



**Università
di Brescia**

Rethinking Academic Multilingual Skills in the Age of AI

Prof. Annalisa Zanola, PhD

annalisa.zanola@unibs.it

Department of Economics and Management



26/02/2026

-
- **Oral communication has become a significant aspect of scientific and professional HE training**, both in person (e.g. conferences, debates, meetings) and remotely. It is a less commonly acknowledged fact that **oral proficiency displays distinctive characteristics** that differentiate it from **written text proficiency**.
 - The distinguishing features of this phenomenon interferes with **evident facets of nativeness and/or non-nativeness**, especially where the findings indicate a **lack of formal pronunciation teaching and training at all levels**.
 - Despite the idealization of nativeness, the issue is about competent and legitimate language teaching and learning.





Roadmap



AI and language teaching: the “English language teaching” case



Dynamic assessment (DA) for improving English Speaking Skills



AI and Native Speakerism

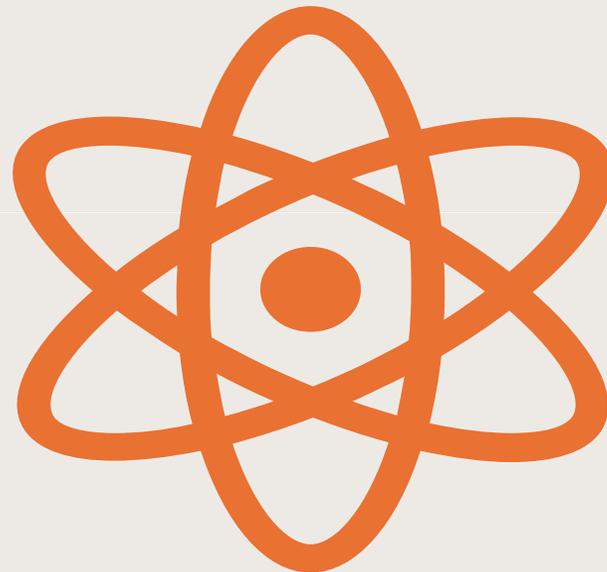


Assessing oral skills at University in the AI era



AI and language teaching:

The “English language teaching” case



01.

Assessment in ELT is an area in need of further research.

AI would not necessarily be used to change the nature of assessment itself, rather will do things in an automated and therefore more cost-efficient manner.

Artificial intelligence and English language teaching: Preparing for the future

Dr Adam Edmett
Neenaz Ichaporia
Dr Helen Crompton
Ross Crichton



Edmett A., Ichaporia N., Crompton H., and Crichton R. (2023), *Artificial intelligence and English language teaching: Preparing for the future*, English programmes Series, British Council, p. 26.

Statements 1 to 4: AI can help learners improve their English speaking/writing/listening/reading skills.⁴

