LANGUAGE@LEEDS

THE CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE IN
LANGUAGE TEACHING

LEEDS INSTITUTE FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

WORKSHOP 05 JULY 2019

LANGUAGE ANALYSIS TO INFORM LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Understanding fluency to enhance teaching and assessment practices

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OVERVIEW

➢ What we think we mean by fluency?

➢ What research can tell us about fluency?

- *Is it just a question of practice??*
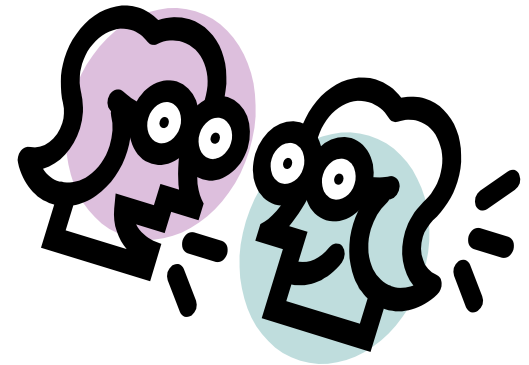
➢ What teachers should tell researchers?

Thanks to collaborators – Parvaneh Tavakoli

WHAT DO YOU EXPECT?

➢ In pairs/3s, can you define fluency in your context?

- Primary?
- Secondary?
- Other?
- Assessing fluency (GCSE, A-level?)

Do you agree who is your ideal fluent speaker? Why?

Who struggles to become fluent? Why?

NOW – on your own, 1 top tip to help that struggling speaker?
1 big gap you'd like to know more about?

Hold on to those thoughts! We'll come back to these at the end

FLUENCY: WHAT DO WE MEAN?

General concept in L2?	Speech fluency definition
Language proficiency	Having fluid speech
Ability to communicative efficiently	Ability to produce uninterrupted talk
Having a good command of language: grammar, vocabulary, ….	Ability to speak in time

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DEFINITIONS OF FLUENCY

➢ A range of meanings …

➢ One of the earliest definitions – for L1:

> "Fluency might simply be the ability to talk of length with few pauses; the ability to fill time with talk; the ability to talk in coherent and semantically dense sentences; the ability to have appropriate things to say in a wide range of contexts; and the ability to be creative and imaginative in the language use" (Fillmore, 1979, p. 51).

Is this relevant for L2? Why, why not?

One advantage is helping to check in linguistic terms what are suitable targets (or not) for L2 fluency

FILLMORE'S DEFINITION IN LINGUISTIC TERMS

| Fillmore (1979)	Fluency as communicative competence
Time filled with talk, Semantically-dense	Not stopping many times to think what to say or how to phrase it, semantic richness (grammar, vocab, etc.) – linguistic competence e.g. Radio/Ad presenters/Brian Cox
Communicatively appropriate, coherent	Having effective pragmatic skills: Knowing how to say it – discourse competence e.g. Martin Luther King/Jacinda Ahern
Use language creatively & imaginatively	Having flair, style and imagination for a range of social situations and different people - sociolinguistic competence But does everyone have this ability? Who would you nominate for this criterion?

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HOW TO APPLY THIS TO L2 FLUENCY?

➢ Achieving oral fluency as a
- personal aim in L2 learning
- pedagogic aim in L2 teaching

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Socio

➢ Basis for CLT teaching approaches

➢ What kind of speaking activities do you include?

➢ Why?

