



# AGENDA

**PART 1: Acoustic, speech, NLP, linguistics basics. (20 min) - VIKRAM**

**PART 2: State of the art (60 minutes) – KEELAN & KLAUS**

**BREAK**

**PART 3: Bleeding Edge (25 minutes) - VIKRAM**

**PART 4: Q&A + Live Interactive Session/Demos (60 minutes) - ALL**

# WHAT THIS WORKSHOP *IS* ABOUT...

- Automated scoring basics
- An industry perspective on how to get started with designing automated scoring systems...
- ...that can be deployed on actual tests of spoken English...
- ...with an outlook on developing technologies.

# WHAT THIS WORKSHOP *IS* *NOT* ABOUT...

- Language learning theory
- Assessment theory
- Psychometrics & Validity
- Linguistic theories of discourse
- Machine learning and statistics
- Elaborate software coding

# WHO ARE WE AND WHAT DO WE DO?

GRE

HiSET

The PRAXIS  
Series

TOEFL

TOEIC

660  
EDUCATIONAL TESTING SERVICE

CHAUNCEY CONFERENCE CENTER

THE LAURIE HOUSE

Group of researchers, engineers, psychometricians,  
data analysts in San Francisco, CA and Princeton, NJ.

**We design, deploy and analyze spoken  
language technologies for learning and  
assessment.**





# Benefits of Spoken Language Technology for Language Learning & Assessment

- Language assessment applications
  - cost reductions (especially for large-scale assessments)
  - faster score reporting
  - increased score consistency and reliability
  - sub-scores / feedback about specific aspects of speaking ability
- Language learning applications
  - ability to practice speaking when no instructor is available
  - targeted, personalized feedback for individual learners
  - interactive, authentic speaking tasks using SDS

# How is Spoken Language Technology Currently Being Used for LLA?

- Language assessment applications
  - automated speech scoring system used as sole score
    - Pearson Test of English – Academic, Duolingo English Test, TrueNorth Speaking Assessment (Emmersion), etc.
  - automated speech scoring system combined with human ratings
    - TOEFL iBT Speaking (SpeechRater), Linguaskill (Cambridge English)
- Language learning applications
  - pronunciation feedback: Carnegie Speech, ELSA, etc.
  - interactive conversations: Alelo, Supiki, etc.

# WHAT TERMS DO NEWCOMERS TO L2 SPEECH ASSESSMENT NEED TO KNOW ABOUT?

Vikram Ramanarayanan

10/26/20



# FORMATIVE vs SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

## Summative Assessment

- End-of -year assessment
- State Assessments
- Aligned to content area state standards
- Measures student AYP
- A component of teacher accountability and evaluation

## Interim Assessment

- 6-8 week assessment
- School and district level assessments
- Identify gaps in student learning
- Predicts student performance on state tests
- Data used at classroom level
- Drives district level decisions

## Formative Assessment

- Daily assessment
- Linked to learning experience
- Assesses student understanding and mastery of skills
- Data used to modifying instruction

Source: <https://edulastic.com>

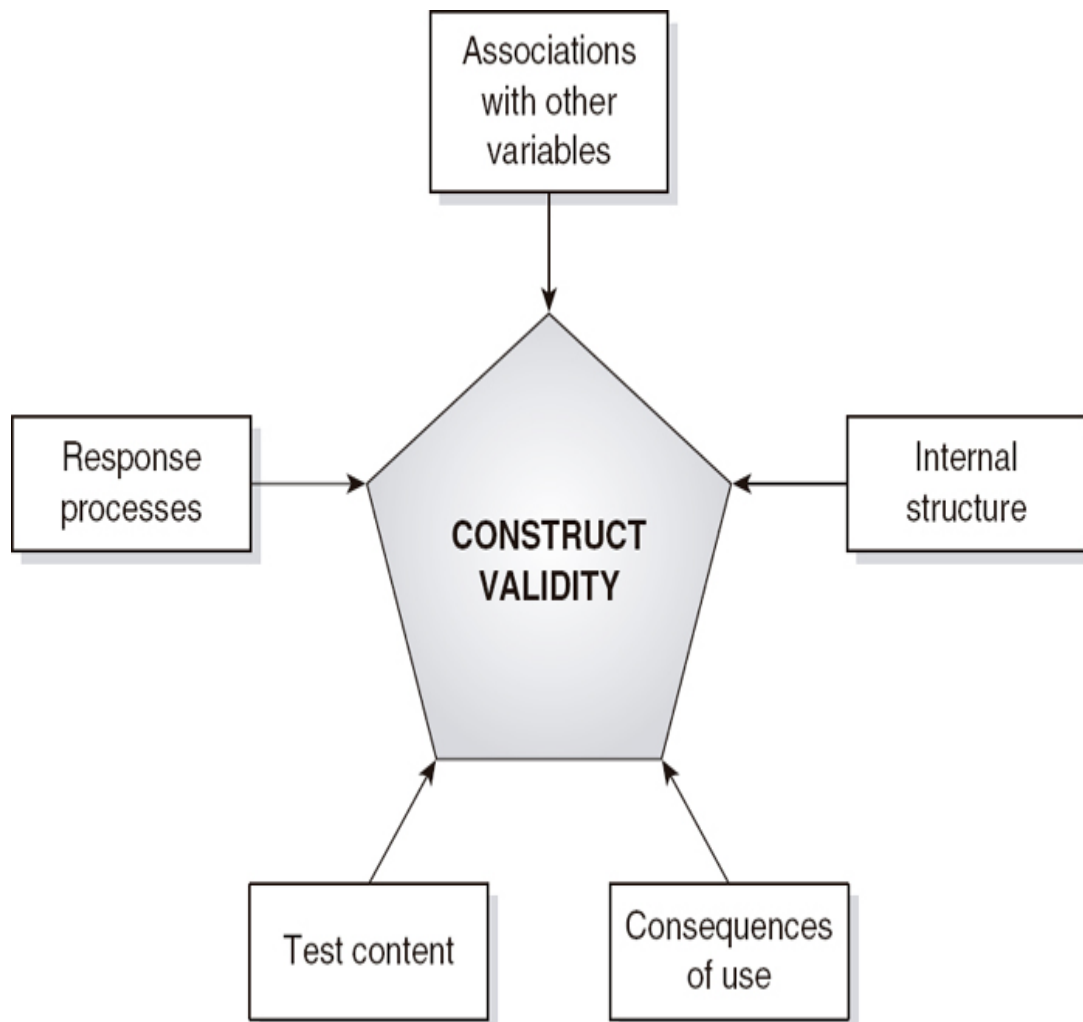


# PSYCHOMETRICS

- Objective measurement of skills and knowledge, abilities, attitudes, personality traits, and educational achievement.
- Key concepts in test theory:
  - Reliability: A reliable measure is one that measures a construct consistently across time, individuals, and situations.
  - Validity: A valid measure is one that measures what it is intended to measure.
  - Reliability is necessary, but not sufficient, for validity.
  - Fairness: do automated scores show any bias towards sub-groups, e.g., gender, native language etc.
  - All can be assessed statistically, and contribute to the quality of an assessment

# CONSTRUCT

- **Construct** is the set of **knowledge, skills and abilities** that a given assessment is designed to provide information about
- Should NOT depend on the scoring approach
- Should depend on the language use domain



# RUBRIC

- A **rubric** is typically an evaluation tool or **set of guidelines used to promote the consistent application of learning expectations, learning objectives, or learning standards** in the classroom, or to measure their attainment against a consistent set of criteria.
- Elements of a scoring rubric:
  - **One or more traits or dimensions** that serve as the basis for judging the student response
  - **Definitions and examples** to clarify the meaning of each trait or dimension
  - **A scale of values** on which to rate each dimension
  - **Standards of excellence** for specified performance levels accompanied by models or examples of each level



**What are the issues we encounter in non-native speech?**

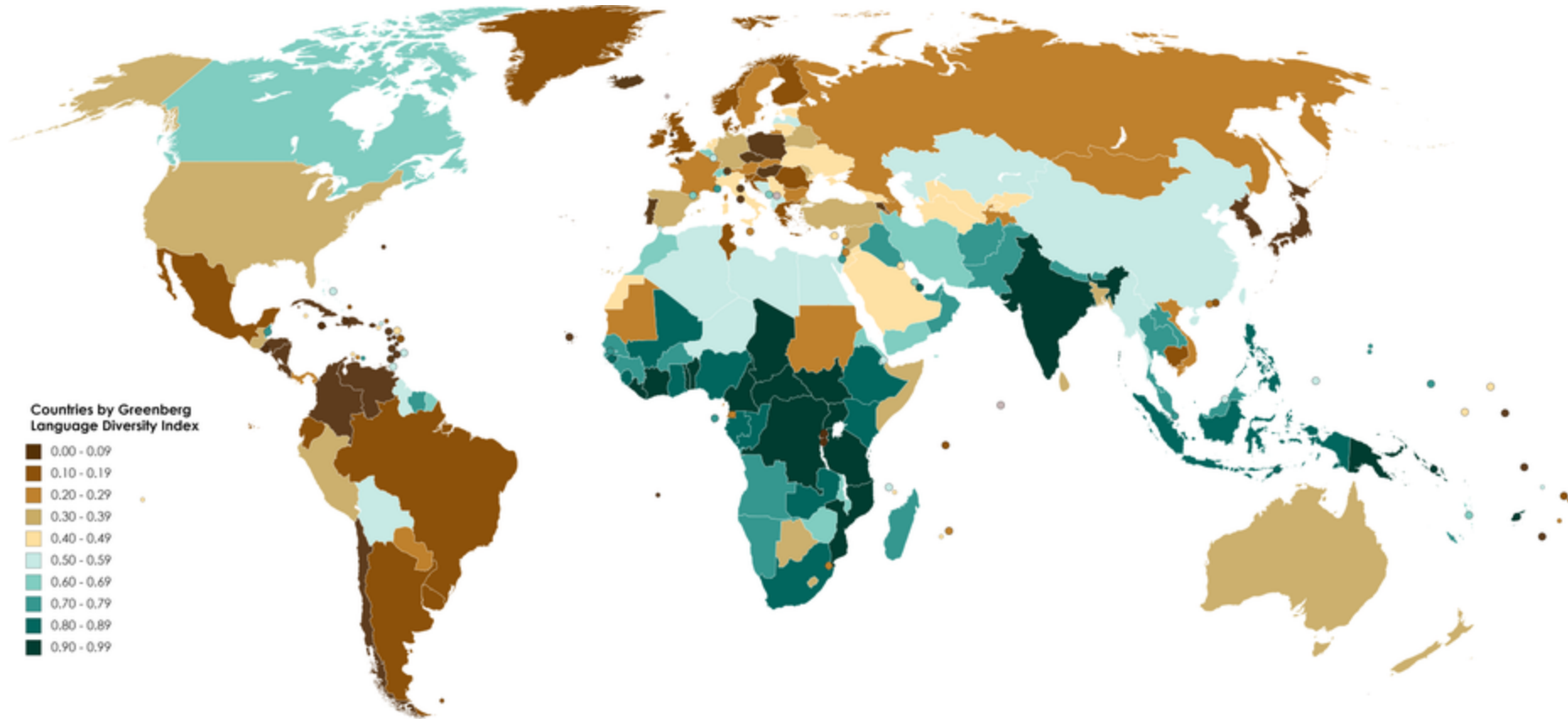
**What kind of knowledge do we need to incorporate into models of non-native speech processing?**



# ACOUSTICS / ENVIRONMENT

- Microphone or Capture Device
- Background Noise in Ambient Environment
- Test platform/server configuration
- Internet connectivity and bandwidth

