La pragmàtica i entonació dels oferiments

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Offers and invitations

- Offers and invitations can be formulated with a:
    - Yes/no question ('Shall I help you?')
    - Wh- question ('How can I help you?')
    - Declarative question ('You are ok there?', 'You need help?')
    - Declarative ('I'll help you')
    - Imperative ('Let me help you')

Offers within the Politeness theory framework

- Offers are potentially face-threatening to both the hearer and the listener (but less so than requests, rejections, etc):
  - The hearer can be offended if the thing offered is too much or too little or because of the risk of losing face by being offered something in the first place
  - The speaker risks losing face if the offer is rejected or accepted with reluctance

- Politeness theory studies the strategies to cope with the risk
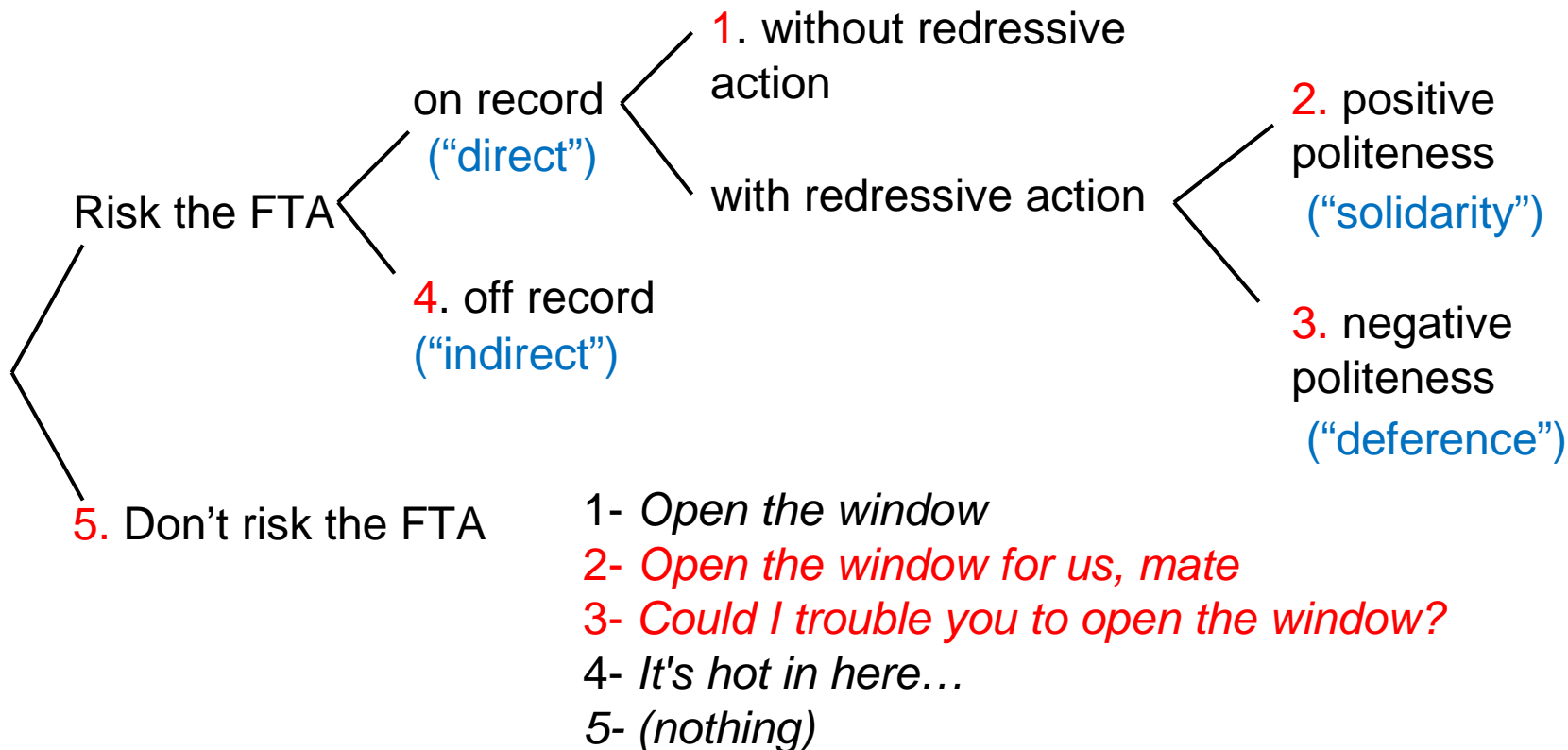
Politeness (Brown & Levinson 1987)

