

Fluency Activity with Function Phrases

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ABSTRACT

In this project, I implemented three types of instructions in order to help students engage in the 3/2/1 fluency activity more effectively. The first instruction is an awareness raising activity, which helps students to learn and understand how to engage in the 3/2/1 fluency activity more properly. The second instruction is using visual aids of target function phrases, which remind students to use and practice them while engaging in the 3/2/1 fluency activity. The third instruction is a function activity, which pushes students to practice and automatize the function phrases through the 3/2/1 fluency activity. By having activities in different stages throughout the semester, it seemed that students gained more self-efficacy toward the 3/2/1 fluency activity as well as speaking fluency and function usage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

One objective of the EDC program is that students gain oral fluency and acquire function phrases because both oral fluency and function phrases are essential to conduct an efficient and effective group discussion. One of the theories that can be related to learners' fluency development is the Skill Acquisition Theory. According to Skill Acquisition Theory (Anderson, 1983), learners gradually transform their performances from controlled to automatic. For example, these processes happen through practice and many trials. Through repetition, controlled processes become automatized. In other words, through proceduralization, declarative knowledge will become implicit knowledge, which leads to automatization. This theory implies that lots of repetition will help learners to gain oral proficiency.

In order to help learners improve their oral proficiency through proceduralization, the 3/2/1 fluency activity is implemented every lesson in the EDC curriculum. In the 3/2/1 fluency activity, one speaker talks about two topics to a partner for three minutes. Then, the same speaker retells their talk to a different partner in two minutes. Finally, as a third time, the speaker retells for one minute to another partner. Afterwards, the speakers and listeners change roles. De Jong and Perfetti (2001) found that the 3/2/1 fluency activity is effective to develop automaticity and proceduralization through repeating the same topics over and over.

In spite of the effectiveness of this activity, students in my class found this activity rather difficult. One problem was that students did not understand the proper way to do this activity. For example, some students did not repeat the same information but they added new information or skipped some of the information that was told. When engaging in the 3/2/1 fluency activity, the key point to develop proceduralization is to repeat the same talk rather than giving a different talk (De Jong & Perfetti, 2001). Another example is that students did not try to speak faster when they spoke for a shorter time (2 minutes or 1 minute). Not recognizing the importance of speaking faster, the 3/2/1 fluency activity might be considered as repeating the same talk without any fluency improvement. A final example is that some listeners started asking questions to a partner. If listeners are allowed to ask many questions, speakers do not have to practice speaking but they would merely answer the partners' questions. These issues disturb the speakers from developing proceduralization. Therefore, it is necessary to raise students' awareness to understand how to engage in the 3/2/1 fluency activity more correctly.

The second issue, which was commonly seen in my class, was that students paused a lot and discontinued their speech very quickly. I hypothesize that there are two reasons behind it.

One reason is that students have not generated their ideas about what to talk about. If students were not provided enough planning time in advance, they usually engage in “online” planning (Yuan & Ellis, 2003). Students might take time to think while they speak. Another reason why students had a lot of pauses might be because students did not know how to extend their speech. Students were not taught explicitly how to elaborate their ideas during the 3/2/1 minute fluency activity. For example, when students were given the topic of “Which celebrity do you like?”, some of them gave the names of their favorite celebrity without any detailed elaboration and moved to the next topic (e.g., In my opinion, I like Lady Gaga because she is cool. Okay... next topic...). However, if students knew how to elaborate and extend more, they would not have any problems of discontinuing their speech. For instance, “It’s mainly because she is a famous celebrity in the world. For example, she became more famous when she wore a unique dress on the stage. I think it is very cool to express her own styles” If students had a lot of things to say, they would need to speak faster to repeat their talk. On the other hand, if students paused a lot and spoke little, they did not have to speak faster to repeat everything in a shorter time, which defeats the point of having a shorter time. Therefore, it was essential for students to learn how to extend their speech. In order to help students to elaborate their speech, Warren (2014) used the four functions (opinions, reasons, examples, and possibilities) during the 3/2/1 fluency activity. He found that when students try to learn how to elaborate with the function phrases, students could use these during the group discussion. This implies that students’ proceduralization occurred.

