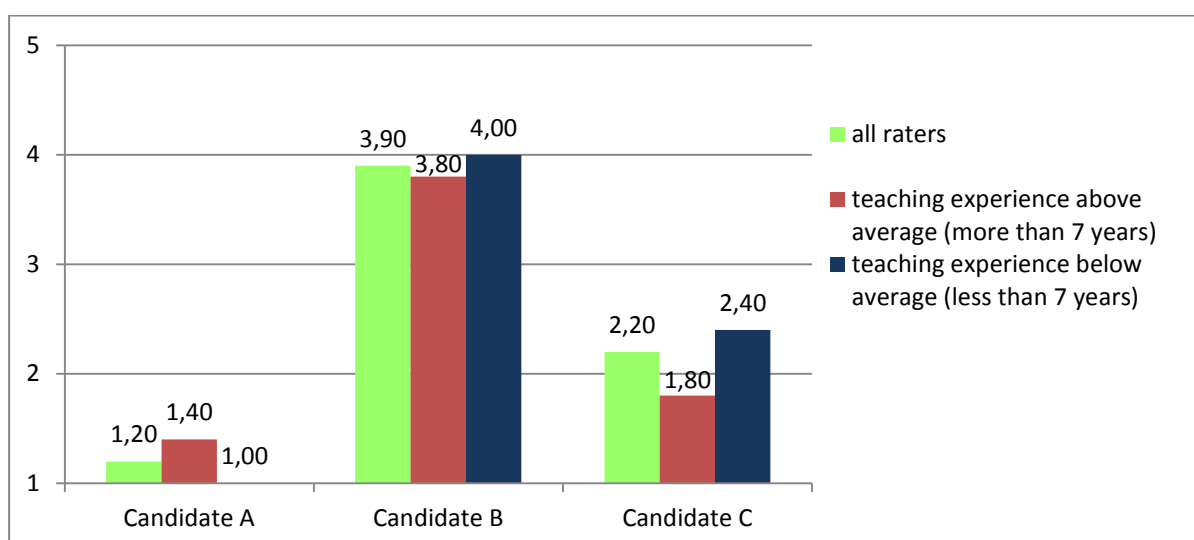


Figure 2: Means of overall performance rating (differentiation according to years of teaching experience)

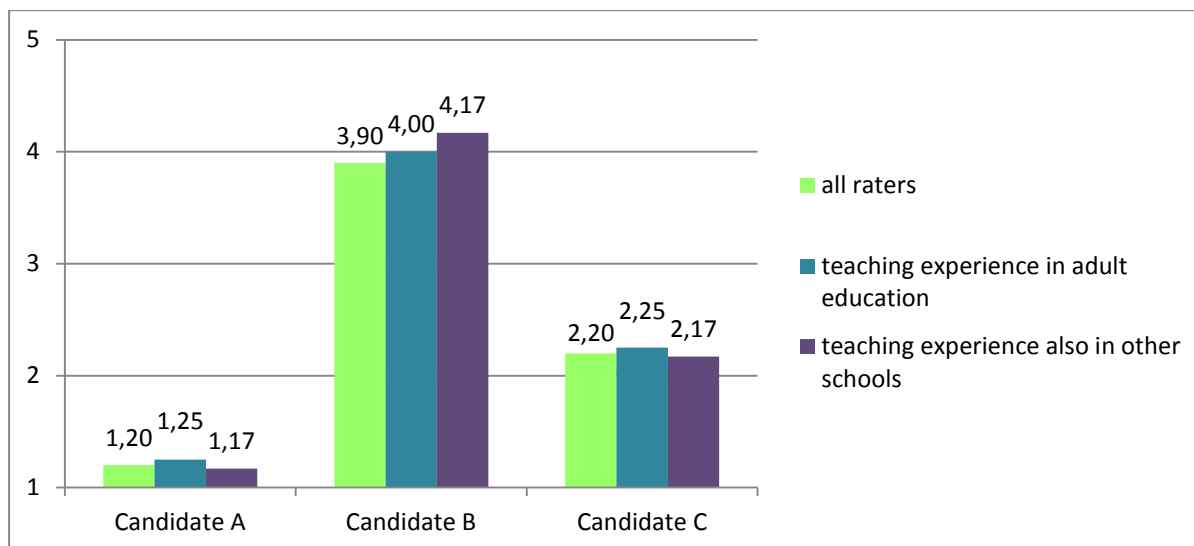


Figure 3: Means of overall performance rating (differentiation according to type of educational institution)

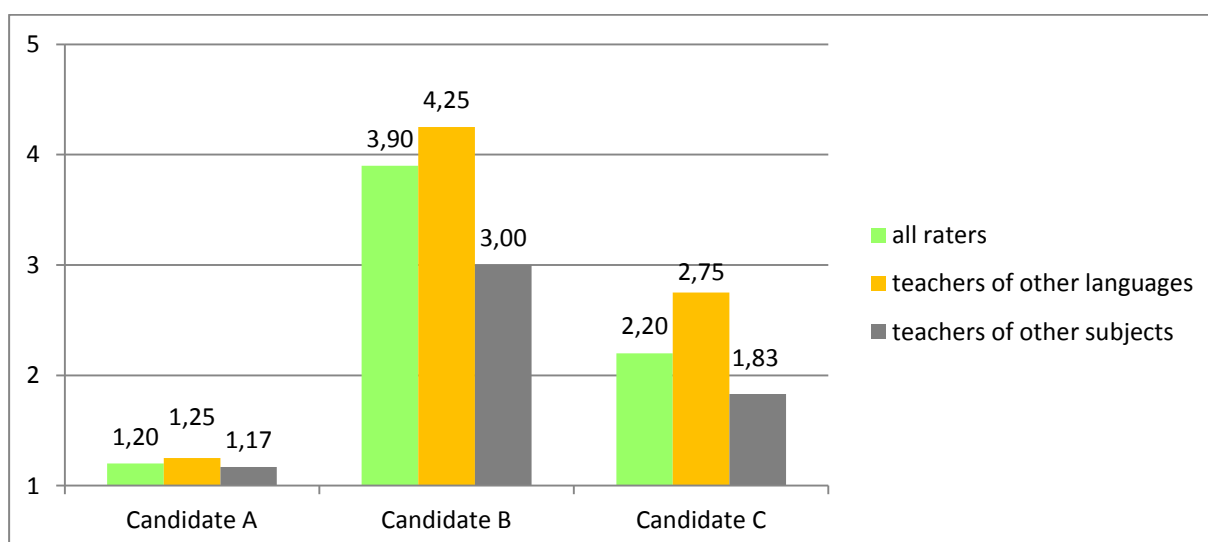


Figure 4: Means of overall performance rating (differentiation according to their second subjects)

Apart from an overall mark which assesses the entire performance of the three candidates, there are also different aspects which were separately rated. Those aspects of performance are based on the official assessment criteria of *Berufsreifeprüfung* at *WIFI Niederösterreich* (see appendix V). They are vocabulary, grammar, reaction/interaction, content/ideas and fluency/pronunciation. The latter aspect is presented separately in subchapter 4.2, because it is the main focus of this paper.

As regards the performance of candidate A, he was rated with a grade of 1.20 on average (i.e. the calculated arithmetic mean among all the raters) in the category of

vocabulary, with 1.30 in terms of grammar, 1.10 regarding the aspect of reaction/interaction, and 1.30 when it comes to content/ideas. In comparison, candidate B scored a much worse result, receiving a rating of 3.90 for both vocabulary and grammar, 3.70 for reaction/interaction, and 3.40 for content/ideas. The performance of candidate C shows results which are in between the ones of the other candidates. He scored an average mark of 2.00 in terms of vocabulary, 2.50 regarding the category of grammar, 1.70 in terms of reaction/interaction, and 3.00 for content/ideas. The category of fluency/pronunciation is somewhat problematic, since it represents two concepts which are arguably different. However, in the present thesis, fluency is treated as the main focus and therefore the aspect of pronunciation is disregarded in the evaluation of the category. As already mentioned, the assessment of the three candidates' performances concerning fluency is evaluated and discussed in the following subchapter (see 4.2). Additionally, the present thesis investigates in how far the performance aspect *fluency* relates to the other four aspects (see 4.3).

4.2 Individual perception of fluency

This subchapter is dedicated to answering the first research question (***Is there a consistency in the perception of learner fluency by teachers of English as a foreign language?***) and, as a result, reviewing the according hypothesis (*The perception of fluency in spoken language of English learners differs considerably among English teachers*). It is divided into two subsections. First, the ratings of the candidates' performances regarding fluency are presented. Additionally, in the questionnaire the respondents were asked for the reasons why they assessed the performances the way they did. Then, in the second subsection, the teachers were asked for their individual perception of fluency. Thus, they had to define the concept according to their personal opinion.

4.2.1 Rating of fluency

Concerning the category of fluency the results are similar to the ratings of the overall performance (see above). Candidate A was rated the best, scoring an arithmetic mean of 1.20, while candidate B was rated the worst with a mean of 4.10, and

candidate C scored the average mark of 2.30. Similar to the rating of the overall performance, candidate B was marked with a *Nicht Genügend* three times. However, in contrast to the general performance rating, there is no noticeable difference in how men and women assessed the candidates' fluency (see figure 5).

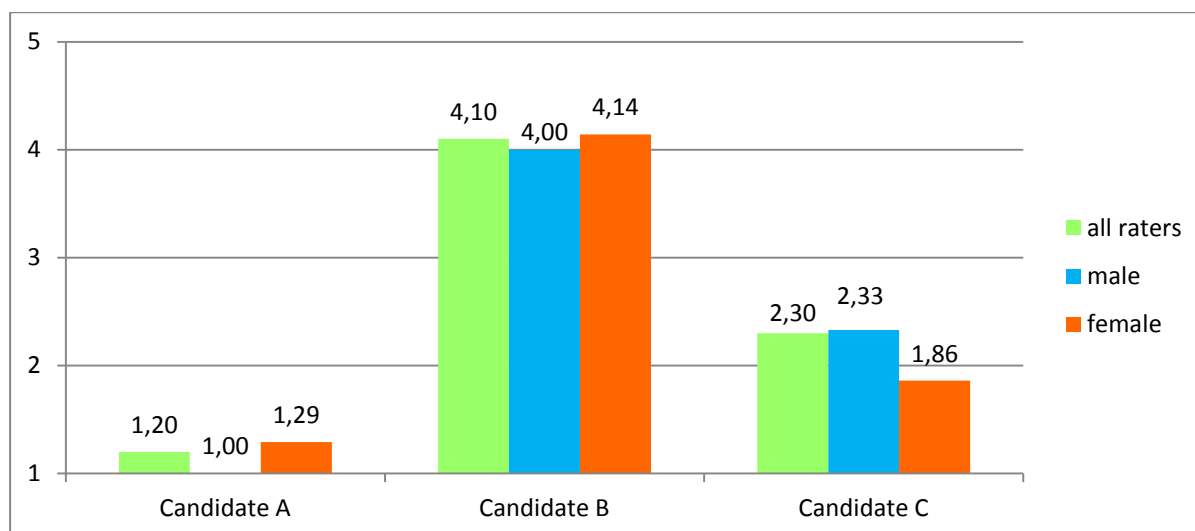


Figure 5: Means of fluency rating (differentiation according to gender)

When it comes to the differentiation between more and less experienced teachers (see figure 6) there is only one significant gap in the assessment. While the candidates A and B were rated almost equally, candidate C was considered worse (by one entire grade) by the less experienced teachers. In the section of the questionnaire where the raters had to give an explanation for their assessment of fluency, the less experienced teachers explained their rating mainly by stating that candidate C was very limited in his vocabulary range and that he hesitated much. One teacher, who gave him a *Genügend* in the category of fluency, even commented that “the fluency was sufficient, but on the verge of failure”. The more experienced teachers, by contrast, emphasized that candidate C spoke quite fast and that he gave long answers showing that he understood the basic message of the text. Perhaps it is a matter of experience for a teacher to judge whether someone understands a text or not.