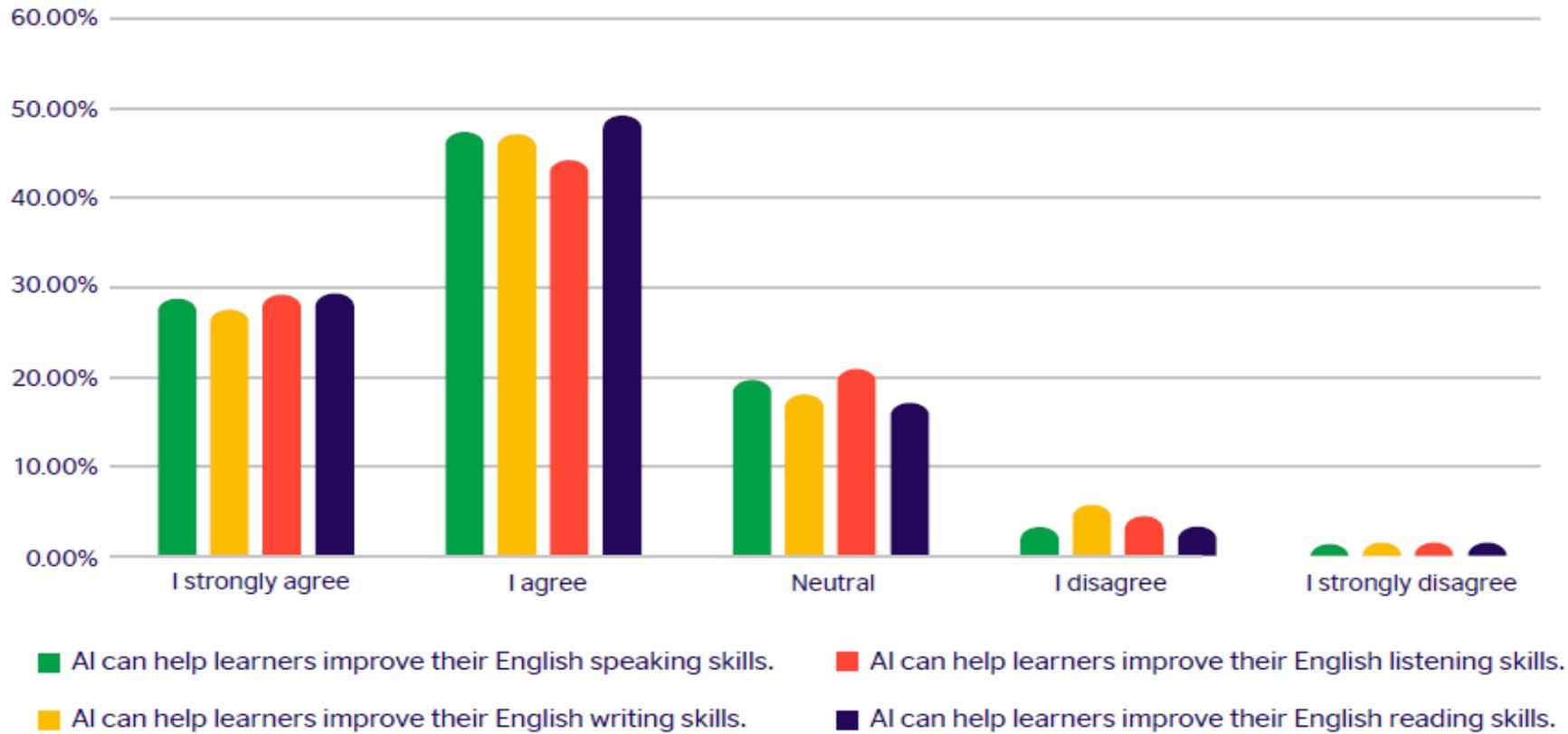
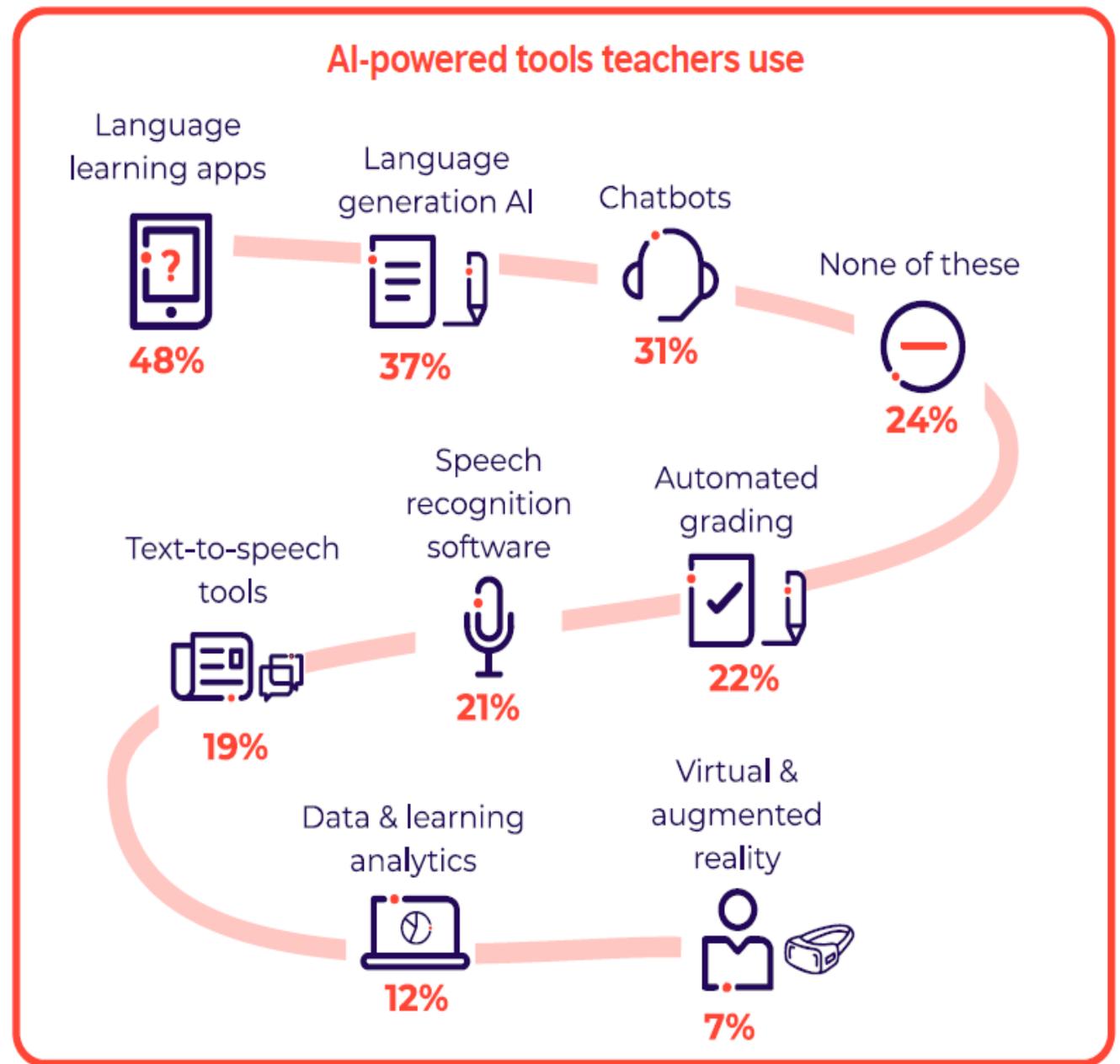
