The Role of Prosody and Gesture in Mock vs. Genuine Impoliteness

Sean McKinnon
Universitat Pompeu Fabra/Indiana University
seanmckinnon.80@gmail.com
M.A. Thesis Advisor: Pilar Prieto

5th Workshop on Catalan Prosody
June 17th, 2013
Introduction

- Background
  - Genuine vs. mock impoliteness
  - Prosody/Gesture and (im)politeness

- Methods & Results
  - Production experiment
  - Perception experiment 1
  - Perception experiment 2

- Discussion
Genuine vs. Mock Impoliteness

**Genuine impoliteness**: “communicative strategies designed to attack face, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony” (Culpeper 2003).

- Examples (Culpeper 2010)
  - Insults: You [fucking/rotten/dirty] [moron/fuck/bastard].
  - Dismissals: [fuck/piss/shove] off.
  - Silencers: shut [the fuck] up.
  - Negative expressives: go [to hell/fuck yourself].

**Mock impoliteness**: potentially genuine impolite behaviors that are interpreted as non-impolite because speakers understand its intention to create social bonding (Culpeper 2011)

- Examples (Haugh & Bousfield, 2012)
  - Jocular abuse: you big headed bastard (accompanied by laughter).
  - Jocular mockery: (after someone eats a lot of food), basically that run you went on this morning James you might as well not have bothered (accompanied by laughter).
Genuine vs. Mock Impoliteness

- Mock and genuine impoliteness often use the same lexical items.
  - ‘Taboo’ words (Stenström & Jörgensen, 2008; Mugford 2013).
  - Slurs (Chauncey, 1994; Kennedy, 2002; Croom, 2011).
- Context is important for both types of impoliteness, but are there any other linguistic features that are associated with one form or another?
Prosody/Gesture and (im)politeness

- **Prosody**: “Remarkably, the bulk of research on politeness or impoliteness pays woefully little attention to the role of prosody” (Culpeper, 2011; pg. 146).
  - Final rise in intonation has been observed to convey politeness (Chen et al., 2004; Félix-Brasdefer, 2009).
  - Downsteps can be used to linguistically hinder speakers (Culpeper, 2003).

- **Gesture**: “Non-verbal cues such as gaze, facial expressions, body movements/gestures [...] and the spatial positioning of the self play a key role in communication [...] yet it is still an area that receives relatively little attention in communication and pragmatic studies” (Culpeper, 2011).

- **Prosody/Gesture and emotion**: Anger has frequently been examined
  - Raised pitch & loudness (Culpeper, 2003).
  - Wide pitch ranges, abrupt pitch changes on stressed syllables & tense articulation (Murray & Arnott, 1993).
  - Higher amplitude (Hammerschmidt & Jürgens, 2007).
  - Furrowed eyebrows (Ekman et. al, 1971).

- **Can specific prosodic and gestural cues be linked to the manifestation of mock vs. genuine impoliteness?**
**Methods: Production Experiment**

- **Goals**: Are there specific prosodic and/or gestural cues that are associated with either genuine or mock impoliteness?
- **Participants**: 6 native Catalan speakers (3 male, 3 female, average age = 33, \(sd = 5.1\)).
- **Task**: Completed a Discourse Completion Task (DCT).
- **Analysis**: Qualitative analysis of prosodic features, using Cat_ToBI (Prieto, in press), and gestures.
Després d'un desastrós tall de cabell, estàs ben empipat amb el teu nou pentinat. El perruquer t’ha deixat només amb un dit de cabell. Quan arribes a casa, et mires al mirall i comences a riure perquè et sembla que ha quedat totalment ridícul i no hi ha maneres d'arreglar-ho. Aquesta nit et reuneixes en un restaurant amb el grup de pàdel del gimnàs. Hi ha persones que coneixes i d’altres que no has vist mai. Quan arribes veus que hi ha un noi, que sembla el graciós del grup, que comença a riure i et diu:

"Què, t’han passat el tallagespes pels cabells, avui?" i continua rient. Tu t’empipes molt.

Ara digue-li que se’n vagi a la merda.
(2) Mock Impoliteness

Després d'un desastrós tall de cabell, estàs ben empipat amb el teu nou pentinat. El perruquer t’ha deixat només amb un dit de cabell. Quan arribies a casa, et mires al mirall i comences a riure perquè et sembla que ha quedat totalment ridícul i no hi ha maneres d'arreglar-ho. Aquesta nit et reuneixes amb els teus millors amics i saps que els encantarà veure’t amb aquest pentinat tan alternatiu. Quan arribes veus que en Pau comença a riure i et diu:

"Què, t’han passat el tallagespes pels cabells, avui?" i continua rient.

Tu el contestes en to de broma que se’n vagi a la merda.
Results: Production experiment

Prosody:

Intonation: Most utterances began with a pitch accent of L+H* or L*+H on the first accented syllable, and then plateauing on the swear word before ending with H+L*L% or L*L%.

- Downsteps can be used to linguistically hinder the interlocutor (Culpeper, 2003).

