

TEACHING PARALINGUISTIC FEATURES AS EXPRESSING EMOTION: A PHONOLOGICAL* APPROACH TO APPRAISAL?

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ABSTRACT: *As EFL pronunciation teachers, it seems to us that most studies on Appraisal focus on lexico-grammatical resources and on the written language, and that a phonological approach might also be attempted. The purpose of this paper is 1) to present a description of the way in which we deal with the expression of attitude in our English pronunciation courses, and 2) to pose some questions that might lead to future research on Appraisal in spoken discourse. Following Brown's (1990) taxonomy of paralinguistic features and through carefully planned activities, our university students are trained in the use of phonological resources that contribute to the expression of emotion. Hypothesizing about possible connections between paralinguistic features and Appraisal, we wonder, for example, whether paralinguistic features are complementary to Appraisal and whether they constitute a system on their own.*

KEY-WORDS: *paralinguistic features, appraisal, phonology, EFL teaching*

1. Introduction

Appraisal theory is one of the most significant recent contributions to Systemic Functional Linguistics. Appraisal extends the SFL account of interpersonal meaning presenting a framework of ways in which writers or speakers construct texts and 'adopt stances' (Martin and White 2005:1) towards what they say and towards those to whom they say it. By *stance* is meant "the lexical and grammatical expression of attitudes, feelings, judgements or commitment concerning the propositional content of a message" (Biber and Finegan 1989 in Eggins and Slade 1997:125). Undoubtedly, the Appraisal framework provides valuable tools for the analysis and interpretation of discourse from the

* The terms *phonology* and *phonological* are used in a very wide sense and are made to include the features referred to as *paralinguistic features* in this paper.

interpersonal perspective. However, it seems to us that most studies on Appraisal focus on lexico-grammatical resources and on the written language. Even in the case of conversational appraisal analysis the main focus of interest is on the attitudinal meanings of the *words* used by the interactants in conversation (e.g. Eggins and Slade 1997).

Before presenting a description of the way in which we deal with the expression of attitude in our English pronunciation courses, we would like to make some theoretical considerations. In the spoken language, from the point of view of realization, phonology is the most concrete level; next comes lexico-grammar, which is realized through phonology, and discourse semantics constitutes a third and higher level of abstraction. Appraisal is “located as an interpersonal system at the level of discourse semantics”(Martin and White 2005:33); that is, it is a discourse semantic resource for making interpersonal meaning. As Martin and White (2005) explain, Appraisal is placed in discourse semantics because, among other reasons, “the realization of an attitude tends to splash across a phase of discourse, irrespective of grammatical boundaries”(p.10).

From the SFL perspective, Tench (1996:107) refers to the attitudinal function as one of the meanings intonation is used to express; this meaning is expressed by means of variations to the tones. These changes include variations to the “degree of falling, rising and falling-rising, either greater or lesser than the neutral forms” and also “variations in the pitch movement in the pre-tonic segment”. As can be seen from description, the focus is on pitch movement. An explicit connection is made between the expression of emotion and the pitch movement that differs from the neutral or unmarked form. In addition, making reference to a number of linguists who have acknowledged it (e.g. Halliday 1967, Crystal 1969, Brown 1977), Tench (1996:108) points out that the expression of attitude is optional since there are “modes of presentation” in which it is not usually included, such as in newsreading, where it is kept to a minimum, and in unison prayer, where it is impossible. In the case of informal spontaneous conversation, emotions are expressed, but not necessarily all the time. While “the ideational, interactional and textual components are obligatory, the attitudinal component is optional” (Tench 1996:108).

Following Martin and White (2005:35), Appraisal can be described as including three interactive components: *attitude*, *engagement* and *graduation*. Attitude has to do with the expression of emotions (*affect*),

evaluation of behaviour (*judgement*) and of things (*appreciation*). Engagement is concerned with the sources and voices of attitude and graduation deals with the upgrading or downgrading of attitude. Related to graduation and particularly relevant to the scope of the present paper is the category of appraisal devised by Eggins and Slade (1997) and labelled *amplification*, which they define as “the way speakers magnify or minimize the intensity and degree of the reality they are negotiating” (p.125), and which they also describe as “the most complex area as far as casual conversation is concerned” (p.133). According to these authors, the major subcategories of amplification are *enrichment*, *augmenting* and *mitigation*.