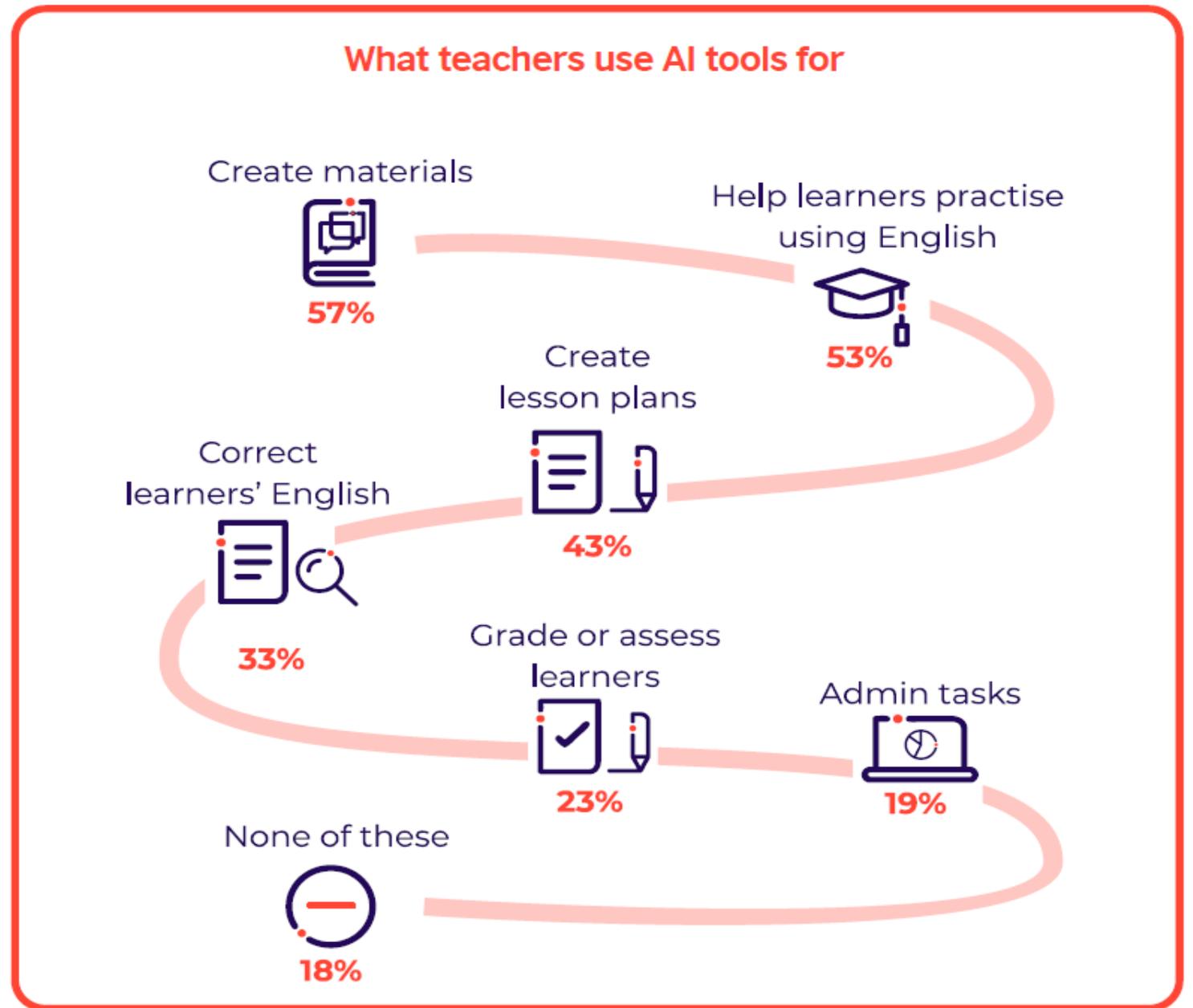


