



21st Annual Midwest Association of Language Testers (MwALT) Conference

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We are pleased to announce that the plenary speaker for MwALT 2019 is [Okim Kang, Ph.D.](#) She is a Professor at the English Department at Northern Arizona University. The following is the abstract of her talk.

Second Language Speech and Variability in Language Assessment

In the field of second language (L2) assessment, there is an increasing need for a comprehensive understanding of linguistic varieties on the part of both test practitioners and test takers. Language variation can advantage or disadvantage a learner beyond day-to-day interactions in the era of globalization. Especially relevant to the new movement toward English as an international language and the growing acceptance of English varieties is the assessment of listening and speaking skills. The presenter will review the effect of test taker individual difference and linguistic variation on their testing performance, discuss the relationship between linguistic properties and rater perception of L2 speech, and explain the variance attributable to rater background and attitudinal variables on assessment of spoken English. She will also address effective practice in listening/speaking assessment that promotes a World Englishes approach and discuss how the variability of L2 speech can be managed in a real-world context.

Okim Kang: Research Interests and Projects

Kang's research focus lies in the areas of second language (L2) oral assessment and testing, speech production and perception, L2 pronunciation and intelligibility, and language attitudes. Her overall research goal is to investigate the nature of accented speech of non-native speakers of English, which includes several sub-areas of research: (a) how accent is assessed by listeners, (b) how accented speech is characterized linguistically, (c) how the assessment of accented speech is validated through automatic systems, and (d) how speakers with accents can better communicate with others.

She has recently completed and been working on various research projects relevant to the topics listed above. Some examples of her funded and collaborative research projects include (1) Impact of different task types on candidates' speaking performances and interactive features that distinguish between CEFR Levels (funded by Cambridge English Language Assessment, 2014-2015), (2) Intelligibility of different varieties of English in the TOEFL iBT listening test (funded by ETS TOEFL COE research program, 2014-2017); (3) Development of prosodic features in automated speech systems (funded by NAU Technology Research Investment, 2014-2017); (4) Linguistic analysis of speaking performance and automated extraction (funded by British Council Assessment Research, 2017-2018); (5) Enhancing communication between U.S. undergraduates and international teaching assistants through structured contact activities (collaborated with the University of Virginia, 2016-2019); and (6) Investigation of relationship among learner background, linguistic progression, and score gain on IELTS (funded by IELTS Joint-Funded Research, 2019-2020). Based on her expertise in L2 phonology and language assessment, she has developed computer systems that automatically process prosodic features and recently obtained a patent entitled "Systems and Methods for Automated Evaluation of Human Speech".