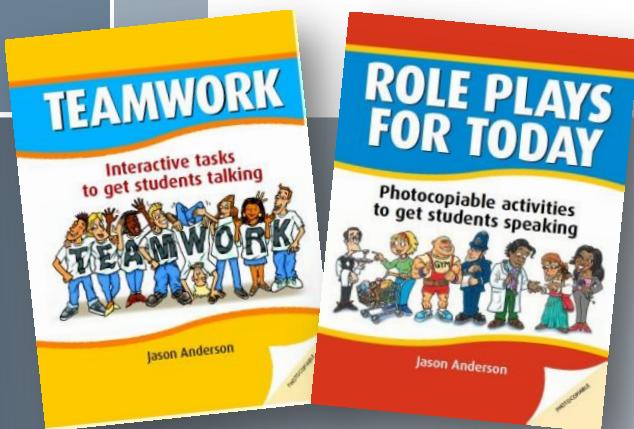


Jason Anderson  
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# Accuracy and Fluency

Practical ideas and a draft framework for helping learners to achieve both simultaneously.

**IATEFL Liverpool 2013**



# Accuracy and Fluency

## Aims:

- to look at the origins of the accuracy fluency distinction
- to ask you whether you find the distinction
  - a) valid
  - b) useful
- to give my opinion on this question
- to present a draft framework for classifying language practice activities
- to show you several activities that I think are useful for helping learners achieve accuracy and fluency (dotted around the workshop) and how they fit into the draft framework
- I'll give web address for downloading summary notes and activity booklet for the talk

## **Context:**

Adult/teenage learners, intermediate to advanced levels

## **Learning focus:**

Language practice activities, written or spoken

## **Key terminology:**

**'accuracy'** or **'focussing on accuracy'** -

when the learners and teacher are concerned with avoiding errors (spoken or written)

**'fluency'** or **'focussing on fluency'** -

when the learners and teacher are concerned with producing meaningful language as close to native speaker speed as possible (mainly spoken)

# Icebreaker: Question Poker



Play in groups of 4-6

Stage 1) On the table in front of you are question cards with 2 different questions on them. Please take one of each and working individually and silently write your own personal answer for each question on the back of the card. Keep your answers secret.

Stage 2) One person should collect in all the cards, shuffle them and lay them out on the desk so that the questions are face up (answers are hidden face down).

# Icebreaker: Question Poker



Stage 3) Take it in turns to pick up a question, look at the answer and guess who you think wrote it. Ask the question to that person who must give the answer they wrote on the card.

Stage 4) If it's the same answer, the asker 'wins' the card. If not, the asker puts the card back exactly where it was, question facing upwards.

**IMPORTANT:** If, by chance, you pick up your own card, don't reveal it's yours (poker face). Ask someone, get the answer and replace it coolly.

Stage 5) Continue until all the cards have been 'won'. The person with the most cards is the winner. Some of you will have to answer a question several times. Don't change your answer.

# Question Poker



Why I like it:

- It allows learners to write answers first (thinking carefully about accuracy).
- Learners then have to recall what they wrote, speaking ‘fluently’.
- Because they have already written it (teacher can monitor writing stage to check for errors), there is a greater chance of accuracy than if they’re just answering the questions without preparation.
- I like ‘recall’ activities. I think they help learning by getting the learners to hold language (often in chunks) in their short- term memories.

# Examples of typical language practice activities

## Which are for ‘accuracy work’ and which are for ‘fluency practice’?

### Present perfect or past simple

Complete the gaps by putting the verb into either present perfect or past simple tense:

1. I \_\_\_\_\_ (visit) Liverpool twice. The first time \_\_\_\_\_ (be) in 1995.
2. She (meet) \_\_\_\_\_ her husband in 1995.
3. I \_\_\_\_\_ never \_\_\_\_\_ (try) caviar. Is it nice?
4. John Lennon \_\_\_\_\_ (die) in 1980.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ you \_\_\_\_\_ (finish) with the paper yet?

### Speaking Practice - In my life

Student A: Tell your partner about three interesting things you’ve done in your life.

Student B: Ask questions to find out more information about each one.

Then swap over.