Figure 3 Responses from 1,112 teachers to survey statements 1 to 4

*‘AI refers to technologies that mimic human behaviour to conduct tasks normally done by people’
(1st part)*



*‘AI refers to technologies that mimic human behaviour to conduct tasks normally done by people’
(2nd part)*





Dynamic assessment (DA) for improving Speaking Skills

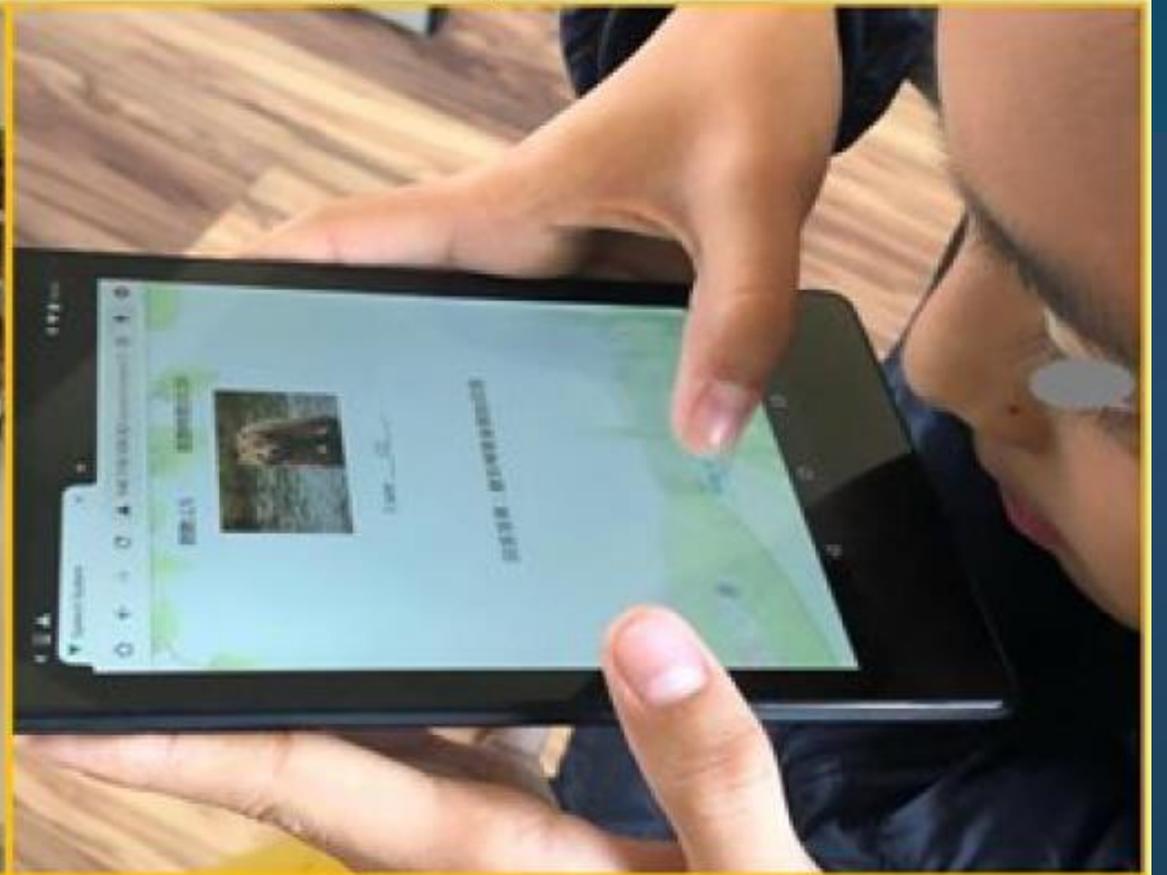


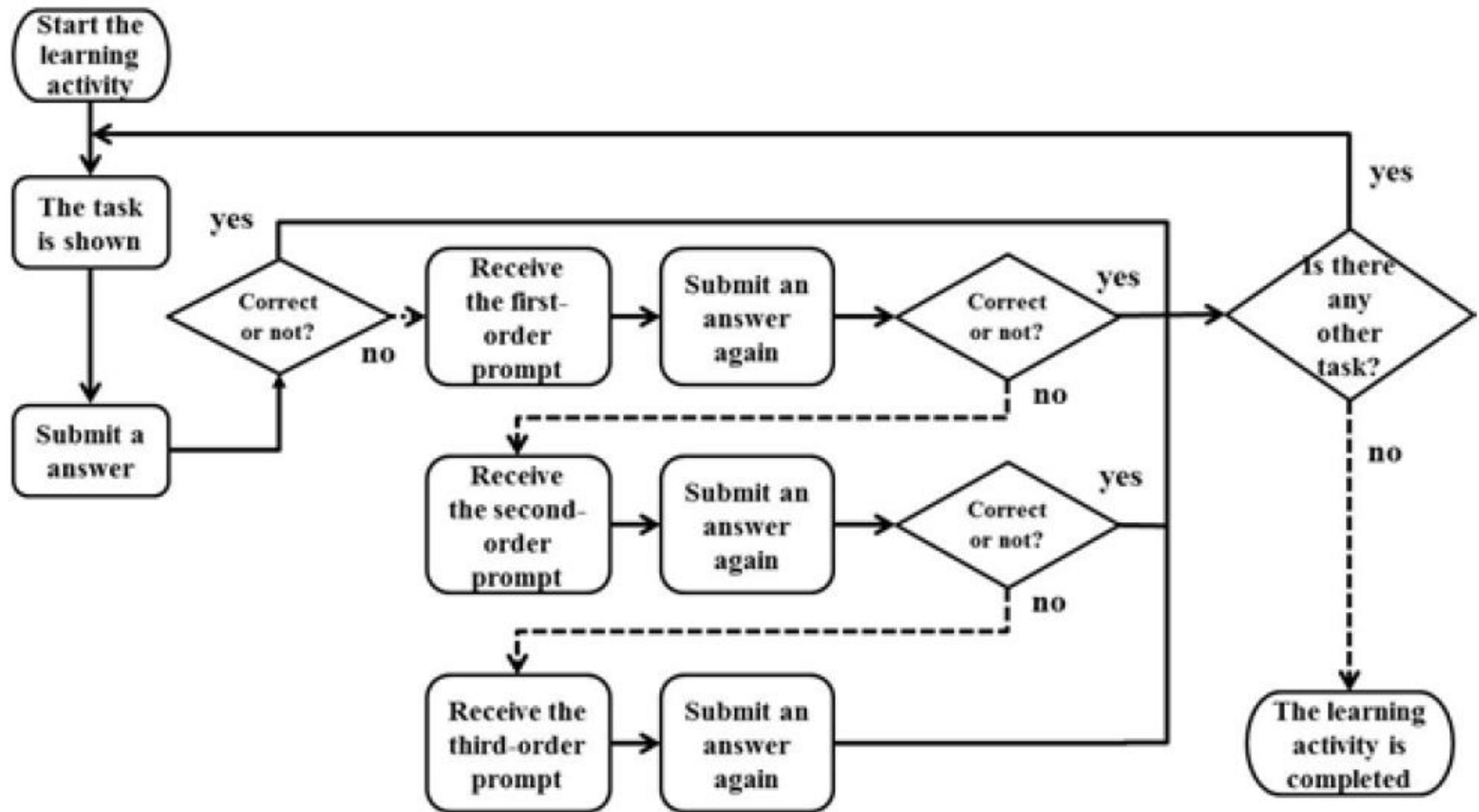
01.

Chen, C.-H., Koong, C.-S., & Liao, C. (2022). Influences of Integrating Dynamic Assessment into a Speech Recognition Learning Design to Support Students' English Speaking Skills, Learning Anxiety and Cognitive Load. *Educational Technology & Society*, 25 (1), 1-14.