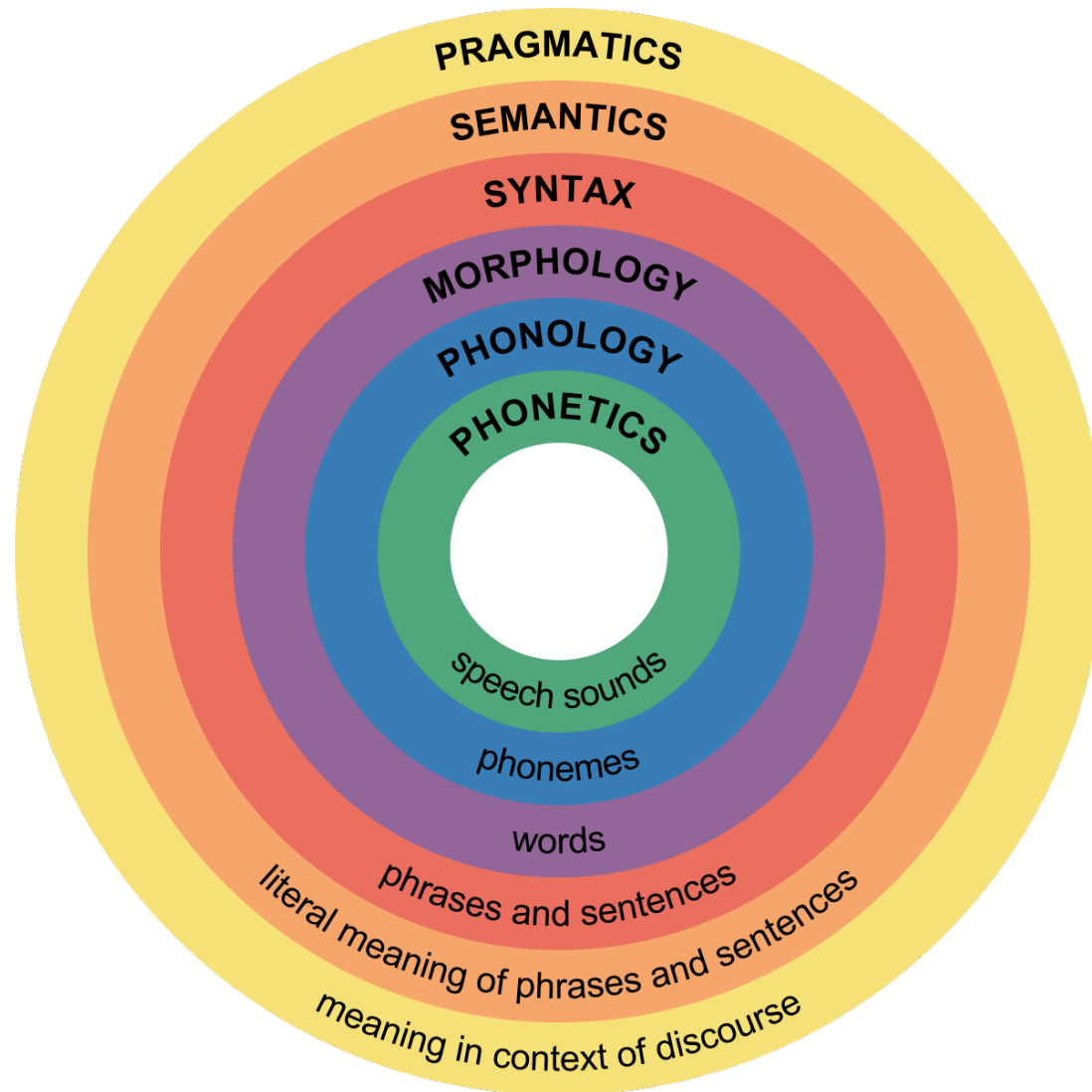
# NATIVE LANGUAGE (L1) & GEOGRAPHY



# AGE & GENDER



# LANGUAGE & SPEECH FEATURES OF INTEREST





# TASK DESIGN



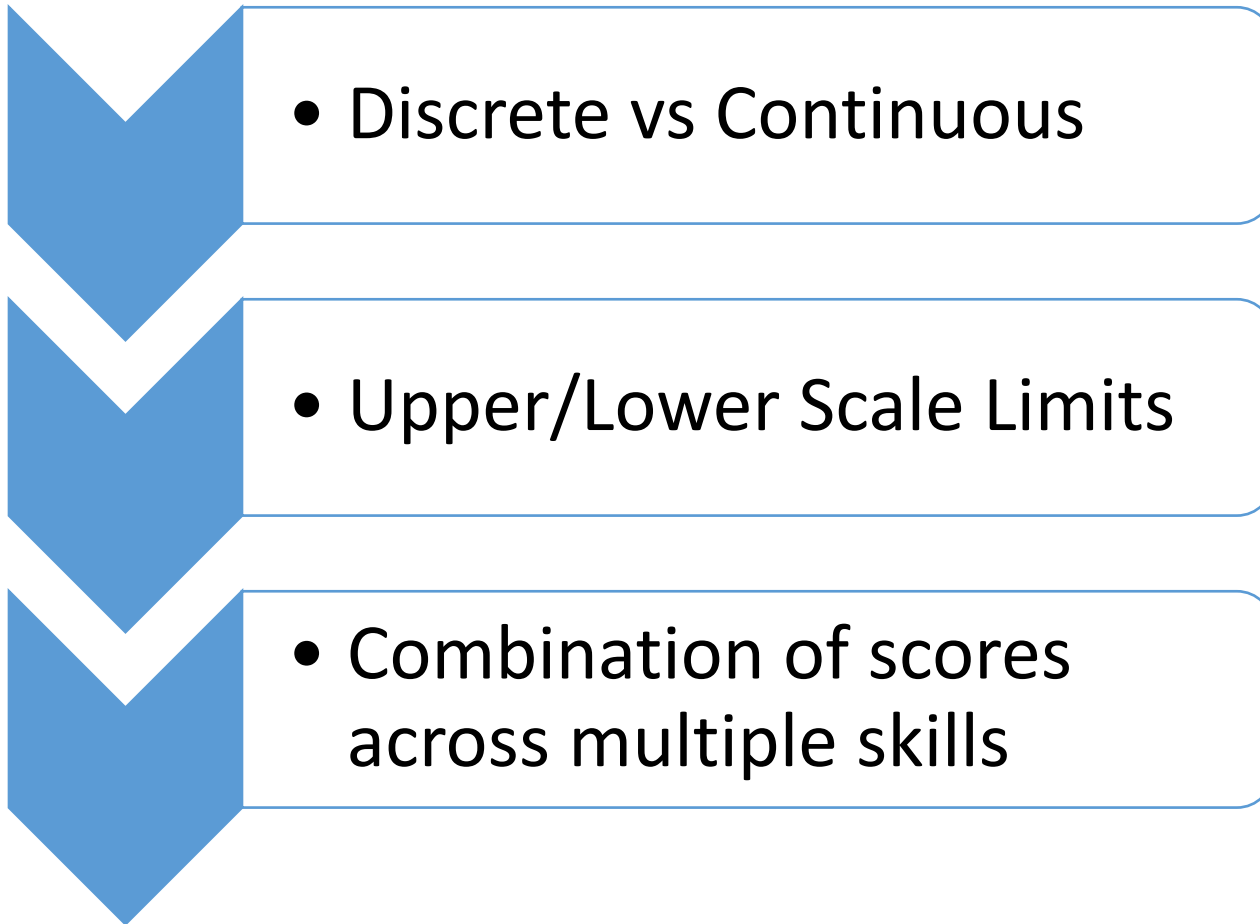
- Monolog vs Dialog

- Response Duration

- Read vs Spontaneous

- Skills Measured

# SCORE TYPE



All these impact the type of machine learning algorithm used for automated scoring

# CULTURE & PRAGMATICS





Now that we have an understanding of the basics, let's do a deep dive into the current state of the art in automated assessment of monolog speech...



# Automatic Speech Scoring

Klaus Zechner & Keelan Evanini

10/26/20



# AUTOMATED SCORING EXAMPLE: The lifecycle of a TOEFL iBT response

- Automated speech scoring is embedded in a much broader context beyond the NLP & Speech processing work
- Many other aspects of the lifecycle of a spoken response need to be considered
- Before the test:
  - **Test Development:** assessment specialists use Evidence Centered Design to develop construct-relevant test questions and scoring rubrics for the domain of academic English speaking proficiency
  - **Institutional Mandates:** institutions that need to evaluate students' English proficiency (e.g., universities) set requirements for test cut scores for admission based on validity studies
  - **Test Registration:** the prospective test-taker registers to take the test at a specific time and location

# AUTOMATED SCORING EXAMPLE: The lifecycle of a TOEFL iBT response

- During the test:
  - **Audio capture logistics:** standardization of computer hardware/software, microphones, and testing environment to ensure high-quality audio with minimal background noise
  - **Test security:** screening mechanisms such as statistical models of responses and biometrics checks to detect fraudulent behavior (copying responses, test-taker impersonation)
- After the test:
  - **Scoring:** spoken response is sent to distributed network of human raters and automated speech scoring system; scores are combined in hybrid approach using pre-determined weights
  - **Scaling:** scores for individual test questions are aggregated for the Speaking section and scaled to a standard range (0-30) using psychometric models
  - **Score Reporting:** scores are presented in an interpretable manner on a score report and sent to test-takers and institutions

# AUTOMATIC SCORING OF SPEECH

- determine speaking proficiency of a language learner
- mapping a speech recording to a numeric score
- questions:
  - how is speaking proficiency defined? how many levels are differentiated?
  - what tasks are provided to the test taker? (e.g., state an opinion, read a paragraph aloud)
  - what aspects of speaking proficiency are measured and how?
  - what is needed to train and evaluate the system?

# BRIEF HISTORY

- earliest systems around 1990 (Bernstein et al., 1990): focus is on pronunciation, fluency; tasks are predictable speech (read-aloud, listen-repeat)
- early explorations into scoring of open-ended, spontaneous speech in the 2000s (Cucchiarini et al., 2002; Zechner et al., 2009)
- first operational speech scoring system for spontaneous speech: ETS's SpeechRater (2006), used for scoring TOEFL Practice Online spoken responses
- 2019: SpeechRater used for TOEFL iBT in a contributory scoring approach (combination of human and machine scores)

# DIMENSIONS OF AUTOMATIC SCORING

Dimension	Easier to score	Harder to score
Speech predictability	Highly predictable (e.g., read aloud)	Highly unpredictable (e.g., spontaneous speech)
Response based on stimulus/source	Tightly connected to stimulus materials (e.g., prompts with lectures, images, and readings)	Not connected to particular stimulus materials (e.g., prompts ask for personal knowledge, experience, or opinions)
Task interactivity	Monologic	Dialogic



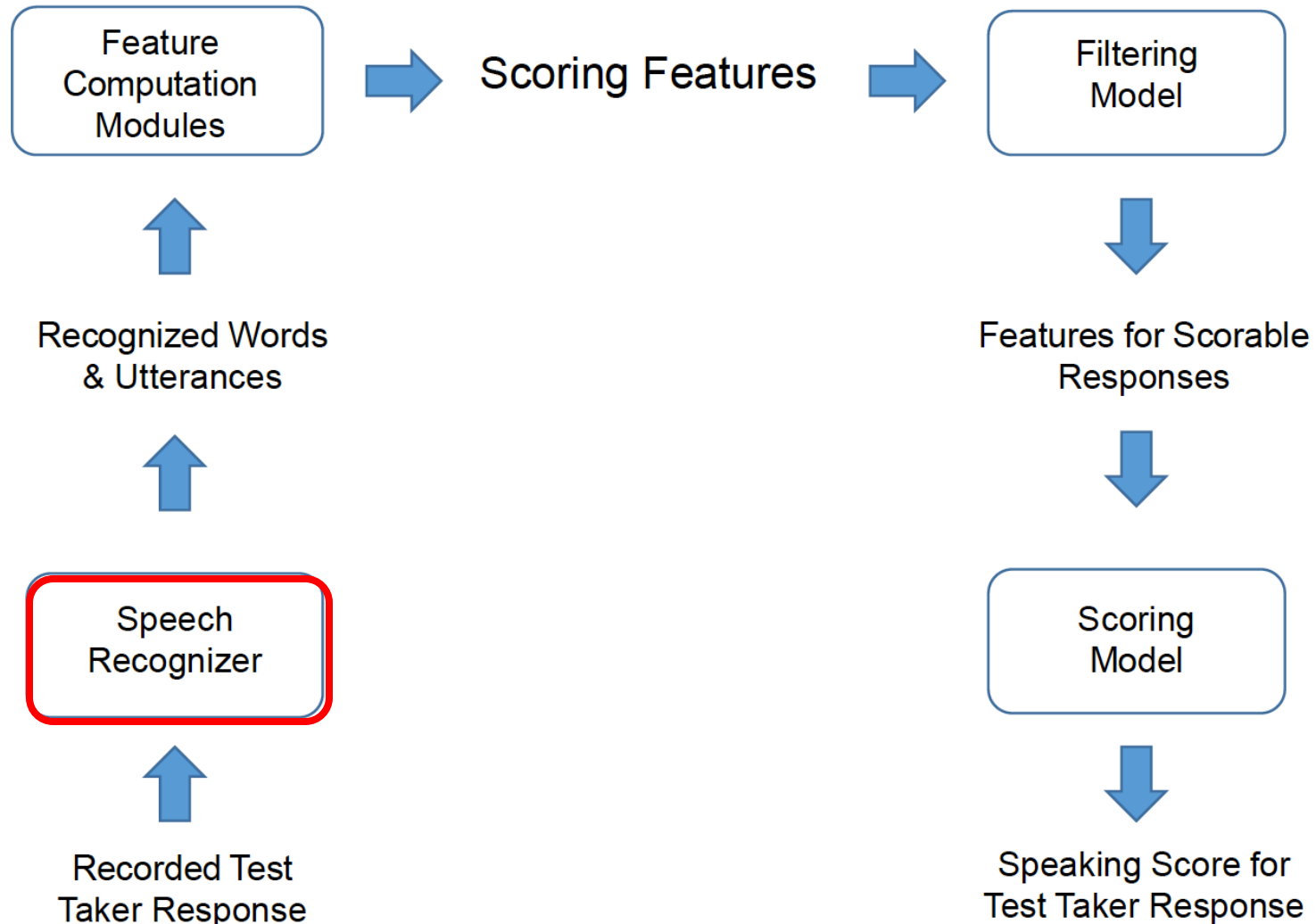
# DIMENSIONS OF AUTOMATIC SCORING

Dimension	Easier to score	Harder to score
Test taker native languages	Only one or very few native languages spoken	Many different native languages spoken
Test taker age	Adults	Children
Test taker proficiency levels	Mix of proficiencies	Fairly similar proficiency

# DIMENSIONS OF AUTOMATIC SCORING

Dimension	Easier to score	Harder to score
Speech capture	Professional recording equipment such as close-talk noise-cancelling microphone	Consumer devices such as mobile device with built-in microphone
Overall recording environment	Low noise (e.g., quiet room, soundproof recording booth)	High and variable noise (e.g., café, street, classroom)
Voice contamination during recording	Only single speaker recorded	Potentially multiple speakers around or in background

# SPEECHRATER SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE



# CHALLENGES FOR ASR OF SPONTANEOUS NON-NATIVE SPEECH

- **Acoustic Modelling**
  - high variability of phones' acoustics across many different first languages
  - variation also due to range of speaking proficiency
  - Mispronunciations
- **Language Modelling**
  - lexical and grammatical errors
  - more and less regular filled pauses, other disfluencies