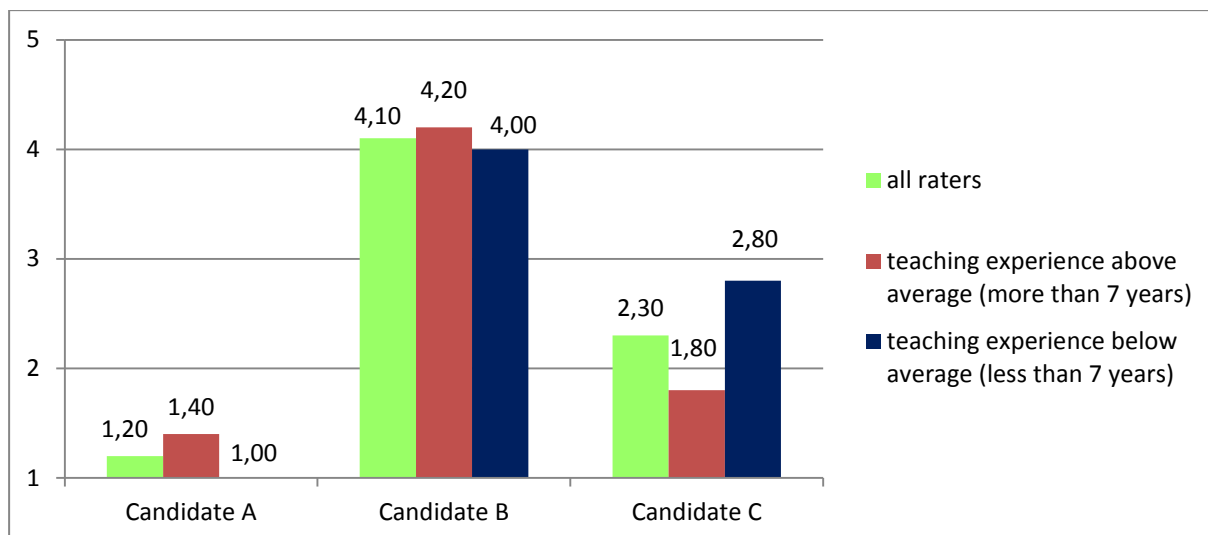


Figure 6: Means of fluency rating (differentiation according to years of teaching experience)

Also the differentiation in terms of educational institution (see figure 7) does not show any particularity apart from candidate C, where there is a slightly bigger difference between those teachers who work in adult education exclusively and those who also teach in other schools, who gave him a better mark.

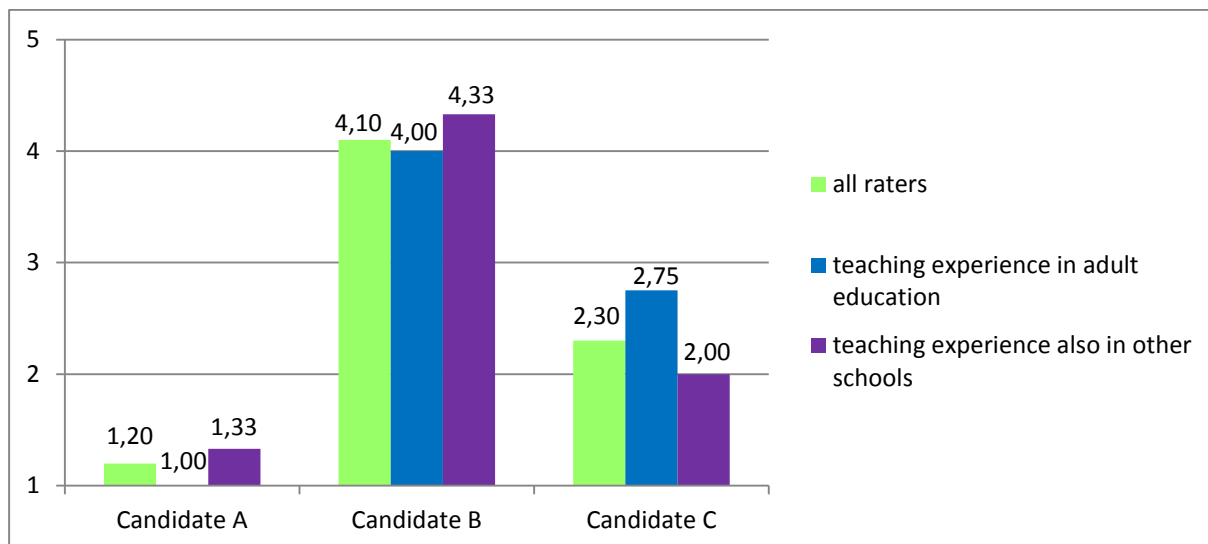


Figure 7: Means of fluency rating (differentiation according to type of educational institution)

Regarding the second subjects of the teachers who assessed the candidates' performances (see figure 8) the same striking difference in scoring can be observed for fluency as for the overall performance. Again, those teachers who teach another language as a second subject seem to be stricter than those who do not.

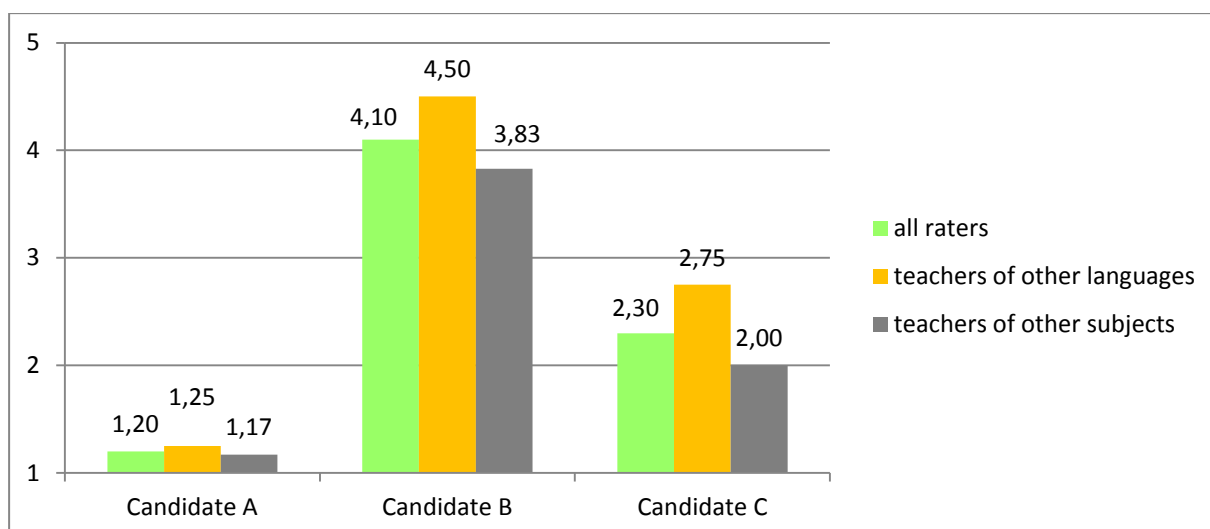


Figure 8: Means of fluency rating (differentiation according to their second subjects)

In order to check how much the respondents of the questionnaire agree in their assessment of fluency, there is a statistic tool which is commonly applied for finding out a central tendency within a certain sample – the standard deviation.

According to Ary and Jacobs (1976: 90) the standard deviation is usually derived from the variance, which calculates how much a single score in a distribution deviates from the mean in that same distribution. Thus, the variance is calculated by subtracting the mean from each individual score. As for the standard deviation itself, Ary and Jacobs (1976: 94) explain that it is calculated by taking the square root of the variance. Furthermore Ary and Jacobs (1976: 103) state that the standard deviation indicates the “variability that characterizes a distribution of scores or other measures”. Therefore, with the spread of the scores the standard deviation increases proportionally. Consequently, if there are scores which spread out from the mean and are widely varied, the standard deviation is large. By contrast, “if all the scores are clustered closely around the mean, the squared deviation scores are small and the variance and standard deviation are also small” (Ary & Jacobs 1976: 103).

As for the evaluation of the present survey, that is to say the standard deviation describes how homogeneous the sample of teachers is in terms of their perception of fluency. In other words, if the standard deviation is indicated with a high number, there is discordance among the teachers, and if the standard deviation is low, the teachers’ perception of fluency is concordant.

Concerning the actual assessment in the survey under consideration (see table 2), the standard deviation of the ratings of candidate A is at 0.40, while the result for

candidate B is 0.70 and for candidate C it is 0.90. Hence, the average standard deviation – calculated by the arithmetic mean of the three values – is at 0.67 in round terms.

Table 2: Standard deviation of the assessment of fluency

	Candidate A	Candidate B	Candidate C
<i>Rater 1</i>	1	4	3
<i>Rater 2</i>	2	5	1
<i>Rater 3</i>	1	5	3
<i>Rater 4</i>	1	4	2
<i>Rater 5</i>	1	3	2
<i>Rater 6</i>	1	4	3
<i>Rater 7</i>	2	4	1
<i>Rater 8</i>	1	5	4
<i>Rater 9</i>	1	4	2
<i>Rater 10</i>	1	3	2
Standard Deviation	0.40	0.70	0.90

By comparison, for instance, if one candidate had obtained a *Sehr Gut* from half of the raters and a *Nicht Genügend* from the other half, the standard deviation would have accounted for 2.00 (which can be considered a maximal deviation). On the other hand, for instance, if one candidate had been assessed with a *Sehr Gut* from all the raters, the standard deviation would have been zero. That is to say the respondents of the questionnaire employed in the present thesis have a comparatively concordant perception of the three candidates' fluency.