Influences of Integrating Dynamic Assessment into a Speech Recognition Learning Design to Support Students' English Speaking Skills, Learning Anxiety and Cognitive Load

Chih-Hung Chen^{1*}, Chorng-Shiuh Koong² and Chien Liao¹





題數:1/3 答題時間:10:42



A: What do you see?
B: _____(1)_____.

The first-order prompt

回答答案：I see a kangaroo

- 1. There is a monkey.
- 2. I see a zebra.
- 3. I see some zebras.
- 4. How many zebras are there?

開始作答

題數:1/3 答題時間:11:30



A: What do you see?
B: _____(1)_____.

The second-order prompt

回答答案：I see some zebras

- 1. There is a monkey.
那裡有一隻猴子。【用於敘述事實時】
- 2. I see a zebra.
我看到一隻斑馬。【用於描述事實時】
- 3. I see some zebras.
我看到一群斑馬。【用於敘述事實時】
- 4. How many zebras are there?
那裡有幾隻斑馬?【用於詢問斑馬數量時】

開始作答

題數:1/3 答題時間:12:21



A: What do you see?
B: _____(1)_____.

The third-order prompt

回答答案：there is a monkey

- 1. There is a monkey.
那裡有一隻猴子。【用於敘述事實時】
- 2. I see a zebra.
我看到一隻斑馬。【用於描述事實時】
- 3. I see some zebras.
我看到一群斑馬。【用於敘述事實時】
- 4. How many zebras are there?
那裡有幾隻斑馬?【用於詢問斑馬數量時】

開始作答

- **visual support:** Liu and Hung (2016): AI – and the visual representation of the pitch as a spectrogram – significantly improved learners’ pronunciation by reducing the flatness of pitch and intonation patterns.

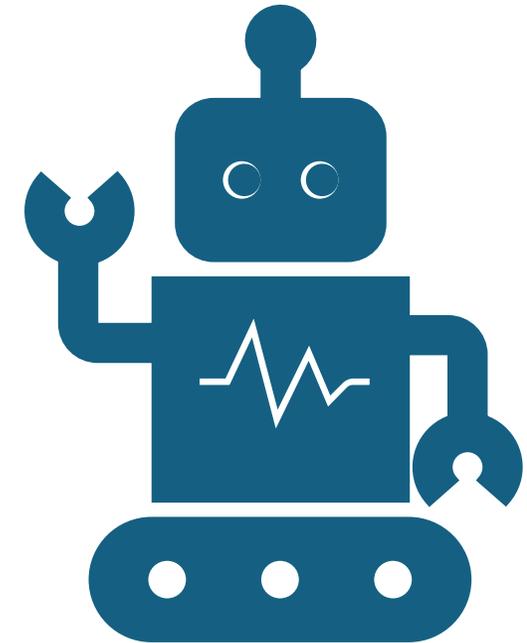
- **conversational partner:** AI used as a language coach and in a multimodal capacity. Dizon and Tang (2020) had learners converse with Alexa, a personal voice assistant. They found that it promoted meaningful interactions, supported vocabulary acquisition, improved language skills and provided interesting, enjoyable learning.

- **multimodal system:** employing multiple ways to present information, such as text, images,

audio and video). Shivakumar et al. (2019) in a higher education setting: learners were provided with an AI coach that tailored instruction to each learner’s learning patterns and needs, resulting in the ability to speak more fluently using consistently accurate language structures.

- **tool for speech recognition, adaptive learning, automatic speech analysis and voice assistance.** Kazu and Kuvvetli (2023) developed an AI-supported pronunciation model for Turkish learners. This system helped learners practise, record and react to learners pronouncing words, resulting in longer retention of the vocabulary and significant benefits in learning consonant and vowel sounds.

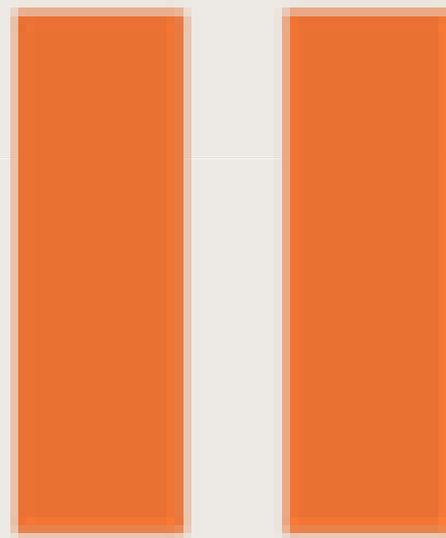
AI as a...





AI and Native Speakerism

01.



Native vs non native?

(Pinnavaia, Zanola 2022)

1. acquired the language in early childhood (Davies, 1991; McArthur, 1992; Phillipson, 1992) and maintains the use of the language (Kubota, 2004; McArthur, 1992)
2. has intuitive knowledge of the language (Davies, 1991; Stern, 1983)
3. is able to produce fluent, spontaneous discourse (Davies, 1991)
4. is communicatively competent (Davies, 1991; Liu, 1999; Medgyes, 1992), able to communicate within different social settings (Stern, 1983)
5. identifies with or is identified by a language community (Davies, 1991; Johnson & Johnson, 1998)
6. does not have a foreign accent (Medgyes, 1992; Scovel, 1969, 1988).