Other features: shorter average syllable duration, higher pitch range, higher intensity and longer VOT for swear words containing an initial stop (e.g. *puto/*puta) for genuine impoliteness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impoliteness</th>
<th>H+L*L%</th>
<th>L*L%</th>
<th>L*HL%</th>
<th>L+H*L%</th>
<th>L*HH%</th>
<th>H*H%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genuine</td>
<td>12 (40%)</td>
<td>16 (53%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1(3%)</td>
<td>1(3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mock</td>
<td>4 (13%)</td>
<td>21 (70%)</td>
<td>2 (7%)</td>
<td>2 (7%)</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results: Production experiment

- Nuclear Configurations: H+L*L%
Results: Production experiment

- Nuclear Configurations: L* L%
Results: Production experiment

- Nuclear Configurations: L*HL%
# Results: Production experiment

- **Gestures:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gestures</th>
<th>Genuine</th>
<th>Mock</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head shake</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head nod</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head tilt</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furrowed eyebrows</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raised eyebrows</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smile</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body movement</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gesture A</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gesture B</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gesture C</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gesture D</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results: Production experiment

- Genuine impoliteness features: L*L% nuclear configuration, furrowed eyebrows, head tilt, Gesture C
- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6r3_pEw9l4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6r3_pEw9l4)
Results: Production experiment

- Mock impoliteness features: L*L% nuclear configuration, smiles, shakes head back and forth, dismissive hand gesture (Gesture D).
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikh5botdlBY
**Methods: Perception Experiment 1**

- **Goals**: Can people tell the difference between genuine and mock impoliteness when presented with prosodic cues only and/or with both prosodic and gestural cues?
- **Participants**: 47 native Catalan speakers.
- **Task**: Complete an online survey created with SurveyGizmo, using the materials obtained through the production experiment. Divided between Block 1 (audio only) and Block 2 (audiovisual).
  - 20 stimuli in each block (5 scenarios x 2 levels of impoliteness x 2 speakers).
  - Two Questions after listening/watching the utterance.

### Questions

5. Penses que el parlant està insultant el seu interlocutor? Contesta en una escala de l'1 al 5.
   - No l’està insultant
   - Una mica
   - Neutre
   - Força
   - Totalment

6. Penses que el parlant està fent broma amb el seu interlocutor? Contesta en una escala de l'1 al 5.
   - No està fent broma
   - Una mica
   - Neutre
   - Força
   - Totalment
Results: Experiment 1

- Generalized Linear Mixed Model (GLMM)
  - Dependent variable: An impoliteness scale was created by first reversing the mock impoliteness scale and then averaging it with the genuine impoliteness scale.
    - From 1 (more mock impoliteness) to 5 (more genuine impoliteness).
  - Fixed factors: speaker intention (genuine vs. mock impoliteness) and modality (audio vs. audiovisual).
  - Random factors: subject and items.
Results: Experiment 1

- Interaction: INTENTION x MODALITY

More genuine impoliteness

More mock impoliteness
**Methods: Perception Experiment 2**

- **Goals:** Does context matter in the interpretation of genuine and mock impoliteness? What happens when there is a mismatch between the context and the utterance?
- **Participants:** 50 native Catalan speakers.
- **Task:** Same as Experiment 1, but before listening/watching the utterances, participants were asked to read a discourse context.
  - New factor: congruency
    - Congruent: When the discourse context matched up with the correct utterance, e.g. genuine impoliteness discourse context followed by a genuine impoliteness utterance.
    - Incongruent: When the discourse context did not match up with the correct utterance, e.g. mock impoliteness discourse context followed by a genuine impoliteness utterance.
  - 2 Blocks, 10 stimuli in each block (5 scenarios x 2 levels of impoliteness x 1 speaker).
Results: Experiment 2

- Generalized Linear Mixed Model (GLMM)
  - Dependent variables:
    - Impoliteness scale: From 1 (more mock impoliteness) to 5 (more genuine impoliteness).
    - Naturalness of how well the audio/audiovisual fits with the provided discourse context.
  - Fixed factors: speaker intention (genuine vs. mock impoliteness) and modality (audio vs. audiovisual).
  - Random factors: subject and items.
Results: Experiment 2

- Impoliteness scale interaction: INTENTION x MODALITY x CONGRUENCY

However, did participants accept the mismatch?

More genuine impoliteness

More mock impoliteness
Results: Experiment 2

- Naturalness scale interaction: CONGRUENCY x INTENTION x MODALITY

![Graph showing naturalness scale interaction](chart.png)

More natural

Less natural
Speakers are able to distinguish genuine from mock impoliteness by prosody and by a combination of gestural and prosodic cues.

- For genuine impoliteness: there is no difference in the interpretation of genuine impoliteness between prosody only and prosody + gesture (both are interpreted as high in genuine impoliteness, 3.9 and 3.8, respectively).

- For mock impoliteness: there is a difference in the interpretation of impoliteness between modalities, with prosody + gestures receiving higher scores of mock impoliteness (2.1) vs. prosody only (3.1).
However, context matters!

- There was a clearer significant difference between genuine and mock impoliteness when the context was congruent (3.8 vs. 2.5) than when the context was incongruent (3.2 vs. 3.2).
Even though speakers are “confused” when presented with an incongruent discourse context/audio(visual) pair, they accept it.

- Genuine impoliteness discourse context with mock impoliteness audio(visual): “maybe they were trying to diffuse the situation with humor.”
- Mock impoliteness discourse context with genuine impoliteness audio(visual): “maybe they were upset by the joke.”