# AUTOMATIC SPEECH RECOGNITION COMPONENT IN SPEECHRATER

- Kaldi, nnet2
- AM: using i-vectors
- LM: trigram model
- training corpus: ~800 hours of spontaneous non-native speech
- WER ~20%
- agreement between human transcribers: 15% - 20% WER

# SPEAKING PROFICIENCY & TASKS

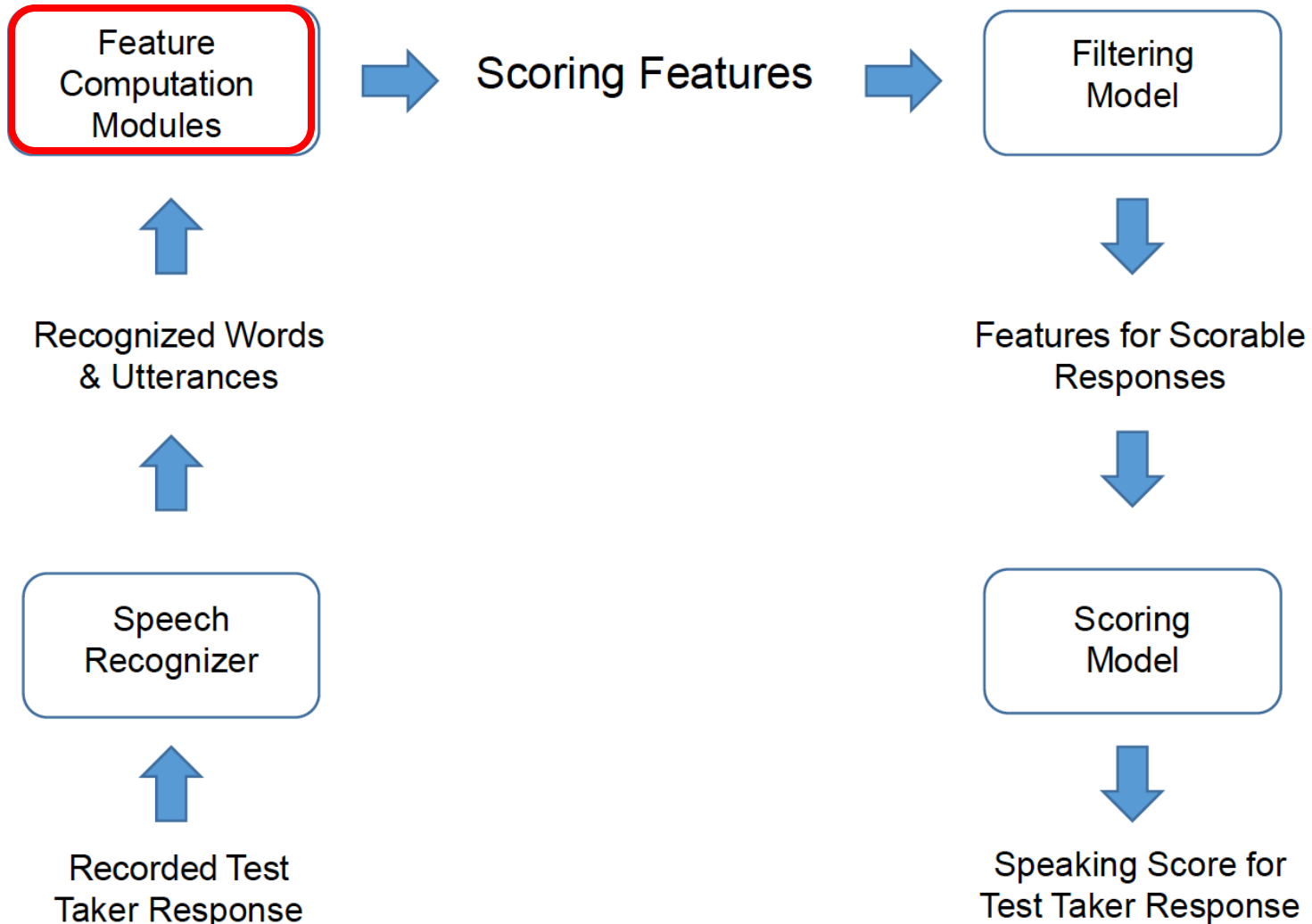
- most important question when designing an assessment: what do we want to measure?
- speaking proficiency – in TOEFL iBT: communicative competence
- domain: academic, social/campus
- speaking tasks: need to elicit speech from test takers that allow to evaluate the aspects of speaking proficiency that are considered to be relevant
- informed by theories of language learning and second language acquisition
- TOEFL iBT: independent and integrated tasks



# SPEAKING RUBRICS

- detailed descriptions of important aspects of speaking proficiency for each score level
- used by human raters to assign holistic scores to spoken responses
- TOEFL iBT: 4 score levels, 3 dimensions: **delivery** (fluency, pronunciation), **language use** (vocabulary, grammar), **topic development** (content, discourse)

# SPEECHRATER SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE



# FEATURES MEASURING SPEAKING PROFICIENCY

- using information from speech processing components (e.g., F0 or power obtained via Praat), word, timing and confidence information from ASR, phone and syllable boundaries from forced alignment
- some features require complex processing using NLP methods, e.g., predicting stressed syllables, syntactic parsing etc.
- around 80 features computed in SpeechRater for TOEFL iBT

# DELIVERY: FLUENCY & PRONUNCIATION

- **Fluency**: speaking rate, distribution of pauses, disfluencies
  - example:  $\text{speaking\_rate} = \# \text{words} / \text{response\_length}$
  - example:  $\text{pause\_variability} = \text{stddev}(\text{pause\_lengths})$
- **Pronunciation**: segmental (individual phones), suprasegmental (stress, pitch contours, rhythm etc.)
  - example:  $\text{pronunciation\_accuracy} = \text{average AM score across all phones (where AM is based on native speech, used in forced alignment)}$
  - example:  $\text{stress\_frequency} = \text{percentage of syllables bearing stress}$

# LANGUAGE USE: VOCABULARY & GRAMMAR

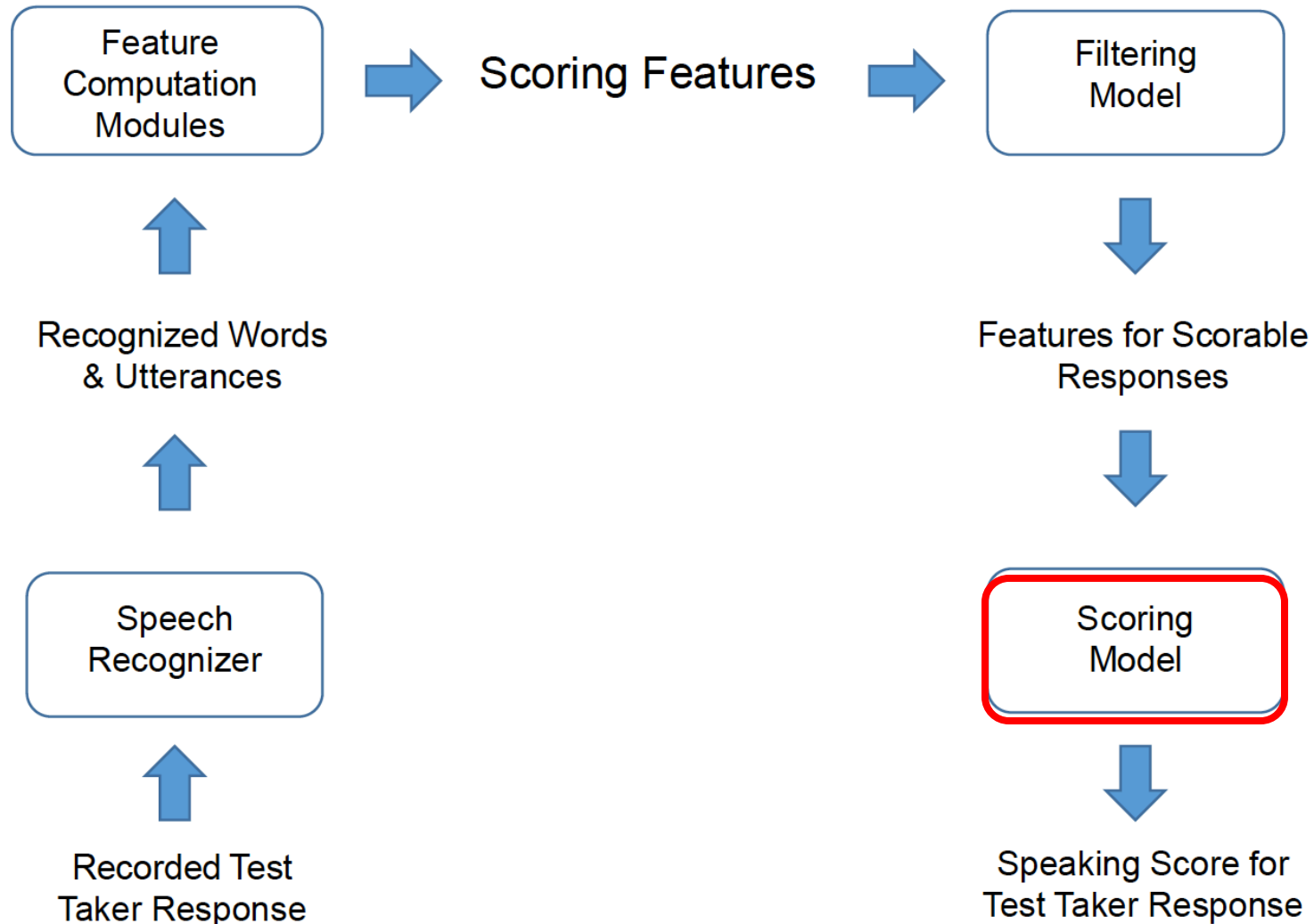
- **Vocabulary**: diversity, range (e.g., use of frequent vs. infrequent words)
  - example: vocabulary\_sophistication = average frequency of words in response based on a word list
- **Grammar**: accuracy (measured via POS n-grams), diversity (occurrence of syntactic constructions)
  - example: complexity of phrases = number of noun phrases with embeddings

# TOPIC DEVELOPMENT: CONTENT & DISCOURSE

- **Content**: bag-of-words features (general topic), keypoint prediction (specific content in a response)
  - example: topicality = cosine\_similarity (words in response, words in high proficient responses)
- **Discourse**: coherence/cohesion, structure (using RST parsing)
  - example: coherence = # connection words (e.g., “and”, “then”, ...)



# SPEECHRATER SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE



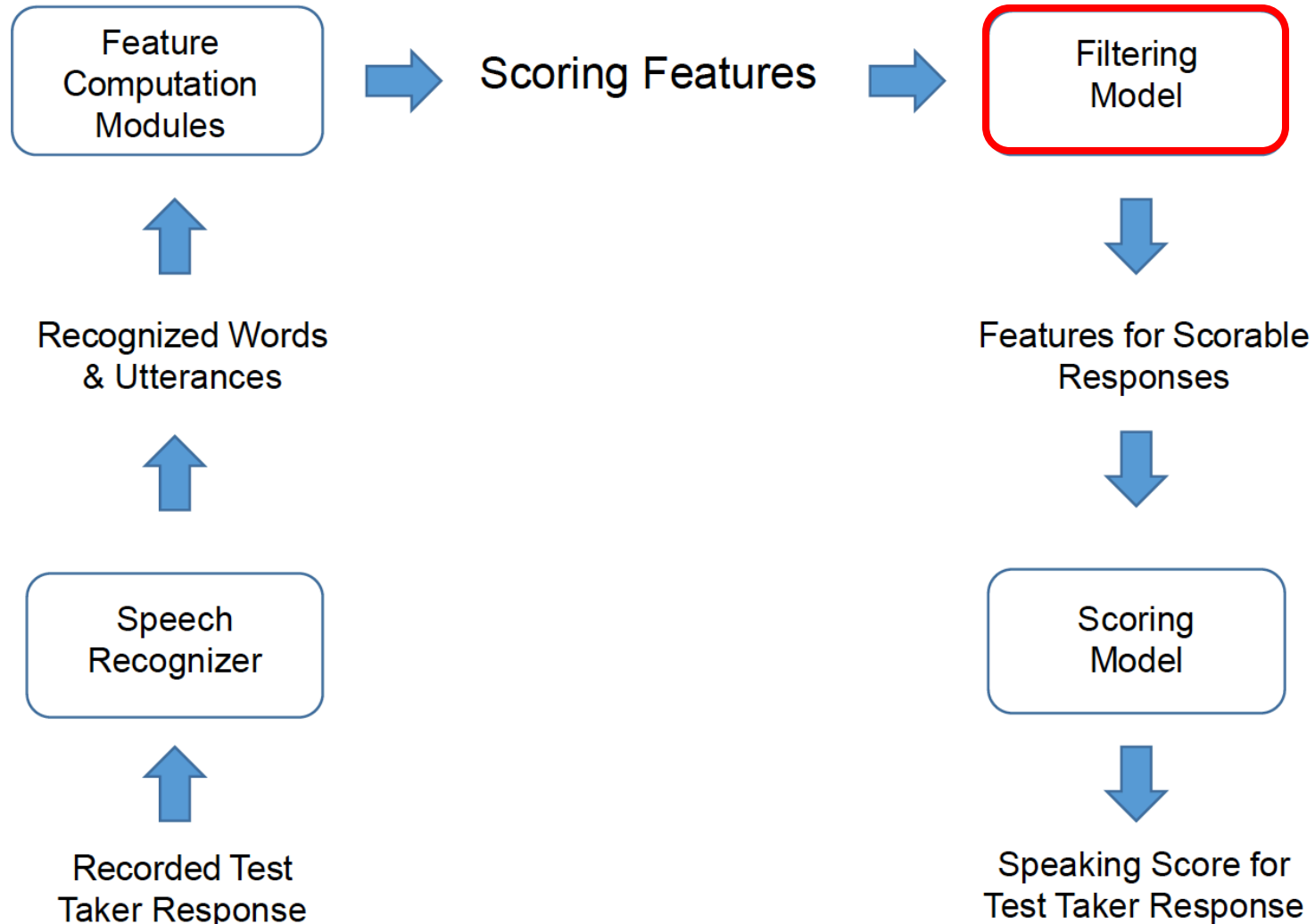
# CONDUCT PILOT TEST & OBTAIN HUMAN RATINGS

- recommended: 1000+ responses for each task, double human scored
- used operational data: 200k test takers, 50% training, 50% evaluation
- 4 responses per test taker
- human ratings: 1-4, integer