To solve the above problems, I implemented three different activities. The first activity is an awareness raising activity, which was conducted on the first day of instruction. This activity aims to solve the first problem (students do not understand how to conduct a proper 3/2/1 fluency activity). In order to solve the second problem (students pause a lot and finish their speech very quickly), two activities (visual aids and a function pair-check activity) were implemented. I hypothesize function phrases would be one of the useful ways to help students to elaborate their speech as Warren (2014) showed. The visual aids and pair-check activity were created to push students to elaborate by practicing function phrases through the 3/2/1 fluency activity.

MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE

Context

The project was conducted in four classes (three Level III classes and one Level IV class). These activities were designed for all the levels. Classes were selected based on their proficiency and motivation. Students in Class A (Level IV) had difficulty in speaking fluently and had low self-efficacy toward speaking English. Students in Classes B and C (Level III) had an intermediate level of proficiency and sometimes they seemed less confident about speaking English. Students in Class D (Level III) had high intermediate proficiency and high motivation to study abroad in the coming year.

Activity 1 (awareness raising activity)

On the first day of instruction, I spent quite some time to explain about the 3/2/1 fluency activity. Although students already knew about this activity from the previous semester, it was essential to remind students of its purposes and procedures because different classes did this activity slightly differently. There are two reasons why the awareness raising activity was conducted. The first purpose was to confirm that students understand why they do this activity. Particularly, I emphasized the importance of speakers’ goals by using a handout (Appendix A). Some of the

rules that were mentioned were:

- 1) Speakers need to speak as much as they could.
- 2) Speakers need to speak faster as time goes by (3 minutes -> 2 minutes -> 1 minute).
- 3) Speakers need to repeat the same content without adding new information or skipping any information.
- 4) Listeners do not ask any follow-up questions.

Next, students practiced how they could speak faster to repeat everything that they said previously. I provided students a handout of a model speech (Appendix B). Due to the time constraint, instead of doing the full 3/2/1 fluency activity, students practiced 1 minute - 45 seconds - 30 seconds for this awareness-raising activity. Students read aloud the model passage for 1 minute for the first time by themselves. Students were instructed to mark the last word to which they had read. Then, students read the same passage from the beginning one more time for 45 seconds and were asked to reach the same word that they read for the first time. The third time (30 seconds) was conducted in the same manner. By using the model passage, students were expected to understand that they should try to speak faster in order to repeat the same talk without skipping information.

After this reading activity, students told their own ideas on the same questions as the model passages with the full 3/2/1 minute activity. Since it was their first time, I provided them with a short planning time. After they finished the 3/2/1 minute fluency activity, I provided discussion questions to check whether students understood the concept of the 3/2/1 minute activity. Most students answered, "How was your performance during the 3/2/1 minute activity?" by saying that the 3 minute was the most difficult due to its length. For questions such as "What should speakers/listeners do during the 3/2/1 minute activity?", most of the students answered correctly saying that "Speakers should speak faster, repeat the same talk and do not have pauses. Listeners should only react but should not ask questions." Their answers imply that they understood how to do the 3/2/1 fluency activity correctly.

Activity 2 (Visual aid for function phrases)

The purpose of this activity is to help students to extend their speech and procedurelize the function phrases. Most of the fluency topics asked students their personal opinions. For example, "Do you think that English is important to learn?", "Is fashion important for university students?", "Where would you like to travel?", "What types of media do you often use?" and so forth. Therefore, it was essential for students to use the function phrases to state their opinion (In my opinion,... / I think... / Personally speaking,...), followed by reasons (It is because... / One reason is...). They could also use examples (For example,... / For instance,...) to elaborate more. Lastly, they could say some possible situations using "if." These functions were taught in the first semester, therefore I assumed it would be easier for students to use the function phrases during the 3/2/1 fluency activity. However, students did not necessarily use the function phrases, which caused them to finish their speech too quickly without any elaboration.

