

Extrinsic and intrinsic evaluation of L2 vowel pronunciation

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Evaluating L2 pronunciation via acoustic measures is problematic. In the literature, this is sometimes accomplished via fluency metrics (speech rate, average length of IPUs, etc), which however do not capture pronunciation accuracy. Other studies use VOT measurements (only possible if L1 and L2 differ in this respect) or comparisons of L2 vowel formants with native values. These methods are defined as 'extrinsic' because they evaluate L2 pronunciation with reference to comparable native data. This contribution proposes ways of measuring L2 pronunciation intrinsically, that is to say without referring to L1 data. Inspired by methods coming from sociophonetics, we use vowel distances, Pillai scores and classification scores for vowel pairs produced by learners of L2 English and L2 French. A comparison of these metrics with traditional measures (fluency metrics, VOT measurements, impressionistic judgments provided by native speakers) reveal a high correlation and suggest that the intrinsic evaluation of L2 learners could be a viable method for L2 pronunciation evaluation. The advantages and drawbacks of this approach are presented and discussed.