### Discussion – Press and media freedom

Work in groups. Do you agree with the following statements? Give reasons for your answers.

- A) “The government should make newspapers and news TV channels focus on ‘serious’ news only.”
- B) “Freedom of speech in the media is an essential part of a true democracy.”
- C) “We have a right to know about the private lives of the politicians, and the media can inform us.”

### Verb-noun collocations

Cross out the verb that is not correct:

1. He didn’t have time to make/do his homework.
2. I don’t usually take/have breakfast.
3. She often makes/does mistakes when she’s tired.
4. We need to get/take some milk. There is none in the fridge.
5. I took/made a day off work because I was sick.

# Origins of the accuracy vs. fluency distinction

Did it start with the audiolingual approaches?

“Like sin, error is to be avoided and its influence overcome, but its presence is to be expected.”

Nelson Brooks, 1960



It didn't start here!  
The audiolinguists corrected  
everything!

# Origins of the accuracy vs. fluency distinction

The terms became familiar in 1980s as communicative language teaching began changing classroom practice.

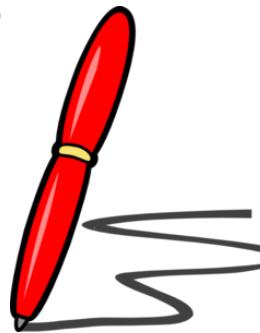
Brumfit, describing a ‘methodological distinction’, called accuracy & fluency ‘polarities’. He believed the distinction should help teachers to decide on ‘...the distribution of time between various types of activity.’

He recognised that ‘the distinction is not absolutely tidy’.

(1984: 52)

# Discussion Questions

1. Do you think the accuracy/fluency distinction is valid?
2. Is it useful to you as a teacher?
3. Would your learners find the distinction valid?



## Preparation Task

Make notes on the flipchart paper on your desk to prepare for the discussion. You can note down:

- a) useful vocabulary you want to use
- b) ideas, examples and people you'd like to mention

Please make sure your notes are legible (3 mins)

# Discussion Questions

1. Do you think the accuracy/fluency distinction is valid?
2. Is it useful to you as a teacher?
3. Would your learners find the distinction valid?

## Whose line is it anyway?

Stage 1) Rotate the flipchart sheet through 90° a few times so that you all get a chance to read each others' notes. DON'T START THE DISCUSSIONS YET!

Stage 2) Begin the discussion with your pen in your hand. Each time you mention/include one of the things on the sheet (anybody's), tick it with your pen.

*If you want to make it competitive, the person who has made the most ticks by the end is the winner.*

# Whose line is it anyway?

Why I like it:

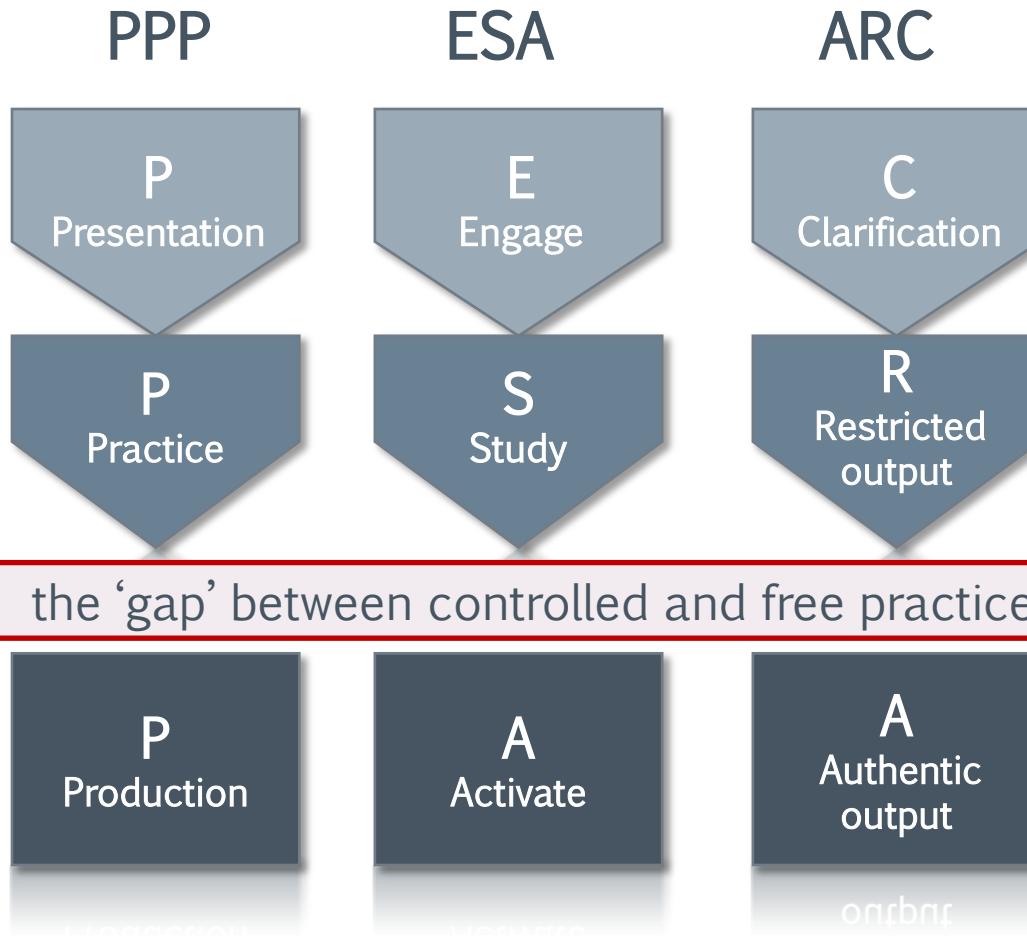
- it provides preparation time for demanding discussion activities (increases accuracy/complexity)
- it encourages learners to learn off each other and notice that they're doing this
- key themes are repeated /reworked during the discussion, leading to internalisation of language
- it involves both **competition** and theft

# Accuracy and Fluency

## Some problems with the accuracy/fluency distinction

- Many students don't see it as valid. They are aiming for both, so why separate them?
- It has caused a distortion in the mindset of some teachers and trainee teachers:  
*'Why didn't you do any correcting?'*  
*'I didn't think I was allowed to. They were doing fluency practice.'*
- It may have caused materials to become too polarised.
- It has caused a similar polarisation in models / paradigms for lesson planning and description