# SCORING MODEL

- reduce feature set via non-negative least-square regression (avoid high inter-correlations between features)
- **28 features**, from all areas of the speaking rubric (except for “content’)
- correlation between machine and human scores: **0.64** (*inter-human correlation: 0.58*)
- using other traditional machine learning algorithms did not result in any marked performance increase
- recently explored transformer-based scoring, more promising (but disadvantage of less interpretable scores)

# SPEECHRATER SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE



# FILTERING MODELS

- some spoken responses can have non-ideal properties: blank, high-noise, off-topic...
- need to identify such non-scorable responses: filtering models
- TOEFL iBT: filtering model based on acoustic information (e.g., noisy or empty responses)
- flagged responses are not scored by the machine but typically routed to human raters

# SYSTEM EVALUATION

- major evaluation criteria, informed by theories of educational measurement and psychometrics, are: reliability, validity, and fairness
- **reliability**: machine score should correspond to the “true score” (idealized score e.g. average of many independent human raters’ scores)
- **validity**: are features measuring what they are supposed to measure? (in terms of the relevant aspects of speaking proficiency)
- **fairness**: do automated scores show any bias towards sub-groups, e.g., gender, native language etc.
- TOEFL iBT: hybrid scoring system: for each item, a machine score and a human rater score are combined
- combines advantages of human raters (evaluation of content aspects) and machine (evaluation of more detailed aspects of fluency, pronunciation etc.)



# DEEP LEARNING FOR AUTOMATED SCORING

- using BLSTMs for scoring of spontaneous speech, using both time-aggregated and response-level linguistic features (Yu et al., 2015)
- using BLSTMs for scoring of dialogs and monologs, predicting both holistic and analytic scores (Qian et al., 2019)
- using transformers to score specific content in spontaneous speech (Wang et al., 2020)

# LARGE SCALE DEPLOYMENT: ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- test administration: test centers vs. at-home
- bandwidth for A/V data (video e.g. used for test security)
- test integrity/security issues
- data flow and storage
- integration of human raters and machine scores
- score turn-around time to test takers
- monitoring of scores (human and machine)
- continuous supply of new items

# MAJOR DIRECTIONS MOVING FORWARD

- expanding feature set (e.g., discourse structure, specific content)
- exploring DL for scoring
- expanding set of filtering models
- improving ASR component (e.g., using larger data set for training)

# Automatic Feedback

Keelan Evanini

10/26/20



# Automated Speech Feedback

- Goal: provide language learners with actionable information about how they can improve their speaking ability
- Focus is on spontaneous speech in an academic context
  - Prior research on speech feedback has primarily focused on restricted speech, e.g., pronunciation error detection
- Considerations
  - Which aspects of speaking proficiency to provide feedback on?
  - How should feedback be presented?

# Feedback Feature Selection Criteria

Usability

Understandable to test takers

Usefulness

Provide actionable information

Reliability

Be consistent

Relevance

Correlate with human scores

Coverage

Address different aspects of the construct

# Selected SpeechRater Features

Feature name	Construct area	Description
Speaking Rate	Delivery-Fluency	Words per second
Sustained Speech	Delivery-Fluency	Number of words without disfluencies
Pause Frequency	Delivery-Fluency	Pauses per word
Repetitions	Delivery-Fluency	Number of repetitions
Vowels	Delivery-Pronunciation	Vowel sounds compared to a native speaker model
Rhythm	Delivery-Pronunciation	Stressed syllables
Vocabulary depth	Language Use-Vocabulary	Use of infrequent words

# Consistency across Tasks

<b>TPO 2012 (N = 776)</b>	<b>Avg. Alpha</b>	<b>Min. Alpha</b>	<b>Alpha Range</b>
Speaking Rate	0.94	0.91	0.04
Sustained Speech	0.91	0.88	0.05
Pause Frequency	0.94	0.92	0.02
Repetitions	0.75	0.67	0.15
Rhythm	0.83	0.80	0.07
Vowels	0.88	0.78	0.15
Vocabulary Depth	0.79	0.74	0.09
<b>TOEFL iBT (N = 10,469)</b>	<b>Avg. Alpha</b>	<b>Min. Alpha</b>	<b>Alpha Range</b>
Speaking Rate	0.95	0.94	0.02
Sustained Speech	0.92	0.86	0.07
Pause Frequency	0.95	0.94	0.02
Repetitions	0.80	0.79	0.04
Rhythm	0.85	0.83	0.05
Vowels	0.81	0.66	0.23
Vocabulary Depth	0.84	0.81	0.07



# Consistency across Tasks

TPO 2012 (N = 776)	Avg. Alpha	Min. Alpha	Alpha Range
Speaking Rate	0.94	0.91	0.04
Sustained Speech	0.91	0.88	0.05
Pause Frequency	0.94	0.92	0.02
Repetition	TPO Average Cronbach's alpha: 0.75 – 0.94		0.15
Rhythm			0.07
Vowels	0.88	0.78	0.15
Vocabulary Depth	0.79	0.74	0.09
TOEFL iBT (N = 10,469)	Avg. Alpha	Min. Alpha	Alpha Range
Speaking Rate	0.95	0.94	0.02
Sustained Speech	0.92	0.86	0.07
Pause Frequency	0.95	0.94	0.02
Repetition	TOEFL Average Cronbach's alpha: 0.80 – 0.95		
Rhythm			
Vowels	0.81	0.66	0.23
Vocabulary Depth	0.84	0.81	0.07

# Correlation with Human Score

Name for reporting	Mean Corr. (TPO N = 776)	Mean Corr. (TOEFL iBT N = 10,469)
Speaking Rate	0.51	0.69
Sustained Speech	0.50	0.62
Pause Frequency	0.50	0.66
Repetitions	0.32	0.46
Rhythm	0.45	0.61
Vowels	0.48	0.57
Vocabulary Depth	0.48	0.67

# Correlation with Human Score

Name for reporting	Mean Corr. (TPO N = 776)	Mean Corr. (TOEFL iBT N = 10,469)
Speaking Rate	0.51	0.69
Sustained S	TPO Pearson correlations: 0.32 – 0.51	
Pause Frequency	0.50	0.66
Repetitions	0.32	0.46
Rhythm	TOEFL Pearson correlations: 0.46 – 0.69	
Vowels	0.48	0.57
Vocabulary Depth	0.48	0.67

# Added Value

- Do machine-generated linguistic measures have value in addition to human and machine holistic scores?
- Approach: Proportional Reduction in Mean Square Error (PRMSE) (Haberman, 2008; Sinharay, Puhan, & Haberman, 2011)

PRMSE = Proportion of the variance explained by the observed scores to the total variance of true scores.

- The larger the PRMSE, the better the model prediction.
- PRMSE addresses relationship between observed and true scores, as well as reliability of observed measures.

In our case, feature scores have added value when:

$$\text{PRMSE}_{\text{feature\_score}} > \text{PRMSE}_{\text{holistic\_score}}$$

# Added Value - Model Specification

Best linear prediction approach (BLP) to predict true scores from observed scores.

- Model 1: Observed **feature score** used to predict the corresponding feature true score.
- Model 2: Observed **machine holistic score** to predict the feature true score.
- Model 3: Observed **human holistic score** to predict the feature true score.

# Added Value - Modeling Results

(N=244)	PRMSE		
	Model 1 AS-Feature	Model 2 AS-Holistic	Model 3 Human Holistic
Sustained speech	.92	.65	.38
Pause frequency	.94	.60	.33
Speaking rate	.94	.70	.36
Repetitions	.78	.21	.07
Vowels	.92	.58	.33
Rhythm	.83	.55	.30
Vocabulary depth	.79	.68	.44

Substantial gain in PRMSE between Model 1 and 2, and between Model 1 and 3

# Added Value - Modeling Results

(N=244)	PRMSE		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Dep			
Su			
Pa			
Sp			
Re			
Vowels	.92	.58	.33
Rhythm	.83	.55	.30
Vocabulary depth	.79	.68	.44

Feature scores have added value over holistic scores because feature true scores were better predicted by the corresponding observed feature scores than by machine or human holistic score.

Substantial gain in PRMSE between Model 1 and 2, and between Model 1 and 3



ETS Automated Scoring Technologies: the SpeechRater™ Engine  
Developed to provide automated scoring of spoken English proficiency.

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Please enter a coupon code for the SpeechRater™ demo.

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<https://nlp-pilot.ets.org/srater>



Select one of the speaking prompts from the Prompts list to record your response or select See Results in the Select Report section to see your SpeechRater results for a previous submission.

## Prompts

Prompt ID	Prompt Text	Select Question
TOEFL-independent1	Talk about a pleasant and memorable event that happened while you were in school. Explain why this event brings back fond memories.	 <a href="#">Submit Response</a>
TOEFL-independent2	Some people think it is more fun to spend time with friends in restaurants or cafes. Others think it is more fun to spend time with friends at home. Which do you think is better? Explain why.	 <a href="#">Submit Response</a>

**Directions:** Submit a spoken response to SpeechRater. Read the prompt and record your answer below.

## Read the question below

Some people think it is more fun to spend time with friends in restaurants or cafes. Others think it is more fun to spend time with friends at home. Which do you think is better? Explain why.

## Record your answer

Click on the RECORD button below to record your spoken response.

▶ 0:44 / 0:44 ————— 🔊 ⋮

RECORD AGAIN

SUBMIT



# SpeechRater Demo

YOUR SCORE

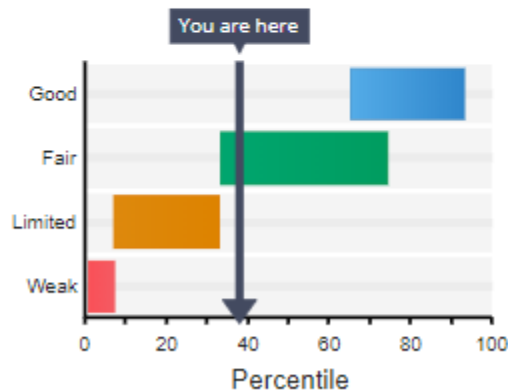
**2.6**

OUT OF 4.0



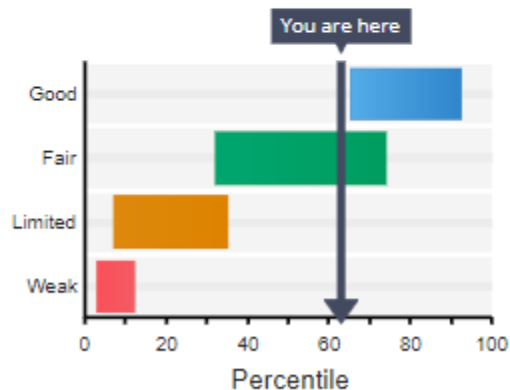
## Speaking Rate 38 (Fluency)

Speaking Rate is a measure of how many words you speak per minute. Stronger speakers tend to speak faster. (Be careful; if you speak too fast, it may be difficult for others to understand you.)



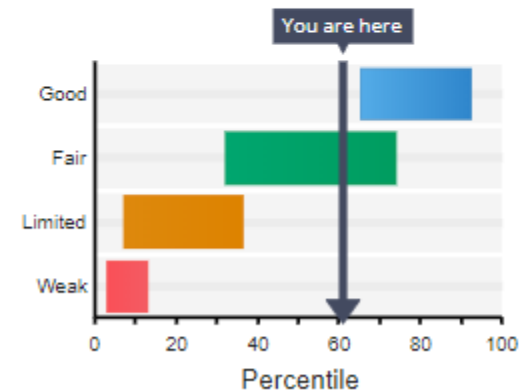
## Sustained Speech 63 (Fluency)

Sustained Speech is a measure of the average number of words you say without: (1) pausing or (2) using a filler word such as "um." Stronger speakers tend to say more words without pausing or using a filler word.



## Pause Frequency 61 (Fluency)

Pause Frequency is a measure of how often you pause when speaking. Stronger speakers tend to pause less frequently. Keep in mind that other aspects of pausing are also important; for example, pausing at the end of a sentence is better than pausing in the middle of an idea.



# User Perception Study (Gu et al., 2020)

- Participants: 123 TPO test takers, 31 EFL teachers
- Review a mockup report for an imaginary test taker
- Survey: Rate the usefulness of the feedback for
  - Preparing for TOEFL iBT
  - Improving English speaking proficiency in general
- Four-point Likert-scale: “definitely yes”, “maybe yes”, “maybe no”, and “definitely no”
  - Table reports the percentage of the respondents who said “definitely yes” or “maybe yes”

---

	For Test Prep	For Improvement
Test Takers	92%	86%
Teachers	87%	80%

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# Targeted Feedback

- In addition to global feedback about an entire response, *targeted feedback* can also be helpful to learners

## Filler Words

We found these filler words in your speech. Try to avoid filler words. Your speech will sound smoother.