As stated above, it seems to us that Appraisal has been dealt with mainly from a lexico-grammatical perspective. True enough, Eggins and Slade (1997:125), for example, make reference to Labov’s (1972) categorization of intensifiers which includes “expressive phonology” as one of the “evaluative devices”. Also, when developing the subcategory of *augmenting*, which “involves amplifying attitudinal meaning”, these authors argue that the force of the evaluation can be intensified through the use of prosodic features, which typically involves “adding stress to the lexical item which may or may not already express attitudinal meaning” (Eggins and Slade 1997:134). In addition, Martin and White (2005:12) explicitly refer to the contribution of phonology to Appraisal through aspects such as “intonation, phonaesthesia and various features of voice quality which have tended to be marginalized as paralinguistic but appear far more central once appraisal systems are given their due”. Martin and White’s (2005:35) “guide to the range of phonological patterns realizing appraisal” can certainly serve as a point of departure, but the role played by phonology in the Appraisal system still has to be described.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the fact that, as Eggins and Slade (1997) point out, in Appraisal, categories are not always clearly differentiated on the basis of fixed criteria; for this reason, they claim that

the analysis of Appraisal depends significantly on the co-text: it is often not possible to state whether a lexical item has attitudinal colouring until it is used in context. [. . .] The interpretation of the meaning of lexical items is not only dependent on the co-text but also on the sociocultural background and positions of the interactants. Appraisal analysis must therefore be sensitive to the

potential for different readings or '*hearings*' [the authors' highlighting] of attitudinal meanings (p.126).

It seems to us that a phonological approach to Appraisal might be attempted and that the way in which we deal with the expression of emotion in our EFL pronunciation classes might be illuminated by Appraisal theory.

2. The expression of emotion in EFL pronunciation classes

At the School of Languages, National University of Córdoba, prospective EFL translators, licentiates and teachers receive training in English pronunciation for three years. During the first two years, the emphasis is placed on segmental and suprasegmental features of pronunciation; during the third year, the focus is mainly on the phonological resources that construe cohesive and coherent oral texts; in other words, the purpose is to help students become aware of and produce communicatively effective texts. Through different types of activities, students practice organizing and delivering different types of oral texts. For example, they are expected to make effective oral presentations and efficiently read aloud texts that range from academic reports to poems and stories for children. The objective is to help students acquire phonological tools that will help them produce effective oral texts of various types which will be part of their activities as EFL professionals.

When we first included training in the production of different types of oral texts in our EFL courses, we found that in spite of their exposure to a variety of models, students frequently failed to produce communicatively effective oral messages. It seemed to us that our students paid more attention to the 'correct' pronunciation of individual words than to the message they were trying to convey. Naturally, this apparent lack of attention to the message itself had a bearing on the way in which emotion or attitudinal positioning was expressed. That is, in many cases, although the lexico-grammatical choices clearly construed a stance, the oral delivery of the texts did not match that stance, involuntarily contradicting or minimizing its force. True enough, from the phonological perspective, the expression of emotion is an optional element but this is likely to be determined by the type of text. It seems hard to imagine, for example, a speech against the violation of human rights read aloud or delivered without emotional intonational cues.

It was when we resorted to Brown's (1990) taxonomy of paralinguistic features, that better results, or more effective oral texts began to be produced. To start with, Brown's categories of paralinguistic features offer a simple theoretical basis on which to make our students aware of the use of those features. In addition, it constitutes a clear framework for systematically teaching phonological (vocal) resources that contribute to the expression of emotion. As Tench (1996:124) points out, the speaker's attitude is conveyed through factors which include not only the choice of words and the context of situation but also the choice of prosodic and paralinguistic features, besides body gestures or movements.

