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**MA Thesis Report:**  
**Roksolana Fedorenko**  
**“Phonetic Aspects of Fluency in Read and Spontaneous Speech”**

The thesis investigates linking and prosodic phrasing parameters in Czech learners of English as a second language. Two conditions are compared: (1) students' performance at the beginning of their studies and prior to taking a course in phonetics and phonology, and (2) two years after completion of the course and mid-way through their English studies. It was shown that linking improved with higher language proficiency, however Czech-typical features prevailed (i.e., glottalization). Results also varied by treatment (read speech versus spontaneous speech production).

The introduction/ literature review is generally detailed, however, the number of citations from more recent years is underrepresented. While the student presents a good introduction to topics pertinent to second-language fluency, a thorough discussion of the implications of reading texts and speaking spontaneously is missing. There is a large body of research on differences between read and spontaneously produced speech, and this information would have helped the reader make better sense of the results of the study (which clearly showed an effect of reading vs. spontaneous speech).

The methods section does not provide sufficient information for readers to understand how acoustic measurements were taken. How exactly were glottal stops and transient /j/ and /w/ etc. identified on the spectrograms? Especially in the case of glottal stops, I can imagine a variety of problems one runs into

when trying to acoustically define them. What acoustic parameters were extracted for each linking phenomenon with the Praat script?

Concerning the prosodic phrasing, the definitions „logical“ and „illogical“ phrases need more explaining. Examples of the two types of phrases should have been provided.

In addition, it is stated on page 25 that the participants „were native speakers of Czech and their English pronunciation was evaluated as strongly accented“ but no information is given how accentedness was measured. Was that information part of the corpus? Or did the student measure it? If yes, how?

In general, it would have been appreciated if examples had been given. For instance, when it is stated on page 35: “There are two phonetic contexts in which the most significant progress occurred (when comparing individual rates of participants): /r/ sound + vowel (linking r) and /u:/, /ʊ/, /aʊ/, /ɔʊ/, /əʊ/ + vowel (transient w)“, examples of the read and spoken stimuli would have been informative.

It is explained that there is little difference between Czech and English in terms of prosodic phrasing (page 42), which seems an important observation to me. If no differences are expected in the study, why was this investigated in the first place? One could have calculated a similarity/ dissimilarity score of the variables between Czech and English and then looked at how the most dissimilar variables were acquired by the Czech learners of ESL. This would have given a better answer to the question of how Czech students become more “English-like“ over time in terms of phonetic linking by showing that they go from more dissimilarity to more similarity over the course of two years.

The study aimed to test the efficiency of a particular phonetics/ phonology course (p. 42) and compared students at the beginning of their studies and prior to taking the course to “a couple of years later“ (as stated on pages 25 and 42). During a couple of years, especially the beginning years of their studies, students of English improve their overall language competence and performance a great deal in general. They take lots of other courses and immerse themselves more deeply in English-speaking culture. If one wanted to test the efficiency of a particular course, one would take data right before the students start the course, and then immediately after completion of the course. Another problem is the difference in stimuli between the beginner and the advanced stage – the beginners read texts and the advanced students spoke spontaneously. It can be difficult to disentangle the effects of treatment (reading, speaking spontaneously) from phonetics proficiency level (beginners, advanced).

**Minor comment:**

Page 21: a part of this sentence is missing: "This r is generally presumed to be retained or inserted either to serve as a 'hiatus-breaking' element, or to provide a "

*Questions for the defence:*

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1. Please provide a brief explanation of how you acoustically measured the linking phenomena described in your thesis.
2. What factors could have contributed to the advanced students' better phonetic performance a few years after the first reading?
3. If you chose to investigate the same students at the end of their studies, at a very high proficiency level, would you expect the linking parameters to have changed further?

In summary, the thesis is well-written and investigates interesting hypotheses. As I have indicated above, I believe that there are some areas in which it could be strengthened. I suggest the thesis to be accepted with a grade of *velmi dobře*.

Eva Maria Luef, PhD

