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# **Advanced Students' Oral Fluency: The Neglected Component in the CLT Classroom?**

## **1. Oral fluency—definitions and some theoretical considerations**

The very notion of *fluency* seems to be relatively problematic. On the one hand, most native speakers of any language, even without much formal education, are able to voice their opinions on whether or not somebody they hear talking is fluent. This intuitive understanding, however, is not homogeneous across social and age groups. It can be easily observed in the results of oral fluency judgement tests, such as the one conducted by Rossiter (2009), where various groups of judges, despite some observable consistency, were, in certain cases, found to pay attention to very different features of subjects' speech production.

Moreover there seems to be a disagreement as regards the very nature of this phenomenon. As it was mentioned by Lennon (1990), the term *fluency* can stand for overall *oral proficiency*, as well as one of its components, namely temporal features of speech production (number of pruned syllables per minute, distribution and duration of pauses, etc.). In such a case, the remaining components of proficient speech production are referred to as *accuracy* (Brumfit 1984).

The binary opposition between the two (or, rather, as Harmer explains it—two ends of “the communication continuum”—1993: 50) proves useful in teaching terms, since it provides a clear-cut division between two different types of exercises or classroom activities. Essentially, the difference between these two terms seems highly correlated with providing students with feedback. In fluency-oriented tasks,

attention is paid to the “content of what they are saying, rather than the way they are saying it” (Thornbury 2009: 91). In contrast, accuracy-oriented activities entail extensive error correction: “focus on form—that is, on formal accuracy” (Thornbury 2009: 92). The implication of such a model is that ESL/EFL teachers face the problem of balancing the two extremes or “blending” them together in the right proportions (discussed, for instance, in: El-Koumy 2002; Harmer 1993; Thornbury 2009 and many other ESL/EFL books).

This “narrow” definition, however, poses some problems, especially as regards advanced students of English. This is because it suggests that two groups of phenomena connected with oral production (namely, its temporal features and “correctness”) are not interrelated. Though this distinction may be useful in purely practical terms, there exist researchers who claim that, especially in the case of advanced students, it is relatively “difficult to maintain” (Nation and Newton 2009). For instance, Brumfit (1984; in: McCarthy 2005: 2) stresses the fact that “fluent language does not necessarily mean inaccurate language”. Nation and Newton (2009: 152) report on the results of a study where an activity “designed to bring about an increase in fluency, also resulted in a reduction of errors and an increase in grammatical complexity” (after: Arevart and Nation 1993; Nation 1989). Thus, they claim that “developments in fluency are related to developments in accuracy” and that, in fact, “it is not possible to account for developments in fluency simply through an increase in speed of processing” (after: Schmidt: 1992), but, instead, it is connected with a whole range of factors (ibid.: 152).

Therefore, in this article the former, “broad” definition of fluency was used. As Lennon aptly put it, *oral fluency* is “the highest point on a scale that measures spoken command of a foreign language” (1990: 389; quoted in: Rossiter 2009: 397). Such an interpretation of this concept entails the existence of various fluency markers, connected with a number of aspects of speech production. These were enumerated by certain authors, for instance: McCarthy (2005: 1-6); Rossiter (2009: 395-412) Rossiter et al. (2010: 583-606), and presented in the Table 1.

Certainly, the notion of fluency is not restricted to the terms and definitions in the table. As it was explained by Thornbury (2009: 11-40), speakers who are successful at conveying their message need to possess extensive knowledge of pragmatic, linguistic, extralinguistic, grammatical, lexical and phonological phenomena.

However, such a broad definition poses the problem of how to distinguish between fluency development and language teaching as such. This is the main reason for which advanced students were chosen as a target group in this article—in their case it is easier to distinguish between the two phenomena. Advanced<sup>1</sup> students already possess some *declarative knowledge* that might be transformed into *procedural knowledge* by means of fluency-oriented exercises. It needs to be

<sup>1</sup> For the sake of this article it was assumed that *advanced students* are the ones whose proficiency level, as described in the CEFR, is C1/C2 or C2.

stressed that the former notion should not be treated as synonymous with *accuracy*. In other words, students' extensive linguistic knowledge does not have to result in truly accurate speech production.