WHAT IS L2 FLUENCY?
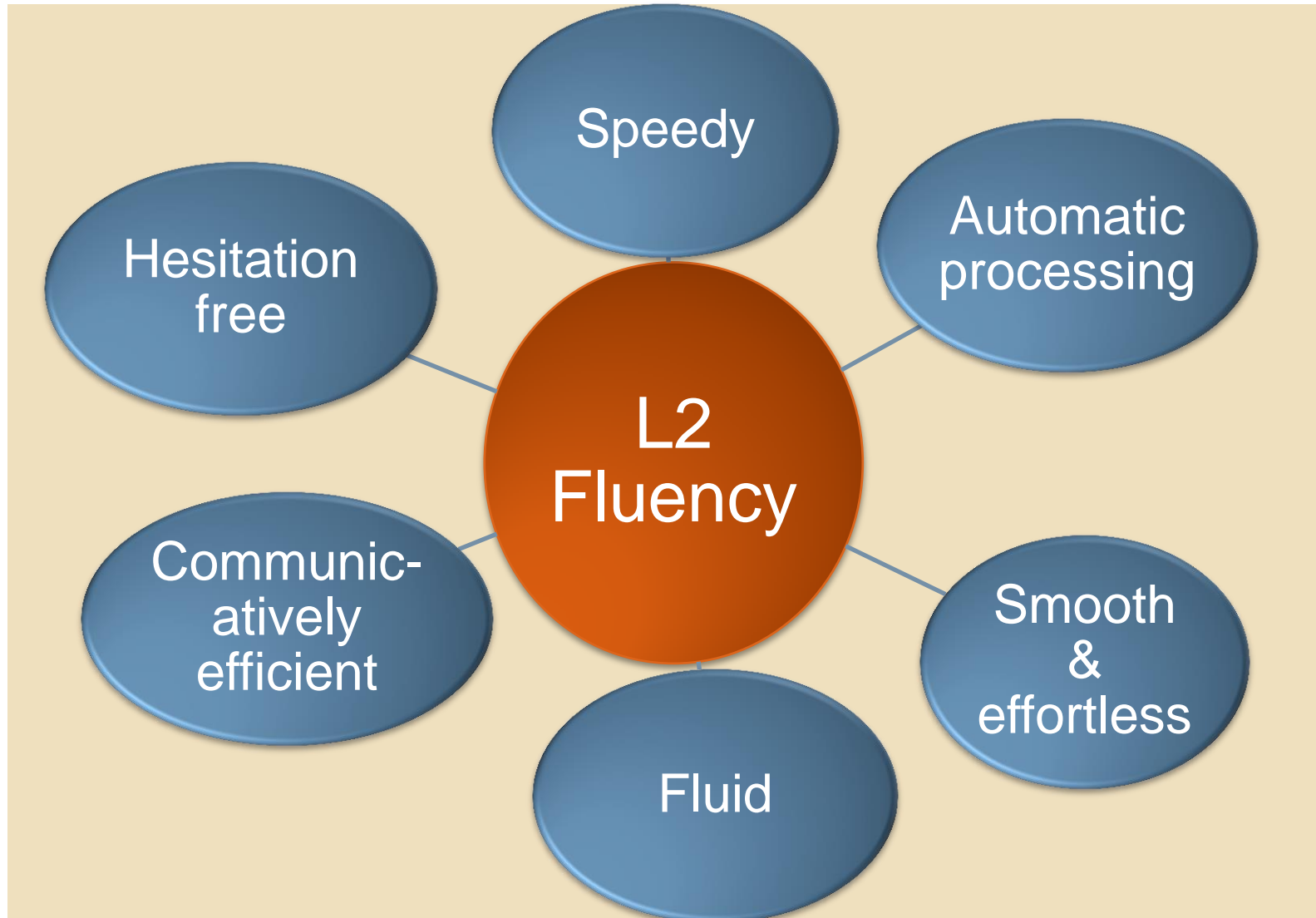
L2 FLUENCY: JUST IN THE MIND?

➢ Fluency encompasses the notion of **"rapid, smooth, accurate, lucid, and efficient translation of thought or communicative intention into language"** (Lennon, 2000, p. 26)

➢ Fluency is an **"automatic procedural skill"** (Schmidt, 1992)

➢ Fluency also in the ear of the beholder?
  - Broad holistic ratings of fluency vs narrow temporal measures (Lennon 1990)

➢ Evidence of oral proficiency

FLUENCY IN ASSESSMENT?

➢ Fluency central to external measures of proficiency:

➢ But how defined?

