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Studies have shown that, in communication, a great deal of meaning is exchanged through non-verbal language. This includes prosodic aspects of the speech signal (rhythm, pitch, voice quality, tone of voice, volume, etc.), as well as body language (eye gaze, facial expressions, hand gestures, body movements) (Mehrabian, 1972). However, much is still to be learned about the contribution of speakers' non-verbal language to overall communication, and more studies are needed to investigate the interplay of linguistic and non-linguistic features in successful oral communication. Particularly, cross-linguistic investigations can reveal the existence of culture-specific differences in speakers' verbal and non-verbal behavior (Burgoon & Bacue, 2003; Derwing & Munro, 2001; Kormos & Demes, 2004; Matsumoto, 2006; Matsumoto et al., 2007; Munro, 2008; Munro & Derwing, 2001; Pickering, 2002; Pickering, 2004; Wang & Li, 2007; Wennerstrom, 2000; Wilson & Wharton, 2006).

In this perspective, this paper presents the preliminary results of a large-scale investigation of the effects of non-native speakers' non-verbal language in L2 communication. The hypothesis behind the study is that, in second-language speech, processes of interference and transfer from the L1 will concern not only the use of linguistic features (grammar, pronunciation, discourse practices), but also the use of non-linguistic features (rhythm, prosody, body gestures, eye movements, etc.).

To test this hypothesis, audio-video data was collected from 15 (Northern) Italian university students of English, who were filmed in two separate retelling tasks: 1) a retelling of Aesop's fable 'The fox and the crow'; 2) a retelling of the events seen in a short clip (McNeill & Levy, 1982). From these data, the speakers' speech prosody was analyzed with Praat (www.praat.org), and the speakers' body gestures were analyzed with the multimodal annotation tool Elan (www.lat-mpi.eu/tools/elan).

The preliminary results of the investigation show that the prosodic patterns of the Italian speakers of English differ substantially from the native speakers'. In particular, the Italians' speech in English seems to be characterized by the inability to emphasize any part of speech through stress and/or pitch. In addition, Italian intonation in English appears rather flat and monotonic. This may be an effect of the influence of the speakers' L1, be a characteristic of 2nd-language speech (Mennen et al., 2008) or may be related to the particular speech style examined (Hinks, 2004). In any case, because level intonation in English conveys detachment, it may cause the listener to perceive the L2 speakers of English as being not very involved in the conversation.

As for body language, the preliminary investigation seems to confirm previous studies (cited above) showing that speakers 'transfer' their L1 non-verbal behavior into their L2 speech. In fact, speakers seem to be quite unaware that gestures that have a specific meaning in their native language may have a different meaning, or be meaningless, in the L2.

It is possible that, as with linguistic features, the observed differences in the speaker's non-linguistic behavior, due to the L1, may have a significant effect on intelligibility and successful communication in the L2, because they may convey meaning that may be misinterpreted by the L1 listener. This will be tested in further studies.

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