The Influence of Power Relations on English L1 and L2 Speakers’ Oral Requests

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INTRODUCTION
• The current study investigates the effects of social factors (gender, power relations, etc.) on request of native English (L1) and Korean EFL (L2) speakers.
• It is predicted that i) both L1 and L2 speakers lower their pitch and intensity toward interlocutors having higher power status, and that ii) L1, but not L2, speakers have slower speech rate in power-high situations [1, 2, 3].

METHODS
Participants
16 Korean EFL speakers (8 for each gender) & 9 native English speakers (4 males and 5 females)

Materials
12 English request sentences (4 tokens for each power relations: power-high, -equal, and -low)
Stimuli consisted of three different interrogative sentences (i.e., Can ~ please?, Do you mind ~?, and Is it possible to ~?).

Procedure
While watching the picture of a requestee on the screen (power-high: professors, power-equal: classmates or neighbors in twenties, and power-low: younger siblings or kids), the participants listened to a description of the situation and produced the appearing request sentence as if they were actually taking to the person in the given picture. Verbal reports were also conducted.

RESULT I – PITCH

Figure 1: Individual speakers’ mean F0 (Hz) in all 12 sentences.
♦ Speakers mitigate their pitch in a socially difficult situation in a way that are similar to their own.

RESULT II – SPEECH RATE

Figure 2: Mean speech rate ratio (syl/sec) and standard deviations of four groups: NM, NF, KM, and KF.
• No significant gender difference in both L1 and L2
• L2 speakers (KM & KF) had significantly slower speech rate than L1 speakers (NM & NF) (Figure 2; p < .001), especially in power-high relations (Figure 3).

RESULT III – INTENSITY

Figure 4: Mean intensity (dB) and standard deviations of four groups: native males (NM), native females (NF), Korean males (KM), and Korean females (KF).
• No significant group or power difference in general (Figure 4)
• Standard deviations are bigger for L2 (may be related to proficiency level).

CONCLUSION
• The results for speech rate showed that L2, but not L1, speakers exhibit their reluctance to request by speaking more slowly in socially difficult situations.
♦ The findings indicate that speech rate is a prominent prosodic cue distinct from the native speakers in the production of L2 speakers.

Selected References

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