

## Practicing with a Pint: Alcohol's Effect on Second Language Learning

### Abstract

It is commonly believed that consuming alcohol influences your ability to speak fluently in your second language (L2) (MacDonald, 2014; Holmes, 2017). Though widely disseminated across language-learning blogs and news sources, there is little scientific evidence supporting this belief. Some related research found that alcohol led to more authentic pronunciation of words in a foreign language (Guiora et al., 1972) and that observer ratings of fluency were higher when participants had consumed moderate amounts of alcohol (Renner et al., 2018). While these findings provide some evidence that alcohol improves perceived fluency in L2 research has yet to show whether these subjective observations are significant in objective measures, such as error and speech rates. Our research aims to extend previous findings using more rigorous assessments of fluency to determine the impact of moderate alcohol consumption on spoken L2 fluency. Participants in this study were L2 learners of German over age 21. We used two methods to assess the fluency of our participants: error analysis and speech rate analysis. Lexical, morphological, and syntactic errors were coded, and the rates compared between the sober and the intoxicated interviews in a within-subjects design to control for covariates such as proficiency level, years of instruction, and speech rate. In the alcohol condition, participants consumed enough alcohol to raise their BrAC to at least 0.08 for the duration of the interview. We also calculated turn- and time-based measures of speech rate. Due to ongoing data collection, we present a short analysis of Participant 1. In addition to initial findings and analysis, we present our study design, data analysis, and additional avenues of inquiry. The results of this study will have implications across multiple disciplines, including second language acquisition, cognitive sciences, psychology, and education.

### References

- Guiora, A. Z., Beit-Hallahmi, B., Brannon, R. C. L., Dull, C. Y., Scovel, T. (1972). The effects of experimentally induced changes in ego states on pronunciation ability in a second language: An exploratory study. *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, 13(5), 421-428.
- Holmes, L. (2017, October 25). Alcohol can help you speak a foreign language more fluently. *HuffPost*. Retrieved from [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/alcohol-foreign-language\\_n\\_59ee4770e4b0d888ea3d0f42](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/alcohol-foreign-language_n_59ee4770e4b0d888ea3d0f42).
- MacDonald, J. (2014, November 3). Alcohol really does make you better at a foreign language (sometimes). *Slate*. Retrieved from <https://slate.com/human-interest/2014/11/alcohol-and-foreign-languages-a-small-amount-can-make-you-speak-better-but-not-too-much.html>.
- Renner, F., Kersbergen, I., Field, M., & Werthmann, J. (2018). Dutch courage? Effects of acute alcohol consumption on self-ratings and observer ratings of foreign language skills. *Journal of Psychopharmacology*, 32(1), 116-122.