- All competent adult members of a society know each other to have "face" (self-image):
  - Negative face: the want that his actions be unimpeded by others
    - Can be threatened by certain speech acts (face threatening acts, FTAs), such as orders, requests, suggestions, advice, offers, threats, warnings and dares,…

  - Positive face: the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others
    - Can be threatened by FTAs such as criticism, ridicule, challenges, irreverence, mentioning taboo topics,…

Politeness (Brown & Levinson 1987)

- Brown and Levinson's theory focuses on face-threats and how to avoid them.

- All members of a community know each other to have 'face'. Certain speech acts (orders and requests, but also suggestions and advice, offers and compliments) threaten this public face.

- Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) can be mitigated by means of appropriate linguistic strategies such as:
    - the use of indirect language,
    - insertion of softening expressions,
    - or with the intonation.

Politeness (Brown & Levinson 1987)

- Speakers assess the cost of face threatening acts (FTAs) before deciding whether to go ahead (Brown and Levinson 1978: 74):

Risk the FTA

on record ("direct")
- 1. without redressive action
- with redressive action
  - 2. positive politeness ("solidarity")
  - 3. negative politeness ("deference")

4. off record ("indirect")

5. Don't risk the FTA

1- *Open the window*
2- *Open the window for us, mate*
3- *Could I trouble you to open the window?*
4- *It's hot in here…*
5- *(nothing)*

Politeness (Brown & Levinson 1987)

- Speakers choose strategies by assessing the weight of the FTA:
  - Wx= D(S,H) + P(H,S) + Rx

- Weight of FTA (Wx) is computed as:
  - the social distance (D) between hearer and speaker
  - plus the measure of power (P) that the speaker has over the hearer
  - plus the cost of the action(Rx), the degree to which the act is considered as an imposition in the culture that the speaker and the hearer belong to

- "X is my boss"; "I don't know X well"; "to ask someone like X to do this is a big deal"

Intonation of yes-no questions in Catalan
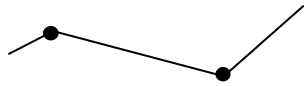
{   Vols   ve n i r ? }

L*+H   L*   H%

{ Que vols ve n i r ?   }

H+L*   L%

- Assumption that *que* only occurs with descending pattern (Bonet 1984; Prieto 1998, 2002; Fernández Planas et al 2004; Martínez-Celdrán et al 2005; Prieto & Rigau 2007)

Intonation and politeness - Catalan

- Descending pattern is perceived as more polite than the ascending pattern (Payà 2003, Astruc 2009)

- Descending pattern (with optional *que*) is less polite and deferential than the ascending pattern (Payrató 2002, Prieto 2002, Prieto & Rigau 2007)
  - *que* + descending pattern only used in neutral information-seeking questions and when the cost is minimal for the hearer (Payrató 2002, Prieto & Rigau 2007)

- Both patterns are perceived as equally polite, at least in low cost situations (Nadeu & Prieto, in press)

  - "No linguistic expressions are inherently polite or impolite, some expressions may be open to a polite or impolite interpretation in a given context." (e.g. Félix-Brasdefer 2006)

Research goals (1)

- Thus, offering questions in Catalan present a choice of at least three intonational contours which can be associated with different contextual factors and different degrees of perceived politeness.

- Research goal:
  - Exploring the extent to which extent empirical pragmatic methods can be fruitfully applied to research in intonation.
  - Testing the adequacy of the politeness framework to the design of tightly controlled scenarios for the elicitation of productive data.

Research goals (2)

- The politeness value of each pattern is still undecided in the literature, we ask the following research questions:

  - (i) which pattern is used in the most face-threatening situations/ in the situations requiring maximum politeness?

  - (ii) is there a preference for a falling or rising pattern? (iii) what is the influence of each factor (power, distance, cost) in the choice of intonational pattern?