**Table 1. Fluency constituents**

Name of the constituent	Sources
Appropriate speech rate (Rossiter et al.: 584)	Derwing et al. 2004; Freed 1995; Kormos and De'nes 2004; Lennon 1990; Riggensbach 1991; Rossiter 2009; Towell et al. 1996
Length, frequency and distribution of silent pauses and non lexical fillers such as <i>um</i> and <i>uh</i> (Rossiter et al.: 585)	Derwing et al. 2004; Foster and Skehan 1999; Freed 1995; Lennon 1990; Riggensbach 1991; Rossiter 2009
Mean length of run, i.e. average number of syllables between pauses (Rossiter et al.: 585)	Ejzenberg 2000; Lennon 1990; Riggensbach 1991; Towell et al. 1996
Discourse markers (Rossiter et al.: 585)	Guillot 1999; Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992; Tyler 1992
Semantic density of the utterances	Fillmore 1979
Automaticity	Schmidt 1992
Phonological fluency	Pennington 1989
Natural use of language	Brumfit 1984

## 2. Ways of teaching oral fluency

One of the tendencies in the fluency-oriented ESL/ELF literature is connected with the criticism of the weak version<sup>2</sup> of the *communicative language teaching*, or the way in is used in the foreign language classroom. For instance, Gatbonton and Segalowitz (2005: 327) claim that:

Although one component of fluency is automatic, smooth and rapid language use, there are no provisions in current CLT methodologies to promote language use to a high level of mastery through repetitive practice. In fact, focused practice continues to be seen as inimical to the inherently open and unpredictable nature of communicative activities. Thus, when teachers believe that learning has reached the point where reinforcement of new forms through practice is necessary, they tend to revert to non-communicative means for attaining this end (such as pattern practice).

<sup>2</sup> The *weak* version is often described as *learning to use*, as opposed to *using to learn* (Richards & Rodgers 1995: 66).

Similar concerns were expressed by a number of other researchers, for example, Rossiter et al. (2010), or El-Koumy (2002). All of them criticise the CLT (or the way it is used by teachers) for the insufficient focus on oral fluency. Gatbonton and Segalowitz claim that very few CLT teachers are actually able to create “genuinely communicative classrooms” (2005: 325). These authors also propose a solution—further referred to as ACCESS (*Automatisation in Communicative Contexts of Essential Speech Segments*)—whose main premise is that students should be taught certain phrases and expressions in a truly communicative context (ibid: 325-328). They divide this process into three stages (ibid: 325-334):

- The *Creative Automatisation Phase* where the teacher tests whether students are able to perform a task in terms of their linguistic abilities and skills (in the form of a communicative activity). In case of problems, the teacher provides ready-made phrases as well as necessary explanations and ensures that students have the same basic set of expressions at their disposal. What follows it is the *Main Task* that allows students to “strengthen the control of the problematic utterances” elicited in the previous phase. This task is supposed to be *genuinely communicative*, since the learners are expected to gather and, then, present data obtained from their friends by means of conversations (hence, there exists both an *information gap* and a *communicative need*). In addition, the authors stress that such an approach is *inherently repetitive*, since in order to achieve a communicative goal, the learners should use the presented structures a number of times; moreover it is also perceived as *functionally formulaic*, as the utterances, used as chunks, have very clearly defined pragmatic functions.
- The *Language Consolidation Phase* whose main purpose is to allow the teacher to focus on the most problematic utterances and draw students’ attention to *fluency* (understood in the “narrow” sense), and *accuracy*, also by means of “traditional” methods that are not normally associated with the CLT, i.e. exercises that do not have an explicit communicative purpose.
- The *Free Communication Phase*—using essential speech segments in a “more open context”, students are able to express their views, which usually entails the use of less predictable language.