However, it is remarkable that the rating of candidate C shows the highest deviation from the mean, given that this candidate was generally perceived neither the best nor the worst of the three students. Apparently, it is somewhat easier for the majority of teachers to detect a performance which is either clearly good or clearly bad. But if the speaking performance is neither distinctly good nor obviously very bad, it is harder to rate it.

As for the analysis of the qualitative data gathered in this survey, the teachers were also required to give a reason for their individual judgement. As illustrated above, as regards fluency candidate A was rated with good marks rather consistently. Accordingly, the reasons stated by the teachers uniformly include positive speaker qualities. Three respondents observed that candidate A spoke quite fast and one of them also indicated that he “used good vocabulary”. Moreover, it was

stated that the candidate made only very few mistakes, and after one preposition mistake he even corrected himself. He used relative and reflexive pronouns correctly and he employed words to connect ideas, as for example *basically*. Furthermore, the teachers pointed out that he reacted spontaneously and he did not only react to questions quickly, but he was also able to engage the examiner in the conversation. One of the raters even said that the interview sounded “more like a conversation than an exam”. Three of the respondents found that the candidate always knew what to say next and two of them recognized that he also brought in his own ideas. In general, candidate A was considered natural and almost like a native speaker– or at least “close to qualities of a native”. One of the teachers even added “I wish I had more students like him”. In sum, there was considerable agreement about the achievement of this student in terms of fluency among all the raters.

As for the perceived fluency of candidate B, the marks given ranged from *Befriedigend* to *Nicht Genügend*. Seven out of the ten respondents observed that the woman spoke slowly and five remarked that she was also very hesitant, insecure or “groping for words”. It was pointed out that she obviously lacks practice because getting her to speak was quite difficult. Furthermore, she was limited in her word choice, because she “did not use any vocabulary that was not in the text”. In addition to many grammar mistakes (e.g. **many parents go work*, **it isn't no effect on weight*), she did not come up with any own ideas and she could not really react to any questions by the examiner whom she did not engage in conversation. One of the teachers stated that the only reason she gave her a 4 and not a 5 was “because [she] know[s] from experience that students who at least perform at this level can scrape by with a 4, although it is absolutely not comparable to the other 2 candidates”. However, the same respondent pointed out that the candidate seemed to understand the basic message of the text.

The rating of the fluency of performance of candidate C showed the most discordant results, ranging from *Sehr Gut* to *Genügend*. The disagreement is particularly reflected in the perception of speed and hesitation. While some teachers found the performance “rather fast” and detected “almost no hesitation”, others considered it “halting” and observed much hesitation. Moreover, two of the respondents argued that the candidate could react promptly and one of them even considered him confident. Most teachers seemed to agree that the student understood the text and that he brought across the basic message. One rater

claimed that the candidate “brought in some of his own ideas”, but the vocabulary he used was all in the text. Three other raters agreed with this notion, stating that the speaker’s range of vocabulary was restricted. Other negative aspects of the performance were a lack of spontaneity and the frequent repetition of words. One of the respondents claimed the following: “I settled on a 2 for the reason that this candidate was fluent, but made more grammar mistakes than Candidate A”. The most severe mistakes discovered by the teachers were the use of the word *underline* instead of *undersign* and phrases such as **persons you don’t really met often* or **the biggest dangers is...*

4.2.2 Definition of fluency

As already mentioned, in the course of the survey the participants were also asked to indicate their personal definition of fluency. In the following the definitions are quoted verbatim. In order to group the individual definitions, they are numbered from one to ten. While definitions 1 to 5 were indicated by the more experienced teachers (i.e. those who have taught for more than seven years by the time of the implementation of the survey), definitions 6 to 10 were given by the less experienced teachers.

Definition 1: “As a native speaker myself, it is more important to me that someone wants to talk and can carry on a conversation in my language. Even if they do not know every word, or make small grammar mistakes, those things usually don’t get in the way of fluency if it is clear to the listener what the person is trying to say. On the other hand, there are just some people who give short answers to questions, don’t engage you in conversation, and hesitate when speaking because they are either ashamed of their English or are afraid to make mistakes. This hampers not only communication but also their fluency. To use someone well-known as an example, no one would say that Arnold Schwarzenegger doesn’t speak fluent English even though he has a thick accent and pronounces some words incorrectly. Do his pronunciation mistakes hinder his fluency? Not at all.”

Definition 2: “Very important concerning fluency is vocabulary, you need a wide range of words to be fluent in a foreign language. Another important aspect is a variety of sentence structure, so you can react differently in similar situations. To be spontaneous enough you have to understand everything quite well, so vocabulary is again the main point. In my opinion pronunciation and intonation are a significant sign for fluency.”

Definition 3: (...) “that you have a good level of speed, that there is not too much thinking time (pauses), that you do not have to rephrase your sentences too often, the voice sounds natural and self-confident.”

Definition 4: “You have to be able to communicate with the speaker, without hesitating. You have to be able to express your ideas in an understandable way, react immediately and so carry on the conversation.”

Definition 5: (...) “speaking at a reasonable speed, being eloquent, having under control what you say.”

In sum, the more experienced English teachers agree on certain factors of fluency, such as hesitation or speed. Other recurring elements also seem to be decisive for a speaker’s fluency, such as sentence structure, spontaneity, (making few) pauses, naturalness or self-confidence. As for whether mistakes, vocabulary and pronunciation play an important role in terms of fluency, there seems to be disagreement.

Definition 6: “Fluency is speaking in a quite fast and understandable way without hesitating too much.”

Definition 7: “Fluency is the ability to speak fast and in connected sentences, without making too many mistakes.”

Definition 8: “100% fluency is speaking (almost) like a native-speaker. Appearing very secure, confident and spontaneous when speaking. Making only very few grammar mistakes and having a wide range of vocabulary.”

Definition 9: (...) “being able to formulate ones ideas and perceptions in a coherent, and therefore fluent, way.”

Definition 10: “Fluency means one’s ability to read, listen, and speak in a language at the pace of a native speaker.”

The less experienced teachers appear to share similar views of fluency as well. Aspects such as (making few) mistakes, speed, self-confidence, spontaneity and (a wide range of) vocabulary come up in the definitions as well as the comparison to native-speakers. Two of these respondents also included connectedness (as in *connected sentences* and *in a coherent way*) in their definition of fluency. In definition 9 the term coherence even seems to be equated with the notion of fluency.

Having gathered quantitative (i.e. the calculation of the standard deviation of fluency ratings) and qualitative (i.e. the analysis of the respondents’ reasons for their ratings and of their definitions of fluency) data, the first research question (***Is there a consistency in the perception of learner fluency by teachers of English as a foreign language?***) can be answered. The first hypothesis made in the present thesis is the following:

The perception of fluency in spoken language of English learners differs considerably among English teachers.

According to the results of the aforementioned qualitative and quantitative research, for the most part the first hypothesis is provisionally falsified. The reasons for this rebuttal are on the one hand of bare quantitative nature, and on the other hand they are revealed by the respondents’ individual opinions. The calculation of the performance ratings results in a relatively high concordance, as for how fluently the candidates spoke in their mock exams. The standard deviation of the ratings amounts to numbers substantially closer to the arithmetic mean than to a maximal disagreement. Moreover, when asked for the reasons why they rated the candidates the way they did, the teachers seemed to agree in terms of assessment. However, the individual definitions of fluency reveal some differences in the perception of the concept among the respondents, especially among the more experienced teachers. In this regard, the raters’ opinions differ mainly on the aspects of vocabulary, mistakes and pronunciation.

4.3 Correlation between fluency and other competences

In this subchapter the second research question (*Is there a correlation between the perception of fluency and other competences in spoken English?*) is answered and consequently, the hypothesis (*The perception of fluency in spoken English is mainly influenced by the way grammatical accuracy is perceived*) is reviewed.

The first question to be addressed in this section has to be which competences are the ones fluency might be related to. The candidates' performances were rated according to those categories which are normally used at *Berufsreifeprüfung* (see appendix V). These categories are the following separate fields of language competence: *vocabulary*, *grammar*, *fluency/pronunciation*, *reaction/interaction* and *content/ideas*.

The teachers' individual definitions of fluency (see subsection 4.2.2) suggest that particularly grammar and vocabulary are those categories which seem to influence a speaker's fluency, as phrases such as *without making too many mistakes* or *making only very few grammar mistakes and having a wide range of vocabulary* indicate. However, one teacher opposes that view stating that "even if they do not know every word, or make small grammar mistakes, those things usually don't get in the way of fluency".

Comparing the teachers' views on aspects which are potentially related to fluency with the findings from the literature review in this paper, the academic understanding of the term *fluency* (as it is summarized in table 1 in subchapter 2.3) reveals some other suggestions. Whereas the factor *mistakes* (see 2.3.17) points to the aspect of grammar to be closely related to fluency, the factor *creativity* (see 2.3.9) for instance, sets the stage for contrasting speculations. On the one hand, *creativity* might contribute to the assessment aspect *vocabulary*, as speakers need to be imaginative and resourceful to make use of an ample vocabulary range, but on the other hand *creativity* could also be related to the aspect of *content/ideas*, as fluent speakers are conceivably required to bring in their own ideas in a creative way. Moreover, fluency could be connected with the performance aspect of *content/ideas* because, according to academic literature, definitions of fluency also involve *contextual appropriateness* (see 2.3.7). Hence, it seems to be important to have something to say that fits the context and thus contributes to the content of the

message conveyed. What is indicative that the aspect of *reaction/interaction* is closely linked to *fluency*, is that also *readiness* (see 2.3.15), *speed* (see 2.3.18) and *spontaneity* (see 2.3.19) seem to be constitutive factors of fluency. Apparently a fluent speaker has to react readily, quickly and spontaneously.

In order to find out which of the above-mentioned competences influences a speaker's fluency the most, the correlation between the category fluency/pronunciation and the other four areas has to be calculated. In other words, each area of competence represents one variable and the fluency/pronunciation variable is compared to every other respective variable. According to Ary and Jacobs (1976: 172-173) there is a measure which is "a numerical index indicating precisely the degree of relationship". They explain that this measure is called the "*Pearson product-moment coefficient of correlation* or simply the *correlation coefficient*," named after the British statistician Karl Pearson (Ary & Jacobs 1976: 173). The Pearson correlation coefficient can easily be calculated by means of user programs such as *Microsoft Excel*.

Furthermore, Ary and Jacobs (1976: 187) explain how to interpret the result of the calculation of the correlation coefficient, stating that "[i]f high scores on one variable are associated with high scores on the other and low scores are associated with low scores, a positive correlation is indicated" and, conversely, "[i]f high scores on one variable are associated with low scores on the other and vice versa, a negative correlation is indicated" (Ary & Jacobs 1976: 187).

Moreover they state that the coefficient "assumes a value between 0 and ± 1.00 ", and "[a] coefficient of 1.00 indicates a perfect positive correlation", whereas a coefficient of -1.00 "indicates perfect negative correlation". But if the correlation coefficient is 0.00, there is no correlation at all between the variables (Ary & Jacobs 1976: 188).