Methodology

- Participants: 9 Catalan and 6 English

- Questionnaire with 20/21 situations

- Controlling:

  - Social distance between participants (D)

    - Sibling > acquaintance > stranger

  - Power of hearer over speaker (P)

    - Friends' child > colleague > boss

  - Cost of the offer

    - Lemonade > car ride > restaurant meal

  - Benefit for the hearer: 2/3 extra situations

    - A really special treat (home-made lemonade for sibling, freshly baked cake for close friends, trip to theme park for own child)

Methodology

1 *Les tres situacions que vénen a continuació van sempre referides a la teva germana, amb qui tens una relació molt propera i us veieu quasi cada dia.*

– Ets a casa teva i saps que a ella li agrada moltíssim la llimonada amb canyella que fas. Ofereix-li llimonada: Vols llimonada?

– Ets a casa teva. Ofereix-li de portar-la amb cotxe a casa seva, que és molt a prop: Vols que et porti a casa?

– És el dia del teu aniversari. Saps que a la teva germana li agrada molt d'anar a dinar a un restaurant molt bo que hi ha prop de casa teva, i tens moltes ganes de convidar-la-hi. Digue-li si vol anar-hi: Anem a dinar a un restaurant?

Methodology

- DCTs, Discourse Completion Tests are...

- Criticisms that DCTs elicit less semantic variety (e.g. Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1992) and shorter responses (Beebe & Cummings, 1996) in comparison to naturally occurring data

- However, the main advantage of a DCT is the ability to capture a large data set in a controlled environment (e.g. McNamara & Roever 2006)

- Advantages of using DCTs for research in intonational phonology

Analysis: sentence type, morpho-syntactic markers

- Transcription on to an Excel spreadsheet and codification:
  - Form of address: informal tú coded as T, formal vostè coded as V
  - Mood (Present and Conditional): Indicative coded as I, Conditional coded as C

- Phonological analysis by listening to the speech files and examining the pitch traces using Praat

- Labelling following the conventions of the Spanish version of the intonation transcription system ToBI (Sp_ToBI)

- Phonetic analysis: pitch range

Results (1)

Mitigating language

■ Direct language ■ Mild mitigation (V or C) ■ Strong mitigation (V and C)

3%

18%

79%
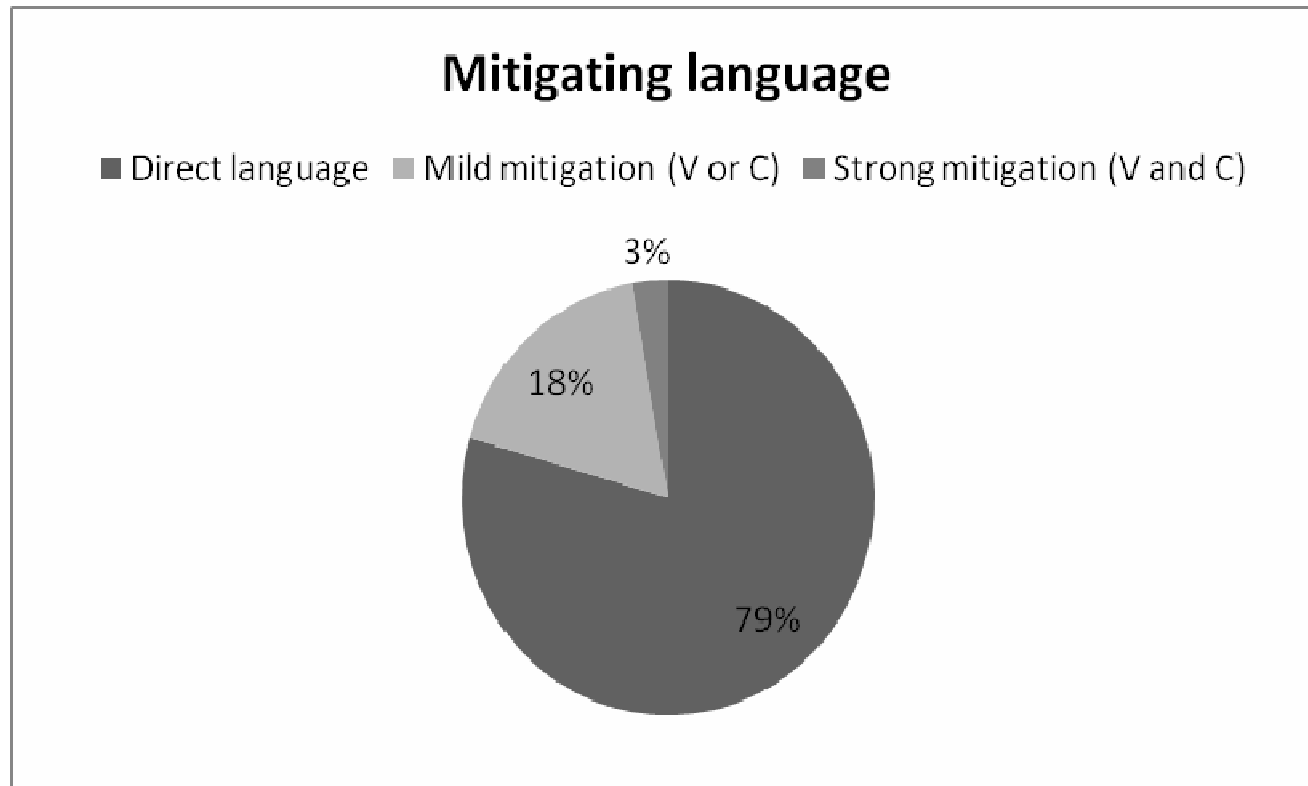
- Distance : strong correlation (Pearson: 0.771**) with the use of V and a significant though weak correlation with the use of the conditional (Pearson: 0.251*).