➢ Spanish GCSE

- spontaneity and fluency

➢ IELTS

- Fluency and coherence

➢ CEFR (English) B2 first mention of fluency

- Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party
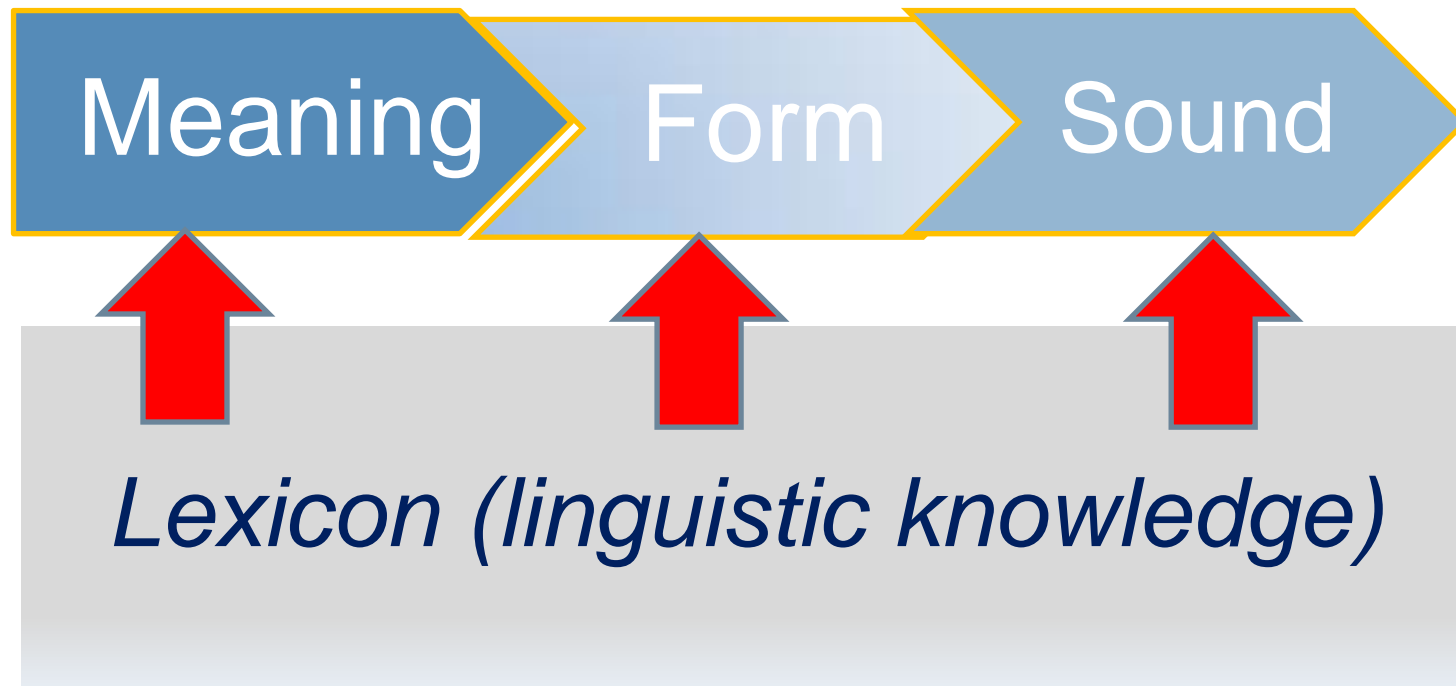
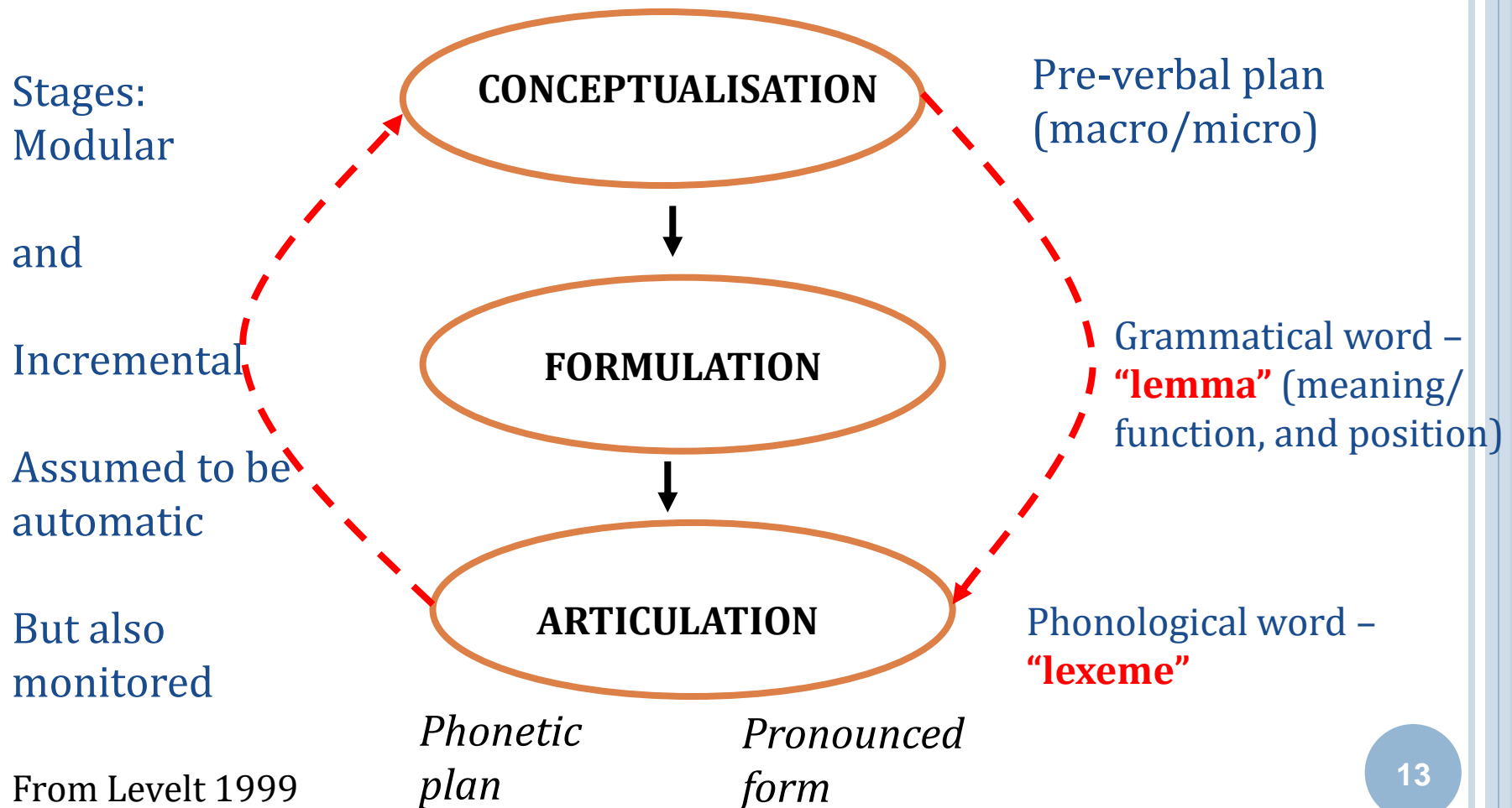➢ So can research tell us how to get from here
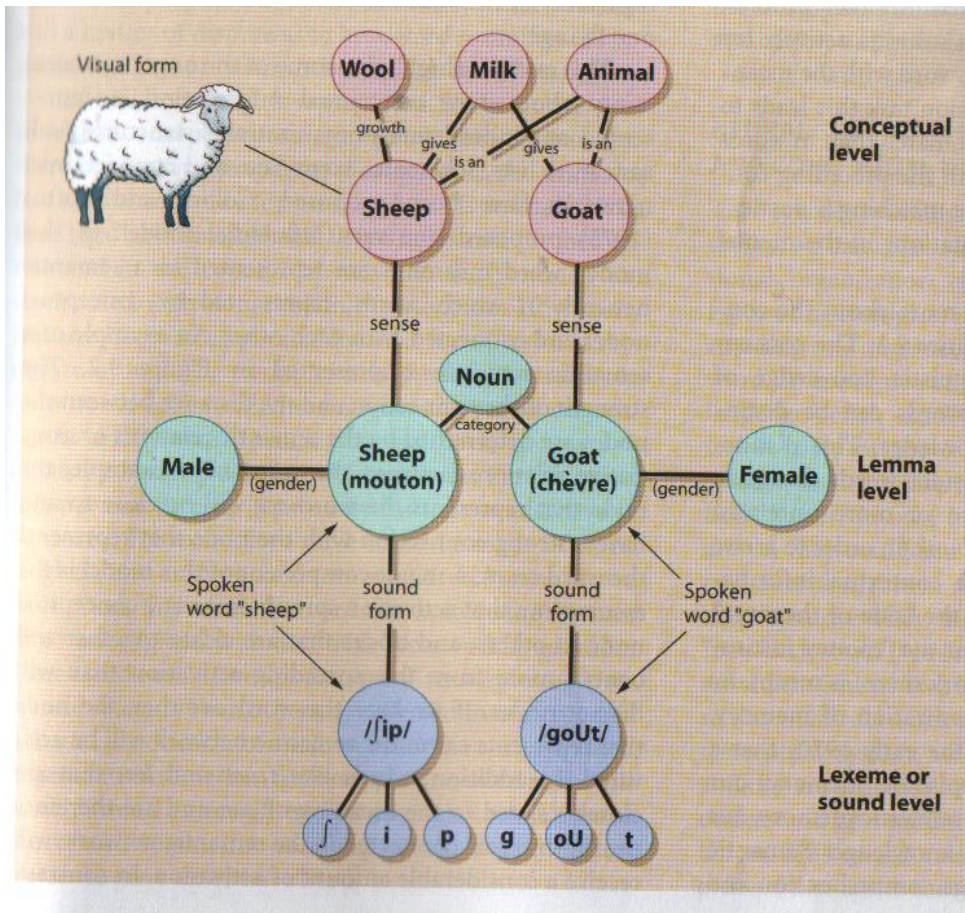
to there?