### You said ...

"  
um i prefer ... studying ..... for my test our myself ..... and uh ... i feel ..... this ..... ways for two reasons ... first of all i can ..... um ... i can focus ... entirely ..... on what i need to learn when i ... when we study in a ... group ..... everyone has different week ..... spot and they're ... old ... enough to be um uh the old the two three um ... even is some ..... members of the group ..... are really strong ..... in those areas ... um ... in contrast when we work alone we can focus entirely our ..... um ..... our weak styles and therefore um ... get ... the best uh um first of ... all the schools ... and uh secondly i'm very easily distracted uh which ... can have um effect when i study in a group ... for instance um

## Pauses

Here are the pauses you made in your speech. Pausing between ideas is OK, but pausing in the middle of an idea can be 😞.

### You said ...

"  
um i prefer ... studying ..... for my test our myself ..... and uh ... i feel ..... this ..... ways for two reasons ... first of all i can ..... um ... i can focus ... entirely ..... on what i need to learn when i ... when we study in a ... group ..... everyone has different week ..... spot and they're ... old ... enough to be um uh the old the two three um ... even is some ..... members of the group ..... are really strong ..... in those areas ... um ... in contrast when we work alone we can focus entirely our ..... um ..... our weak styles and therefore um ... get ... the best uh um first of ... all the schools ... and uh secondly i'm very easily distracted uh which ... can have um effect when i study in a group ... for instance um

## Repeated Words

We heard you use "like" 11 times.

### You said ...

"  
i prefer studying for my test all by myself and i feel this way for two reasons ... first of all um i like i can focus entirely uh what i need to learn like uh when we study in a group like everyone have different week start like that ... or ... deserve to be cut down even if the members of the group are uh like they're really strong in those areas ... um but also in ... other in another hand like when we work alone uh like we can strokes entirely on our own we smiled and like therefore uh we can get to the ... bank the ... possible target score secondly i ..... will i am ..... uh you will be distracted uh which ... can help uh he ... was a terrible in fact uh when i study in a group like uh last year ... i was preparing for a mid-term exam uh where is like a bunch of classmates but ... we ended up spending a lot like music and sport ... instead of studying ... so



# PART II: TRENDING TOPICS

## DIALOG & MULTIMODAL SCORING AND FEEDBACK

# Spoken Dialog Systems in the Educational Domain

Vikram Ramanarayanan

10/26/20



# WHY DIALOG?

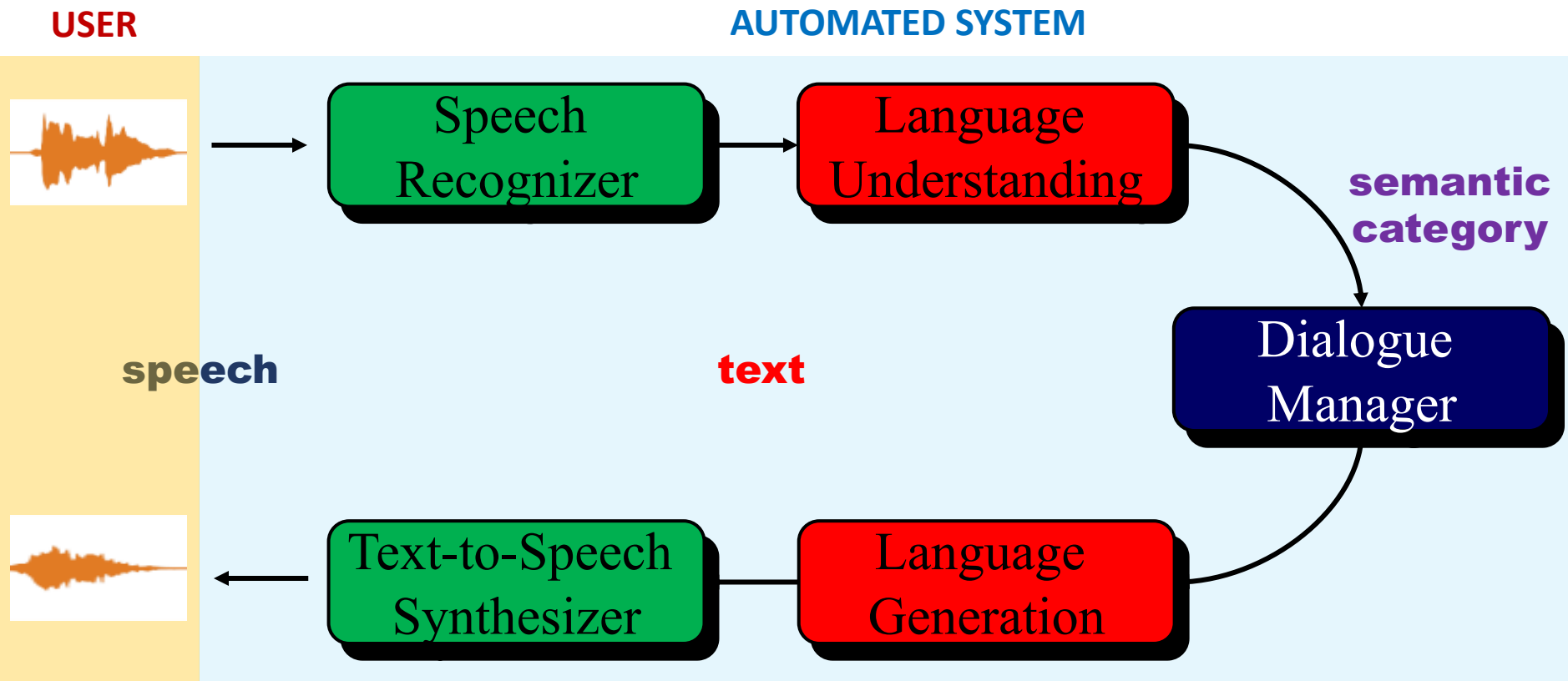
- Current instruments for spoken formative English language assessment are **not** naturalistic and conversational, for the most part.
- Certain exceptions (or getting there at least):



- However, it is important to **engage people** in conversations in **naturalistic settings** in order to be more effective and measure/train relevant skills
- Reaching people with **disabilities**, e.g., visually-impaired individuals.



# SPOKEN DIALOG SYSTEMS



**A dialog system iteratively goes through this loop until termination.**

Adapted from:  
Kamboj, SIG-AI Fall  
2003 presentation

# SEVERAL CHALLENGES IN DESIGNING DIALOG SYSTEMS

Voice activity detection:

Sensitivity

Time-out

Barge-in

ASR:

Language is strongly context-dependent

Adverse acoustic conditions (speaker phone, background noise)

SLU:

Out-of-vocabulary/no-match

DM:

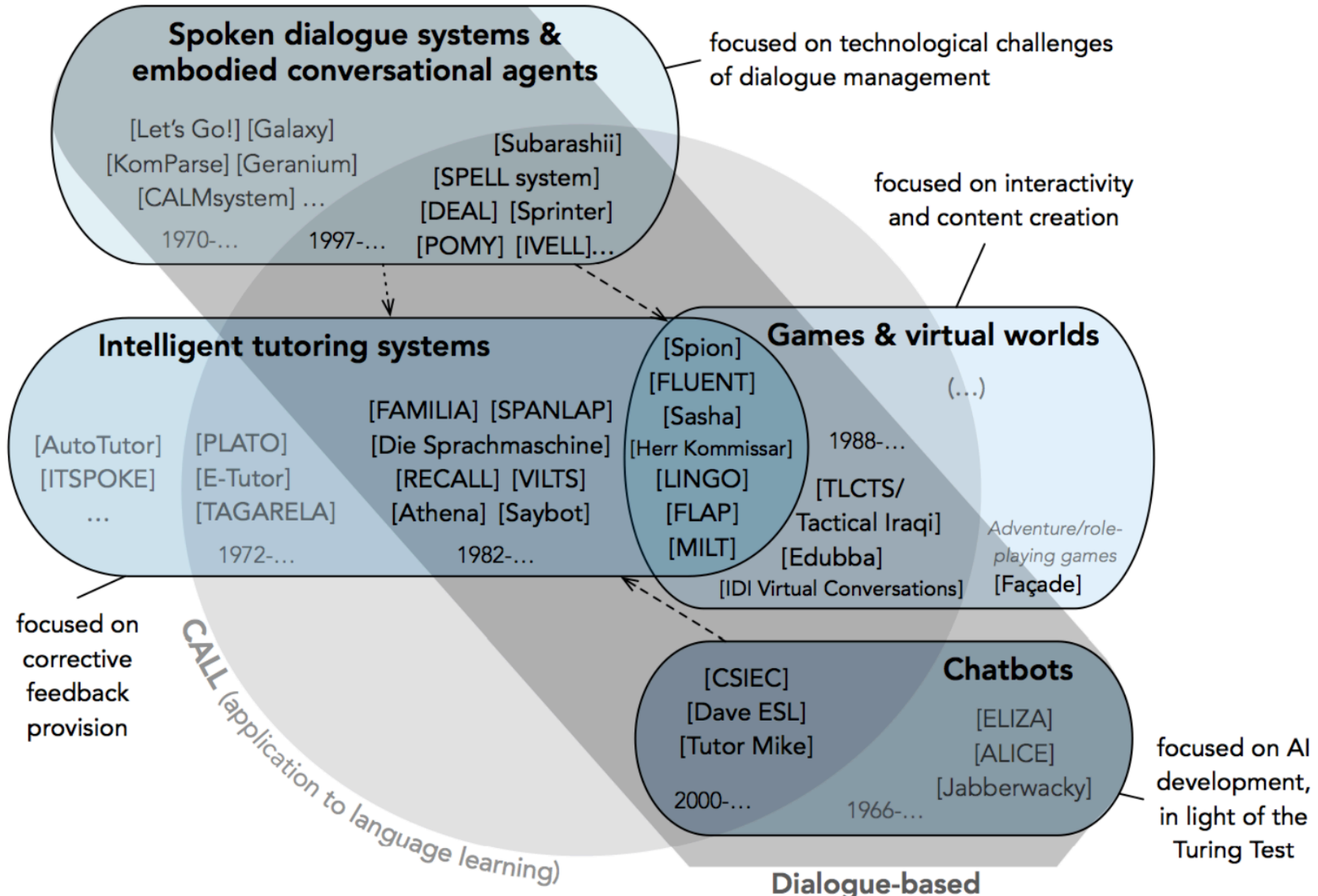
Behave naturally (e.g. back-channel),  
robust (cover all situations, do not loop indefinitely, ...),  
effective (accomplish target task with reasonable effort)

# COMPLEMENTARY TUTORIALS

- Our 2018 Interspeech Tutorial on Spoken Dialog Technology for Educational Domain Applications
  - <http://www.vikramr.com/tutorials.html>
- Deep Learning for Dialog Systems by Vivian Chen, Asli Celikyilmaz and Dilek Hakkani-Tur
  - [https://www.csie.ntu.edu.tw/~yvchen/doc/DeepDialogue\\_Tutorial.pdf](https://www.csie.ntu.edu.tw/~yvchen/doc/DeepDialogue_Tutorial.pdf)
- Deep Learning for Conversational AI by Pei-Hao Su, Nikola Mrksic, Iñigo Casanueva and Ivan Vulic
  - <https://www.poly-ai.com/docs/naacl18.pdf>
- Tutorial material from Steve Young (Cambridge) on Statistical Spoken Dialogue
  - <http://mi.eng.cam.ac.uk/~sjy/tutorial.html>

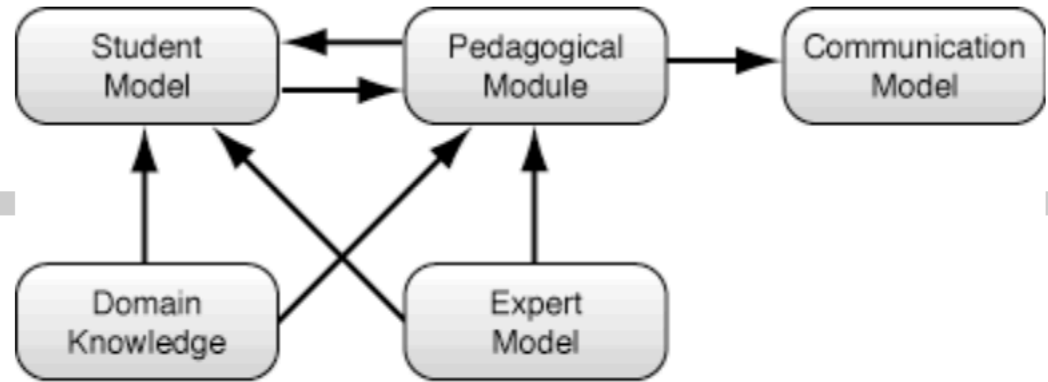
# OPEN SOURCE DIALOG SYSTEMS

- Olympus: <http://wiki.speech.cs.cmu.edu/olympus> (2007)
- InproTK: <https://bitbucket.org/inpro/inprotk> (2010)
- OpenDial: <http://www.opendial-toolkit.net> (2012)
- HALEF: <http://halef.org> (2013)
- Alex: <https://ufal.mff.cuni.cz/alex> (2014)
- PyDial: <http://www.camdial.org/pydial> (2017)



[Bibauw et al. \(2015\). Dialogue-based CALL: an overview of existing research](#)

# INTELLIGENT TUTORING SYSTEMS



## Graesser's 5 steps:

1. Tutor asks question (or presents problem)
2. Learner answers question (or begins to solve problem)
3. Tutor gives short immediate feedback on the quality of the answer (or solution)
4. The tutor and learner collaboratively improve the quality of the answer.
5. The tutor assesses the learner's understanding of the answer

Happens in classroom instruction

Happens in 1-1 tutoring

While many of the early ITSs were dialog-based, they were limited by the NLP technologies at the time.