- Power, medium correlation with the use of V (Pearson: 0.536**).

Results (1)

- The use of mitigating language varies according to the situation, and that these differences are statistically significant

- There are 6 situations that elicit mitigating language. These are situations 7, 8, and 9 (talking to a stranger) and situations 16, 17, and 18 (talking to your boss).

- The 6 situations that elicit mitigating language belong to the highest level (Level 3) of the factors (social) Distance and Power.

Analysis: intonational patterns
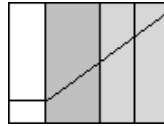
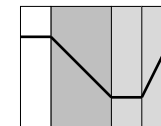|		
3- High rise	L+H* H%	4 - High nucleus + L%
2 – Ascendent	L*+HH%	
1 – Descendent	H+L*L%	5 - Descendent +H%
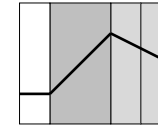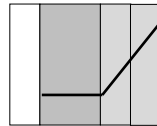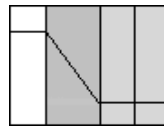
Results (1)

Catalan

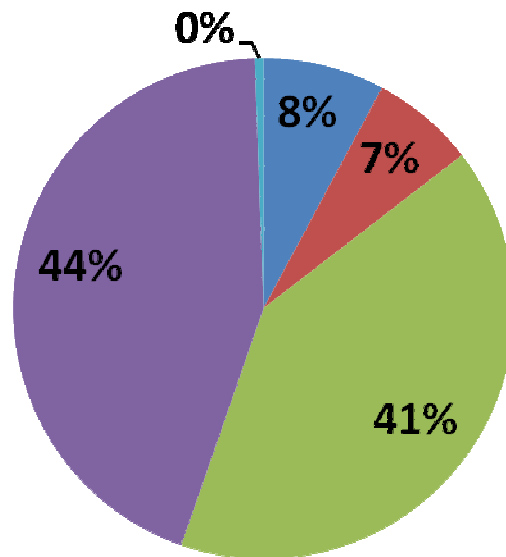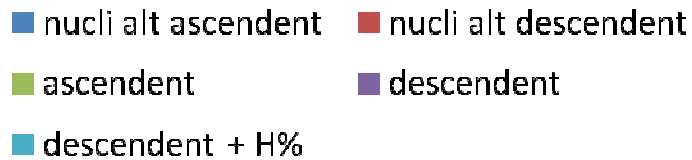- ■ nucli alt ascendent
- ■ nucli alt descendent
- ■ ascendent
- ■ descendent
- ■ descendent + H%
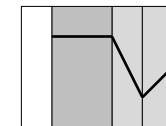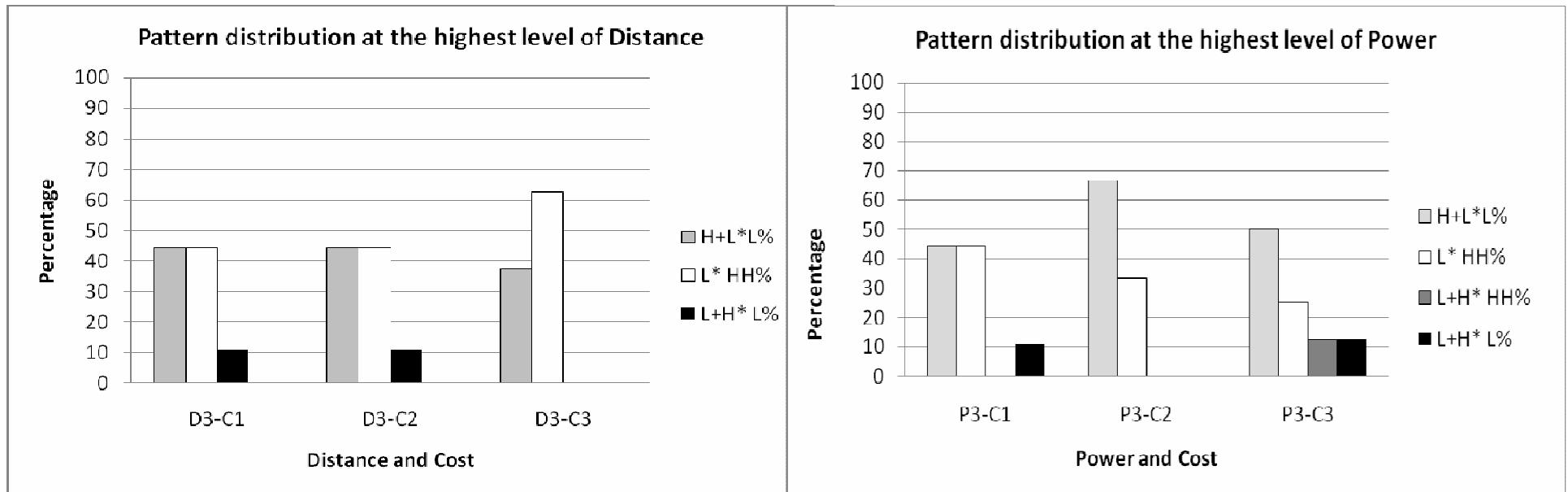

- Similar occurrence of *descendent* and *ascendent*

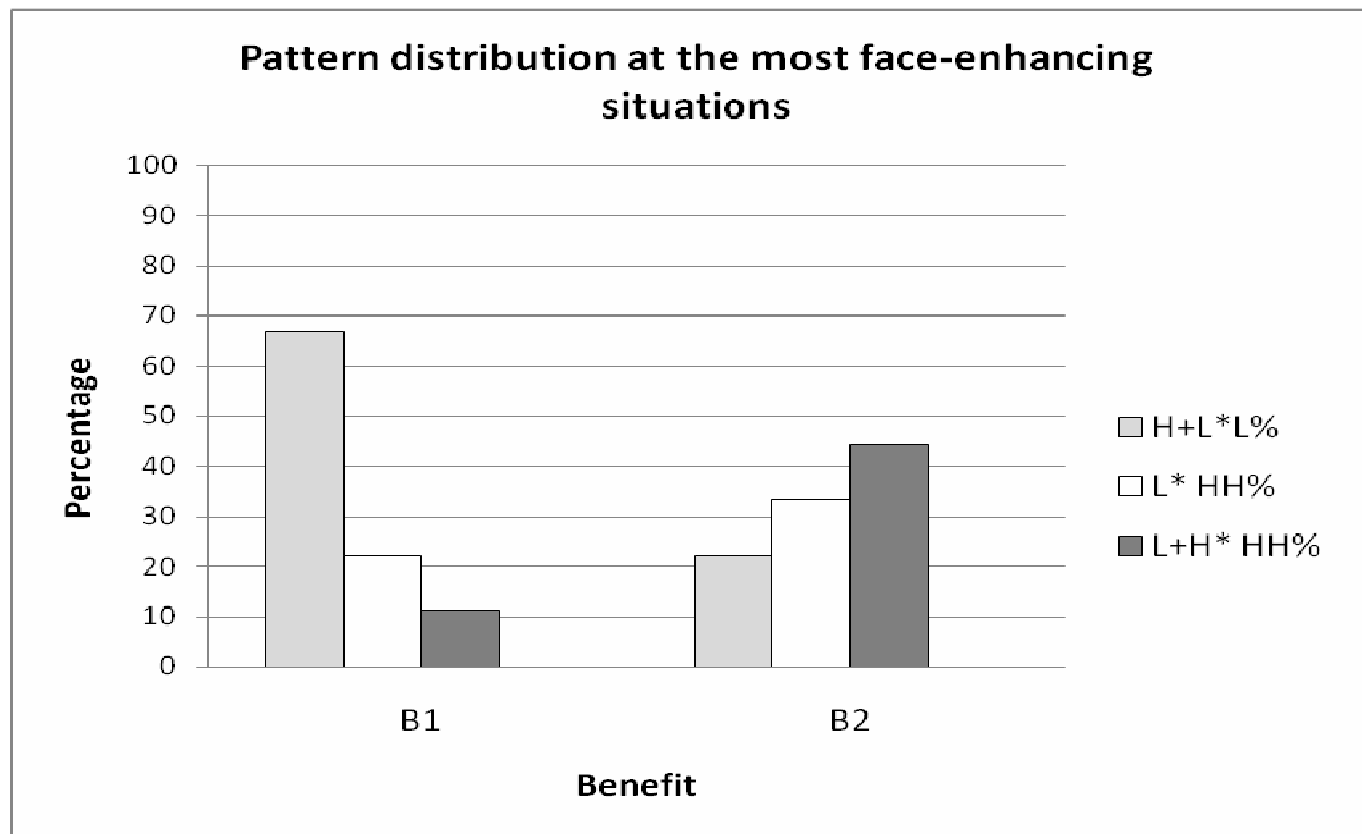- Final fall and final rise:
  - 50% split (51% and 49%)