WHAT IS L2 SPEECH?

Meaning   Form   Sound

Lexicon (linguistic knowledge)

Speaking processes in L1:

Stages:
Modular

and

Incremental

Assumed to be
automatic

But also
monitored

From Levelt 1999

CONCEPTUALISATION

FORMULATION

ARTICULATION

Phonetic plan   *Pronounced form*

Pre-verbal plan
(macro/micro)

Grammatical word –
"lemma" (meaning/
function, and position)

Phonological word –
"lexeme"

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FOR L2 SPEECH

Single Lexicon
- parallel conceptualisation for microplanning

Separate Formulation

Separate Lexemes

Single Articulation

From De Bot 1992, Bock & Levelt 1994

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CHALLENGES FOR L2 FLUENCY

➢ Linguistic:

- Insufficient L2 linguistic knowledge to match pre-verbal plan (conceptualisation) with how to say it (formulation)
- Limits on production (articulation)

➢ Cognitive:
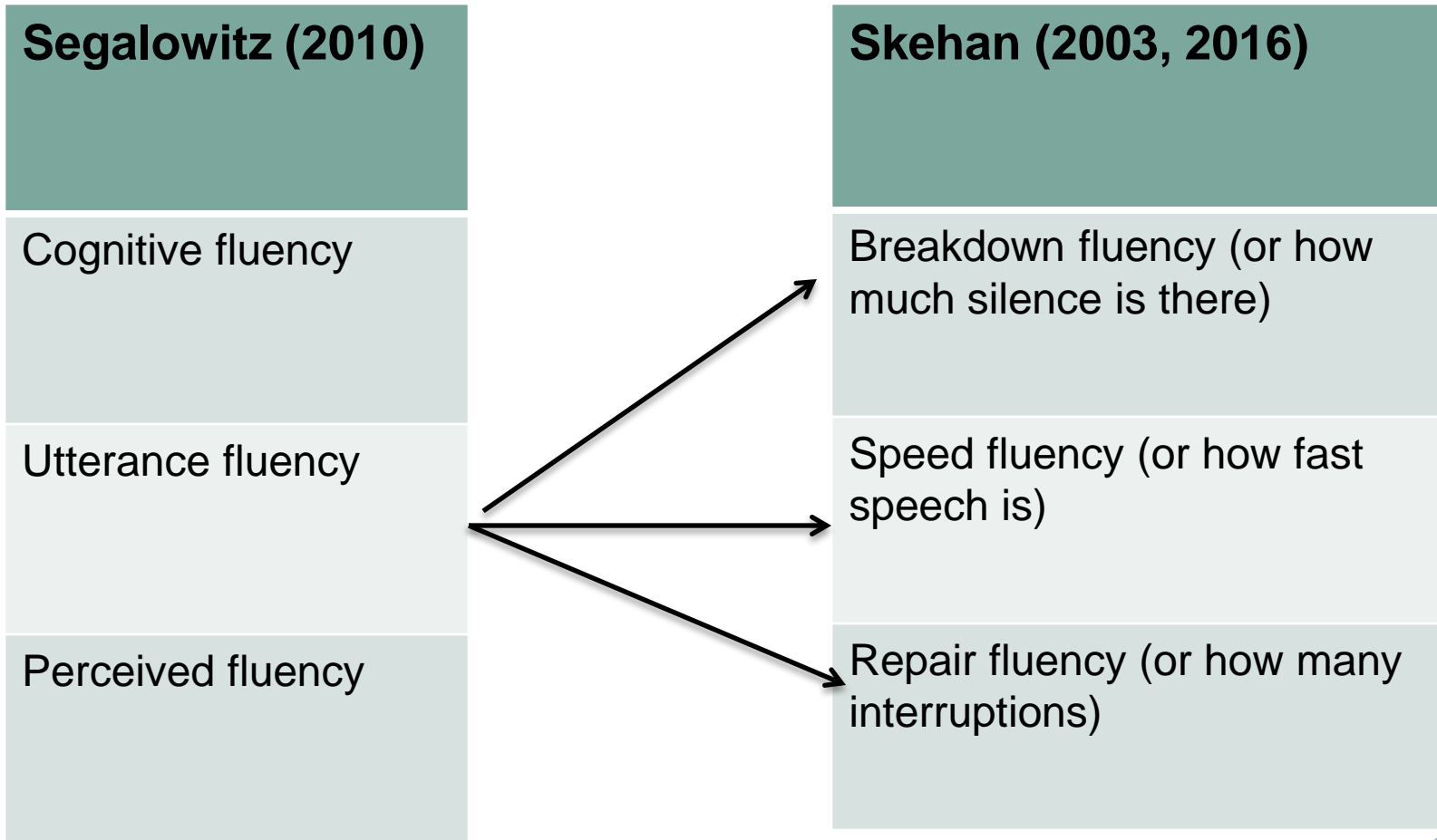
- Lack of automatic processing
- Hesitation, pausing

Most fluency research
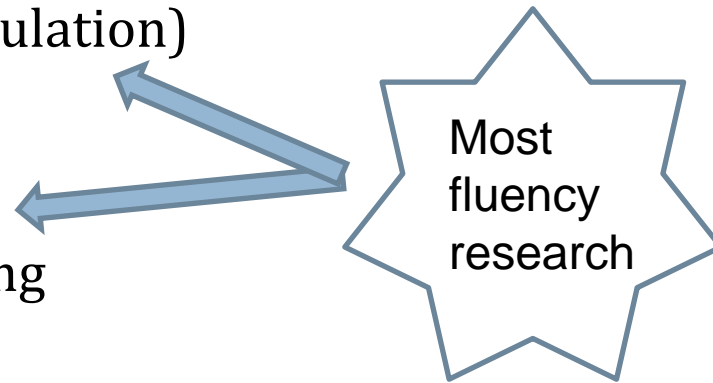
➢ BUT ALSO Contextual:

- Demands of context and task? Of Interlocutor?
- Amount of practice?
- Classroom issues - type of assessment?