Following Brown (1990), paralinguistic features are described as "vocal features that can be heard and are listened to", which are independent of the traditionally called segmental and suprasegmental features, and which may or may not be present. Although, intonation and paralinguistic features share similar properties of the speech signal such as pitch, stress and tempo, linguistically these properties are considered as "basic components" while "paralinguistically, they are part of the means by which an attitude is expressed" (Tench 1990:477). It seems that both speakers and listeners can distinguish between linguistic and paralinguistic aspects of the same properties. Normally, paralinguistic features are used to reinforce the verbal content of the message. However, when there is a mismatch between the verbal content of a message and the expression of attitude, the listener usually perceives that and pays more attention to the attitudinal meaning: "It's not so much what he said as the way he said it that upset/struck/infuriated me" (Brown 1990:113). Surely, how attitude is conveyed and interpreted depends on more than one variable, as paralinguistic features co-occur and are culturally determined.

Basically, Brown (1990) considers that each individual has a "normal range" for the "linguistic" realization of features such as loudness, tempo, pitch span, timing of segments and syllables, and pause. Departure from that norm turns these features into a paralinguistic realization which sets up an attitudinal positioning. Even though there seem to be no significant differences between English and Spanish, students are usually unaware of paralinguistic features and hardly use them in activities such as oral presentations or reading aloud. This often results in monotonous, unemotional spoken discourse in the foreign language (and even in their mother tongue, Spanish). It is through

purposeful exposure to different oral texts, through simple theoretical descriptions and various in and out-of -class activities that students become aware of and begin to use these phonological features as resources that express emotion or attitude.

In general, in-class activities include, analysis, discussion and oral production of different recorded texts (poems, lectures, stories, speeches, news bulletins), the focus being on the way in which paralinguistic features contribute to attitudinal positioning. Once the analysis and discussion stage is over, students are asked to shadow read the recordings. A quite engaging activity is to listen to and/or orally reproduce the same text or part of a text without the use of paralinguistic features or using other paralinguistic features. Finally, students are asked to prepare their own speeches on subjects of their interest and also to read aloud unrecorded texts making their own decisions as to what features to use and where and when to use them.

In effective reading aloud, the reader goes beyond the mere oral delivery of the verbal content of the message; an effective reader aloud will also express the emotional positioning resulting from his own reading and, in this respect, paralinguistic features play an essential role. One text type which has proved particularly useful to our purposes of raising awareness of and encouraging the use of paralinguistic features is poems. Poems clearly illustrate how the spoken word enhances the written one, how phonological choices at the paralinguistic level can add to the lexico-grammatical choices. It is precisely in poetry that the “aesthetic attributes of speech sounds are most intensively exploited” to create different auditory effects which, rather than fulfilling a purely decorative purpose, are “integral to the poem’s aesthetic and affective structure” (Carter and Nash 1990:119-20). In the case of poems, EFL students tend to find it particularly difficult to communicate any emotional meaning beyond that expressed by the lexis. As already stated, in most cases, their rendering of poems, and also of other text types, tends to result in a linear reading of words, intonationally organized according to the orthographic structure but deprived of any suprasegmental or paralinguistic feature that may contribute to the emotional load of the text. Reading aloud should make the affective content of a text come alive.

To illustrate how the expression of attitude can be integrated into EFL teaching, we are going to briefly refer to how we help our EFL students

become aware of the way/s in which a read aloud poem may be supplied with affective meaning, in our Phonetics and Phonology II class.

On the basis of Brown's taxonomy, we start by analyzing the importance of the use of paralinguistic features in a recorded version of the poem *About Friends* (Geddes, Sturtridge and Been 1991:23). The voice in the poem depicts different stages in a person's life: the author's life. Thus the poem presents different moments, each of which is characterized by a different attitude towards life and friendship and brings about a different emotional state. Although the lexico-grammatical content of the poem guides listeners through the different stages, it is the use of non-verbal features such as tempo, loudness, placing in voice range and pauses that highlight the transition from one stage to the other and the subsequent change in attitude.

