SKEHAN TRADE-OFF HYPOTHESIS

* attentional capacity is limited
* attending to one of the three performance areas (complexity, accuracy, fluency) may drain attention from other areas
* given this limitation, there is, in particular, a form-meaning tension, with meaning normally taking priority, and therefore reducing the attention available for form
* even when there is attention available for form, there is tension between form directed to the use of more complex, cutting-edge language and attention within form directed to accurate, error-free language
  + a trade-off hypothesis can be formulated which predicts that raised levels in one performance area, when it consumes attention, may take attention away from other areas, with the result that performance in those areas may be lowered.

Regarding difficulty:

* tasks based on familiar information: easier
* tasks with more information transformation: more difficult.

Regarding selective influences:

* tasks based on familiar information -> greater accuracy and fluency
* dialogic tasks -> greater accuracy and complexity, while monologic tasks produce the reverse results

Regarding task conditions:

* pre-task planning consistently -> greater complexity and fluency
* pre-task planning sometimes -> more accurate language
* pre-task planning is more effectively done when led by the teacher, and least effectively done in a group of learners

Different task features and different task conditions exert systematic influences on performance, and that if one conceives of performance in terms of complexity, accuracy, and fluency, many individual or combined effects are possible. For example, it can be claimed that complexity and accuracy often enter into competition with one another, so that the more usual outcome will be that one of these will show elevated performance, but the other will not.

ROBINSON

Robinson (2001) has outlined the Cognition Hypothesis. This rejects the notion of a limited attentional capacity, instead proposing that we have available multiple attentional pools, and expandable resources which respond to the communicational needs that arise. Performance is driven, following this hypothesis, by the notion that task difficulty provokes wider attentional use, in that the more difficult the task, the more likely the language user will be to strive to match task difficulty with more complex language (consistent with claims made earlier), but also to strive to respond the difficulty of the task by producing more precise and accurate language to ensure that meanings are communicated effectively. This leads to the prediction that more difficult tasks will be associated with both increased accuracy and complexity, since these are not seen as competing for attentional resources.