The view that (formulaic) expressions and phrases are the CLT’s “missing ingredient” as regards fluency development was also shared by Rossiter et al. (2010). Their approach can be called a more traditional one—they do not insist on the communicative nature of the *presentation* exercises, but, instead, they suggest repetitions (e.g. a *disappearing text* where students keep repeating the text while more and more words—especially formulaic expressions—are deleted from it; ibid: 589, adapted from Nation and Newton: 2009), *explicit presentation* (a list of expressions found in a given reading passage, followed by controlled practice—students are to use these structures while they “engage in

a series of role-plays”—*ibid*: 590, adapted from Keller and Warner: 2005), *pre-task planning* (students prepare a presentation and they are asked to include discourse markers—*ibid*: 592, adapted from Matthews: 1994), and manipulating the utterances in non-communicative settings (students are presented with short dialogues and their task is to write “extended” versions, containing more formulaic expressions—*ibid*: 593, from Nattinger and DeCarrico: 1992). Moreover, they advocate the use of *meta-discussions* (i.e. discussions where students can comment on their strategies, difficulties with speaking etc.), *linguistic data analysis* (e.g. “identifying factors that affect fluency”—*ibid*: 595) and, finally, speaking exercises: *repetitions* (“tracking and shadowing”; *ibid*: 597-598), poster presentations (*ibid*: 597) and the 4/3/2<sup>3</sup> technique.

Unlike Gatbonton and Segalowitz, Rossiter et al. stress that their approach is not intended to significantly modify the CLT but, rather, to add a new, missing component which might be broadly summarised as paying *conscious attention* to certain aspects of fluency development. The authors also remark that there exists the need for more practical activities (*free communicative production*; 2010: 599). This was also proposed by El-Koumy (2002) who adopted the traditional Presentation-Practice-Production approach and divided fluency-oriented lessons into three corresponding stages, namely: *Presentation of speaking skills*, *Guided conversation* and *Free conversation*. The first phase is devoted to the presentation of new vocabulary items, along with the ways of using them in speaking—“a speaking rule and a phonics rule” (*ibid*: 69).

The three works mentioned are further referred to as examples of *vocabulary-based solutions*, since their main focus is on target phrases and expressions. According to these authors, *fluent*, i.e. smooth and accurate speech production is attained as a result of a high degree of *automatisation* of essential formulaic phrases. However, this approach seems to fail to fully represent other aspects of attaining oral fluency. Some examples of such aspects can be found in the following section, devoted to alternative approaches to oral fluency development.

## 2.1. Other ways of attaining fluency

Though perfecting one’s automaticity in speech production by learning/revising vocabulary items seems to contribute to development in oral fluency, there exist other techniques of improving spoken proficiency that need to be taken into account while teaching advanced students. Though the list below is by no means complete, it provides an insight into these aspects of spoken fluency that are under-represented in the *vocabulary-based solutions*:

<sup>3</sup> 4/3/2 refers to an exercise where students are asked to convey the same message in, respectively, 4, 3 and 2 minutes.

- **Improving students' stress management skills in order to minimise the effect of communication apprehension** (Piechucka-Kuciel 2011: 203-204). Since stress can significantly impede one's communicative abilities, (*debilitating anxiety*, as described by Nerlicki 2011: 105), it seems advisable to prepare students to face it. While in the case of intermediate learners this can be achieved by means of *supportive listening* and *peer correction* (Nation and Newton: 119), these methods do not have to be the most effective ones in the case of advanced learners (*ibid.*: 22). One of the ways of preparing this group of students to cope with stress might be *immunising* them to *debilitating anxiety* by means of exposure to fine and controlled "doses" of stress (Molenda 2012: 26-32).
- **Focusing on temporal fluency.** Nation and Newton (2009) remark that in the case of advanced students it seems important to focus on the pace of oral production. One should also remember that there exist other skills connected with the notion of temporal fluency, for instance *impromptu speaking* (Thornbury 2009) or natural distribution of pauses. In order to focus on these features, teachers are advised to utilise form-oriented exercises, where the focus is shifted from meaning to form (Molenda 2012: 32-34; Nation and Newton 2009: 153-155).
- **Raising students' awareness.** Conscious attention paid to fluency development seems to be a threefold phenomenon (Molenda 2012: 41-44). Firstly, students who are aware of their linguistic/extralinguistic goals connected with oral proficiency (*goal awareness*) are more likely to find the form-oriented exercises purposeful. Secondly, one should be aware of their own level of proficiency in order to be able to focus on problematic areas (*proficiency awareness*). Finally, it seems advisable for students to develop *strategic competence* (Drożdżał-Szlest 2011: 131) which is a way of compensating for any potential deficiencies in the remaining three competences (*linguistic, sociolinguistic* and *discourse* competence).