In short, the closer the coefficient is to the value 1.00 or -1.00, the higher is the correlation between the two variables (i.e. the competence areas) and the closer to 0.00 it is, the lower is the correlation.

As already mentioned, in the course of the present survey the raters assessed the three candidates not only in terms of their overall performance, but also regarding their performance in the separate categories *vocabulary*, *grammar*, *reaction/interaction*, *pronunciation/fluency* and *content/ideas*. As for the calculation of the correlation between the rating of the candidates' fluency and the rating of the

other categories of their performances, the entire lists of individual scores for the three candidates (see tables 3, 4 and 5) have to be considered.

Table 3: Rating scores of candidate A

Candidate A	Vocab.	Grammar	Fluency	Reaction	Content/ Ideas
Rater 1	1	1	1	1	1
Rater 2	1	1	2	1	1
Rater 3	1	1	1	2	2
Rater 4	1	1	1	1	1
Rater 5	2	2	1	1	2
Rater 6	1	1	1	1	1
Rater 7	2	2	2	1	1
Rater 8	1	2	1	1	2
Rater 9	1	1	1	1	1
Rater 10	1	1	1	1	1
<i>Arithmetic mean</i>	<i>1.20</i>	<i>1.30</i>	<i>1.20</i>	<i>1.10</i>	<i>1.30</i>

Table 4: Rating scores of candidate B

Candidate B	Vocab.	Grammar	Fluency	Reaction	Content/ Ideas
Rater 1	3	2	4	3	3
Rater 2	5	5	5	5	4
Rater 3	4	4	5	5	4
Rater 4	5	4	4	4	4
Rater 5	3	3	3	2	2
Rater 6	4	5	4	5	5
Rater 7	4	4	4	4	4
Rater 8	5	5	5	2	3
Rater 9	3	3	4	4	3
Rater 10	3	4	3	3	2
<i>Arithmetic mean</i>	<i>3.90</i>	<i>3.90</i>	<i>4.10</i>	<i>3.70</i>	<i>3.40</i>

Table 5: Rating scores of candidate C

Candidate C	Vocab.	Grammar	Fluency	Reaction	Content/ Ideas
Rater 1	2	2	3	2	2
Rater 2	2	3	1	2	1
Rater 3	3	3	3	2	3
Rater 4	2	2	2	1	2
Rater 5	2	2	2	2	3
Rater 6	2	3	3	2	2
Rater 7	1	2	1	1	3
Rater 8	3	4	4	3	2
Rater 9	1	2	2	1	1
Rater 10	2	2	2	1	1
<i>Arithmetic mean</i>	<i>2.00</i>	<i>2.50</i>	<i>2.30</i>	<i>1.70</i>	<i>2.00</i>

In the calculation of the Pearson correlation coefficient (see table 6) the scores of each candidate's performance rating in terms of fluency are compared with the ratings of the same candidate's performance in every other category.

Table 6: Calculation of correlation between fluency and distinct performance aspects

Aspect	Vocabulary	Grammar	Fluency	Reaction/ Interaction	Content/ Ideas
Candidate A	0.38	0.22	1.00	-0.17	-0.33
Candidate B	0.71	0.47	1.00	0.43	0.56
Candidate C	0.70	0.58	1.00	0.68	0.14
<i>Average correlation</i>	<i>0.59</i>	<i>0.42</i>	<i>1.00</i>	<i>0.31</i>	<i>0.13</i>

The results of the calculation of the Pearson correlation coefficient reveal a clear tendency. Whereas the resulting coefficients for *content/ideas* (in comparison to fluency) are spread widely, ranging from -0.33 to 0.56 and therefore accounting for a very low correlation to fluency (i.e. close to value 0), the coefficients for the category *vocabulary* are very close to one another, ranging from 0.38 to 0.71 and therefore resulting in a rather high correlation (i.e. close to value 1.00, which is the perfect positive correlation). Similarly, the category of *reaction/interaction* shows quite a low correlation, while the category of *grammar* correlates to a much higher degree.

As illustrated by the average correlation coefficient (i.e. the arithmetic mean of the coefficients for each candidate), the competence category of *vocabulary* is the one which correlates the most with fluency, while *grammar* is ranked second, *reaction/interaction* third and *content/ideas* accounts for the least correlation to fluency (see figure 9). In this graph, the correlation in the perception of the performance of each candidate between fluency and every other performance aspect is shown by bars in three different shades of green, while the average correlation is indicated by yellow bars in every performance aspect. The orange auxiliary line serves to illustrate the difference between the four aspects.

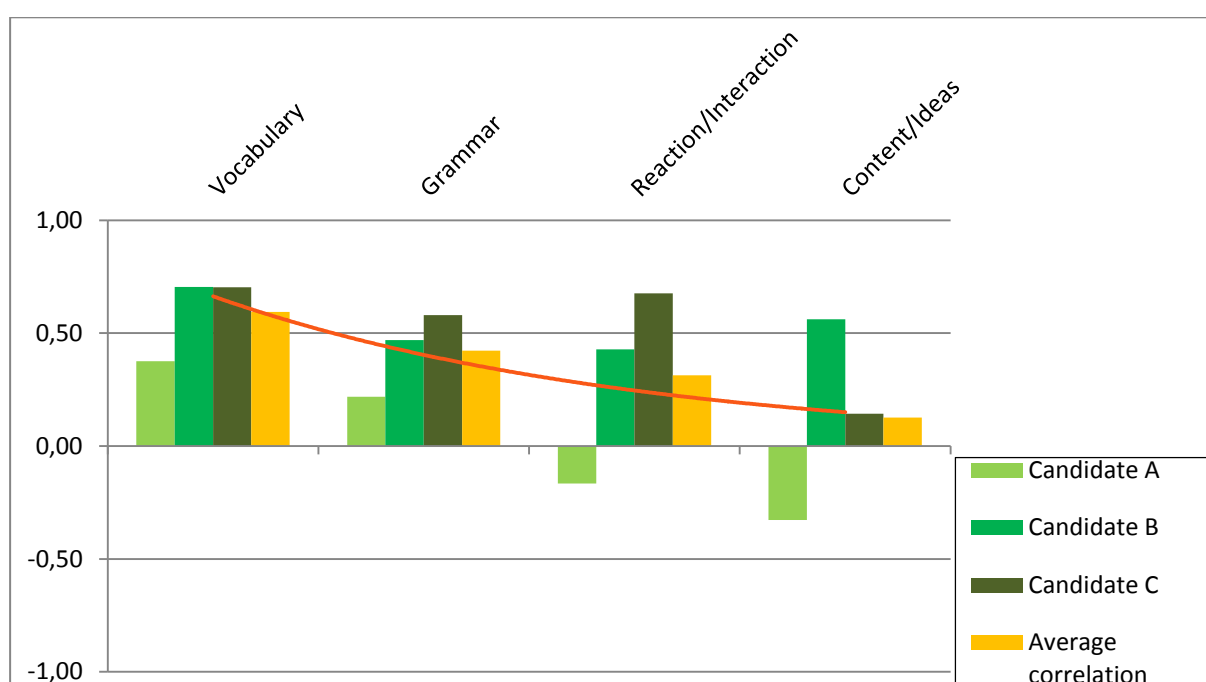


Figure 9: Calculation of correlation between fluency and distinct performance aspects (graph)

Thus, having gathered the relevant data, the second research question (*Is there a correlation between the perception of fluency and other competences in spoken English?*) can be answered. The second hypothesis made in the present thesis is the following:

The perception of fluency in spoken English is mainly influenced by the way grammatical accuracy is perceived.

According to the results of the survey, the second hypothesis is provisionally falsified, because the competence in terms of *vocabulary* seems to influence the competence

regarding fluency even more than grammatical accuracy. However, also *grammar* apparently plays an important role, being more related to fluency than the other two categories, *reaction/interaction* and *content/ideas*.

The reason for the focus on vocabulary and grammar in this regard might be the way traditional English lessons are frequently designed. Apparently many lessons used to focus on grammatical accuracy and correct word choice rather than emphasizing the communicative aspect of language, where the interaction between two or more speakers and the content (i.e. the message which is conveyed) was at the center of attention. However, with the emerging concept of communicative language teaching (i.e. CLT), there is a certain paradigm shift going on.

4.4 Factors relevant to fluency

The third research question in this thesis is the following: ***Which factors contribute to the perception of fluency (or a lack of fluency) in spoken English?*** Hence, in this subchapter the third hypothesis (*Fluency in spoken English is mainly constituted by factors such as speed, coherence and the appropriate use of discourse markers and linking devices*) is reviewed.

In section 4.2.1, where the reasons why the respondents assessed the candidates' performances regarding fluency the way they did, the factors mentioned predominantly were speed, vocabulary range, grammar mistakes, self-correction, spontaneity, adding own ideas, native-likeness, hesitation, self-confidence and repetition.

In the questionnaire of the survey conducted for the present thesis, the respondents were also asked to indicate to what extent the listed factors (see 2.3) are – in their respective opinion – relevant to a speaker's fluency. For each of the factors there were three different answer options. When choosing *definitely*, the respondents regard the respective factor as definitely relevant for a speaker's fluency. When opting for *partly*, they indicate that they deem the respective factor only in some cases (or under particular circumstances) relevant for fluency. In the latter case, the respondents had to explain why they think so in the last question of the survey. Finally, when selecting *never* as an answer, the teachers find the respective factor definitely not relevant in terms of fluency.

For the calculation of the results (see figure 10) the three answer options were allotted concrete numbers, *definitely* assuming the value 1, *partly* the value 2 and *never* the value 3. Employing again the calculation formula for the arithmetic mean, the average rating among all the respondents is computed. In figure 10, the column labeled with the character <Ø> against an orange background shows the mean results for each factor. Given the allotment of values for the three different answer options, a high arithmetic mean indicates a tendency towards the option *never*, and a low mean stands for a tendency towards the option *definitely*. In other words, the lower the arithmetic mean, the more associated is the characteristic with the notion of fluency (according to the respondents' opinions).