Results (2)

- Intonational patterns used in the most face-threatening situations:
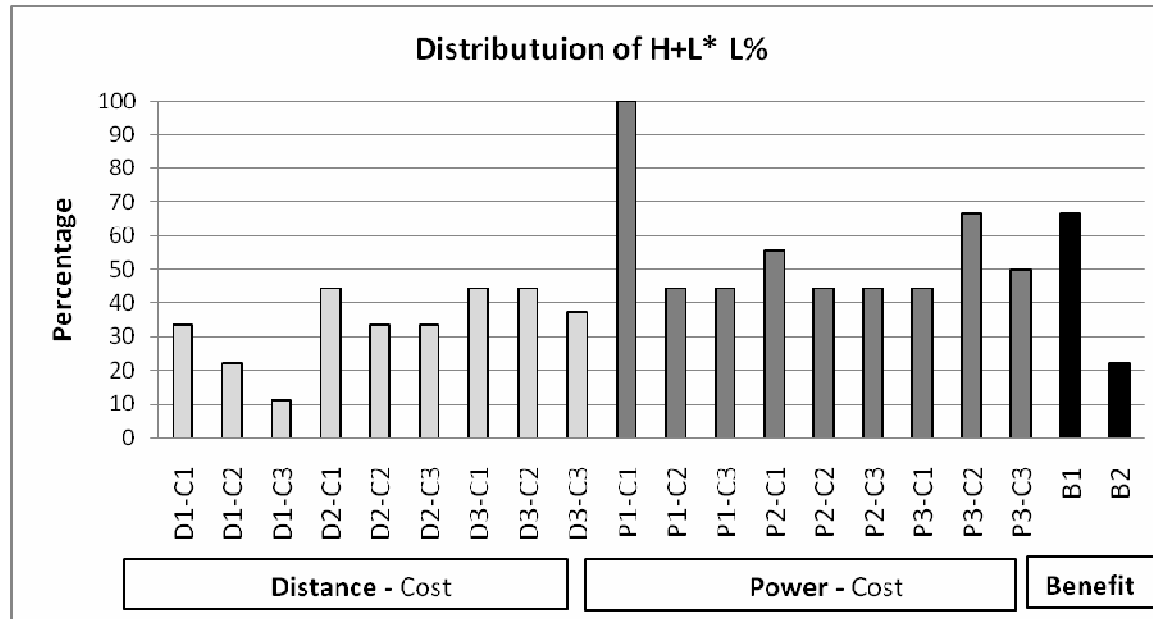 - Offers to a stranger and to your boss

Results (3)

- Patterns used in the most face-enhancing situations

Pattern distribution at the most face-enhancing situations

Results (4)

Distributuion of H+L* L%

- Used across all situations, However, this is the only pattern for offering lemonade to a child, 100%

- Possibly related to social Distance (the greater the social distance, the higher its occurrence) and also to the intention to be nice; this is the pattern most frequently used with children.

