

I was thrilled to receive the ASSTA Conference Travel Award to attend the 20th International Congress of Phonetic Sciences (ICPhS) 2023, held in Prague, Czech Republic, from 7th to 11th August. ICPhS is a quadrennial gathering that unites researchers working in speech acoustics and (socio)phonetics from across the globe. Therefore, I am particularly grateful for the ASSTA's financial support, which made my participation and presentation at this prestigious event possible.

This year's ICPhS conference celebrated the diversity and richness of phonetic research under the theme of "**Intermingling Communities and Changing Cultures**". Among the numerous enriching sessions, I found a particular interest in research focusing on speech perception, speech acoustics, speech production and physiology, phonetics of sound change, sociophonetic variation, phonology-phonetics interface, and more (not forgetting to mention that the recorded videos, along with readily available proceedings, were much appreciated bonuses that have allowed me to review and revisit many interesting talks at my convenience and as many times as I wanted!). In particular, the paper/talk "**Computational Models for Articulatory Learning of English Diphthongs: One Dynamic Target vs. Two Static Targets**" left a significant impact on me due to its innovative approach to exploring the nature of English diphthongs. The paper contributed to the ongoing debate about whether diphthongs should be considered as phoneme entities or simply vowel combinations. By using computational simulation of vocal learning, the authors employed a three-dimensional vocal tract model and an automatic phoneme recogniser to train an articulatory synthesiser to learn American English diphthongs. Their results showed that diphthongs learned with dynamic targets were more intelligible across different durations. This innovative use of modelling not only presents a novel methodology but also sheds light on the underlying mechanisms involved in articulatory learning.

Prof. **Jane Stuart-Smith's** engaging and interesting talk on "**What can speakers tell us about speech?**" was another that expanded my horizons. With its insightful exploration of the systematic and informative nature of phonetic and phonological variation in speech, the talk emphasised the significance of social-indexical cues in understanding speakers' identities through their speech, as well as how speech variation is intricately linked to speakers' social aspects such as gender, social class, ethnicity and dialects. Such a nuanced perspective on linguistic patterns within local communities has indeed enhanced my comprehension of phonetic and phonological knowledge as inherently intertwined with the social dimensions of speakers' lives.

I also had the privilege of presenting a paper within a session dedicated to Sociophonetics that explored different English varieties. Titled "**Acoustic merger between /e/ and /æ/ in Singapore English: insights into stylistic variation and sub-varietal difference**", this paper investigates the extent of the /e/-/æ/ acoustic merger in Singapore English produced by young Chinese Singaporeans. Highlighting the complexity of the effects of speech style on the acoustic properties of the vowels under examination, this paper raised questions about the acoustic boundaries between speech styles and subvarieties in New Englishes, such as Singapore English, and also posed theoretical concerns about approaches to studying New Englishes for future research. The Q&A session that followed not only provided me with constructive feedback from international colleagues on my research but also offered the opportunity to form new friendships with researchers from other countries!

As I reflect on this exceptional experience, I am deeply grateful to the ASSTA for their generous support. Through this Travel Award, I was able to contribute to this global discourse, expand my knowledge of phonetics and speech science, and incorporate new perspectives and ideas gained into my research, thereby improving the overall quality of my work.