Edited by Sabine Doff and Richard Smith

Policies and Practice in
20th-century Language Teaching

Amsterdam
University
Press

Key Concepts

- automated pronunciation feedback and numeric scores
- certain accents are privileged
- favoring American English
- false precision
- psychological effects: initial excitement turns into frustration over opaque scoring
- AI tools reinforce problematic discourses of nativeness

AI and Native Speakerism: The Intersections of Technology, Language Assessment, and Linguistic Objectivity

Nate Ming Curran 

Department of English and Communication, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong SAR

Beiwei Gu

Department of English and Corporate Communication, Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Lichen Zhen

Communication, Penn State Abington

Christopher Jenks

Department of Languages, Literature and Communication, Utrecht University

RELC Journal

1–15

© The Author(s) 2025

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/00336882251367459

journals.sagepub.com/home/rel



ASPECT**KEY INSIGHT**

AI Role Provides automated pronunciation feedback and numeric scores

Bias Issue Reinforces native speakerism and privileges certain accents

User Perception Trusts AI as objective, masking embedded biases

Impact Creates false precision, affects confidence and motivation

Recommendations Increase transparency, mitigate bias, promote sociolinguistic awareness

REVIEW OF SCHOLARSHIP

Research on “native” and “non-native” English-speaking teachers: Past developments, current status, and future directions

Ali Fuad Selvi¹ , Bedrettin Yazan²  and Ahmar Mahboob³ 

¹The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL, USA, ²The University of Texas at San Antonio, San Antonio, TX, USA and

³The University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia

Corresponding author: Ali Fuad Selvi; Email: afselvi@ua.edu

- Reject rigid labels (Natives vs Non-natives) and adopt inclusive terms (e.g., multilingual, translingual).
- Promote equity in hiring and workplace practices; engage professional associations and policymakers.
- Integrate critical awareness of native speakerism and Global Englishes into curricula.



AI and Native Assessing oral skills at University in the AI era



01.

- Oral exams

In-person oral assessment

Copyright ©2023 Harvard Business School Publishing



ENGLISH FOR SCIENTIFIC AND PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES (ESPP)

Zanola (2023)

- effectiveness and efficiency of **native** and **non-native** speakers of English in **professional** contexts
- **corrective** to the well-established European tradition of ESP (English for Special Purposes)
- specific **needs** of oral production in selected **professional** environments



Zanola A. (2023) *La lingua inglese per la comunicazione scientifica e professionale*, Carocci Editore: Roma (Collana Studi Superiori). ISBN: 9788829017676.



ESPP... in a few words

Effectiveness and efficiency of ESPP natives and non-natives

- Role of **context** within a **multicultural** setting; appropriate **professional** communicative solutions
- Diverse educational and cultural backgrounds

ESPP as a corrective to the well-established European tradition of ESP

- Language assessment must contemplate **remedial** and **improvement** phases
- Courses and lessons focused on **real**, perceived needs detected by and for the students themselves

Specific needs of written and oral production in selected professional environments

- “**Treatment**” rather than “correction” and evidence of success and progress in the learning process

The oral genres

Zanola (2022)

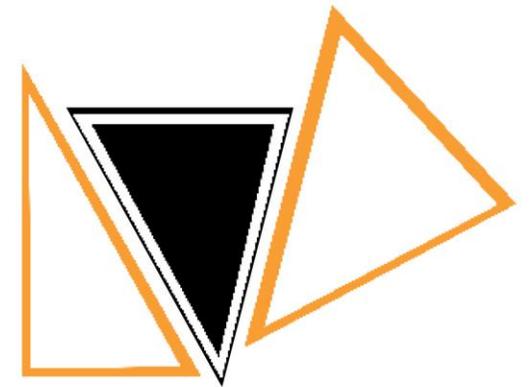
- The academic lesson
- The seminar
- The short presentation
- The interview
- The job interview
- The dialogue with the client/customer
- The conversation with a colleague
- Team working, negotiating, etc.



Zanola A. (2022) Speaking about speaking. Historical Foundations of Oral Communication Studies, *TEXTUS*, vol. 1/2022 (numero monografico su “Oral Communication in English: Established Trends, Good Practice(s), and Future Perspectives”, ed. by A. Zanola, J. Gooch, R. Doerr), pp. 17-38. ISSN: 1824-3967.