# AUTOTUTOR

Developed by Art Graesser and other researchers at the University of Memphis that helps students learn STEAM and ELLA topics through tutorial dialogue in natural language

The screenshot shows the AUTOTUTOR interface with a purple background. At the top, a text box contains the question: "The sun exerts a gravitational force on the earth as the earth moves in its orbit around the sun. Does the earth pull equally on the sun? Explain why." Below this, a 3D rendered male head (the talking head) is shown on the left. A yellow callout bubble points to the head with the text: "Talking head" followed by a bulleted list: "▪ Gestures" and "▪ Synthesized speech". Another yellow callout bubble points to the question text with the text: "▪ Presentation of the question/problem". In the bottom left, a "Log of previous turns" window shows a history of dialogue. A yellow callout bubble points to this log with the text: "Dialog history with" followed by a bulleted list: "▪ tutor turns" and "▪ student turns". In the bottom right, a text input field is labeled "Type your response here". A yellow callout bubble points to this field with the text: "Student input (answers, comments, questions)".

# SDSs for Language Learning: Designing Conversational Items

10/26/20





# SDS for Language Learners

- Spoken Dialog Systems (SDS) can help improve foreign language learning and assessment
- SDS enable interactive, conversation-based speaking tasks
  - authentic, situation-based, goal-oriented, dialogic
- benefits for **language learning**:
  - learner can practice conversational English without instructor/tutor present
  - real-time feedback on specific language skills
- benefits for **language assessment**:
  - elicit evidence for aspects of speaking ability that can't be measured using traditional, prompt-response items (pragmatics, turn-taking, etc.)

# Designing Interactive Speaking Tasks

- Tasks should be naturalistic
- Tasks should be goal-oriented
- Tasks should elicit open-ended speech of variable complexity
- Tasks should be engaging
- Tasks should be robust to off-task responses
- System should adapt to different speakers (L1 backgrounds, proficiency levels, cultural knowledge)
- System should be able to provide feedback about language and task completion

# Design Process

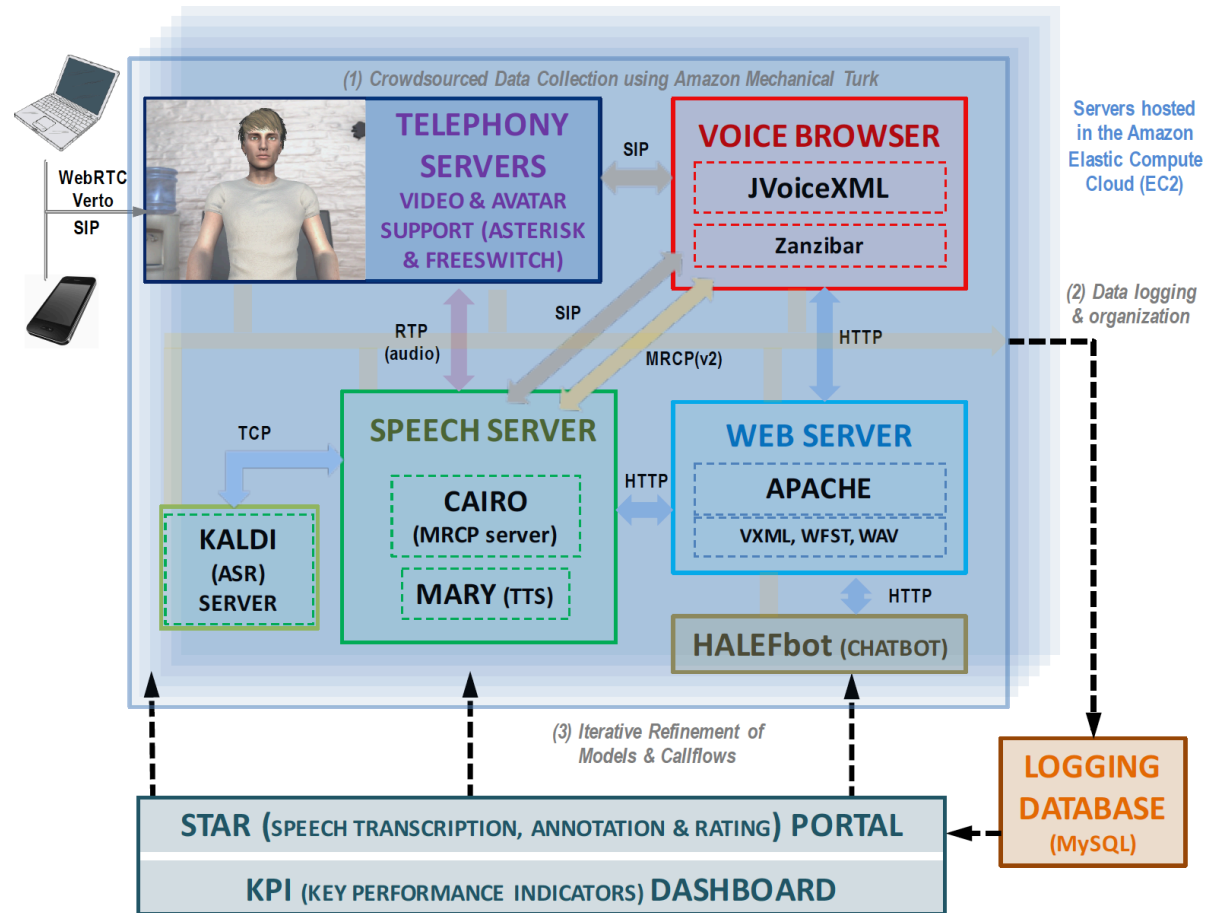
- Iterative procedure
  - design initial branching conversation flow based on expected responses
  - collect sample responses from actual users
  - analyze user responses
  - revise conversation flow to handle unmatched responses
  - collect new responses using revised conversation flow
  - ...
- System will never be able to handle every possible response  
→ goal is to make it as robust as possible and handle most likely responses

# A PROBLEM OF SCALE:

## HOW DO WE TEST THE SYSTEM AND COLLECT DATA FROM LARGE NUMBERS OF ACTUAL LEARNERS?

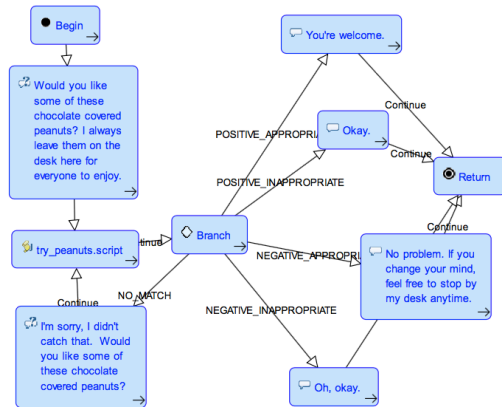
**HALEF:**  
Help Assistant–  
Language Enabled &  
Free  
<http://halef.org>

HALEF is an open-source, standards-compliant, cloud-based and modular dialog system (text, audio or video)

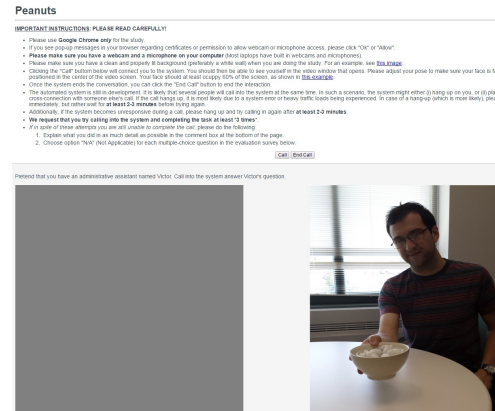


**Crowdsourcing** techniques allow us to iteratively bootstrap SDs from scratch & collect data from target populations

# TYPICAL DATA COLLECTION PROCESS



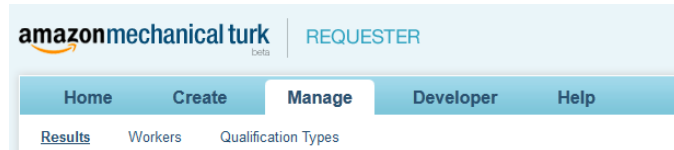
Design callflows in OpenVXML



Design webpage interface



Proof of task completion



Create task on crowdsourcing platform

# Making Requests

- Communicative function: making requests in a workplace environment
- Target language: pragmatically appropriate phrases for indirect requests
- Task: learner plays the role of an office worker having a conversation with their boss and is instructed to make two requests

# Task Directions

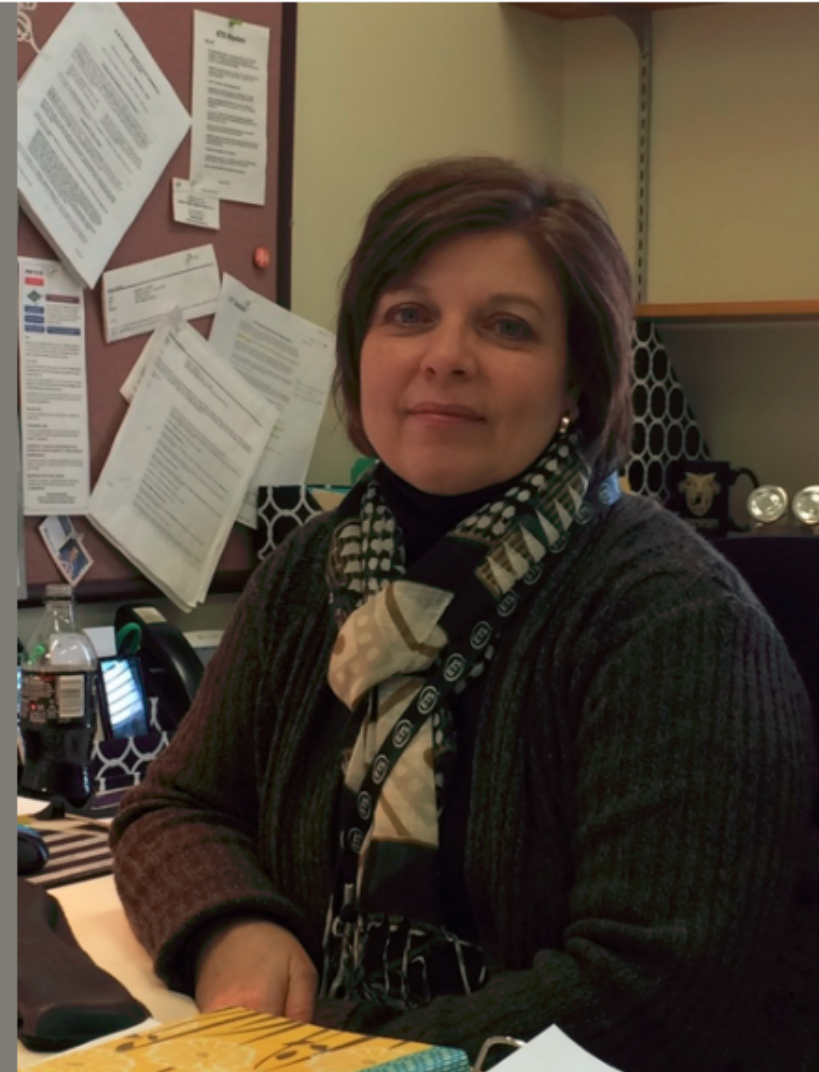
Imagine that you are calling your boss, Lisa Green. Your goals are to:

1. get her to agree to have a meeting with you and
2. ask her to review your presentation slides before the meeting.

Your schedule is free for the rest of the week, so any time proposed by Lisa will work for you.

You:

Lisa Green:





## Practice Speaking in Conversations

🎧 For each task, you will speak into your microphone.

💡 The system will listen to what you say and speak back to you.

📄 At the end of each task, you will receive some feedback.

⚠️ Note: The exercises are different from items you will encounter on the TOEFL® test.

- <https://www.edx.org/course/toefl-test-preparation-the-insiders-guide>



### The Coffee Spot

Pick up a beverage and a snack for your friend.

[Go to the coffee shop →](#)



### The Group Project

You and your classmate need to make some progress on your class project.

[Call my classmate →](#)



### The Job Interview

Practice your job interview skills with a career advisor.

[Prepare for the interview →](#)





# FEEDBACK & SCORING

# SCORING INTERACTIONAL COMPETENCE

- ❖ *Big Picture Goal*: developing intelligent dialog agents for instruction, learning and assessment of learners of English
  - Conversational proficiency is a crucial skill in today's workplace, but is not an easy construct to define (Young, 2011; Doehler and Pochon-Berger, 2015).
  - Dialog systems offer one way of automating this need at scale.
  
- ❖ *Study Motivation*: no prior study has performed a comprehensive examination of the automated scoring of whole dialog responses based primarily on text features, specifically for interaction aspects thereof.
  
- ❖ *Key contributions*:
  1. developing a comprehensive rubric specifically tailored to conversational dialog
  2. triple-scoring a selection of dialog data based on this rubric
  3. examining the performance of two methods for automated scoring– the first based on interpretable feature engineering and the second based on deep model engineering.