- Our interpretation is that, at least with offers, it sounds less threatening than the other patterns

Results (5)

Distribution of L* HH%
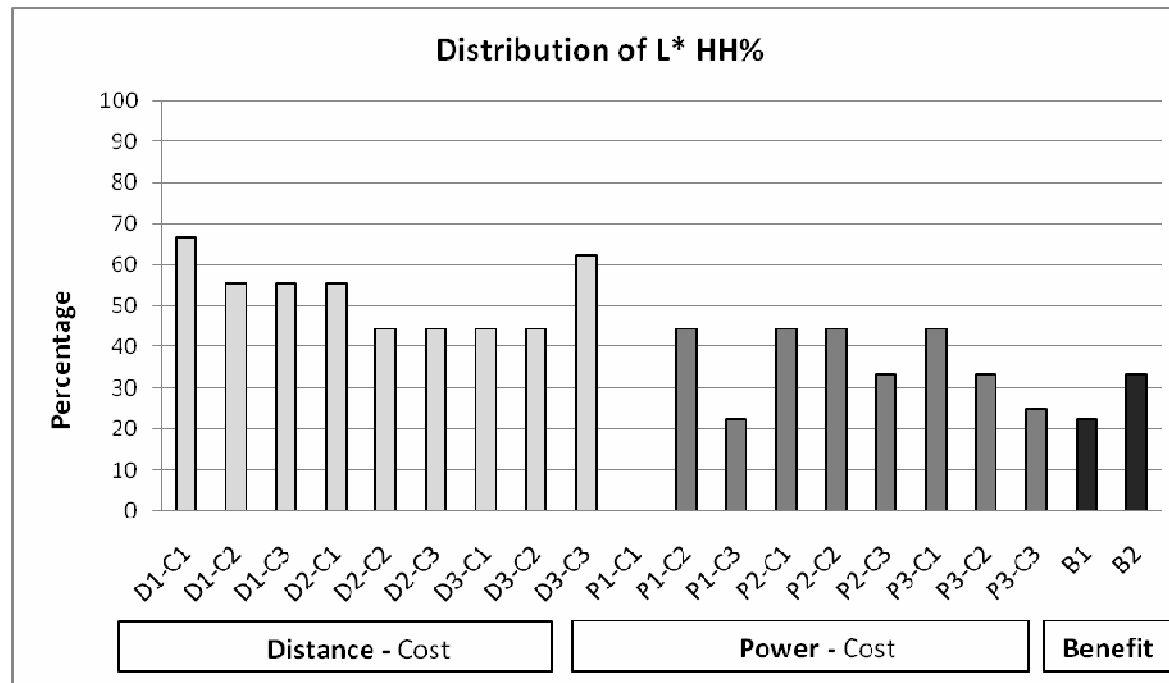
- Used when offering lemonade to your sibling when offering a restaurant meal to a stranger.
- Rarely used with children and boss

Conclusion

- Overall, the most face-threatening situations in our corpus are resolved by both morpho-syntactic means (using redressive language, that is the V form and/or the conditional tense) and by prosodic means

- Which pattern is used in the most face-threatening situations/ in the situations requiring maximum politeness?
  - Both main patterns, descending (H+L* L%) and rising (L* HH%)

- What is the influence of each factor (Power, Distance, Cost) in the choice of intonational pattern?
  - Distance and Power, at their extreme level, elicited the two types of high rise, very rare in other situations
  - Cost: the cost (real or psychological) of the thing offered influences use of high rise, L+H*H% (from 15% to 28% in the last 2 situations)

Conclusion

- Our goal was to explore the interface prosody and pragmatics

- Production experiment controlling for the relevant contextual factors in interactions, in line with Brown & Levinson's classical strand of Politeness theory

- We have looked at offers –more experiments are needed studying other speech acts, from requests to complaints

- More perceptual experiments also needed, such as the one by Nadeu and Prieto (2010) on the effect of raising/lowering the boundary tones and the pitch range on the perception of politeness

Many thanks!
Any questions?