

Title of abstract: *Perceptual competence and persuasiveness: L1 and L2 compared*

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Most of the research about speech perception in L2 focuses on segmental phonemes, neglecting the analysis of prosodic information given by the acoustic signal, although in L1 a leading role has been recognized to prosodic factors. Indeed, it has been shown that in spontaneous speech, the perceptual process also uses the information given by suprasegmental features: intonation, pauses, rhythm, quantity, variations of tone and speech rate, which indicate the intentions of speaker and mark the internal borders and points of emphasis in a sentence (Stevens & House, 1972; Studdert-Kennedy, 1970; Summerfield, 1987).

For this reason, our research aims at analyzing the perception of prosodic features in Italian L1 and L2, from a comparative perspective. In particular, choosing spontaneous argumentative speech - which implies the perlocutionary act of convincing (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1984) – our task is to investigate the relationship between the degree of persuasiveness of a speaker and the prosodic features characterizing his/her speech, in relation to the perceptual competence of native and not native listener.

For our study we collected a corpus of argumentative speech in Italian L1 and a corpus in Italian L2. For the constitution of the corpus in L1, 8 Italians were asked to participate in a debate to argue (up to two minutes) for (4) or against (4) a specific topic. Each speaker argued in order to convince an audience of 19 Italians, who evaluated the persuasiveness of each speaker, judging it as "positive" or "negative". For the collection of the corpus in Italian L2, we carried out the same procedure with 10 Chinese learners of Italian (with a B2 level, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), who argued (5 pros, 5 cons) in front of an audience composed of 8 Chinese.

The corpora were then subjected to a spectro-acoustic analysis by using the *Wavesurfer* software. For each speaker, we calculated: articulation rate, speech rate, fluency, percentage of silence, percentage of disfluencies (vocalizations, nasalizations, prolongations, repetitions, and corrections), average duration of silent pauses and tonal range. Then, for each speaker we crossed the rating about persuasiveness with each prosodic feature, in order to verify the existence of a correlation between persuasiveness and prosody.

In terms of speech production, the results confirm what is described in the literature for non-spontaneous speech: indeed, even in spontaneous speech, there is a quantitative and qualitative difference between L1 and L2 suprasegmentals (Chun, 2002; Trofimovich & Baker, 2006).

In terms of speech perception, the data obtained are significant because they show not only that there is a relationship between persuasiveness and prosodic features, but that this relationship is strongly influenced by the perceptual competence of listener. Indeed, the data related to the corpus in L1 show that native listeners judged as most persuasive the native speaker who produces a hyper-articulated speech (a lower articulation rate), with the presence of many silences (a lower fluency) and of a longer duration, with few disfluencies and a flat tone (a short tonal range). Conversely, the data related to the corpus in L2 indicate that non-native listeners perceive as a more persuasive the non-native speaker who produces a faster speech (a higher speech rate), with few silences (a higher fluency) and of a shorter duration, with few disfluencies and a dynamic and varied tone (a wide tonal range).

Therefore, the results of our research reveal that, contrary to native listeners, the perceptual competence a foreigner has in L2 moves him/her to judge positively another foreigner who speaks very quickly and without pauses, even if this could affect the comprehension of text. This not only sheds new light on studies about intercultural communication, but it makes us to continue on this direction to explore its implications in the field of acquisitional linguistic and language teaching.

Further data will be discussed in detail.

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