# The **implications** of the accuracy fluency distinction



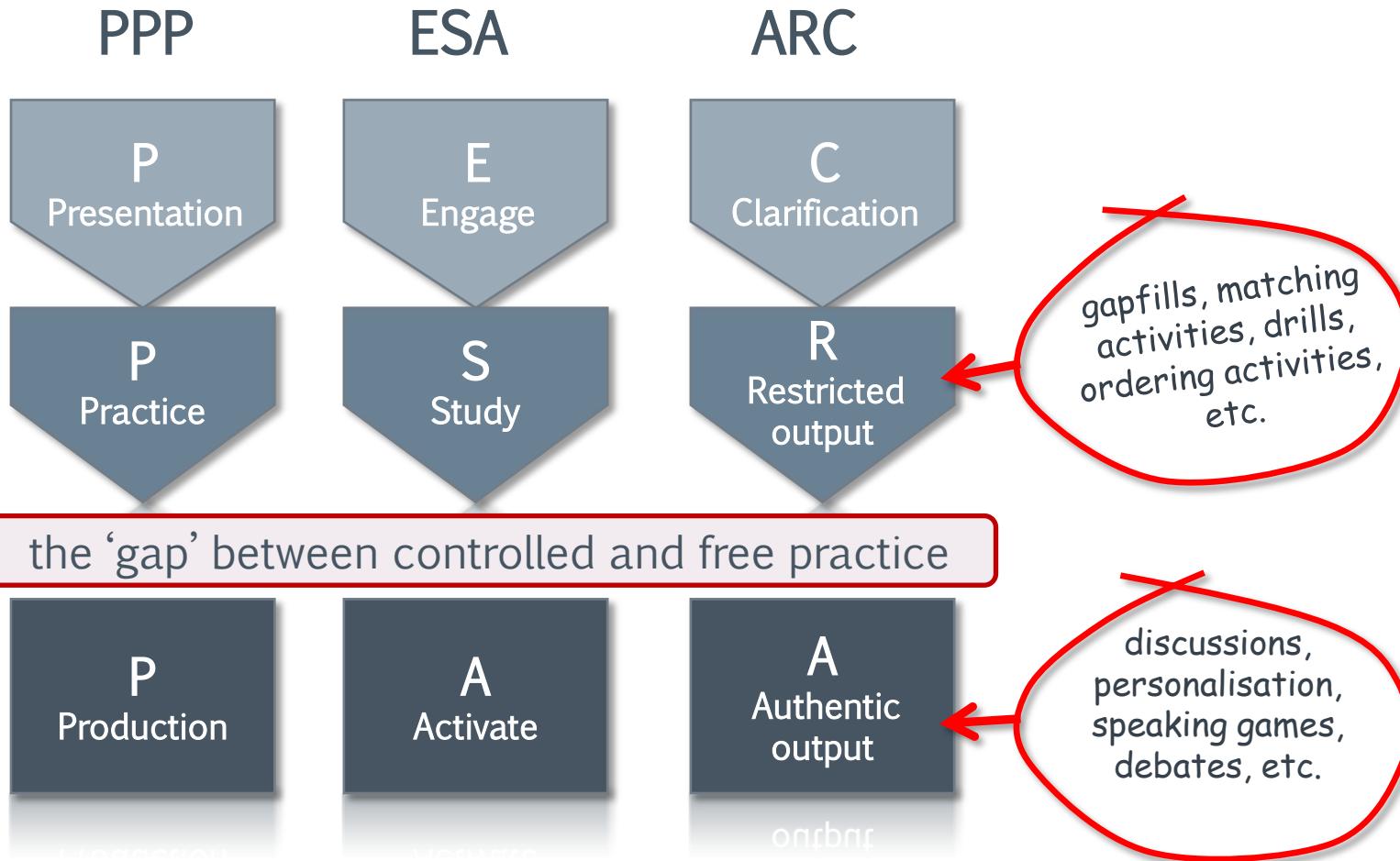
Jim Scrivener

"The focus on restricted output tends to be on getting language right, whereas the emphasis on authentic output is more often the quality of communication of messages."

"...‘authentic’ and ‘restricted’ are really end points on a continuum, rather than two all-excluding categories!"

Learning Teaching (2005)

# The **implications** of the accuracy fluency distinction



# A Framework for Categorising Language Practice Activities



# Verb Conjugation Cards

- Play in pairs.
- One person takes the green and pink cards and the other takes the yellow and blue ones
- Put them into two piles face down in front of you, making sure both of you can see all 4 piles.
- On the count of “1, 2, 3”, both of you turn over the top card of both your piles to reveal a subject (e.g. ‘he’), a tense (e.g. past continuous), a form (e.g. ?) and a verb phrase (e.g. watch TV).
- The first person to formulate the sentence using all these elements correctly wins (e.g. Was he watching TV?)
- Play again. Keep score if you like.



# Verb Conjugation Cards

Why I like them:

- they help learners focus on manipulating all the variables required to ‘conjugate’ verbs:  
tense /aspect    person    +/-/?
- they get learners to do this under time pressure
- you can add tenses/forms as they are learnt, to build up a class’s repertoire of forms they can conjugate
- learners see the validity of using them regularly

# Gapfill Extension

- Learners do a standard textbook gapfill activity. Answers are checked/confirmed.
- In pairs, learners transform the gapfill activity into questions, so that the question elicits the completed sentence. Both members of the pair note down the questions.
- Then all the learners stand, mingle and ask each other their questions. Weaker learners can peep at the answers if they need to, and stronger ones should try to answer without looking at the original exercise.

# Gapfill Extension

## Exercise 1 – Articles

Write 'the', 'a' or '-' in each gap:

1. I had a sandwich for - lunch.
2. We flew to - Dublin Airport in - Ireland.
3. It was a long flight, but eventually we arrived in the U.S.A.
4. I'm trying to learn - Japanese. I'm having a lesson tomorrow.

What did you have for lunch?

Where did you fly to?

How was the flight?