# EXPERIMENTAL SETUP

- ❖ 2288 conversations of human-machine dialog (Boss – Employee interaction)
- ❖ Deployed on Amazon Mechanical Turk using the HALEF open source dialog system
- ❖ Human Scoring: Each of the 2288 dialog responses triple scored (using a randomized design) by 3 of 8 human raters on a custom-designed rubric.
- ❖ Machine Scoring: 10-fold cross-validation experiments
  - ❖ Input: full dialog (all turns) → Output: Scores.
  - ❖ Feature engineering and e2e deep learning model engineering explored

Dialog state (Turn)	Interlocutor	Response
Hello (T1)	Lisa Green	<i>Hello?</i>
	User	[greeting]
How (T2)	Lisa Green	<i>Hi, how's it going? What can I do for you?</i>
	User	[(positive sentiment) + request for meeting]
Friday (T3)	Lisa Green	<i>Yeah, sure I'm available on Friday at 12. Does that work for you?</i>
	User	[positive response]
Anything (T4)	Lisa Green	<i>Was there anything else you needed?</i>
	User	[request to review slides]
Sure (T5)	Lisa Green	<i>Sure, no problem. Send them over.</i>
	User	[expression of thanks]

# SCORING RUBRIC

Construct	Sub-construct	Description
Interaction	Engagement	Examines the extent to which the user engages with the dialog agent and responds in a thoughtful manner.
	Turn Taking	Examines the extent to which the user takes the floor at appropriate points in the conversation without noticeable interruptions or gaps.
	Repair	Examines the extent to which the user successfully initiates and completes a repair in case of a misunderstanding or error by the dialog agent.
	Appropriateness	Examines the extent to which the user reacts to the dialog agent in a pragmatically appropriate manner.
Overall Holistic Performance		Measures the overall performance.

Human scoring rubric for interaction aspects of conversational proficiency. Scores are assigned on a Likert scale from 1-4 ranging from low to high proficiency. A score of 0 is assigned when there were issues with audio quality or system malfunction or off-topic or empty responses.

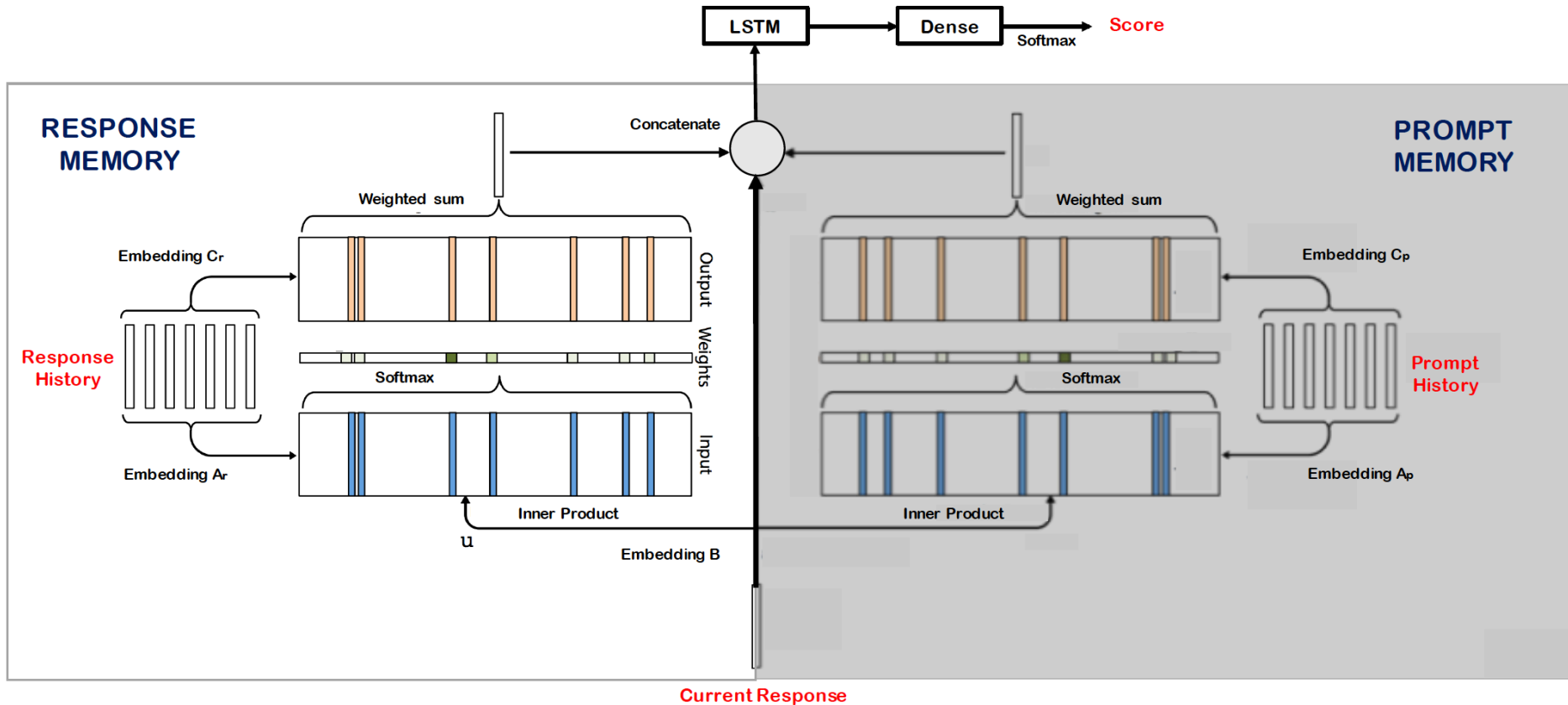
Also see Ramanarayanan (2020). Design and Development of a Human-Machine Dialog Corpus for the Automated Assessment of Conversational English Proficiency

# FEATURE ENGINEERING

Feature	Description
Word $n$ -grams	Word $n$ -grams are collected for $n = 1$ to $2$ . This feature captures patterns about vocabulary usage (key words) in responses.
Character $n$ -grams	Character $n$ -grams (including whitespace) are collected for $n = 2$ to $5$ . This feature captures patterns that abstract away from grammatical and other language use errors.
Response length	Defined as $\log(chars)$ , where $chars$ represents the total number of characters in a response.
Syntactic dependencies	A feature that captures grammatical relationships between individual words in a sentence. This feature captures linguistic information about “who did what to whom” and abstracts away from a simple unordered set of key words.

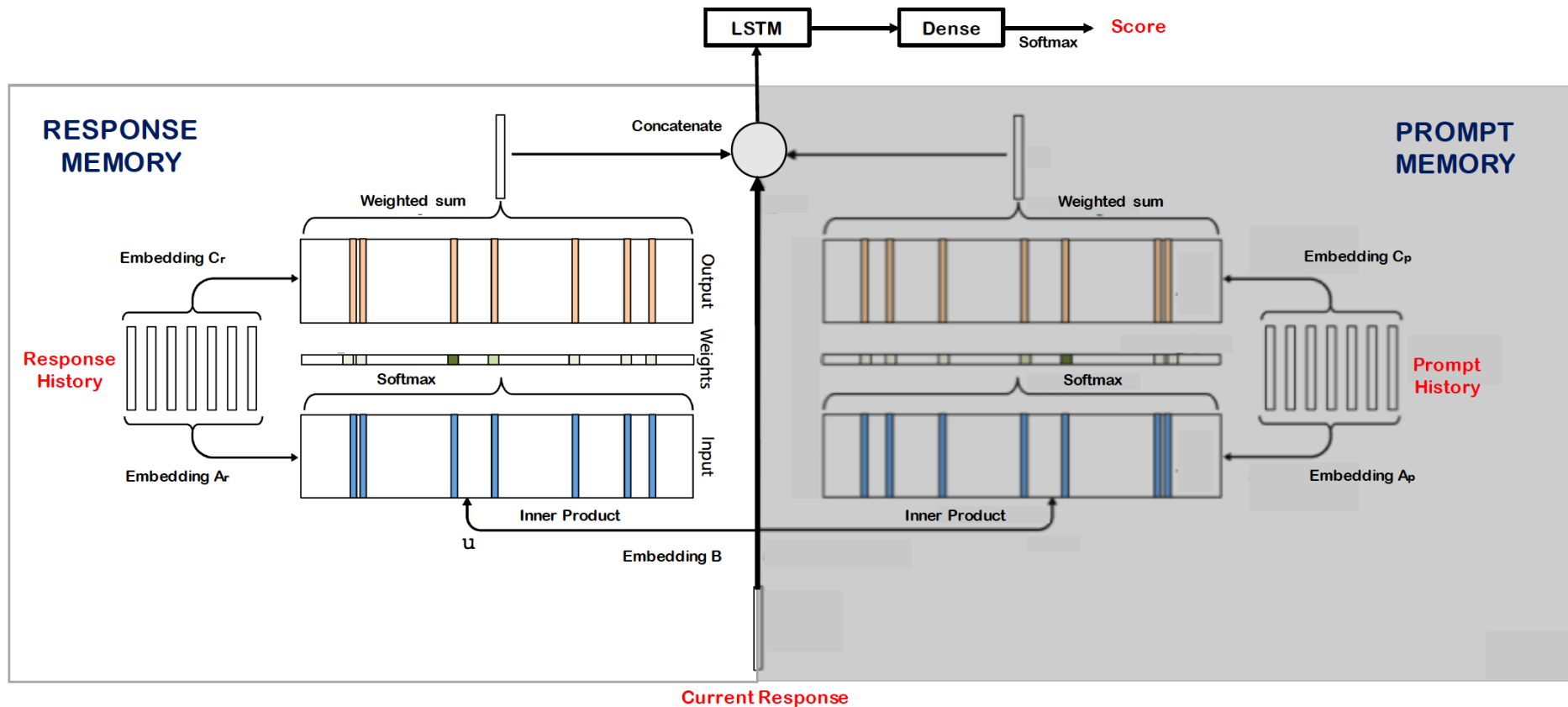
*c-rater* NLP features used for machine scoring (Madnani et al., 2017)

# MEMORY NETWORKS



The MemN2N architecture Sukhbaatar et al. (2015) learns a mapping between an output score and an input tuple consisting of the current response, the response history and the prompt history.

# MEMORY NETWORKS



## MemN2N training details:

- Optimized a cross-entropy-based objective function
- Tuned hyperparameters (# of layers, neurons per layer, dropout) using *hyperas*.
- Experimented with 1, 2 and 3 memory hops and found 2 to be optimal.
- Pretrained embeddings worked better than random for prompt history encoding

# RESULTS

Construct	Sub-construct	c-rater ML		MemN2N		c-rater ML + MemN2N		Human Metrics	
		Accuracy	QW $\kappa$	Accuracy	QW $\kappa$	Accuracy	QW $\kappa$	Conger $\kappa$	Krippendorff $\alpha$
Interaction	Engagement	0.70	0.70	0.65	0.65	0.71	0.72	0.69	0.72
	Turn Taking	0.69	0.67	0.68	0.40	0.71	0.70	0.71	0.74
	Repair	0.66	0.60	0.64	0.58	0.67	0.64	0.73	0.72
	Appropriateness	0.67	0.67	0.62	0.58	0.67	0.67	0.70	0.72
Overall Holistic Performance		0.69	0.72	0.66	0.65	0.70	0.72	0.75	0.75

Moderate to high agreement among human raters.

*Fusing the MemN2N with the c-rater ML system leads to a small but significant improvement over either of the systems alone.*

A combination of n-gram, length, syntactic dependency and memory-based attention over embedding representations of words over the entire dialog are useful in capturing at least some aspects of these sub-constructs of interaction.



# RESULTS

Construct	Sub-construct	c-rater ML		MemN2N		c-rater ML + MemN2N		Human Metrics	
		Accuracy	$QW_{\kappa}$	Accuracy	$QW_{\kappa}$	Accuracy	$QW_{\kappa}$	Conger $\kappa$	Krippendorff $\alpha$
Interaction	Engagement	0.70	0.70	0.65	0.65	0.71	0.72	0.69	0.72
	Turn Taking	0.69	0.67	0.68	0.40	0.71	0.70	0.71	0.74
	Repair	0.66	0.60	0.64	0.58	0.67	0.64	0.73	0.72
	Appropriateness	0.67	0.67	0.62	0.58	0.67	0.67	0.70	0.72
Overall Holistic Performance		0.69	0.72	0.66	0.65	0.70	0.72	0.75	0.75

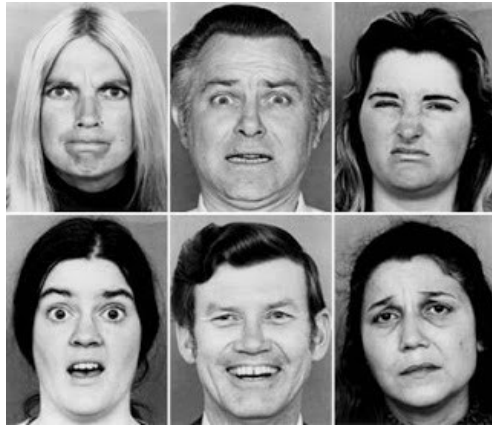
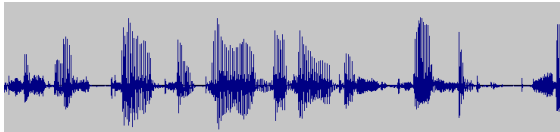
Repair and appropriateness, and even turn taking to a lesser extent are related to proficiency in language use, and hence it makes sense that features such as n-grams and syntactic dependencies might be somewhat useful.