As it was stated by Nation and Newton (2009), one of the most important tasks for the teacher who wants to develop their students' fluency is to make speaking challenging. Be it temporal constraints, difficult topics, or dealing with stressful situations, students need to perform at "a higher than normal level" in order to improve their oral proficiency (*ibid.*: 153). It appears that this end was not given enough attention in the *vocabulary-based solutions*.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Though Rossiter et al. (2010) mention temporal factors (1 exercise) as well as learners' consciousness (one exercise that does not concern awareness of vocabulary items), they seem to pay more attention to introducing new phrases and expressions (at least 8 exercises).

## 2.2. Shortcomings of the CLT in the case of advanced students' fluency

Nevertheless, let us assume for the sake of this discussion that only vocabulary-based aspects of oral fluency development are key to the emergence of this skill. Therefore, target language phrases and expressions (*formulaic phrases, gambits, discourse markers etc.*; Rossiter et al. 2010) are the most important constituents of fluency. Then, there invariably arises the question of how teaching these lexical items is approached in the *vocabulary-based solutions*. Let us first explore the strengths and weaknesses of the ACCESS methodology, which provides a good example of how "vocabulary-based CLT" is used in the foreign language classrooms.

Gatbonton and Segalowitz (2005: 341) stress that the ACCESS methodology is aimed mostly at the less advanced students, however, they also claim that it can be used even "with the ESL teachers (in the CLT workshops)". In their opinion the more difficult tasks, e.g. arguing a case, gathering and synthesizing information etc. "would elicit the more sophisticated language" (e.g., "*Okay, I seem to be the oldest here so I suppose I should take on the role of grandfather*" instead of simply "*I am the grandfather*"), (ibid: 341).

While it is possible that the responsible and mature students would use such utterances, there is no guarantee that they will actually do so. They might as well utilise the former sentence, which is by all means easier for them to produce, and its being curt might as well prove more effective as regards gaining and maintaining attention during a group conversation (as suggested by Thornbury 2009: 8, where he mentions "working hard to gain the floor").

The question that invariably arises is: should a teacher intervene in such a situation and correct a well-formed sentence? How to convince students to use lexically dense (and, at times, somewhat artificial) language during the communicative task whose very nature promotes simplicity and effectiveness by placing emphasis on *meaning* and assigning "some priority" to the *completion of the task* (Brown 2001: 50, after: Skehan 1998)? In other words, is it possible to "punish" the students for the fact that they do what the very nature of communicative tasks requires them to do, i.e. seek simple, effective, easy-to-use-and-comprehend solutions to ensure that the core message is conveyed?

These doubts lead one to the conclusion that students need to have a reason to use target vocabulary in a communicative context. This reason is more likely to exist if both the form and the meaning of the lexical items are new to the students. Let us examine two examples when these conditions are met:

- Pre-intermediate students are assigned a communicative task where they have to disagree with their friends' opinion. Since they do not know how to disagree in English, the vocabulary items provided by the teacher are more than likely to be used extensively; otherwise the task might not be completed.
- Advanced students of Business English were asked to discuss an issue connected with marketing, e.g. the phenomenon of *branding*. Using new items

of target vocabulary, as opposed to providing descriptive definitions of given phenomena (e.g. *brand aware*), makes it much easier for them to effectively convey their message.

In both examples the *communicative need* necessitates the use of new vocabulary items. However, formulaic phrases that are supposed to be helpful in fluency development are not new to the students as regards their meaning, especially if they are arranged according to their pragmatic functions (e.g. apologising, agreeing, negotiating, etc.), as described by the mentioned proponents of the *vocabulary-based solutions*. Certainly, students whose linguistic repository of formulaic phrases which are used to express disagreement is limited to simple vocabulary items, e.g. *I disagree, you are wrong*, and *this is not true*, would benefit from learning some new expressions, e.g. *I am not fully convinced that...* However, in the case of truly communicative activities, where one chooses between a new phrase and a phrase that can be retrieved effortlessly as a whole from one's memory (McCarthy 2005: 4), given that both phrases have similar meaning, students might decide to use an easier solution, as it gives them better chances of completing the task as such.