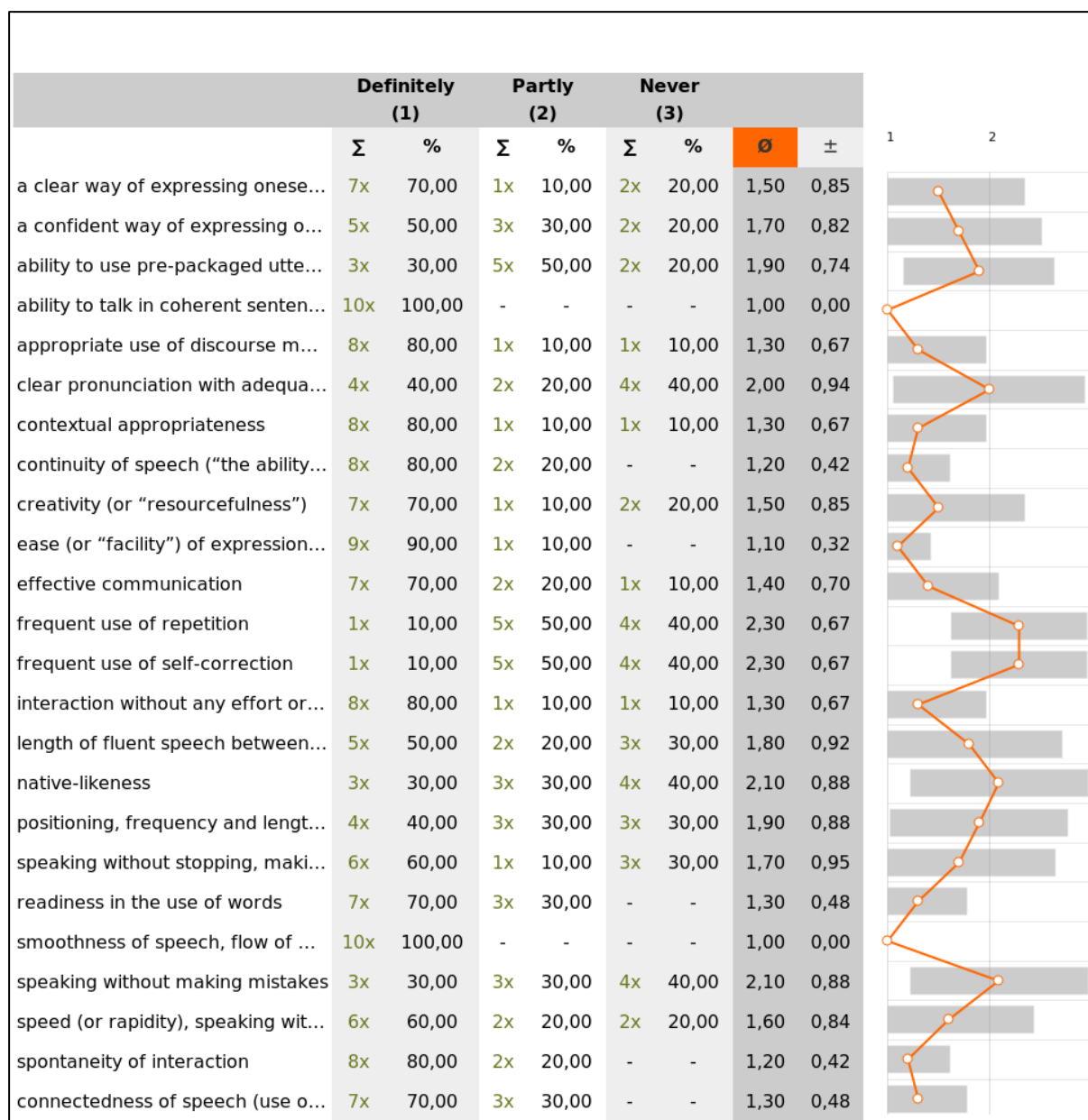


Figure 2: Evaluation of potential factors contributing to fluency
(https://www.umfrageonline.com/?url=result_det&uid=139647, 14 January 2014)

In the present survey there are two factors which are, according to all the respondents, definitely relevant for fluency. These are the *ability to talk in coherent sentences* and the *smoothness of speech, flow of words (absence of rigidity)*, both accounting for an arithmetic mean of 1.00. Other factors strongly regarded as decisive for fluency are the *ease (or "facility") of expression*, with a mean of 1.10 and the *continuity of speech ("the ability to fill time with talk")* as well as the *spontaneity of interaction*, both resulting in a mean of 1.20. Also the *appropriate use of discourse markers* and the *connectedness of speech (use of linking devices)* are regarded as

contributing to fluency quite often, both accounting for a mean of 1.30. However, the factor of speed (which is also mentioned in the third hypothesis) was not so often assigned to the answer option *definitely*, only displaying a mean of 1.60.

Those factors accounting for the highest arithmetic means are the ones which are most often regarded as not particularly relevant for fluency. Among them there are a *frequent use of self-correction*, a *frequent use of repetition* (both resulting in a mean of 2.30) as well as *speaking without making mistakes* and *native-likeness* (both with a mean of 2.10).

In order to find out how concordant in their perception the respondents were, the calculation formula for the standard deviation has to be consulted again. In figure 15, the column labelled with the character \pm shows the standard deviation results for each factor. Here, the standard deviation describes how homogeneous the totality of answers by the respondents is, a low figure signifying a high degree of concordance and a high figure indicating a tendency towards discordance.

Among the most concordant views there were the *ability to talk in coherent sentences* and the *smoothness of speech, flow of words (absence of rigidity)*, both displaying a standard deviation of 0.00. Also some other factors which are considered decisive showed a high level of agreement, as for instance the *ease (or "facility") of expression, speaking without any difficulties* with a standard deviation of 0.32, the *continuity of speech ("the ability to fill time with talk")* and the *spontaneity of interaction*, both accounting for 0.42, or the *connectedness of speech (use of linking devices)*, resulting in a standard deviation of 0.48. As for the factors *speed* and the *appropriate use of discourse markers* the standard deviation is somewhat higher, but can still be regarded as rather agreed on.

The highest level of disagreement can be observed in the factors *speaking without stopping, making few noticeably long pauses* with a standard deviation of 0.95, and *clear pronunciation with adequate intonation and stress*, with 0.94.

Finally, the respondents of the survey were requested to give a further explanation of those factors they considered only partly (or under particular circumstances) relevant to fluency. Concerning the *use of fixed phrases*, for instance, one respondent answered that "it really depends on which phrases to use. I think it is not enough to just use some creative collocations and you are automatically fluent". In terms of *repetition* and *self-correction* it was mentioned that "it always depends on what they are used for and how they are used. If you can see that it is a way to stress

something, then they can make a speaker fluent". Also the factor *speaking without making mistakes* and *the length and type of pauses* seem to be questionable in this regard, because to some of the respondent they may not always hinder communication and "native speakers also make mistakes". This view is in line with the fact that *making (few) mistakes* and *native-likeness* were also regarded as not particularly relevant to fluency before. As for *speed*, one respondent argued that it is "only a habit" and by far not as important as the content of speech, and as regards the factor *readiness*, some of the respondents appeared to be a bit puzzled as to what it actually constitutes. Maybe this term is a bit too vaguely formulated for being considered a factor contributing to fluency. After all, as one teacher put it, "the speech act only has to be connected and make sense" and the message has to be brought across.

In sum, having collected the relevant data, the third research question (***Which factors contribute to the perception of fluency (or a lack of fluency) in spoken English?***) can be answered. The third hypothesis made in the present thesis is the following:

The perception of fluency in spoken English is mainly influenced by factors such as speed, coherence and the appropriate use of discourse markers and linking devices.

Bearing in mind the findings of the survey, the third hypothesis can be verified only partially. On the one hand, particularly the factors *ability to talk in coherent sentences*, *appropriate use of discourse markers* and *connectedness of speech (use of linking devices)* seem to be considered quite decisive when it comes to a speaker's fluency. On the other hand, however, there are many other factors which, in the raters' view, apparently contribute quite significantly to the development and maintenance of fluency too, such as the *smoothness of speech*, *flow of words (absence of rigidity)*, the *ease (or "facility") of expression*, and the *continuity of speech (or "the ability to fill time with talk")* as well as the *spontaneity of interaction*. The factor of *speed* (which is also mentioned in the third hypothesis) was not so often considered important in this regard and may therefore not be particularly relevant for fluency.

5 Conclusion

The present research paper about the fluency of learners of English as a second language centers around the three principal research questions mentioned in the first chapter. Thus, it investigates in how far the perception of learner fluency is consistent among English teachers, with which other areas of language competence the notion of fluency correlates, and by which factors fluency is constituted.

In general, solely knowing the rules of a language probably does not make a speaker command the language perfectly. Therefore, the basic assumption in this thesis is that a certain degree of fluency contributes significantly to the command of a language. But what is fluency?

According to many dictionaries, fluency is commonly associated with an easily flowing, smooth and clear way of speaking. Furthermore it is described as speaking confidently and also at a reasonable pace without much stopping, making mistakes or generally seeming to make much effort. However, as Guillot (1999: 14) points out, the definitions in ordinary dictionaries may be inadequate, since they describe fluency as an abstract norm in its isolated form, which is not always compatible with the practical understanding of the term.

The Common European Frame of Reference (Council of Europe 2001: 31), which can be considered an official authority, defines exactly how a speaker at any given level of language competence should be able to perform in order to speak fluently. At the upper intermediate level B2 (which is the required state of knowledge of the speakers recorded for the survey of this paper) the speakers should be able to produce long, complex stretches of speech quite spontaneously and speak at an even tempo without hesitating too much.

Throughout an extensive literature review it turns out that the concept of fluency is rather difficult to define, as there are many different opinions of various specialists which are not always completely concordant. Brumfit (1984: 53-54), for instance, points out that fluency involves coherence, continuity and speed, but also creativity and context-sensitivity. Guillot (1999: 15), on the other hand, stresses the importance of pauses and hesitation, stating that they are an integral part of the concept, but also a potential limit to fluent speaking.

In order to test the hypotheses resulting from the three above-mentioned research questions, the present thesis features a survey among ten English teachers who pursue their profession in the area of adult education. For the survey to be commensurable and meaningful, the voices of three sample students were recorded during a preparatory mock exam. The students are enrolled in an educational program called *Berufsreifeprüfung*, where they are trained to do the final examination in order to obtain their A-levels. As mentioned above, in the course of the training in English, they are supposed to achieve the level B2 according to the CEFR. Subsequently, the learners' achievement in the mock exam (particularly regarding their proficiency in terms of fluency) was assessed by the ten teachers, who were asked to indicate their ratings and their individual opinions about fluency in general in an online questionnaire.

Unfortunately, such ratings sometimes entail potential downsides as well. McNamara (2000: 37-38) discusses the potential subjectivity of the ratings, arguing that, for a survey to convey reasonable outcomes, the raters may not be sufficiently consistent in their rating. Similarly, Dörnyei (2002: 8-9) names some undesirable effects of using a questionnaire for such a survey, as for instance the *social prestige bias* or the *acquiescence bias*, or the well-known *fatigue effect*, which might distort the respondents' indications. In retrospect, it is not possible to judge whether or not the answers have been affected by these effects, but one concern can certainly not be denied. Namely, the fact that the response to the request for participation in the survey was very sparse, given that only ten out of 21 peer teachers were willing to complete the questionnaire. All the other colleagues did not participate (or did not complete the survey), according to their own statements, because of a lack of time and being busy with their teaching. Certainly, a larger sample of respondents would have produced far more convincing and meaningful results. That is why I argue that any future attempts to tackle the topic of fluency by employing a survey should be arranged on a larger scale.