I created a laminated poster, each of which has a function phrase on it (Appendix D). First, I posted the visual aids on the whiteboard. After introducing the 3/2/1 fluency questions (e.g. "Do you think it is important for you to learn English?"), I showed an example of how to elaborate their speeches with function phrases (e.g. In my opinion, I think it is important to learn English. It is mainly because I want to make a lot of foreign friends. To be a global person, I think making friends with international friends is important. For example, my sister has a lot of international friends because she can speak English very well. She has friends from Mexico, Korea, America and Australia. If I speak English like her, I can make a lot of friends). When I

demonstrated with the visual aids, I pointed at each function poster so that students could understand what phrases they were expected to use.

After I demonstrated, students stood up and made pairs. Speakers were allowed to look at the visual aids on the whiteboard while they talked. However, when speakers were talking, I did not scaffold anything such as reminding them of using the functions or pointing at the visual aids.

Activity 3 (Function Pair-check activity)

The purpose of this activity is to push the students more to practice the function phrases. I developed a check-card for pairs to use (Appendix E). While a speaker was talking, a listener checked whether their partner was using each of the function phrases. By the time of introducing this activity, students had learned new function phrases (e.g., balance opinions, report information, different viewpoints, experiences), I started to incorporate these new functions for the 3/2/1 fluency activity. However, I thought it would be more suitable to use the discussion topics rather than general fluency topics to use the new functions. This is because some of the general fluency topics (e.g. “What mangas do you like?”, “Which celebrity do you like?”) might not be suitable for using new functions such as different viewpoints (e.g. From ..’s point of view,...) or balancing opinions (e.g. One advantage is...).

On the other hand, a discussion preparation topic is more relevant to new functions. For example, in Lesson 11, students discussed what public manners were necessary to follow. For discussion preparation, students first put check marks on the textbook and answered whether they think it is okay to do each thing (e.g. talking on the phone, putting on make-up, eating and drinking) in three different public situations (on the train, on the street, in a café and restaurant). Based on their answers, students told their opinions for 3/2/1 minutes. I showed an example of how to use the function phrases during the 3/2/1 fluency activity. As a teacher-led modeling, I said:

“In my opinion, talking on phones is not okay on the train. One disadvantage is that it is very noisy. Yesterday, when I was on the subway, a businessman was calling. It was so annoying because I wanted to sleep. However, from a busy businessman’s point of view, maybe, it was an emergency call so he needed to call to his office. My foreign friend said that making noises on the public transportation is not a big problem in her country. So, when she came to Japan, she was surprised that most of the train cars were quiet.”

After I demonstrated the model passage, students started the 3/2/1 fluency activity in pairs. Speakers were allowed to look at their textbooks when they talked. Listeners put a check mark if their speaker used a function. For example, when a speaker used, “One advantage is...” the listener checked the box of “advantages/disadvantages” one time. When a speaker used “Another advantage is..”, the listener checked one more time. Whenever a speaker was using a function phrase, the listener put a check mark. In this way, it was possible to show the frequency of the function usage more clearly. Table 1 summarizes the activities and their purposes.

Table 1. Activities throughout the semester

Time	Activities	Purposes
Lesson 1	Awareness raising activity (Appendix A-C)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students will be able to understand how to engage in the 3/2/1 fluency activity. ● Students will be able to learn the goal of the 3/2/1 fluency activity.
Lesson 2 – Lesson 7	Whiteboard visual aids (Appendix D)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students will be able to elaborate and extend their speeches without any follow-up questions. ● Students will be able to practice the function phrases. ● Students will be able to organize their speeches more coherently.
Lesson 11 – Lesson 12	Function Pair-check activity (Appendix E)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In addition to the purposes of the function activity 1, this activity pushes students more to use function phrases.

VARIATION

This project went well for the students in all the levels. Prior to introducing the pair-check activity to Class A (Level IV), I was not sure if lower level students could engage in this activity properly. However, the speakers were very focused on using the functions and the listeners were trying their best to catch what phrases the speaker was using. Especially, these low-level students seemed to be motivated to accomplish using all the functions because the goal was clear.

A minor change needs to be done for the functions that students should use. I included paraphrasing for speakers to paraphrase themselves, “I mean...” However, not so many students were able to paraphrase themselves. Therefore, instead of focusing on all the function phrases, teachers can pick some of the main function phrases so that students might feel less pressure toward the pair-check activities.