Thus, it appears that the *satisfaction of one's communicative needs* might lead to the cessation of progress as regards the acquisition of formulaic phrases which constitute one of the key aspects of oral fluency. In fact, Han and Selinker (2005: 495) mention it as one of the key factors that can contribute to *fossilisation*.

### 2.3. Some solutions to the problems described

Certainly, there exist some ways of tackling both potential problems posed by the attempts to apply the *vocabulary-based methods* in the case of advanced students. In order to create a consistent approach to teaching oral fluency to this particular target group, the author of this article coined an ad-hoc notion of *form-oriented speaking*. It serves as a cover-all term for a number of solutions that were described in the ESL/EFL literature, as well as devised by the author himself. For the sake of brevity, the list of practical solutions was not included in this article. Instead, let us explore some general principles of the *form-oriented speaking*. It needs stressing that these principles are by no means the only way of tackling the aforementioned problems. It is hoped, however, that they will contribute to the ongoing discussion on this topic.

The most effective way of tackling the first problem (cf. 2.1) seems to be connected with the notion of *challenging speaking* and the readiness to perform at a *higher-than-normal level* (Nation and Newton 2009). By controlling the level of difficulty/stressfulness of a given task, as well as imposing certain time limits on the students' oral production, the teacher might make speaking more challenging. The authors' observation is that students commented particularly favourably on



the tasks that involved some elements of humour or were similar to a challenging game. It is possible that the tasks which are not devoid of humour, might be perceived as less face-threatening.

Moreover, it seems advisable to raise students' awareness, not only by means of discussions devoted to the perception of fluency (Rossiter, et al. 2011: 595), but, also, by making learners understand their goals, monitor their progress and develop their *strategic competence*. Practical methods and tools that might be used to attain this end, they can be found in: Carrarelo 2010; Lee 2005; Molenda 2012. Other exercises, devoted to the remaining aspects of *fluency development*, were described by: Harmer 2009; Molenda 2012; Nation and Newton 2009.

The second problem (cf. 2.2) appears to be more difficult to solve. One might assume that in order to enhance students' knowledge and command of formulaic phrases, there should exist a reason that would necessitate the use of new (possibly longer and more complicated), non-automatised lexical items. There are, most likely, many ways of achieving this goal. The one proposed by the author of this article will be referred to as *performance need*, as opposed to the *communicative need*. In short, the concept of the *performance need* was based on the assumption that one of the reasons for using new formulaic phrases is the need to achieve certain performance effects.

This point of view is based on a classification of the formulaic phrases created by Alison Wray (in Białas 2011: 42). She proposed a two-fold way of classifying formulaic expressions: according to the criteria of *social interaction* (*commands, storytelling, institutionalised forms*; also described in the *vocabulary-based solutions*) and according to the *reduction of processing effort* (Wróbel 2011: 58). The main categories in the latter division (*processing shortcuts, time-buyers and mnemonics*) provide a valuable insight into the nature of formulaic phrases from the perspective of fluency development, but they might also be helpful while devising fluency-oriented exercises.

For instance, learners who are asked to keep talking for a given period of time (the aforementioned *time limits*) might be compelled to use *time-buyers* in order to complete the task. Then, the meaning of the phrase will be secondary to its form—the longer and more sophisticated it is, the more time it “buys”.

Finally, it should also be stressed that making speaking *challenging* is a way of creating the *performance need*. Though such a context might be perceived as somewhat artificial, if introduced in the form of a game, it might create another incentive to perform at a *higher-than-normal level*. Moreover, in order to understand the performance functions of formulaic phrases, students should develop their *strategic competence*—another constituent of the *form-oriented* speaking mentioned before.

### 3. Advanced students' oral fluency in practice—materials survey

#### 3.1. Research question

The aim of the research was to verify how the theoretical considerations connected with the development of oral fluency are realised in practice. In order to attain this goal, 3 CPE (C2 level according to the *Common European Reference Framework*) general English coursebooks were examined. The materials were scanned for speaking exercises (both the main tasks and pre-task warm-up exercises) and, then each speaking exercise was examined for the following elements:

- performance (interactive/monologic);
- elements that would make it challenging for the students:
  - temporal constrains,
  - other formal constrains/rules (e.g. impromptu speaking);
- focus on formulaic phrases:
  - ways of presenting them,
  - classification,
  - reasons for which they should be used by students (e.g. both *form* and *meaning* are new to the students; *performance need*),
  - comments on the use and nature of formulaic phrases;
- raising students' awareness (*strategic competence, goal awareness, ways of monitoring one's proficiency*).