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DEFINING L2 FLUENCY

Segalowitz (2010)	Skehan (2003, 2016)
Cognitive fluency	Breakdown fluency (or how much silence is there)
Utterance fluency	Speed fluency (or how fast speech is)
Perceived fluency	Repair fluency (or how many interruptions)

KEY INDICATORS OF L2 FLUENCY

- Mean length of run/utterance
- Rate of speech
  - Articulation rate
  - Speech rate (pruned)
- No and type of repairs
- No of pauses
  - Unfilled and filled pauses
  - Mid-clause pauses: a more reliable indicator

- But – challenges? How can teachers interpret such indicators?

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WHAT DOES 'UM' REALLY DO?

- Repair and pausing not all they may seem
- "MWE" v useful!

- L1 influence (Fast speech rate for Japanese, more pausing and shorter runs in Finnish, information density - Turkish, Spanish)
- Individual characteristics (speech tempo and style)

- Lexical demands (frequency of words affects choice)
- Familiarity of topic (ability to be more precise/accurate)

- Role of perceptions of fluency
  - Prosody/intelligibility
  - Communicative adequacy/comprehensibility

- Task demand trade-off

- Local exposure

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WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Understanding how task type has a real effect in managing demands of constructing fluent speech

And why practice doesn't always seem to have an impact

Some evidence from research on 1 aspect from study abroad students – task type:

➢ Study 1: Chinese students of English,
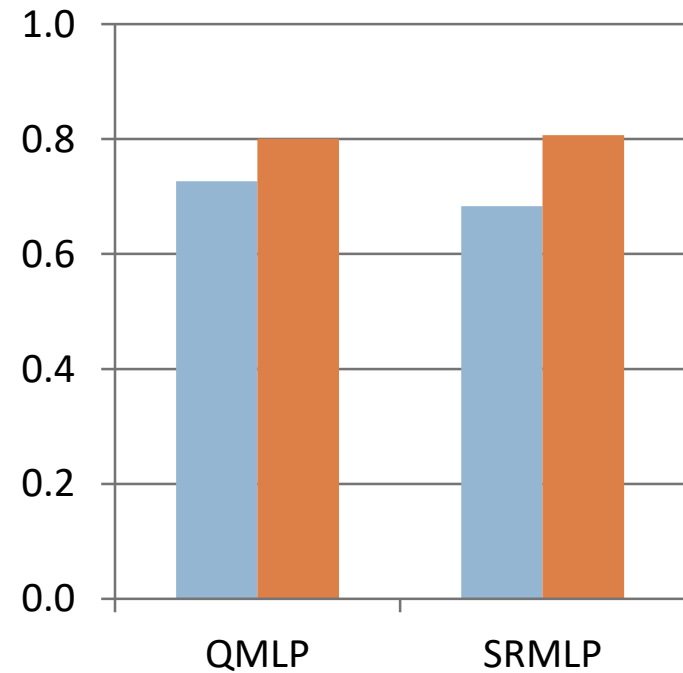
- Questions vs Story telling

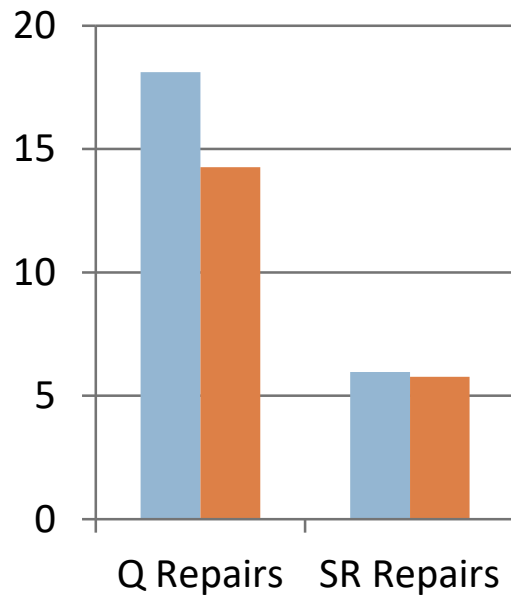Me trying to make new friends:
So... you like... stuff?

