



From Diagnostics to Diapix: modes and methods of pronunciation assessment.

Gemma Archer

University of Strathclyde

Why the interest in pronunciation assessment?

- My own classroom based research led to my interest in pronunciation assessment: extremely stressful!
- Derwing & Munro talk of the 'trade offs' that come with choosing a testing method; something has to take precedence, practicality must be considered(2015).

In the next 45 minutes ...

- Explore a timeline of pronunciation assessments: samples from the last 100 years plus questions to consider
- Small discussion groups:
 - examine each assessment
 - consider the questions together
 - follow up discussion of each assessment's attributes
- Conclusion: has the last 100 years produced a fail-safe pronunciation assessment instrument?

Assessment types



- External and Internal Assessments
- Externally assessed proficiency exams e.g. IELTS/ TOEIC: big business both from an economic and socio-political perspective (Weir, 2013)
 - Learner motivation
 - Working in the UK, high marks in speaking are often a requirement
- Internally assessed: diagnostic & evaluative

Pronunciation resurgence in assessment?

Pronunciation assessment: the last to 'catch up' to the pronunciation resurgence of the last decade.

- Pronunciation still only a 'peripheral role' in publications on L2 speech assessments (Fulcher, 2003; Luoma, 2004 as cited in Isaacs, 2017)
- The only book-length text on pronunciation assessment was published over half a century ago by L2 assessment specialist Lado (Isaacs, 2014)
- In the longest published journal on L2 assessment, *Language Testing*, only 2 pronunciation focused articles were published in its first 25 years 1984 - 2009 (Isaacs, 2013).



Assessment 1:

Follow up to Assessment 1:

Valid? Scorable? Economical? Administrable? Suitable?

- Language assessments with no test of spoken abilities were the norm until mid 20th century (Weir, Vidaković & Galaczi, 2013)
- The indirect method (paper and pencil test) was seen from 1880 +, in the first Cambridge Proficiency Test (1913), and in the 1960s in the work of Robert Lado.

Buck (1989) proved no correlation between written performance and productive performance.



Assessment 2:

Follow up to Assessment 2:

Valid? Scorable? Economical? Administrable? Suitable?

- Direct speaking test formats: reading a passage aloud which contains pre-selected phonological criteria.
- Speech pathology exercise: several passages designed for diagnosing and assessing speech e.g. The Rainbow passage (1960), or The Grandfather passage (Hall & Mueller, 1998).
- Allows for researcher control over contents, but results can be more artificial, given the lack of spontaneity (Derwing & Munro, 2015).



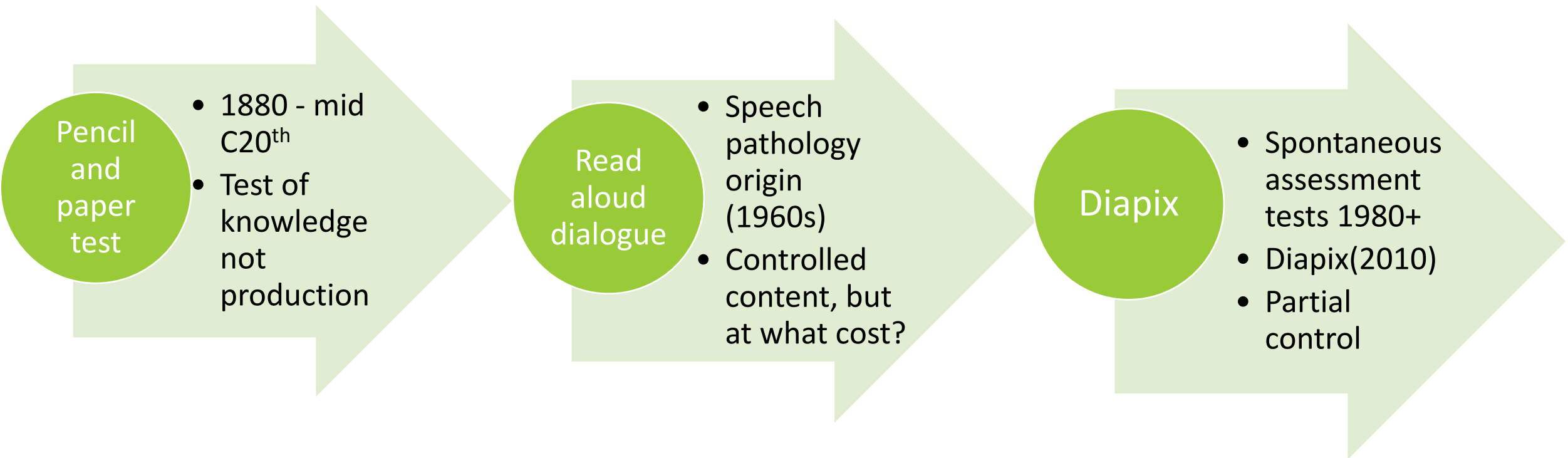
Assessment 3:

Follow up to Assessment 3:

Valid? Scorable? Economical? Administrable? Suitable?

- Spontaneous speech tasks in use since the 1980s, e.g. The map task (Brown, Anderson, Yule, & Shillcock, 1983; Anderson, 1991).
- ‘Speech produced during an interaction differs from read speech’ (Blauuw, 1994; Lann & Van Bergem, 1993; Baker & Hazan, 2010).
- Diapix: allows for assessment of spontaneous speech with partial control.
- Requires a degree of teacher involvement to elicit answers and to manage pair dialogue, confident students may dominate.
- Recordings are ‘challenging to process and analyse’ (Baker & Hazan, 2010)

In review: assessment timeline



Conclusion: Is there one definitive fail-safe assessment instrument for pronunciation?

- A mixture of pre prepared and spontaneous tasks will allow for best assessment of both segmental and suprasegmental features (Derwing & Munro, 2015).
- Your objective should determine your choice of test, but time/ facilities/ syllabus constraints all need to be considered.
- The future: automated testing to replace subjective/ unreliable human assessment. As yet, no test has proven to be accurate enough (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Isaacs, 2016)

References

- El-Bettar, A. K. (1965) *Methods of teaching English*. Baghdad: Al-Sha'ab Press.
- Fairbanks, G. (1960). *Voice and articulation drillbook*, 2nd edn. New York:Harper & Row.
- Hall, J. W. & Mueller, H. G. (1998). *Audiologists Desk Reference: Audiologic Management, Rehabilitation and Terminology*. Thomson Delmar Learning.
- Fulcher, G. (2003). *Testing Second Language Speaking*. London: Pearson.
- Isaacs, T. (2013). Pronunciation. In *Cambridge English Centenary Symposium on Speaking Assessment* (pp 13 – 15). Cambridge: Cambridge English Language Assessment.
- Isaacs, T. (2014). Assessing Pronunciation. In A. J. Kunnan (ed). *The Companion to Language Assessment* (pp 140 -155). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Isaacs, T. & Harding, L. (2017). Research timeline: Pronunciation Assessment. *Language Teaching*. In press.
- Lado, R. (1961). *Language Testing: The construction and Use of Foreign Language Tests*. London: Longman.
- Luoma, S. (2004). *Assessing Speaking*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- The University of Cambridge. (1913). *Certificate of Proficiency in English: Phonetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Weir, C. J. (2013). Measured constructs: A history of Cambridge English language examinations 1913–2012. *Cambridge English Research Notes*, 51, 2 – 12.
- Weir, C. J., Vidaković, I. & Galaczi, E.D. (2013). *Measured Constructs: A History of Cambridge English Examinations, 1913-2012*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.