#### 3.2. Objects

The books surveyed differ as regards the format of target speaking tasks. The oldest one, *Proficiency Gold* (2000) aims at preparing students for the exam before the revisions introduced in 2002; *Upstream Proficiency* (2002) complies with the 2002-2012 format of the exam, while *Cambridge English: Proficiency Masterclass* (2012) is intended for the students who want to take the recently revised version of the CPE (introduced in 2013). In the case of other speaking tasks, e.g. lead-in or follow-up discussions, no substantial differences were identified.

It was hoped that by comparing three books representing three different variants of the exam it would be possible to find indications of certain changes in the perception of oral fluency development. However, one needs to remember that the results of this study were mostly indicative and that, in order to fully represent the change in teaching materials, many more publications would have to be described and assessed. Therefore, the most crucial question that was to be answered in this article is the one of the general attitude of the authors of the EFL

books to teaching oral fluency. This is why the books used represent different time periods and were created by different authors/publishing houses.

### 3.3. Research procedure

The aforementioned books were analysed for speaking tasks/exercises. Features of each task and exercise were described in an assessment form. Templates of these forms were based on similar documents used by Rossiter et al. (2010) in their fluency-oriented materials survey. Finally, all the results were compiled in one table and the percentage values were calculated for selected features.

### 3.4. Results

Table 2. Aspects of fluency development in selected C2 student's books

	Gold	Upstream	Masterclass
<b>Exercises:</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>39</b>
Interactive	18	16	15
Monologic	37	57	24
<b>Challenges:</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>
Temporal constrains	2	6	1
Other constrains	2	1	0
<b>Formulaic phrases:</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>7</b>
Lists	3	26	1
Listening	5	0	4
Vocabulary exercises	0	0	2
Reading exercises	1	0	0
<b>Classification of formulaic phrases:</b>			
Social interaction	9	26	7
Processing effort	0	0	0
<b>Performance need:</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Awareness:</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>
Strategic	1	7	2
Goal	0	0	0
Proficiency	0	7	4

Figures in the table represent the number exercises of a given kind/type present in a book. For instance, one can observe that in each case, monologic speech production occurs more frequently than the interactive tasks. There are 71% of monologic tasks in *Gold*<sup>5</sup>, 78% in *Upstream* and 65% in *Masterclass*.

As regards the proposition that *challenging speaking* should be included in speaking materials, one might say that it is realised, to a certain extent, in every book analysed. In *Gold*, it accounts for about 7% of the speaking exercises (with 3.6% for both *temporal constrains* and *other constrains*); it constitutes approximately 10% (respectively: 8% and 2%) in *Upstream* and 3% in *Masterclass* (with no *non-temporal constrains* observed).

*Upstream* is the book where formulaic phrases were introduced, as a list, as many as many as 26 times. In *Gold* and *Masterclass* there are fewer sections devoted to this topic, (respectively 9 and 7), but it seems that their way of presenting formulaic chunks is more varied. For instance, in the former book, this end is achieved by means of 3 lists, 5 listening tasks and one reading exercise, while in the latter there is one list, 4 listening and 2 vocabulary exercises. In all the cases formulaic phrases were arranged according to their functions connected with *social interaction*; there were also no attempts to utilise the *performance need*.

The topic of students' awareness seems to be under-represented in *Gold* (only one comment), while in *Upstream* there are 7 exercises where students focus on both *strategic* and *proficiency awareness* (since these exercises combine analysing 2 aspects of students' awareness, number "7" was assigned to both categories in the table). Finally, in *Masterclass* there are 2 comments about the development of strategic competence and 4 exercises devoted to the analysis of (dys)fluency markers.