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TASK COMPARISONS, CHANGE OVER TIME

➤ Tasks both unplanned, maintaining dialogue vs monologue

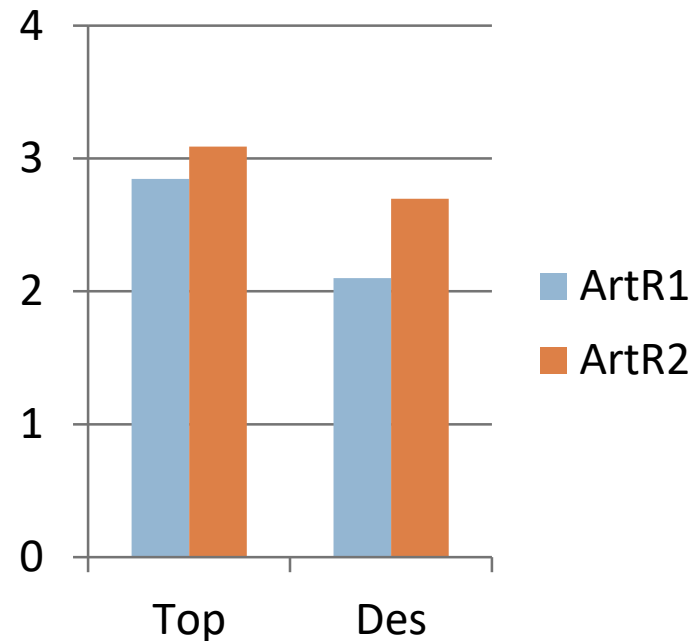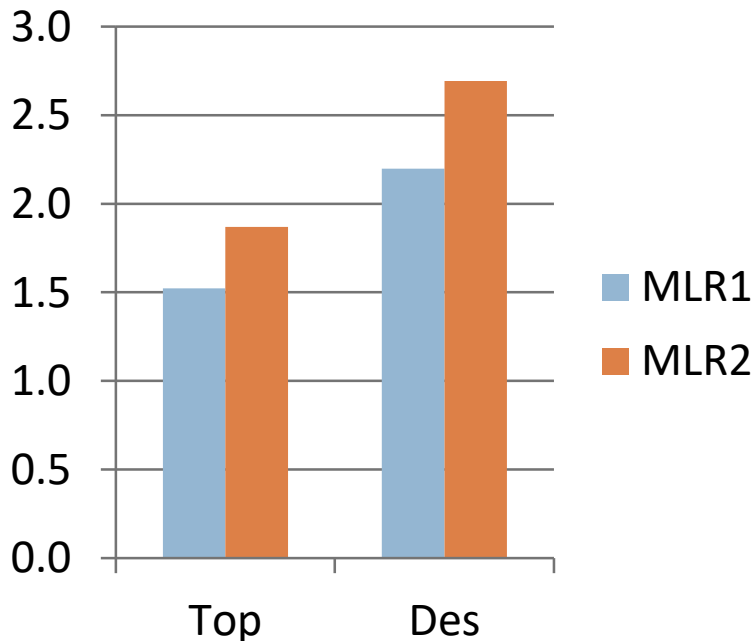➤ MLU, ArtR (sig different by task, but not much by time)