About Friends is a poem about friendship. The author starts by talking about her relationship with a friend of hers in past years, when sharing was above all, when words did not matter provided friends could rejoice in appreciating nature and gleefully sharing their feelings, when they did not have to "finish sentences". The reader aloud resorts to a number of paralinguistic features to denote the deep emotion felt when remembering that period of her life when she would sit with her friend on a river bank and spend summer afternoons together. Specifically, the reader resorts to drawling on sounds to represent the flowing of the river water and to slow tempo, soft voice and long pauses to express the nostalgia she feels for those gone-by days.

The next stage in the author's life is determined by the change in the relationship with her friend, when they meet twenty years later: form seems to have become more important than emotions. The author and her friend now seem to be more interested in formality, in "finishing sentences", in keeping control rather than in spontaneous and uncontrolled sharing. The reader resorts to higher placing in voice range to show the transition from the first moment of melancholy for feelings that will not be recovered to this second moment whose pace is marked by the rhythm of a more mature world and matter-of-fact attitude. In addition, tempo and loudness become normal, pauses are shorter and coincide, in most cases, with grammatical boundaries.

The last moment of the poem is represented in only one final line. This moment denotes the author's awareness of the passing of time and of the loss of delight in and opportunity for spontaneous sharing. This

emotional state of sadness and despair over irrecoverable times and feelings is paralinguistically expressed by means of very slow tempo, long pauses, precise articulation and low placing in voice range.

As to the activities carried out in class, before analyzing the recorded version of *About Friends*, students are asked to read the poem silently and answer some questions designed to help them grasp the author's philosophy about life and friendship and the simplicity and beauty of the lexis chosen to express the evoked feelings. Then students are encouraged to discuss their answers and predict how the poem might be read aloud in a way which enhances its meaning; that is, students are asked to decide on the paralinguistic features which might be associated with the different emotional states of the poem. After listening to the original recording, we reflect together on the effectiveness of the paralinguistic resources exploited by the reader aloud.

In our experience, these suggested activities have always positively contributed to raising our students' awareness of the role played by paralinguistic features and have also encouraged them to use those features in the construction of their own texts. At least in the field of EFL pronunciation teaching, we agree with Brown (1990:137) that paralinguistic features are "the least exploited of the resources available"; we think that the use of these resources should be encouraged in EFL pronunciation classes since communication can thus be greatly enhanced. It appears to us that from the perspective presented in this paper, paralinguistic features may be seen as contributing to Appraisal in spoken discourse. By departing from his/her normal pitch range or loudness or tempo, for example, a speaker expresses emotion, establishes an attitudinal positioning that may amplify, reinforce or contradict the verbal content of the oral message.

3. Conclusion

The more we read and learn about Appraisal, the more it seems to us that the phonological component should be taken into account when describing appraisal in spoken discourse. On the basis of Brown's (1990) taxonomy of paralinguistic features, and Eggins and Slade's (1990) categories of Appraisal, empirical evidence seems to indicate that paralinguistic features operate mainly in the area of *amplification* (magnifying or minimizing) of attitudes and emotions. Paraphrasing Martin and White (2005:43), paralinguistic features appear to "colour" lexico-grammatical appraisal in different ways.

On the basis of the previous considerations, it seems possible to pose a number of questions:

- Are paralinguistic features complementary to Appraisal?
- Do they constitute a system on their own?
- Do paralinguistic features enrich, augment and mitigate attitudes?
- How is it that paralinguistic features can reinforce and contradict the verbal content?
- Are paralinguistic features more closely associated with a certain attitudinal meaning (Affect, Judgement, Appreciation)?
- Are certain paralinguistic features associated with certain attitudes?
- Would it be possible to speak of ‘prosodies’ of paralinguistic meanings?

These are just some of the questions that arise when, as Martin and White (2005:69) point out, “as work on interpersonal meaning evolves, the traditional distinction between language and paralanguage certainly needs to be reconsidered”.

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