A Review of a Bachelor's Thesis
submitted to the Department of English and ELT Methodology,
Faculty of Arts, Charles University

Name and titles of the reviewer: Luca Cilibrasi, MA, PhD
□ supervisor X opponent
Author of the thesis: Dominika Trčková
Title of the thesis: Comparing the effect of segmental and prosodic manipulations on speakers' accentedness and comprehensibility
Year of submission: 2019

Level of expertise:
X excellent   □ very good   □ average   □ below average   □ inadequate

Factual errors:
X almost none   □ appropriate to the scope of the thesis   □ frequent less serious   □ serious

Chosen methodology:
X original and appropriate   □ appropriate   □ barely adequate   □ inadequate

Results:
X original   □ original and derivative   □ non-trivial compilation   □ cited from sources   □ copied

Scope of the thesis:
□ too large   X appropriate to the topic   □ adequate   □ inadequate

Bibliography (number and selection of titles):
X above average (scope or rigor) □ average   □ below average   □ inadequate

Typographical and formal level:
□ excellent   X very good   □ average   □ below average   □ inadequate

Language:
X excellent   □ very good   □ average   □ below average   □ inadequate

Typos:
X almost none   □ appropriate to the scope of the thesis   □ numerous

Overall evaluation of the thesis:
X excellent   □ very good   □ average   □ below average   □ inadequate

Brief description of the thesis (by the supervisor, ca. 100-200 words):

Review, comments and notes (ca. 100-200 words)
Strong points of the thesis:

This thesis focuses on how segmental and prosodic manipulations performed on L2 speech can affect the perception of accentedness and comprehensibility.
The thesis deals with an interesting topic and it does so with clarity and precision. The student shows excellent analytical skills, excellent technical skills in the use of Praat and in the plotting of the results. The thesis is written in good English and typos are limited to a few words in the whole document. I was impressed by the use of LME, a rather advanced type of statistical analysis for a bachelor student.

Weak points of the thesis:

It is not clear how the choice of the participants (those evaluating the manipulated speech) was carried out. In fact, the thesis lacks completely a section on "participants". It is not clear whether the participants are monolingual, and if not, what their proficiency in the two languages is. In addition, we do not anything about their age, nor on their gender, and we do not have metadata (do they study English, do they watch TV in English, do they travel to the UK, etc).

Questions to answer during the Defence and suggested points of discussion:

General main question:
Don't you think that depending on the people you ask to judge, your results could be completely different? I imagine that the less proficient a speaker is in English, the more likely they are to judge positively (at least in terms of comprehensibility) deviations from native pronunciation that make it more similar to their L1. Can you connect your study with a discussion on the effects of proficiency of the subjects evaluating (also adding information on who your participants were)?

Page 12: Intelligibility is defined as an objective construct. Can you expand? Isn't it true that, for example, the British received pronunciation is hardly intelligible to foreigners, while it is the favourite pronunciation of native speakers?

Page 28: You state that "the pitch range of L1 British newsreaders was narrower by 2 semitones than that of the Czech broadcasters who were L2 speakers of English". I would expect it to be the other way around, or am I wrong?

Page 31. One male speaker was asked to come back to the department and adjust the pronunciation of his dental fricatives. What parameters did you use to decide that the solution was "appropriate"?

Pages 35 and 36. Was each participant presented with either Test 1 or Test 2? If so, aren't you concerned by the fact that the conditions are not balanced in the two tests? (Test 1 contains a majority of prosodic manipulations, while test 2 contains a majority of segmental manipulations).

Pages 44. You are rather critical with your work (which is in general a good attitude) where you say that negative impact on comprehension in prosodically manipulated items is probably due to poor manipulation, but what makes you so sure that it is not harder to understand someone that sounds native (and doesn't sound more like L1).

Other comments:

Page 39 (and again page 44-45). Your Post-hoc tests show that the effect of manipulation is significant in the segmental condition but not in the prosodic condition. This is a bit surprising because you did not find an interaction in the main analysis. I am wondering what could be causing this incongruence. I guess it may be because you cannot include random effects in the Tukey, so the two tests are not easily compatible, but I am not sure. It may be worth exploring this further.

Final comment:

This is a very good thesis that fills a gap in the literature and provides potentially interesting data. The student did a great job in designing such a study, and she showed to master both speech analysis software and experimental methods. The only aspect that I find a bit concerning is the lack of a section describing the participants, and the lack of some discussion on how the results may change depending on the participants involved. I look forward to hearing the justification of the student for these choices. Despite this limitation, I believe this thesis is an excellent piece of work, and I recommend it to be accepted.

I hereby
X recommend   □ do not recommend   to accept the bachelor's thesis.

And I propose the following grade:
X excellent   X very good   □ good   □ fail

Place, date and signature of the reviewer:
Prague, 7 June 2019