The first main research question of the present thesis asks for a potential consistency among English teachers in terms of their perception of learner fluency. Surprisingly, the hypothesized large inconsistency of the teachers' ratings had to be falsified in the course of the evaluation of the survey results. Apparently, the teachers seem to agree on a similar perception of learner fluency. The only remarkable discordance in their rating was the relative *strictness* of those teachers who teach a

language other than English as their second subject. The reason for this particularity might result from a tendency to be over-sensitive (or over-corrective) when it comes to certain linguistic aspects.

As regards the second research question, in how far fluency correlates with other language aspects, the hypothesis could not be completely verified either. It turns out that, according to the respondents of the survey, it is not grammatical accuracy which correlates most with fluency, but it is the vocabulary. However, grammar is also connected with a fluent speech. In fact, the survey results show that it is stronger interrelated with fluency than the content of speech or the ability to react and interact successfully.

Concerning the third research question, which asked for potential factors contributing to fluency, the subject matter is somewhat more complicated. The contingent factors extracted from academic literature were discussed in great detail and, consequently, also enquired in the survey. Apparently, those factors which are considered particularly relevant for fluency, are *coherence* (i.e. *the ability to talk in coherent sentences*), *flow and smoothness of speech*, *spontaneity of interaction*, *connectedness of speech* (i.e. *the appropriate use of linking devices*), the *appropriate use of discourse markers*, as well as a certain *continuity* and *ease of expression*.

In terms of *coherence*, the *Longman dictionary of applied linguistics* (1985: 45) associates it with the linking of meaning and developing a main idea within discourse, and as for *linking devices*, Werth (1984: 60) assigns them the purpose of connecting the sentences in a text on a formal level. When it comes to *discourse particles*, Sankoff *et al.* (1997: 9) explicitly associate them with *smoothness of speech*, while Aijmer (2002: 2-3) ascribes them a certain pragmatic value as they stand out from a normal speech act by their sheer frequency.

Moreover, there were other factors which were considered rather relevant for fluency. Those characteristics were not particularly frequently selected in the list of factors on the questionnaire, but they were explicitly mentioned in the teachers' individual definitions of fluency and in their statements where they stated the reasons for their assessment of fluency. Among these factors there are *a confident way of expression* and *speaking without stopping (pauses)*. As regards *confidence*, academic literature mostly equals this characteristic with the absence of nervousness; and concerning *pauses*, Böhringer (2009: 26) argues that they can

indicate hesitation but that they can also regulate the turn-taking, and thus function as speech act.

In how far other aspects of *hesitation*, for instance *repetition* and *self-correction*, are relevant for fluency, there was not any remarkable degree of agreement, but according to Wong (2000: 407-424), especially *repetition* can be part of a speaker's normal behavior rather than a sign of disfluency. Sawir (2000: 1-32) adds that repetition can also be an applicable resource for language learners. In general, hesitation does not always mean that someone lacks speaking skills, but sometimes it can serve a rhetorical purpose (e.g. time gaining), even improving fluency.

Furthermore, other factors mentioned explicitly in the teachers' own definitions of fluency but not so frequently selected in the list of characteristics, were *native-likeness*, *speed (speaking without inappropriate slowness)*, and *speaking without making mistakes*. The speed of speaking was a sensitive issue in the responses of the teachers. Some of them consider it an indispensable characteristic of fluent speech, while others argue that it is just a habit or an individual character trait. In fact, the *Longman dictionary of applied linguistics* (1985: 237) argues that the speed depends on various factors, such as the personality of the speaker, the number of people present, or the general topic.

Those factors which produced a particular discordance among the respondents of the questionnaire (as for how relevant for fluency they are), however, were *pauses* and also *pronunciation*. What makes the matter even more complicated in this regard is that in the assessment criteria used at the mock exam (see appendix V), the concept of fluency is closely affiliated to pronunciation. The question is, whether this means that pronunciation is the same thing as fluency, or that it is an aspect of language which is not worth being assessed as an independent criterion.

Moreover, when the teachers stated the reasons for their evaluation of the speech samples, it was frequently mentioned that in order to speak fluently, one has to have an ample range of vocabulary, and thus be able to add one's own ideas to conversation. This could be ascribed to the category of *creativity*, as this term can be used synonymously with *resourcefulness* and speakers have to draw on their language resources coming up with new ideas in their talk.

Finally, those factors which were not assigned any specific significance in the ratings of the survey participants (because they were not very frequently mentioned, nor were they particularly frequently selected from the list of characteristics), are a

clear way of expression, the *ability to use pre-packaged utterances* (i.e. *fixed phrases*), *contextual appropriateness*, *effective communication*, *interaction without any effort* (on the part of both listener and speaker), and *readiness in the use of words*. As for the use of fixed phrases (e.g. collocations or idioms), Wray (2002: 35-37) states that they are generally produced more fluently than totally novel phrases. Some respondents of the questionnaire argued that, when it comes to how fluently someone speaks, it largely depends on *which* phrases to use. Maybe this has something to do with the use of an appropriate register, since the use of very formal phrases in a colloquial speaking situation may seem a bit stilted (and therefore not very fluent). When it comes to *contextual appropriateness*, Miecznikowski and Bazzanella (2007: 207) opine that whether something is appropriate or not mainly depends on the conversation events and on the actions performed by the speakers.

The most problematic factor, however, seemed to be the *readiness in the use of words*, as it might not have been clear to the respondents what it actually means. According to academic literature it is apparently another description of a speaker's ease or quickness of expression.

In sum, fluency might be seen as an integral parameter in the assessment of spoken English, but it is only vaguely defined in academic literature, although there seems to be an agreement among English teachers as to what it actually is. Apparently most teachers have a certain sense for detecting it in the performance of a language learner.

What are the implications of the insights gained in this paper on actual language teaching? According to Hedge (2000: 54-55), in the 1970s fluency drills in language teaching used to aim mainly at enhancing the learners' skills to connect syntactic segments. More recently, however, more and more teachers tend to teach conversational gambits, which are basically prefabricated language chunks. These gambits can be retrieved from memory very quickly and are supposed to make the learners more fluent (Hedge 2000: 54-55).

Moreover, Hedge (2000: 57-58) argues the case for communicative language teaching (i.e. CLT) when she summarizes the criteria which are necessary for the development of fluency, set up by Brumfit (1984: 69): A fluency-oriented communicative classroom should focus on meaning rather than form, the learner should determine the content by formulating his or her own ideas, the meaning has to be negotiated (e.g. by means of implementing information gap or opinion gap

exercises), and the teacher should intervene only minimally in order to correct the learner (Hedge 2000: 57-58).

Especially the last argument of the list of criteria obviously emphasizes the need to distinguish fluency from mere accuracy. From my point of view, as a teacher it is crucial (though very difficult) to know when to step down from correcting every single grammatical or lexical mistake, and give way to fluent speech.

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Appendix I: Text presented to candidate A

Live-out lovers

Just because you are an item doesn't mean you have to be inseparable. Maureen Rice reports on the growing trend for semi-detached couples who go their own ways.

Maureen Rice

The Observer, Sunday 16 June 2002

On Monday to Thursday, Simon works a 12-hour day doing something on the internet, which is ground-breaking but highly technical and therefore wreathed in ultimate mystery to most of us. Then he goes home, eats a takeaway in front of the TV, makes a couple of calls and goes to bed. Next morning, he gets up and does it all again. 'I love my job. It's totally absorbing and rewarding. I work these hours because I want to.' Most of his social life is work-based: 'We all eat lunch together, and have drinks out regularly.'

On Friday nights, Simon skips the takeaway and goes out to eat with Jill, the woman he has been seeing for three years. After the meal, they go back to either his place or hers - usually hers, because she has a fridge with food in it. They spend the weekend together, going to the movies, seeing friends, watching DVDs and having sex. On Monday morning they go to work, and on Monday nights back home to their respective houses. They talk on the phone regularly, but rarely meet outside weekends. 'We both love our work. And Jill has teenage sons from her marriage who are hormonal and horrible. They want nothing to do with their mum's boyfriend, and frankly it's mutual.'

Their circumstances suit Jill just as well. 'I'm busy. I have a full-on job and two boys to look after. I don't want to look after anyone else. I'd never let a man move in with me now; it would just mean extra work, and mediating between him and the boys. All I want is at weekends to have someone think I'm fabulous and to spoil me a bit, but not to invade my life or expect too much in return.' If it sounds somewhat cool and pragmatic to the romantics among us, we're wrong. 'We have so much in common. We like the same kinds of food, the same films. We're well matched sexually and I've never met anyone who likes and respects women so much. We never argue, we respect each other's space and give each other love and support.'

It's the best relationship I've ever had.' Simon is equally happy. 'I wish I'd met her years ago. She's so warm and smart. I still get excited whenever I see her.'

The usual next step would be buying somewhere together or even getting married, but that will never happen. 'I don't want to share my whole life with someone else,' says Jill. 'I've done it before and it just doesn't work. Relationships die when they become caught up in whose turn it is to empty the dishwasher or rows about money.' Simon agrees: 'Jill had a life before me that's nothing to do with me, and pretending it is would just give us both problems. I lived with someone who said she didn't mind that I work late and stay up watching movies, but she did mind. She put me under a lot of pressure to be something I wasn't. I want to be me, not half of a neat little unit.'

Simon and Jill are a particularly modern phenomenon: the semi-detached couple (SDC). They may be around-the-block-a-few-times couples, busy career builders, single parents or just highly independent types. They want the usual package of love, sex and connection, but are re-writing the script on how they'd like that delivered. Typically, they maintain separate households, separate bank accounts and have separate as well as joint friends, but consider their semi-detached relationship to be exclusive and their priority. They're Woody and Mia in the good old days, or Margaret Drabble and her husband Michael Holroyd, who lived in separate houses so they could work on their respective books in peace. They are commonly professionals, as money is what makes it all possible: two can live as cheaply as one, but not when there are two flats to pay for.

Nowadays, SDCs are all around us and they're a response to all the big social changes of the past 20 years: career women, protracted working weeks, extended adolescence, the rising divorce rate and the breakdown of conventional relationship and gender roles. 'It's a trend being driven by women,' says psychotherapist Paula Valeria. 'Independence gives them more choice and control. I know a woman in her forties, attractive and successful, with a 20-year-old daughter. Her new partner is the same age but divorced with an eight-year-old son. He wants them to move in together, but she doesn't. She says, "I've done all that domestic stuff and parenting. Do I really want to start again?" The honest answer has to be no.'

Or there's my friend Leah, late-30s and happily semi-detached with her long-term boyfriend. 'He's a difficult, moody sod and so am I. I like my own space, and need

time away from him. And he's not keen on some of my friends, so I prefer to see them separately.'