DISCUSSION

Over all, it was a new challenge for me to implement these activities. I have heard students’ voices that they felt difficulty in the 3/2/1 fluency activity. I have wanted to do something to help my students to maximize their fluency and self-efficacy development. The 3/2/1 fluency activity usually takes around 15 minutes in each class, which means that in total students spend 210 minutes (15 minutes x 14 weeks) on fluency training throughout the semester. Students can maximize their proceduralization and automaticity with that much training time.

For the awareness raising activity, students seemed to understand what they were supposed to do during the activity. Because of the explicit instruction of the 3/2/1 fluency rules in the first lesson, speakers tried to say the same things without adding new information and listeners did not try to ask follow-up questions, which were sometimes seen in the previous semester. However, even after the awareness raising activity to encourage students to speak

faster, I still observed that some students did not seem to speak faster when it came to two minutes and one minute. It might be advisable to find a good way to urge students to speak faster. One possible way is training them with a time management strategy. For example, students should keep their eyes on the timer so that they know how much time they have to repeat all the content that they said previously.

For the visual aids, I observed that some students were trying to practice all of the function phrases by looking at the visual aids on the white board. These students were able to extend and elaborate their speeches without too many pauses. Interestingly, students in Level IV were trying more to follow the visual aids. I hypothesized that the lower-level learners needed scaffolding because they found it difficult to organize and create their speech without any scaffolding. On the other hand, I also observed that many students still did not use function phrases during the 3/2/1 fluency activity. I realized that using only visual aids was not sufficient for all the students to practice function phrases.

When I introduced the pair-check activity, all of them started using the function phrases. Indeed, speakers tried to use the function phrases more than when they had only the visual aids. It is because the goal was so clear that students knew what to accomplish. Interestingly, this activity generated more reactions among students. When the time was up after each speaking time, students said, "Oh, no! It finished already!", "I couldn't say all the functions" or "So difficult!" with lots of excitement. I never observed this kind of students' reactions after the 3/2/1 fluency activity.

This pair-check activity was effective in the following points. First, students were able to continue speaking throughout the three minutes. One of the major concerns was that students felt that three minutes was too long to continue speaking. However, I changed an approach to conduct the 3/2/1 fluency as a group discussion preparation activity during weeks 11 and 12. There are quite a few things to say on the discussion topics in the textbook. Compared to the general fluency questions in the textbooks, which was usually two questions, there were more than five questions that students could talk about for discussion preparation. In addition to the number of questions, students needed to elaborate their speech using function phrases. Therefore, students never finished early because of having nothing to say.

Second, students were likely to repeat the same content compared with when they had only visual aids. One problem of the 3/2/1 fluency activity was that students sometimes skipped information or added new information when they engaged in the second and third round of speaking. With the pair-check activity, students could see their textbook and clearly understand what they have to accomplish to say within the allotted time. This observation is supported by Skill Acquisition Theory (Anderson, 1983). Students gradually transform their performances from controlled to automatic. As students were repeating the same content, they were able to speak more fluently and smoothly by using the function phrases with fewer pauses.

Third, students were also using function phrases more frequently in the group discussion after the 3/2/1 fluency activity. Students were able to pay attention to using the function phrases in the group discussion. The reason why students were able to use the function phrases more fluently may be because they had already rehearsed prior to the group discussion.

Fourth, listeners were able to engage in the 3/2/1 fluency activity more proactively rather than just listening to their partner. In the previous semester, some students looked bored when they listened to their partners, which influenced speakers' motivation. Plus, some listeners started asking follow-up questions. With the pair-check activities, listeners were able to pay more attention to their partners' talk, which influenced speakers' motivation more positively.