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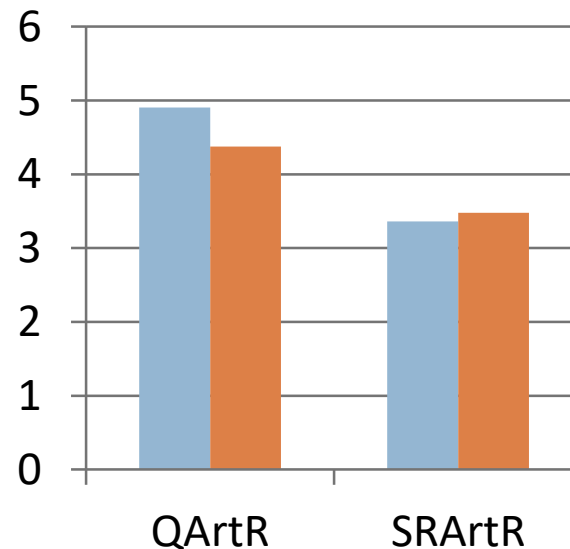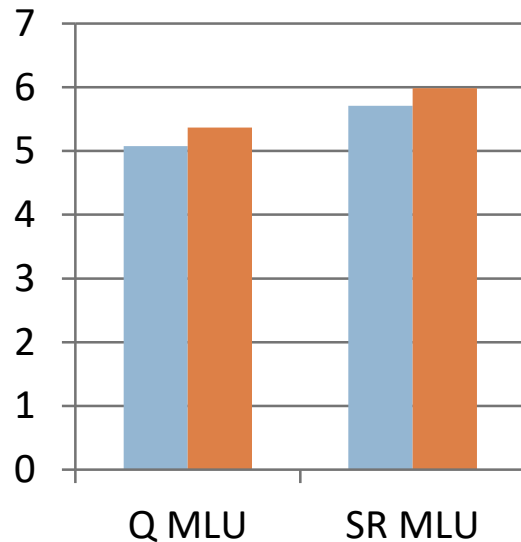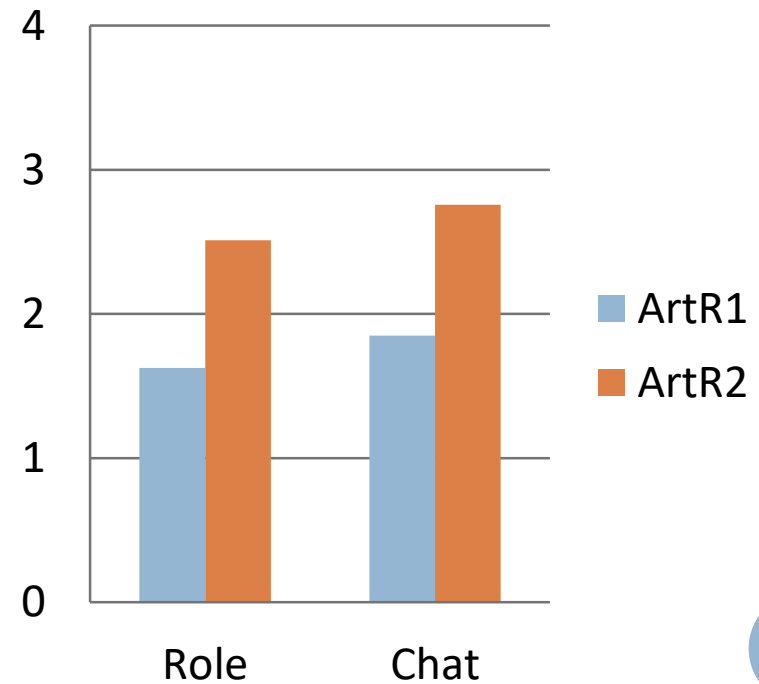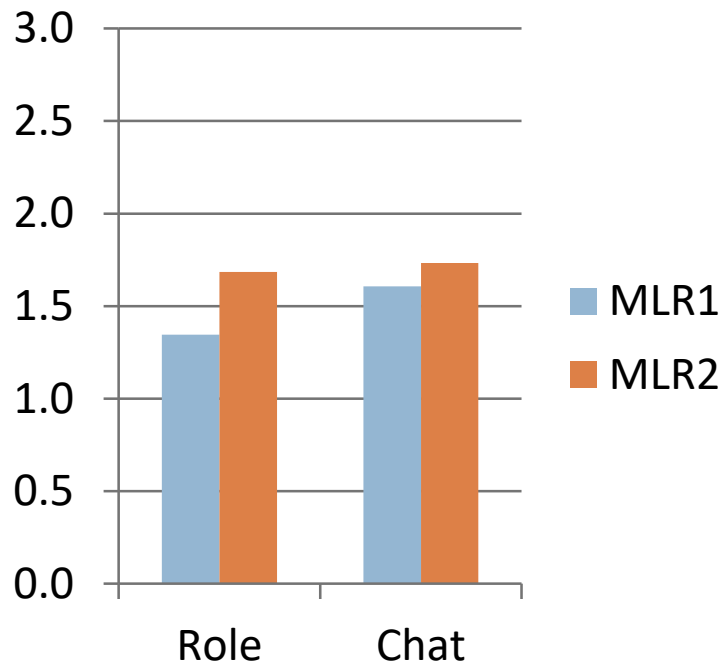
➢ Repairs, pausing (time doesn't change much)

WHAT ABOUT OTHER TASKS, OTHER LANGUAGES?

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➢ Study 2 - English learners of Chinese – 4 tasks (prepared, unprepared) – monologues, then dialogues

➢ Task differences for MLR, ArtR, also repair and pausing

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DIALOGUES = DIFFERENT
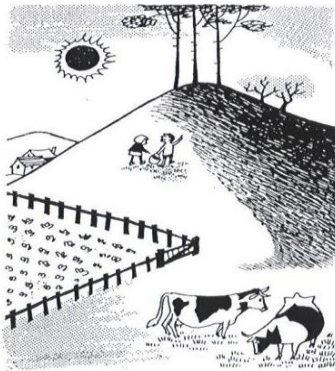
On a scale of 1-10 (fluent to not fluent), rate speed, hesitations and pausing, communicativeness, automaticity, word choice and accuracy

Speaker 1

Speaker 2

WHAT TEACHERS CAN TELL RESEARCHERS?

➢ How social/cognitive context affects use of linguistic resources - *performative vs creative competence*

- How to investigate issues over task design and time to prepare; linguistics of turn-taking

➢ How to encourage risk – make connections

- Stance - self-perception of what they are aiming for; strategies for other-orientation

- Instrumental (restricted) view of benefits of "speaking with the foreigner" if "unable to speak perfectly"