Unlike most relationship experts, Paula Valeria is cautiously optimistic about the rise of the SDC. 'We have freedom to choose new ways of living and relating that work for our lives now. Traditional models obviously don't suit everyone, and being semi-detached can work well.' But it's a rare therapist who celebrates the SDC, which flies in the face of relationships orthodoxy: they're commitment-lite, selfish, immature or inevitably compromised, according to Karen Stobart, from the British Confederation of Psychotherapists. 'They're an admission that two people can't handle a full-time relationship. It's not that marriage is the ideal, but that real relationships are messy, difficult and demanding. Working through that - not avoiding it by going home when things get tough or boring - is how we grow and develop real intimacy and self awareness.'

SDCs can work, she admits, however, as a stage to move on from. 'But choosing to live this way permanently suggests fear of intimacy or conflict.'

'I'd guess that many have been hurt emotionally and have put up barriers. Or they're unrealistic romantics, waiting for the perfect relationship before they really commit.' Many halves of SDCs, says Stobart, are enduring rather than enjoying their relationship status. 'They realise that this is the most their loved one is prepared to give, so they take it because it's better than nothing.'

Rice, Maureen. 2002. *The Guardian*. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theobserver/2002/jun/16/features.magazine87> (11 March 2013).

Appendix II: Text presented to candidate B

Obesity crisis: Get paid to lose weight

By Rebecca Smith, Medical Editor

12:01AM GMT 24 Jan 2008

Fat people will be offered cash incentives to lose weight and take regular exercise under a radical Government strategy announced yesterday to tackle the obesity epidemic.

Employers will be encouraged to set up competitions with money, vouchers and other rewards for people who give up junk food in favour of healthy eating and living. Those losing the most weight would earn the biggest prizes.

Ministers believe that by giving people incentives to do something about their weight now, it will help avoid larger costs associated with treating cancer, heart disease and diabetes caused by obesity. Similar schemes have worked well in America and British medical insurance companies already offer discounts for people who go to the gym regularly.

Experts say that most of the population will be obese by 2050 unless urgent action is taken and the associated rise in ill health would cost the NHS £50 billion a year.

The Government wants Britain to be the first major nation to reverse the rising tide of obesity and said it would focus on reducing within 12 years the proportion of children who are overweight back to the 2000 level of 26 per cent.

At present, 30 per cent of children are obese or overweight.

The Government said schools should consider banning children from going out of the gates at lunchtime and town councils are being urged to block new fast food outlets near parks and schools.

Yesterday's milestone strategy - Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives - highlighted a series of projects run through the Well@Work scheme, led by the British Heart Foundation, which offer rewards for workers who lose weight.

One competition, called The Biggest Loser, awarded £130 in gift vouchers for the participant who lost the most weight. Ministers want to encourage more such schemes in the workplace.

The strategy said: "We will look at using financial incentives, such as payments, vouchers and other rewards, to encourage individuals to lose weight and sustain that weight loss, to eat more healthily, or to be consistently more physically active."

It is not clear from the strategy who would fund such schemes but the onus is likely to be on companies as they could expect to benefit from a healthier workforce. It is likely that the schemes would also be tax deductible.

The Government is investing £372 million over three years to implement the strategy and annual progress reports will be published.

Dr David Haslam, the clinical director of the National Obesity Forum, said the incentives scheme smacked of "desperation". There was little evidence that payments would work and it would be difficult to check whether people were regularly taking exercise.

A recent analysis of nine research studies which used financial incentives found there was no effect on weight after 12 months. Aberdeen University's Health Services Research Unit said eating more fruit and vegetables was more effective than paying for weight loss.

Andrew Lansley, the shadow health secretary, accused the Government of stealing his party's ideas for healthy lifestyle reward vouchers, but criticised plans for cash handouts for shedding pounds.

However, Dr Ian Campbell, the medical director of Weight Concern, said work-based incentive schemes were a "win win" because the employer benefited from a workforce that was less likely to take time off sick, while employees improved their health.

He said: "It might sound a bit desperate but we are desperate so we have to look at all these things."

Smith, Rebecca. 2008. *The Telegraph*. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1576430/Obesity-crisis-get-paid-to-lose-weight.html> (11 March 2013).

Appendix III: Text presented to candidate C

Predators on Social Networks: Sexual Predators and Child Molesters Find Easy Prey

From Tony Bradley former About.com Guide

Various web sites have sprung up for the sole purpose of providing a place for users to express themselves, share with like-minded individuals, discover new things, and communicate with others. The concept is so popular that there are even animals that have their own Facebook profile. MySpace was acquired by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp., Google recently launched Google+ and Microsoft just bought into a large stake of Facebook. The concept of social networking has also been extended to other areas. For example, Youtube (also picked up by Google), provides users with the ability to express their creativity, network, rate their favorite video clips, etc. Some sites like Flickr, DropShots, or PhotoBucket provide users with the ability to post and share photos and family videos. The bottom line is that social networking is hugely popular and it is big business. Unfortunately, child molesters, sexual predators, and scam artists have discovered that these sites can also be exploited to find victims.

There have been numerous instances of sexual predators and child molesters posing as children to network with young victims on MySpace.com. MySpace was also recently discovered to be compromised by attackers spreading malware on exploited profile sites. MySpace has taken steps and implemented security measures to minimize this problem, but users should still be cautious and aware. While not directly related to a social network, Craigslist, the popular regional classified listings site, was recently used by a predator to lure a victim to her death. After listing a job opening for a babysitter / nanny, and arranging a meeting with the potential nanny, the killer then murdered the prospective nanny.

Photo sharing sites are used by thousands of families to post and share family photos. It is possible to restrict access and only let users you identify view the pictures, but many users are proud of their kids and their photographic skills and allow the general public to view the photos as well. Child molesters and sexual deviants can search through these sites and bookmark their favorite photos of young

boys and girls. Follow these steps to use social networking sites responsibly and avoid becoming a victim:

1. **Be Skeptical.** At least be cautious. The point of social networking is to find people who share your interests and establish a network of friends, but don't let down your defenses too easily. Just because someone claims to like the same music as you, or share a passion for scrapbooking, doesn't mean it is true. These new "friends" are virtual and faceless and you can't completely trust that they are what they say they are.
2. **Be Diligent.** Knowing that the potential exists for scam artists or sexual predators to be lurking about, keep an eye on your profile and be diligent about who you allow to connect with your profile. For photo sharing sites like Flickr, check out the users who are marking your photos as their Favorites. If some stranger is marking all of the pictures of your 7-year old son as their Favorites, it seems a little creepy and may be cause for concern.
3. **Report Suspicious Behavior.** If you have reason to believe that someone is a sexual predator or scam artist, report it to the site. If you look at the profile of the user marking your son's photos as their Favorites, you might find that they have marked hundreds of other young boy's photos as their Favorites. Flickr, and other such sites, should take action against this sort of suspicious behavior.
4. **Communicate.** Parents who have children that surf the Web and frequent these social networking sites should communicate with their children. Make sure your children are aware of the threat, and that they are educated about how to use the Web safely. Make sure that they understand the risks and that they know they can talk with you about suspicious or malicious activity they encounter.
5. **Monitor.** If you want additional peace of mind, or you don't fully trust that your children will stay within the guidelines you have laid out, install some monitoring software to watch their online behavior. Using a product like eBlaster from SpectorSoft, you can monitor and record all activity on a given computer and keep an eye on your children.

Bradley, Tony. 2013. *About.com*. <http://netsecurity.about.com/od/newsandeditoria2/a/socialpredators.htm> (11 March 2013).

Appendix IV: Questionnaire – spoken English

Assessment of Spoken English (Diploma Thesis of Maximilian Stummer)

Dear colleagues,
I am currently writing my diploma thesis at the University of Vienna. In order to gain statistical data, I conduct a survey about spoken English. As already mentioned in the e-mail I would like to ask you for your support. Please listen to the three audio recorded spoken exams (as soon as you are asked to do so) and answer the following questions in this survey. Answering the questions will take you about 20 minutes.

I am very grateful for your help.

Thank you in advance!
Maximilian Stummer

Personal Questions

Gender *

- ☐ female
☐ male

Teaching Experience *

I have taught for years.

Where have you taught? *

(You can tick more than one option.)

- ☐ Elementary School (Volksschule)
☐ Lower Grade (Hauptschule, NMS)
☐ AHS (e.g. Gymnasium)
☐ BHS (e.g. HAK, HTL...)
☐ Adult Education (e.g. WIFI, BFI...)

Which subjects (other than English) do you teach?

Learner Performance

NOW PLEASE LISTEN TO THE THREE AUDIO RECORDINGS WHICH WERE SENT TO YOU VIA E-MAIL.

How would you rate the performances of the three candidates?

Please rate the performances according to the Austrian grading scale.
(1 = "Sehr Gut", 2 = "Gut", 3 = "Befriedigend", 4 = "Genügend", 5 = "Nicht Genügend") *

GENERAL PERFORMANCE

Candidate A	<input type="text"/>
Candidate B	<input type="text"/>
Candidate C	<input type="text"/>

Learner Performance (Criteria)

In the following you can see the grid which is usually used for the assessment of learners at "Berufsreifeprüfung" (as it is used at WIFI).

How would you rate the performances of the three candidates in terms of the different criteria?
(again according to the Austrian grading scale, from 1 to 5) *

	Vocabulary	Grammar	Fluency/Pronunciation	Reaction/Interaction	Content/Ideas
Candidate A	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Candidate B	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Candidate C	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Rating of FLUENCY

Why did you rate the performance of CANDIDATE A with regards to fluency the way you did?

(Please indicate in a few key words.)

Why did you rate the performance of CANDIDATE B with regards to fluency the way you did?

(Please indicate in a few key words.)

Why did you rate the performance of CANDIDATE C with regards to fluency the way you did?

(Please indicate in a few key words.)

FLUENCY

What is fluency for you? How would you describe fluency?

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO FLUENCY

Please indicate to what extent the following factors are - in your opinion - relevant for a speaker's fluency.

Definitely = This factor is definitely relevant for a speaker's fluency.

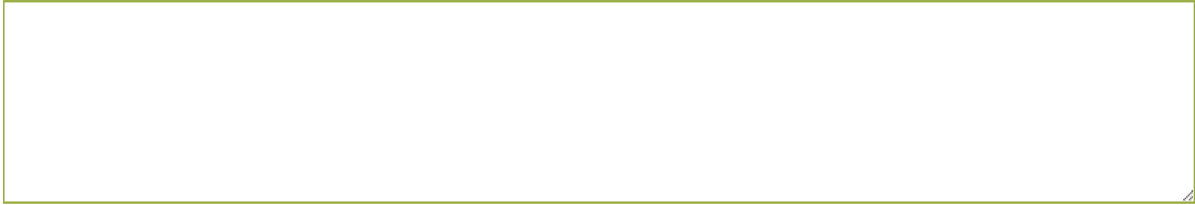
Partly = This factor is only in some cases (or under particular circumstances) relevant for a speaker's fluency.