However, some of the results might also be explained by some of our examined features being highly correlated with more interpretable/relevant features.

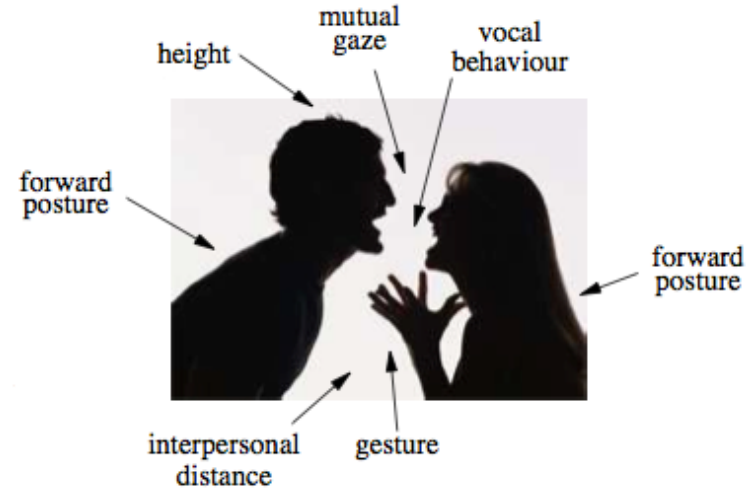
*Future:* consider information from audio or visual channels; useful in predicting properties related to interaction (engagement, for instance).

# MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS

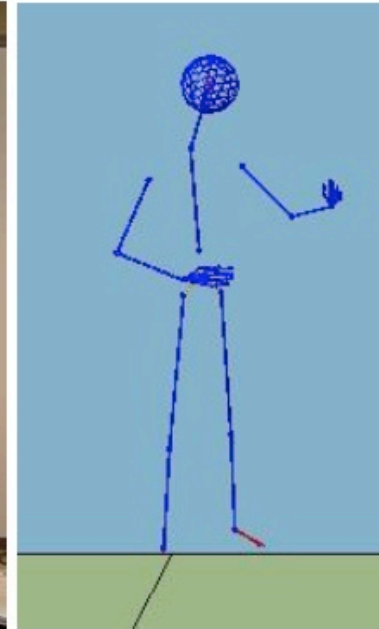
As the name suggests, we use data from **multiple modalities** to inform automatic learning and assessment problems



TEXT



# EXAMPLE APPLICATION AT ETS: MULTIMODAL PRESENTATION SCORING



IDEA: Use **speech, visual and body movement** (Microsoft Kinect) data to automatically predict different scores related to **presentation proficiency**

# PRESENTATION TASKS

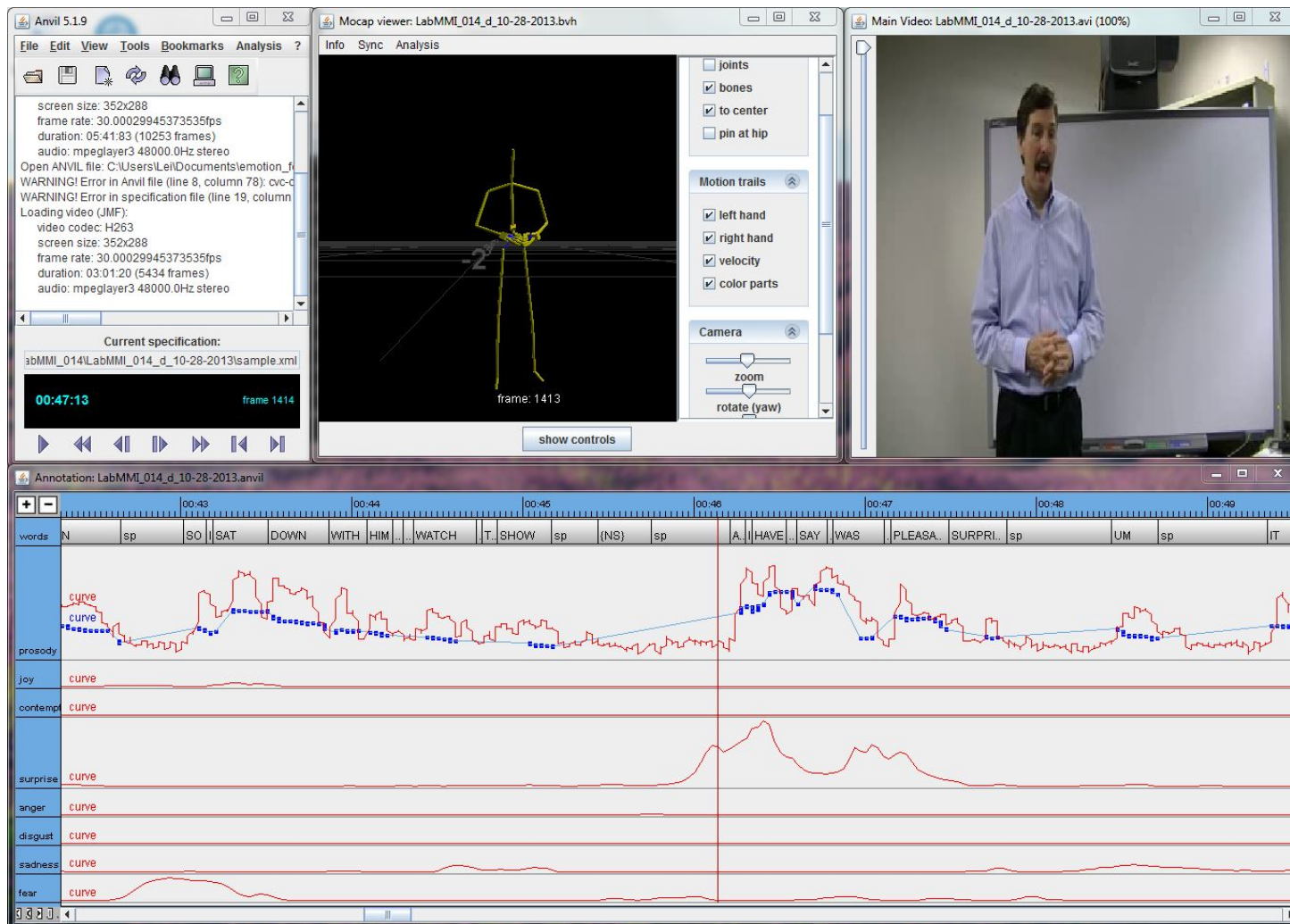
1. Speaker given a slide deck and ~10 minutes for preparation to :
  - a) present a financial report
  - b) teach a topic targeted at middle school students
  
2. Impromptu speeches on:
  - a) a movie you did not like but have to recommend nonetheless
  - b) the benefits of a place that is typically inconvenient to live in

# MULTIMODAL DATA COLLECTION

- 14 speakers – 6 males, 8 females

- Multiple data streams synchronized

- Kinect
- Speech
- Face
- Emotion



# SCORING RUBRIC

At least 2 human raters scored all 56 (4x14) presentation videos on these 10 aspects of the Public Speaking Competence Rubric (PSCR) on a 5-point Likert scale (0-4).

Score Dimension	Shorthand	Description of Item Competency
1	Intro	Formulate an introduction that orients the audience to the topic and speaker
2	Org	Use an effective organizational pattern
3	Conc	Develop a conclusion that reinforces the thesis and provides psychological closure
4	WC	Demonstrate a careful choice of words
5	VE	Effectively use vocal expression and paralanguage to engage the audience
6	NVB	Demonstrate nonverbal behavior that reinforces the message
7	AudAdap	Successfully adapt the presentation to the audience
8	VisAid	Skillfully make use of visual aids
9	Persuasion	Construct an effectual persuasive message with credible evidence
10	Holistic	Overall holistic performance

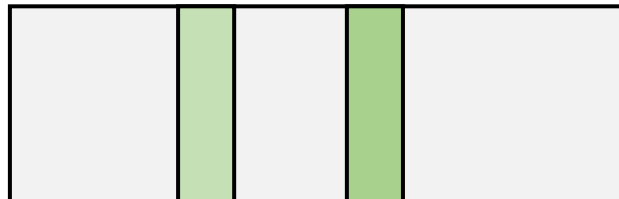
If the two raters **did not agree**, then a third rater was brought in, and the final score was the **average of all three**.

L. M. Schreiber, G. D. Paul, and L. R. Shibley. The development and test of the public speaking competence rubric. *Communication Education*, 61(3):205{233, 2012.



# HISTOGRAMS OF COOCCURRENCES (HoC)

Data matrix



VQ-labels



lag- $\tau$  co-occurrence matrix

(1,1)			0					
(1,2)		1	0				1	
(1,3)			1					
(2,1)			0					
(2,2)			0	1	1			1
(2,3)			0					
(3,1)			0					
(3,2)	1		0			1		1
(3,3)		1	0					1

- ▶ high-dimensional
- ▶ frames contribute additively to the HoC of a phone interval
- ▶ discover latent structure



0
2
0
1
3
0
0
3
1

HoC of utterance

HAC features compactly encapsulate **spatiotemporal** information in each phone interval!

# SPEECH PROFICIENCY FEATURES

Table 2: *Speaking Proficiency Features Extracted by SpeechRater*

Category	Sub-category	# of Features	Example Features
Prosody	Fluency	24	This category includes features based on the number of words per second, number of words per chunk, number of silences, average duration of silences, frequency of long pauses ( $\geq 0.5$ sec.), number of filled pauses ( <i>uh</i> and <i>um</i> ). See [14] for detailed descriptions of these features.
	Intonation & Stress	11	This category includes basic descriptive statistics (mean, minimum, maximum, range, standard deviation) for the pitch and power measurements for the utterance.
	Rhythm	26	This category includes features based on the distribution of prosodic events (prominences and boundary tones) in an utterance as detected by a statistical classifier (overall percentages of prosodic events, mean distance between events, mean deviation of distance between events) [14] as well as features based on the distribution of vowel, consonant, and syllable durations (overall percentages, standard deviation, and Pairwise Variability Index) [15].
Pronunciation	Likelihood-based	8	This category includes features based on the acoustic model likelihood scores generated during forced alignment with a native speaker acoustic model [16].
	Confidence-based	2	This category includes two features based on the ASR confidence score: the average word-level confidence score and the time-weighted average word-level confidence score [17].
	Duration	1	This category includes a feature that measures the average difference between the vowel durations in the utterance and vowel-specific means based on a corpus of native speech [16].
Grammar	Location of Disfluencies	6	This category includes features based on the frequency of between-clause silences and edit disfluencies compared to within-clause silences and edit disfluencies [18],[19].
Audio Quality	–	2	This category includes two scores based on MFCC features that assess the probability that the audio file has audio quality problems or does not contain speech input [20].



# RESULTS

Rater	Feature Set	Score Dimension									
		1 Intro	2 Org	3 Conc	4 WC	5 VE	6 NVB	7 AudAdap	8 VisAid	9 Persuasion	10 Holistic
Machine	Kinect HoC	0.13	0.14	0.16	<b>0.23</b>	0.01	0.25	0.06	0.66	0.24	0.03
	Kinect Aggregated	0.12	<b>0.53</b>	0.09	0.08	0.16	0.26	0.31	0.03	0.11	0.12
	Speech	0.28	0.34	0.03	0.12	0.37	0.22	0.30	0.75	<b>0.48</b>	0.44
	Kinect Both	0.13	0.35	0.19	<b>0.23</b>	0.01	0.27	0.18	0.69	0.25	0.01
	Speech + Kinect	0.20	0.17	0.16	0.16	0.23	0.08	0.07	0.82	0.34	0.31
	Face HoC	<b>0.45</b>	0.39	0.09	0.09	0.33	0.39	<b>0.47</b>	0.16	<b>0.49</b>	<b>0.69</b>
	Emotion HoC	0.21	0.14	0.49	0.20	0.06	<b>0.65</b>	0.26	0.01	0.13	0.03
	Speech + Face HoC	0.39	0.01	<b>0.52</b>	0.05	0.25	0.05	0.13	0.03	0.27	0.03
	Speech + Emo HoC	0.36	0.04	0.47	0.15	0.03	0.01	0.07	0.03	0.32	0.02
	All	0.15	0.18	0.18	0.09	0.29	0.08	0.06	0.79	0.34	0.36
Inter-rater agreement, $\rho_{R_1 R_2}$	0.24	0.33	0.48	0.11	<b>0.60</b>	0.40	0.15	<b>0.88</b>	0.02	0.39	
Human	Rater 1	0.70	0.76	0.86	0.79	0.89	0.82	0.70	0.94	0.69	0.81
	Rater 2	0.80	0.83	0.83	0.61	0.86	0.83	0.73	0.97	0.63	0.82

The **machine predicted score had a higher correlation** with the final score than the agreement between the first two human raters **in 8/10 cases!**

**While it is clear why some features performed well (emotion, face features for NVB and Holistic score), others are less interpretable (→ future work).**



# WRAPPING UP...

# KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Several factors to consider for L2 speech assessment
  - Acoustics, L1, Culture, Task Design, Score Type, Demographic
2. Typical steps of automated scoring
  - Recorded response → Speech recognition → Feature computation → Filtering → Scoring Model
3. Careful design of rubrics is important!
  - Example dimensions: Delivery, Language Use, Topic Development, Interaction/Kinesics (dialog)
4. Reliability, Validity and Fairness are crucial and often overlooked considerations for large-scale scoring systems
5. As we move to more interactive technologies for learning and assessment, dialog/multimodal scoring become increasingly important

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# QUESTIONS?

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