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Book Review

Assessment in Second Language Pronunciation, by O. Kang and A. Ginther (Eds.), London and New York, Routledge, 2018, 178 pp., \$31.88, ISBN 978-1-138-85687-5

The role of pronunciation in L2 instruction and research has fluctuated with the times. It was attached with great value in instruction when audio-lingual pedagogy was popular in the mid-20th century. It then declined and even became marginalized with the rise of Communicative Language Teaching in the 1970s and 1980s (Thomson, 2012). In recent years there has been a revitalization of pronunciation research in applied linguistics (Derwing & Munro, 2005), partly attributed to the fact that the focus on pronunciation has shifted from discrete points of oral production (as in Lado's era) to broader concepts, such as intelligibility and comprehensibility, which are critical components of effective communication (Kang & Ginther, 2018).

This volume titled *Assessment in Second Language Pronunciation*, edited by Kang and Ginther (2018), is a reflection of the resurgence of pronunciation research, which presents an updated picture of pronunciation assessment. Chapters are organized into two parts: Part I is focused on current issues in pronunciation assessment, such as construct and validity, while Part II goes into the use of speech technology in pronunciation assessment. Specifically, in Chapter 1, Thomson examined the constructs of pronunciation – accentedness, comprehensibility and intelligibility, which are related but partially independent. He illustrated the definition, operationalization and methodological approaches to the measurement of the constructs, which provides insights into pronunciation instruction and research. After specifying the constructs of pronunciation, Chapter 2 moves on to the validity of measurement of the constructs in L2 pronunciation assessment. Starting from several legitimate questions regarding potential threats to validity in L2 pronunciation assessment, Harding adopted an argument-based approach with four inferential links (i.e., evaluation, generalization, explanation or extrapolation and utilization) to examine the recent research relevant to those threats and pointed out weaknesses in the evidence being used to justify the interpretation and use of scores in pronunciation assessment.

Chapters 3 to Chapter 5 address facets affecting L2 pronunciation assessment, which are context, raters and rating scales. In Chapter 3, Dimova focused attention on the context of World Englishes (WE) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), in which the native-speaker norm for pronunciation assessment has been challenged for its neglect of multiple linguistic varieties in real-life communicative situations. Despite the lack of systematic codification of different varieties, strides have been made to incorporate WE and ELF perspectives in test construction and task design. In Chapter 4, Yan and Ginther focused on listeners and raters, and delineated the impact of listener/rater background characteristics on their evaluation of L2 pronunciation, such as familiarity with accent and attitudes towards accented speech, which may jeopardize both the reliability and validity of assessment. Discussion of the differences between listeners and raters point to the importance of rater training. Apart from raters, rating scales also hold a prominent place in pronunciation assessment. Therefore, Chapter 5 turns to the numerical scales as instruments of L2 pronunciation assessment. The widely-used 9-point Likert scale was examined through an illustrative example of assessing L2 Korean pronunciation, suggesting that raters exhibit substantial variation in their interpretation and application of the scale, thus calling for adding psychometric evidence related to the measurement quality of the numerical scale via Many-facet Rasch Measurement.

Part II is devoted to the influence of speech technology on L2 pronunciation assessment. Chapter 6 enumerates the acoustic and temporal features that have been shown to be indicators in discriminating among proficiency levels in L2 pronunciation assessment, which were also selected to be predictors in automatic scoring model. Illustrations of the extraction and measurement of the selected features are provided. The comparison between pronunciation features conceptualized in L2 research and those incorporated in oral assessment rating scales helps to inform rubric development and revision in speaking assessment. The pronunciation features mentioned in Chapter 6 build a base for speech recognition and processing. In Chapter 7, a detailed descriptive account is provided of the operationalization and scoring of pronunciation constructs in constrained speaking tasks. Four components are involved in the automated speech scoring system with automated speech recognition (ASR) technology, which are the acoustic model, language model, pronunciation dictionary and scoring model. The acoustic model is the core of ASR and it is important to train the reference acoustic model with appropriate speech according to the test purpose. Chapter 8 gives a fuller picture of the automated pronunciation evaluation. Loukina et al. introduced key differences between assessment of constrained and unconstrained speech and pointed out the challenges in the assessment of unconstrained speech. This is followed by a discussion of two approaches used for L2 pronunciation assessment, namely, the model-based approaches and generic approaches. Challenges such as the accuracy of ASR, choice of a reference model and validity issues in automatic scoring are discussed at the end.

This volume provides a rich and comprehensive survey of the latest development in L2 pronunciation research and assessment, including emerging new constructs of assessment, situating pronunciation within broader multilingual socio-cultural contexts, and employing technology in automated scoring of pronunciation. As Shohamy (2011) posited, “language tests need to build on an updated language construct of what it means to know a language as the fundamental step in the creation of tests of high construct validity” (p. 419). Such clarification of the constructs of L2 pronunciation also improves the validity of test development and score interpretation and use. Besides, this volume situates pronunciation assessment in the multilingual context where variations of pronunciation norms have emerged, calling into question the native-speaker norm. Assessing L2 pronunciation from the WE perspective mimics the reality that L2 speakers of English outnumber L1 speakers in international communication settings (Seidlhofer, 2011), thus making the assessment more authentic. However, as the papers in the volume suggest, the lack of systematic codification of outer-circle varieties causes difficulties for its inclusion in high-stakes testing. It is also noteworthy that compared with other books in pronunciation assessment, this volume provides more detailed accounts of the latest development of automated pronunciation evaluation, which is at the forefront of L2 pronunciation assessment. A variety of acoustic and temporal features were enumerated and elaborated; ASR mechanism of speech recognition and processing, and the automated scoring of both constrained and spontaneous speech are introduced.

The second highlight of this volume is that it links to a useful preceding book, namely, *Second Language Pronunciation Assessment: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* edited by Isaacs and Trofimovich (2016), which calls on future research on pronunciation assessment and technology, automated scoring, and standardization of pronunciation criterion in speaking assessment. These are precisely the areas that the current book focuses on.

However, the volume is not without drawbacks. The first shortcoming is that little attention is paid to classroom-based assessment of L2 pronunciation. This volume primarily deals with L2 pronunciation in psychometrically oriented standardized testing. L2 learners and teachers who assess student pronunciation in class will not find much from the book. As formative assessment has become increasingly important in recent years, how teachers assess L2 learners' pronunciation and offer diagnostic feedback deserve to be included in this volume.

Another shortcoming is the organization of this volume. Firstly, Chapter 6 does not fit the central topic of Part II. Although pronunciation features have an important role to play in automated speech evaluation, Chapter 6 primarily deals with pronunciation features in rating criteria used by human raters. This is not related to automated scoring. Feature selection is a particularly crucial procedure in developing an

automated scoring model. Thus, it would be useful to read about how acoustic and temporal features are selected in automated scoring systems in tests such as the Pearson Test of English Academic and TOEFL. Discussions on the advantages and disadvantages of different methods of feature selection would also be highly relevant. Secondly, in Chapter 8, more coverage of the assessment of spontaneous speech would have been welcome.

Overall, the strengths of this volume dwarf its drawbacks. The volume provides an updated view of the constructs of pronunciation, the multilingual contexts of pronunciation assessment, and the use of technology in pronunciation assessment. The book is easy to read and useful to language testing practitioners, phoneticians, phonologists, and anyone who is interested in pronunciation and its assessment.

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Emily Di Zhang

Department of English, University of Macau, China
Email: yb97712@um.edu.mo