Never = This factor is definitely NOT relevant for a speaker's fluency. *

	Definitely	Partly	Never
a clear way of expressing oneself (clarity)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
a confident way of expressing oneself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ability to use pre-packaged utterances (use of fixed phrases/formulaic language)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ability to talk in coherent sentences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
appropriate use of discourse markers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
clear pronunciation with adequate intonation and stress	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
contextual appropriateness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
continuity of speech ("the ability to fill time with talk")	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
creativity (or "resourcefulness")	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ease (or "facility") of expression, speaking without any difficulties	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
effective communication	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
frequent use of repetition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
frequent use of self-correction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
interaction without any effort or strain on the part of the speaker and listener	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
length of fluent speech between pauses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
native-likeness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
positioning, frequency and length of pauses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
speaking without stopping, making "few noticeably long pauses"	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
readiness in the use of words	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
smoothness of speech, flow of words (absence of rigidity)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
speaking without making mistakes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
speed (or rapidity), speaking without inappropriate slowness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
spontaneity of interaction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
connectedness of speech (use of linking devices)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

This is the last question of the survey:

As for the factors you consider only partly relevant, please give a brief explanation why.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the respondent to provide a brief explanation for factors they consider only partly relevant. The box is currently empty.

You have completed the survey.

Thank you very much for your participation!

Your support is very important for the accomplishment of my diploma thesis.

You can now close the window.

Appendix V: Assessment criteria

Beurteilungsblatt – Englisch

Berufsreifeprüfung WIFI

Name des Kandidaten/der Kandidatin: _____

Topic: _____

criteria	max points	+	~	-	remarks
vocabulary	12 10,11,12/+ 7, 8, 9/~				
grammar	12 10,11,12/+ 7, 8, 9/~				
fluency / pronunciation	5				
reaction/ interaction	5				
content/ ideas	6				
general	total 40				sum

Notenantrag: _____

Begründung: _____

Appendix VI: Summary of the thesis in German

Der Redefluss von Lernenden der Fremdsprache Englisch in der Wahrnehmung österreichischer LehrerInnen

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit behandelt das Thema Redefluss („*fluency*“) und wie diese Grundfertigkeit des Sprachlernens von unterschiedlichen EnglischlehrerInnen wahrgenommen wird. Das Forschungsinteresse ist darin begründet, dass der Autor dieser Arbeit in der Erwachsenenbildung am *WIFI Niederösterreich* tätig ist, und im Zuge dieser Tätigkeit die Aufgabe hat, die Lernenden auf die *Berufsreifeprüfung* im Fach Englisch vorzubereiten. Die Teilprüfung der Fremdsprache Englisch wird am Institut *WIFI* ausschließlich als mündliche Prüfung durchgeführt. Daher ist der Redefluss der PrüfungskandidatInnen von besonderer Bedeutung. Bezüglich der Begrifflichkeit, beziehungsweise der Bewertung des Redeflusses, gibt es allerdings häufig Auffassungsunterschiede unter den einzelnen Lehrpersonen.

Das Grundgerüst dieser Arbeit wird also durch drei zentrale Forschungsfragen gebildet, deren daraus abgeleitete Hypothesen durch eine empirische Untersuchung überprüft werden.

Die erste dieser Forschungsfragen lautet wie folgt: **Ist die Wahrnehmung des Redeflusses von Lernenden der Fremdsprache Englisch durch österreichische LehrerInnen einheitlich?** Die daraus resultierende Hypothese, die der bloßen persönlichen Einschätzung des Autors entspricht, ist, dass sich die Wahrnehmung des Redeflusses von SchülerInnen durch verschiedene LehrerInnen deutlich unterscheidet. Diese Annahme ist durch eigene Erfahrungen mit sehr unterschiedlichen Lehrerpersönlichkeiten und deren individuellen Auffassungen begründet.

Des Weiteren soll die zweite Forschungsfrage dieser Diplomarbeit ergründen, ob es einen **Zusammenhang zwischen dem Redefluss und anderen sprachlichen Kernkompetenzen in der Bewertung von Lernenden der Fremdsprache Englisch gibt**. Die Hypothese, die sich aus dieser Fragestellung ableiten lässt, ist, dass die Wahrnehmung vom Redefluss in gesprochenem Englisch sehr stark von der grammatikalischen Richtigkeit beeinflusst wird. Zu dieser Annahme trägt hauptsächlich die eigene schulische Erfahrung des Autors dieser Arbeit bei.

Die dritte zentrale Forschungsfrage der vorliegenden schriftlichen Abhandlung trägt dazu bei, herauszufinden, **welche individuellen Faktoren zur Beurteilung des Redeflusses (oder eines mangelhaften Redeflusses) beitragen**. Gemäß der Einschätzung des Autors in der dritten Hypothese wird der Redefluss im Englischen wesentlich durch die Faktoren Sprechgeschwindigkeit und Kohärenz sowie die sinngemäß richtige Verwendung von Diskurspartikeln (wie z.B. *just, kind of, like, so, well, yeah, etc.*) und Verbindungselementen (wie z.B. *and, but, because, furthermore, for example, in other words, etc.*) beeinflusst.

Im Zuge der Erhebung von potenziellen zum Redefluss beitragende Faktoren, wurden Lehrbuchmeinungen einschlägiger linguistischer Fachliteratur, aber auch gängige Wörterbücher, sowie die Richtlinien des *Gemeinsamen Europäischen Referenzrahmens für Sprachen* (GERS) des Europarats berücksichtigt.

Der methodische Ansatz dieser Diplomarbeit ist in drei Arbeitsschritten zu verstehen. Zuerst wurden drei KandidatInnen der Berufsreifeprüfung (mit deren Einverständnis) bei einem Probegespräch vor der eigentlichen Prüfung auf einer Audio-Tonspur aufgenommen.

Der zweite methodische Schritt der vorliegenden Forschungsarbeit war die Befragung von zehn EnglischlehrerInnen aus dem Bereich der Erwachsenenbildung mittels eines Online-Fragebogens (siehe Appendix IV). Im Zuge dieses Fragebogens hatten die Lehrpersonen nach dem Anhören der drei mündlichen Textbeispiele diese mit den am *WIFI Niederösterreich* üblichen Kriterien (siehe Appendix V) nach dem österreichischen Schulnotensystem zu bewerten. Außerdem waren ihre persönliche Auffassung der Begrifflichkeit von *Redefluss* („fluency“) anzugeben und die im Literaturteil beschriebenen Faktoren hinsichtlich ihrer Relevanz für den Redefluss im Englischen zu bewerten.

Im dritten Arbeitsschritt wurden die drei aus den Forschungsfragen abgeleiteten Hypothesen mithilfe der aus der Befragung gewonnenen Daten überprüft. Im Zuge dessen musste die erste Hypothese vorläufig falsifiziert werden, da die Bewertung des Redeflusses der Lernenden durch die Befragten einigermaßen einheitlich war. Auch in der Definition der Begrifflichkeit des Redeflusses („fluency“) war eine gewisse Übereinstimmung zu verzeichnen. Die zweite Hypothese, abgeleitet aus der Forschungsfrage nach einer eventuellen Korrelation zwischen dem Redefluss und anderen sprachlichen Kernkompetenzen, konnte ebenfalls nicht verifiziert werden, da die Resultate der Befragung ergaben, dass nicht die grammatikalische Richtigkeit,

sondern vorrangig das Vokabular des/der Sprechers/in den Redefluss maßgeblich beeinflusst. Die dritte und letzte Hypothese dieser Diplomarbeit kann teilweise vorläufig verifiziert werden, da die meisten genannten Faktoren gemäß der Umfrageergebnisse zwar für den Redefluss eines Lernenden durchaus relevant sind, jedoch Uneinigkeit unter den Befragten in Bezug auf den Faktor *Sprachgeschwindigkeit* besteht und es noch einige andere (in der Umfrage nicht sehr häufig gewählte) Faktoren gibt, die wesentlich zur Beherrschung eines gewissen Redeflusses beitragen. Deshalb ist eine vollständige vorläufige Verifizierung der letztgenannten Hypothese nicht möglich.

Zusammengefasst kann man sagen, dass der Begriff *Redefluss* („fluency“) in der gängigen Fachliteratur nicht ausreichend genau umrissen ist, dass aber unter den österreichischen EnglischlehrerInnen eine einigermaßen einheitliche Begriffsauffassung und Bewertung des Redeflusses besteht.

Appendix VII: Curriculum vitae of the author (Lebenslauf)

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name:	Maximilian Stummer
Place and Date of Birth:	Vienna, 23 September 1984
Address:	Friesstraße 384/1/12, 3040 Neulengbach
Nationality:	Austria
Telephone:	0043-699/104 350 23
E-Mail address:	max_stummer@gmx.at

EDUCATIONAL TRAINING

06/2004	School leaving examination at Handelsakademie in St. Pölten, Lower Austria
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ACADEMIC TRAINING

since 10/2006	Teacher Training (<i>Lehramt</i>) Subjects: English and Spanish at University of Vienna
01/2012 – 06/2012	Semester abroad at University of Alicante, Spain
10/2011 – 12/2011	Internship, Subject Spanish at BG/BRG Purkersdorf, Lower Austria
10/2010 – 12/2010	Internship, Subject English at BG/BRG Wr. Neustadt, Lower Austria
10/2005 – 06/2006	Studies of Communication Science (“Publizistik”) at University of Vienna

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE (TEACHING)

since 02/2011	Language Teacher in adult education at <i>WIFI NÖ</i> in St. Pölten, Lower Austria Subjects: English Basic Course <i>Berufsreifeprüfung</i> , English Spanish Language Training
10/2013 – 12/2013	Language Teacher in adult education at <i>Bildungsheimatwerk</i> in Böheimkirchen, Lower Austria
08/2013	Private Tutor for English at <i>Lernquadrat</i> in Tulln, Lower Austria
11/2008 – 06/2009	Private Tutor at <i>Vienna Business School</i> for <i>Lernquadrat</i> in Vienna

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE (MISCELLANEOUS)

12/2005 – 01/2011	Part-Time Employment, Customer Service at <i>Cards & Systems EDV GmbH</i> in Vienna
02/2011, 09/2010, 08/2010, 02/2010, 09/2009, 08/2009, 02/2009, 07/2008	Internship, Customer Service at <i>Cards & Systems EDV GmbH</i> in Vienna
07/2005, 06/2005, 07/2003	Internship, HR Department at <i>Siemens Austria AG</i> in Vienna
07/2001	Internship, Administration at <i>Bank Austria AG</i> in Vienna

LANGUAGE SKILLS

German	native speaker
English	excellent
Spanish	excellent
French	basic

MISCELLANEOUS

Diploma *Lebendiges und Nachhaltiges Lernen* at *WIFI NÖ* (March 2013)

Good user skills in *MS Office*

Austrian driving license, Type B

Compulsory military service (10/2004 – 05/2005)