It's not *what* you say, it's *how* you say it: Creating a prosodic proficiency test battery

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Prosody, including rhythm, intonation, and word accent, is crucial to speech communication. Second language learners (L2) who struggle with producing prosody correctly may face difficulties being understood (e.g., Munro et al., 2020; Saito et al., 2016) and social stigma (Derwing, 2003). Hence, mastering prosody improves L2 learners' communication skills, leading to less foreign-accentedness and greater comprehensibility (van Maastricht et al., 2021). Yet, currently, there are no science-based and open-access tools to assess the prosody of L2 learners. Therefore, this project aims to develop a fully automatic online test for L2 learners of English to assess their prosody production. During the test, L2 learners are asked to record themselves reading aloud sentences eliciting various prosodic forms and functions (e.g., narrow focus, types of declarative and interrogative sentences). Our pipeline of automatic speech recognition, forced alignment and prosodic feature extraction quantifies prosodic features such as pitch accent placement, pausing, and speech rhythm. The L2 data are compared against reference data from English natives (L1) to evaluate the prosodic proficiency of the L2 learners. L1 data collection is currently ongoing, so the Phonetics Day will provide us with a perfect opportunity to collect valuable feedback on the planned phonetic analyses for the automated prosody assessment test. For both L2 learners and teachers, this test will provide information on a speaker's current prosodic proficiency, as well as insight into potential areas of improvement, helping learners produce more native-like prosody. In the long run, our test will make prosody training more systematic and accessible, ultimately helping learners to improve communication in their L2.

References

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