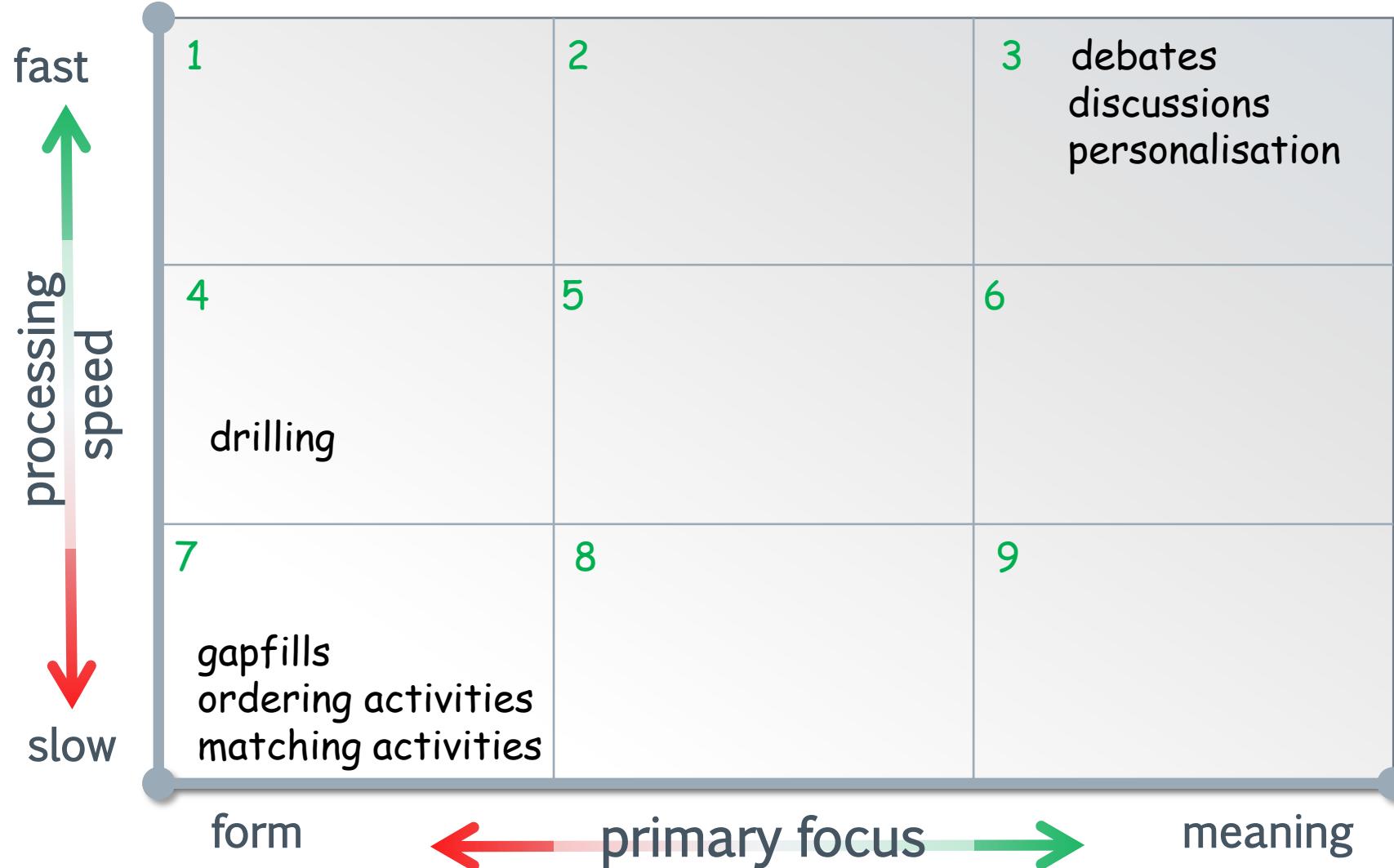
*Oxford Practice Grammar Basic, Coe, Harrison & Paterson, OUP, 2006*

