

**Researcher**

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**Title of Project**

Pronunciation in a Paired-Discussion Task: A Mixed-Methods  
Study of Rater Judgements and Rater and Test Taker Perceptions

**Research Supervisor**

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**TIRF Research Topic Investigated**

Language Assessment

**Bio**

Liberato Silva dos Santos is a doctoral candidate in applied linguistics and technology at Iowa State University. His dissertation investigates the scoring decision processes of raters judging the pronunciation of L2 English speakers in a paired discussion task. His work has been presented in conferences such as LTRC, LARC, TSLL, CALICO, TESOL International, BRAZ-TESOL, New Directions, and SEMAPLE.

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**Project Summary**

Pronunciation is an essential component of oral communication ability as it affects the intelligibility of second language (L2) speakers. Despite the increase in pronunciation assessment studies, scholars have identified several gaps. The pronunciation construct remains underconceptualized (Isaacs, 2018; Choi & Kang, 2023) and is sometimes provided with “skeletal descriptors” (Galaczi et. al., 2012, p. 67) which prevent it from being properly operationalized for assessment and testing. There is also a need to investigate pronunciation assessment using more interactional task types – e.g., the paired discussion – that can elicit less controlled, more open-ended, and more interactionally authentic responses from examinees (Galaczi & French, 2011; Isaacs, 2018). The impact of interactional task characteristics on examinee performance and rater judgments also requires examination. To address these gaps, this study will examine (1) the importance of pronunciation to the oral communication ability construct, (2) rater judgments and perceptions of examinees’ pronunciation in a paired discussion task, and (3) the effect that examinee pairings based on pronunciation may have on scores. To achieve these goals, a group of Brazilian learners of English will be tested in a paired discussion task and scored by trained raters using a pronunciation rating scale developed for this study. Scores, survey, and interview data will be analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The expected outcomes will theoretically contribute to an empirically informed L2 pronunciation construct and inferences about rater behavior and perceptions. Practically, the results can be used by test and rating scale developers, examinee preparation programs, materials developers, instructors, and examinees.