Textus

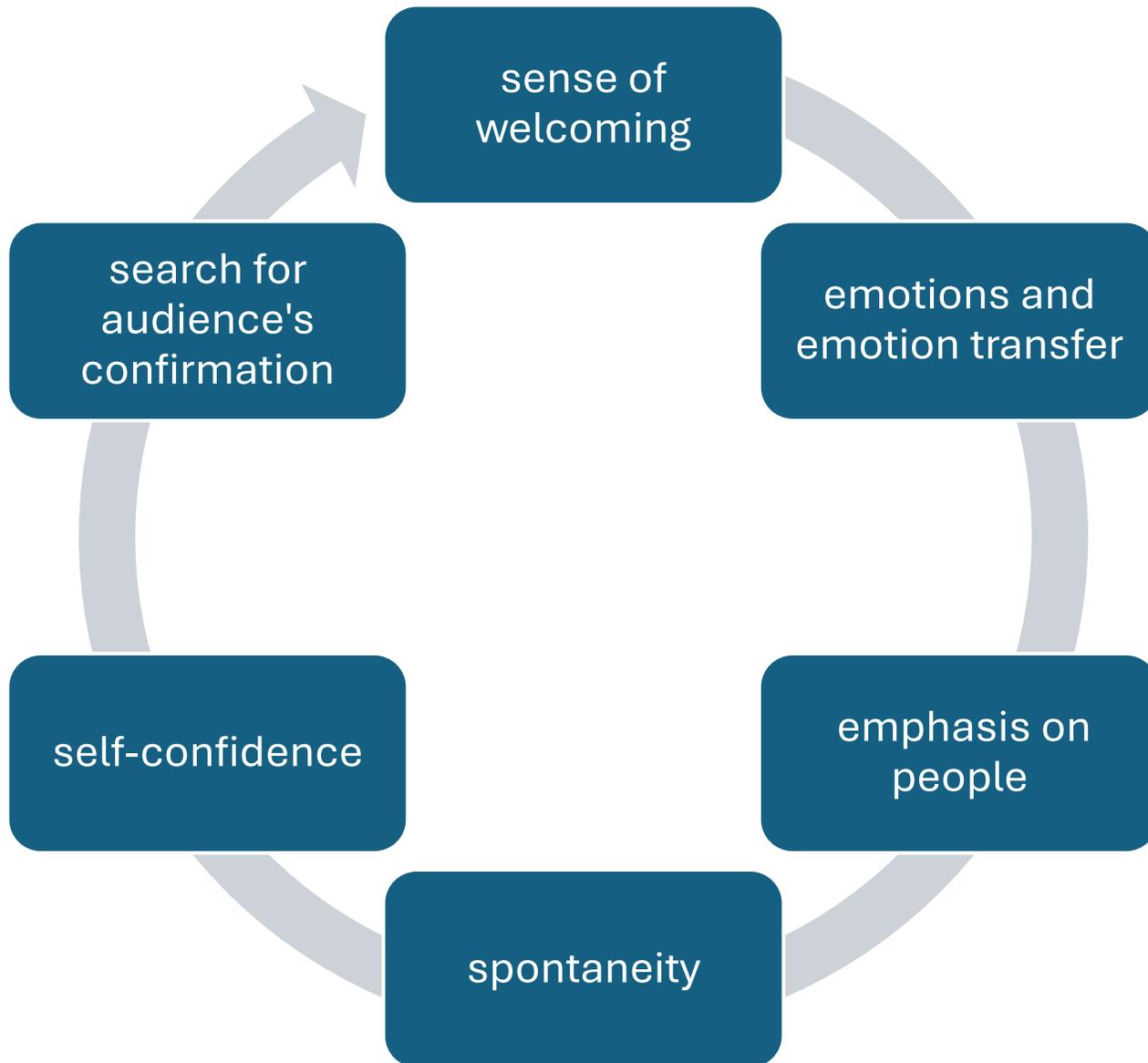
ENGLISH STUDIES IN ITALY



**ORAL COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH:
ESTABLISHED TRENDS,
GOOD PRACTICE(S),
AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES**

XXXV (2022) No. 1 (January-April)

The 'emotional competence'

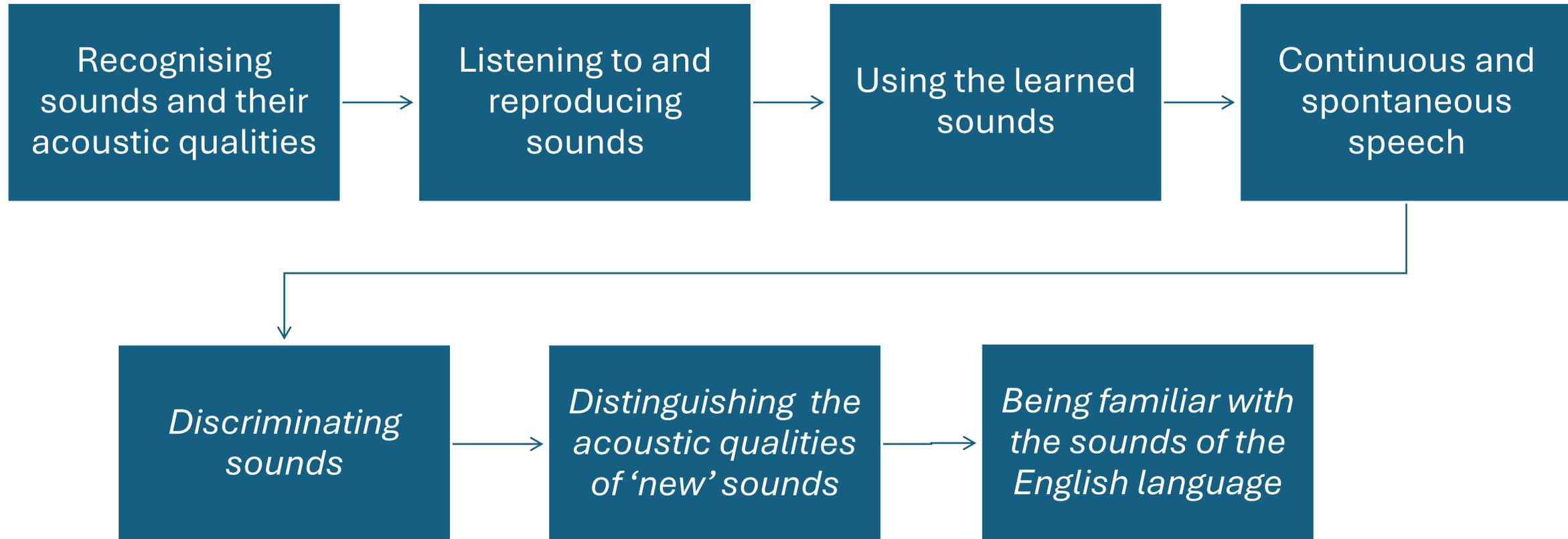


Zanola (2016) "Gender in genre: female entrepreneurs' public speaking in international corporate Communication", INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BUSINESS, HUMANITIES AND TECHNOLOGY, 6/1: 62-72.

Which pronunciation model(s)?