### 3.5. Discussion

The results of the materials survey indicate that some CPE student books meet, to a certain extent, the requirements for a successful fluency-oriented language course for advanced students proposed by Nation and Newton (2009). On the other hand, in all the cases the proportion of the exercises that encourage learners to perform at a higher-than-normal level to the overall number of speaking exercises does not exceed 10%. According to Nation and Newton (2009: 156), in most cases it is advisable to introduce more such tasks:

Where the second language is not used outside the classroom, it is very important that about a quarter of class time is given to fluency activities. (...)

If fluency activities are included in each lesson and make use of new language items taught in that lesson, then these items should occur at a low

<sup>5</sup> Short names of the books were used in this section of the article for the sake of brevity.

density in the fluency material. (...) A second alternative is to include fluency activities in each lesson that make use of items learned several days or weeks before. A third alternative is periodically to give large blocks of time to fluency activities. This suggestion corresponds to Brumfit's (1985) "syllabus" with holes in it". These holes or gaps are times when no new material is presented and there are fluency directed activities.

As regards formulaic phrases, the contents of all the books seems to be in accordance with the principles of the *vocabulary-based solutions*. Although in the case of *Gold* and *Masterclass* some attempts were made to facilitate vocabulary acquisition (i.e. formulaic phrases are not always presented in the form of a list—sometimes students are requested to find them in a recording or text), there were no instances of another classification being utilised. Moreover, though in all three books there exist certain exercises that make speaking more challenging, none of them was directly connected with the use of formulaic phrases.

Certain elements of the *vocabulary-based solutions* are, however, not present in the books analysed. For instance, their authors seem to prefer not to include the non-speaking ways of practising vocabulary items, such as: gap-filling/matching exercises (apart from *Masterclass*), disappearing text activities, expanding phrases by adding new elements to them, etc. (Rossiter et al. 2010). They also avoid the non-communicative speaking activities, for instance: repetitions and drills, tracking, shadowing, etc. (ibid.). Thus, the elements of *vocabulary-based solutions* that prevail in the student books are: lists, communicative activities and data analysis tasks.

*Gold*, *Upstream* and *Masterclass* differ in terms of tasks and explanations devoted to students' awareness of certain aspects of oral fluency development. In the former book, the author was able to identify only one comment concerning *strategic competence*, while in the remaining two this topic was given more systematic attention. For instance, in *Upstream* students are asked several times to listen to exam recordings and assess the speakers in terms of their proficiency, as well as strategies used. In every case, one speaker handles the task more effectively, while the other is not always able to speak fluently. This solution not only provides students with examples of a successful performance, but also sensitises them to possible shortcomings of their own oral production. In *Masterclass* both aforementioned approaches seem to be combined—a few of the tips provided in special text boxes refer to *strategic competence* (though the majority of them refer to the format of the CPE exam), and there exist some listening tasks where students are asked to comment on the speakers' proficiency (but not strategies!)

## 4. Conclusions

It appears that, in general, the elements of the *form-oriented speaking* seem to be missing from the materials surveyed. Although these books contain certain *challenging* activities, as well as awareness-raising tasks, in none of them were

all of these features adequately represented. It might be the case that there does not exist a universal fluency-oriented guideline to be followed, and the mentioned activities are regarded as optional, depending on the author's decision.

Also, very little attention is devoted to making students use selected formulaic phrases and expressions. As it was mentioned before, lists accompanying speaking tasks are one of the most frequently used devices. These lists might be created by means of the aforementioned listening/reading/vocabulary activities, or presented to the students as such, but their purpose remains unchanged—to provide chunks of the language that learners are asked to use in the communicative context. If similar phrases are already known to the students, the only reason to use those from the list would be the requirements of the task or teacher's request. However, the learners might be reluctant to use the target phrases if they find them too simple or complicated (in both cases, using such phrases in a communicative situation might be perceived as face-threatening). Unfortunately, unlike in the case of writing exercises, teachers usually do not have the means to control students' language and to provide negative feedback, should the learners fail to use target phrases. Thus, it seems that the learners need a more tangible reason to use formulaic phrases and expressions.

The *performance need* is by no means the ultimate solution to the problem described, and, by the same token, the *form-oriented speaking* is not the only way of shaping advanced students' fluency. However, the author hopes that his findings will contribute to the discussion on the oral fluency and that more attention will be drawn to teaching advanced students and answering the question of how, because of the satisfaction of their *communicative needs*, teaching this group is different from teaching other learners.

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