Despite the effects of the pair-check activity, one thing needs to be considered when

implementing the pair-check activity prior to the group discussion. Students were more automatized with function phrases due to the repetition and proceduralization. However, when students practiced by giving a monologue on the discussion topics, they tended to talk for longer without much interaction or negotiation of meaning with other members during the actual group discussion. In the EDC, students are encouraged to take turns many times so that students can have more interactions. Practicing individually before the group discussion can cause diminished interactions and negotiating for meaning. Nitta and Nakatsugawa (2014) found that students who planned and wrote what they would talk about before interactive activities tended to speak longer and had less interactions because they already knew what they would say. A similar thing was also observed in my classroom that students were likely to speak for long turns in the group discussion after the 3/2/1 minute discussion practice. Therefore, the timing for 3/2/1 fluency activities should be flexible so that students also know the importance of interacting with each other in a group discussion.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the semester project was overall effective in helping students engage in the 3/2/1 fluency activity more effectively. I believe that students should know how and why the activity is useful so that students can be more autonomous learners without teachers saying what to do each time. For future usage, more implementation with different topics, different timing and different students are encouraged.

In the future, we can assess the effectiveness of this activity more formally. For example, we could record students' oral speech and analyze the data based on Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency (CAF). Also, we could create a rating rubric to assess students' oral speech to understand how well students can elaborate their speech. I hope these activities can help learners to improve their oral fluency.

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APPENDIX A - Explanation sheets for the 3/2/1 minute fluency activity

3-2-1 minute fluency

The goal of this activity:

You will be able to speak more *fluently*.

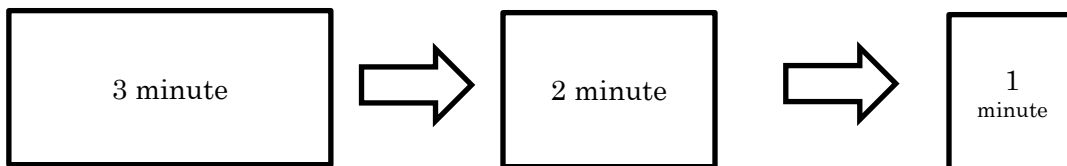
1. Speaker

- Try **NOT** to stop.
- Try to speak in a natural speed.
- Try to use 100% English.

Try to speak a lot!!!

Speak the same content.

Speak the same content.



2. Listener

-
- This is a good practice for speakers to improve their speaking skills.
- Please don't ask questions. Only react.

APPENDIX B - Modeled passage for 3/2/1 minute fluency activity

Let's practice 3/2/1 minute fluency activity!

Questions:

1. Do you like your hometown?
2. If you could live anywhere, where would you live?

I will talk about question one.

In my opinion, I like my hometown very much. My hometown is Shiga, Japan. It is mainly because the nature there is beautiful. One example is the Lake Biwa. When I was a child, I liked to go to the lake with my father and my sister a lot. In the lake, we can catch a lot of fish. But these days, the Lake Biwa is getting dirty. So I don't want to swim there. But the north part of the lake is still clean.

Another reason I like Lake Biwa is because it is convenient to access a big city. For example, it takes one hour to get to Kyoto or one hour and half to get to Osaka. When I was a high school student, I often went to Kyoto for shopping. Another example is that Shinkansen stops in Maibara station, Shiga. So, it is also easy to go to Tokyo. It takes two hours to get to Tokyo from Shiga by shinkansen. However, it is very expensive to use a shinkansen. It costs more than 10, 000 yen for a ticket.

I will talk about question two. Personally speaking, I think I want to live in Hawaii. It is mainly because there are beautiful beaches. I like to swim. If I live in Hawaii, I can go swimming every day! If I live in Hawaii, I want to try surfing. I like to watch a surfing video. I heard that surfing is very difficult but I want to try.

I also want to live in Hokkaido. It is mainly because I like driving. I heard that roads Hokkaido are very wide. So, I think it will be exciting to drive in Hokkaido. But I heard that sometimes I have to be careful about car accidents with wild animals. It is because these animals are sometimes dangerous. Another reason is that Hokkaido has a lot of delicious food. One example is Sushi. In Hokkaido, fish is so fresh. I love salmon sushi so much. I want to eat as much sushi as possible everyday.

Personally speaking, I also want to live in Daikanyama. It is mainly because Daikanyama is very fashionable. If I live in Daikanyama, I can go to my favorite shopping a lot. There are many bakeries and good cafes. I like to read books at a café. So, if I live in Daikanyama, I would like to go to cafés often.