# Gapfill Extension

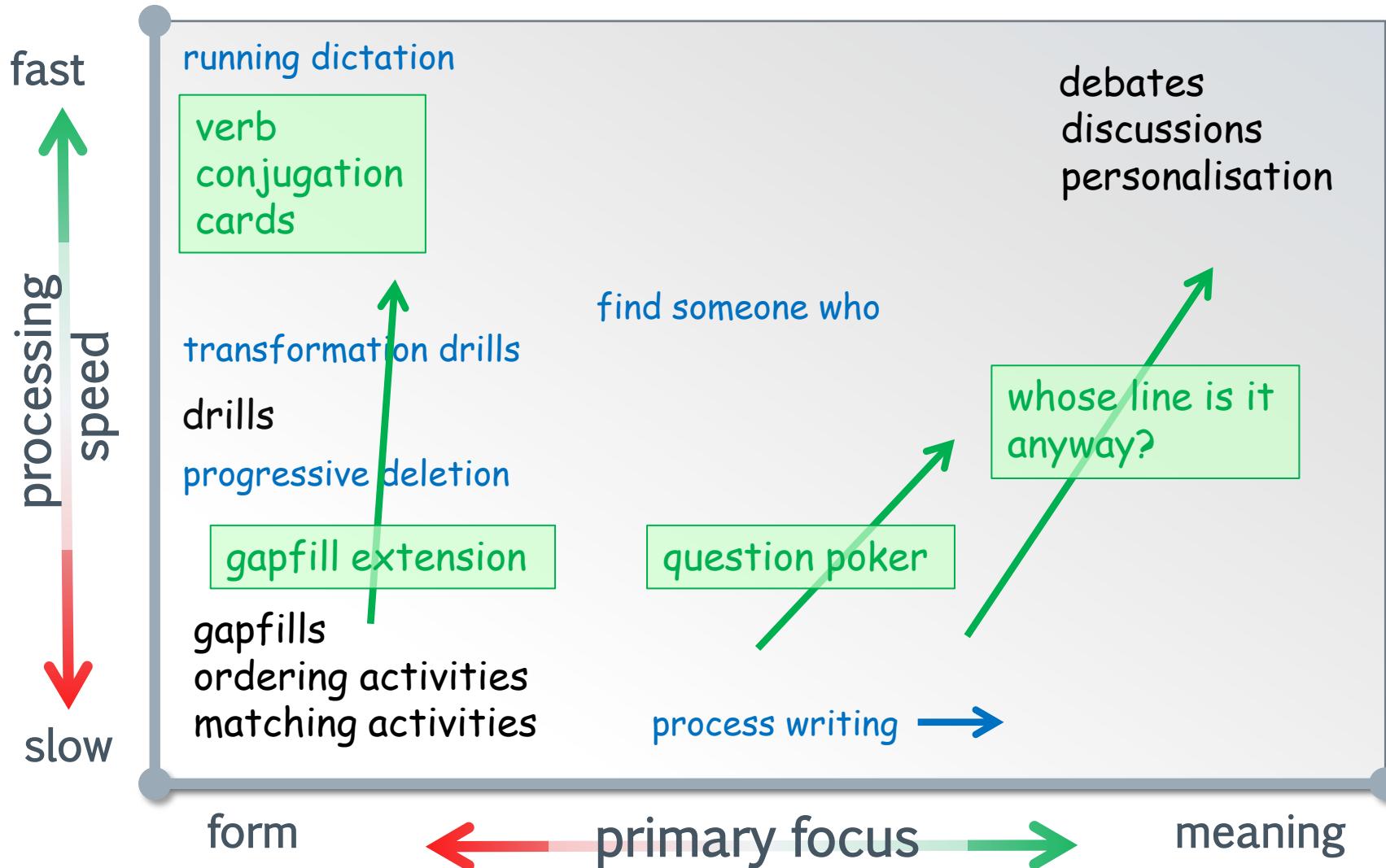
Why I like it:

- Another ‘recall’ activity! Learners are trying to ‘hold’ the language in their short-term memory – helping learning.
- Turns a written gapfill into a spoken activity, increasing processing speed.
- No extra preparation.
- It (almost) makes gapfills fun!

# Where would you put the 3 activities from today? **verb conjugation cards ; whose line...?; question poker**



# A Framework for Categorising Language Practice Activities



# References and Further Reading

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Download pdf of slides and activity booklet from:  
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