1. **Gimson** (1978, *Towards an international pronunciation of English*). An **artificial phonological model** capable of reducing the number of phonemes of the English language from 44 to 29. *A Rudimentary International Pronunciation (RIP)*
2. **Jenner** (1997, *International English: an alternative view*). **International English is the common ground** of the phonological elements found in all variants of pronunciation.
3. **Jenkins** (2002; 2003, *Lingua Franca Core (LFC) model*). Possible combination of an artificial approach like Gibson's and an empirical approach like Jenner's. A taxonomy of fundamental or, vice versa, accessory elements, to **ensure the mutual comprehension of two speakers of international English**. The inclusion of data such as rhythm, accents and weak forms among the non-core features is not considered to be a viable proposition.

WHICH ASSESSMENT?





Recap & Conclusions



AI and language teaching: the “English language teaching” case



Dynamic assessment (DA) for improving English Speaking Skills



AI and Native Speakerism



Assessing oral skills at University in the AI era

The neoliberal **tech-optimism** and **tech-solutionism** eagerly spread (...) are akin to the belief that technology is a synonym for progress, that AI can or will soon be able to do just about anything, and can, and therefore should, be used to improve just about anything. The persuasion is that innovation, acceleration and unlimited investment in AI will make societies progress, will make humans faster, better, stronger, happier, and will solve even the most difficult issues of our time. (...)

The technology's **disruptive effects** on users and societies are surfacing already. It is increasingly clear that the conviction that technology is by definition an improvement, is too coarse-grained as it fails to account for **ecological footprint, legal and ethical issues, societal transformations and anthropological and existential concerns**. There is a growing unease regarding the negative and unintended consequences of the unbridled development and massive adoption of AI.

Peeters, K., Daems, J., Plieseis, C., Rivas Ginel, M. I., Şahin, M. et al. (2025). *AI for Translation and Interpreting. A Roadmap for Users and Policy Makers*. Conseil Européen pour les Langues / European Language Council, p.1.



Conseil Européen pour les Langues
European Language Council

AI for Translation and Interpreting

A Roadmap for Users and Policy Makers

Reflection Paper

by the

Special Interest Group (SIG) on AI in Translation and Interpreting

of the

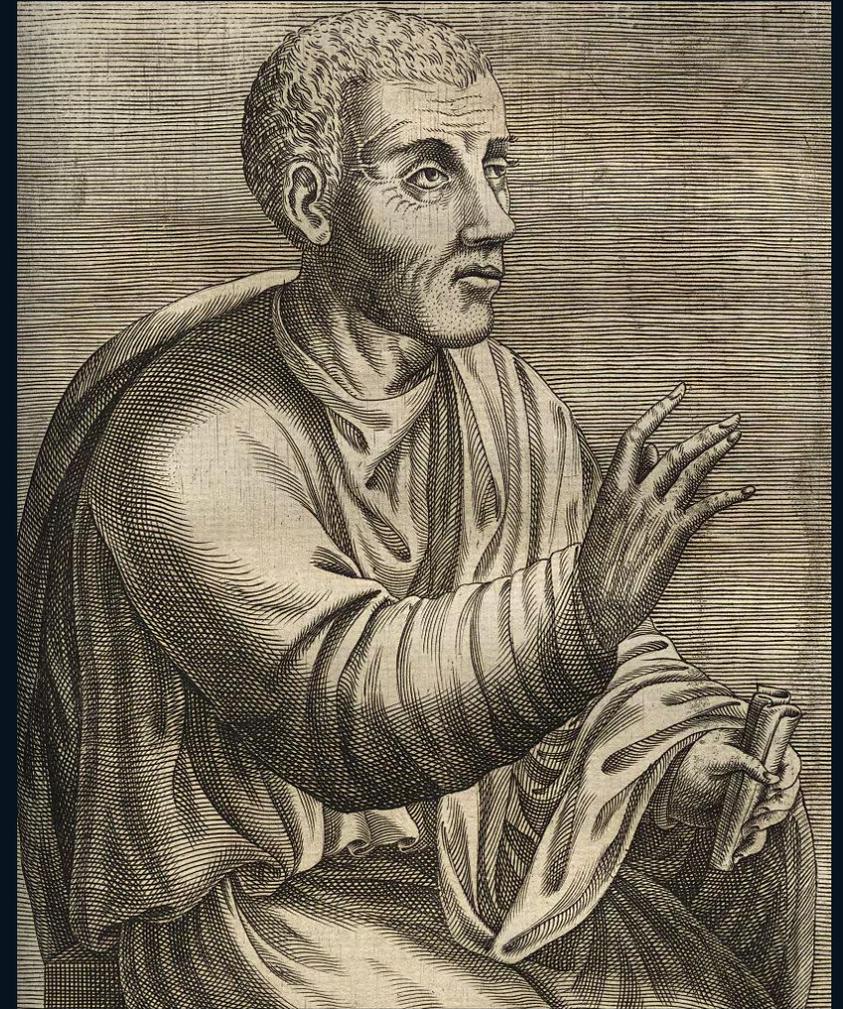
Conseil Européen pour les Langues | European Language Council

www.celelc.org

October 2025

Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* (11.3.14-15)

*Just as the face, although it consists of a limited number of features, yet possesses infinite variety of expression, so it is with the voice: **for though it possesses but few varieties to which we can give a name, yet every human being possesses a distinctive voice of his own, which is as easily distinguished by the ear as are facial characteristics by the eye.***





Università
di Brescia



Rethinking Academic Multilingual Skills in the Age of AI

Prof. Annalisa Zanola, PhD

