

THE LANGUAGE OF EVALUATION: PARALINGUISTIC FEATURES AS
A PHONOLOGICAL DOMAIN FOR APPRAISAL

(A linguagem da Avaliação: os recursos paralinguísticos como um
domínio fonológico para a avaliação)

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Abstract: *In this paper we explore the relationship between the language of evaluation and the use of paralinguistic features in reading aloud, relating Eggins & Slade's (1997) categories of appraisal with Brown's (1990) taxonomy of paralinguistic features. We mainly concentrate on two categories of appraisal: (1) affect, that is the expression of emotional states, and (2) amplification, that is the reader's aloud grading of attitudes and emotions. We present an analysis of part of The Story of Tilly, a story for children beautifully read aloud by Jackie Torrence. It seems to us that this association between paralinguistic features and appraisal may constitute a phonological domain for the description of the language of evaluation beyond the lexico-grammatical level.*

Key-words: *appraisal; evaluation; paralinguistic features; reading aloud.*

Resumo: *Neste artigo exploramos a relação entre a linguagem de avaliação e o uso de recursos paralinguísticos da leitura em voz alta, relacionando as categorias de appraisal (valoração) de Eggins e Slade com a taxonomia dos recursos paralinguísticos. Com esse intuito, nos concentramos em duas categorias de valoração: o afeto, que é a expressão dos estados emocionais, e (2) a amplificação, que é a expressão em voz alta das atitudes e emoções do leitor. Para isso, apresentamos a análise de um excerto de The Story of Tilly, uma belíssima estória para crianças lida em voz alta por Jackie Torrence. Entendemos que essa associação entre características paralinguísticas e appraisal pode constituir um campo fonológico para a descrição da linguagem de avaliação para além do nível lexico-gramatical.*

Palavras-chaves: *appraisal; avaliação; recursos paralinguísticos; leitura em voz alta.*

INTRODUCTION

Within Systemic-Functional Linguistics, Appraisal Theory contributes to interpersonal meaning by presenting a framework of ways in which writers or speakers construct texts and adopt stances towards what they say and towards those to whom they say it. Broadly speaking, *stance* includes the concepts of subjectivity, interaction and evaluation. While subjectivity refers to “self-expression in the use of language” (Lyons 1994, in Engebretson 2007:15), the interactional nature of stance is manifested in the relations that writers establish with readers - or speakers with hearers - and readers establish with texts. As to evaluation, it has to do with the expression of “the speaker’s attitude towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about” (Thompson & Hunston 2000, in Engebretson 2007:16). Therefore, appraisal refers to stancetaking as it is a system which has to do with speakers’ evaluation of what is going on in discourse, and with the ways and means by which that evaluation is revealed. Appraisal Theory focuses mainly on lexicogrammatical resources and on the written language. Even in the case of conversational appraisal analysis (Eggs & Slade 1997), the main focus of interest seems to be on the attitudinal meanings of the words used by the participants in conversation.

We are particularly interested in evaluation, that is, in the expression of attitude, beyond lexicogrammatical resources. As stated in Bombelli & Soler (2006), it seems to us that due attention has to be paid to features other than the lexis and the grammar which play a role in the expression of attitude in oral discourse. In other words, we consider that a phonological approach to appraisal may be a positive and necessary contribution. Following Martin & White (2005), appraisal deals with how speakers show emotion, feelings, roles, status, judgment, that is, with how appraisers show attitude or, as already mentioned, adopt stances in speech. As Tench (1996) points out, attitude is shown not only through the selection of lexical items and the context of situation but it is also revealed through the use of prosodic and paralinguistic features, besides body movements or gestures. In other words, the expression and, hence, the interpretation, of evaluation depends on a complex network of relationships constructed by the choice of words, grammatical resources and prosodic and paralinguistic features, as well.

This work presents a possible connection between appraisal and the phonological subsystem of paralinguistic features. First, we introduce a set of basic categories that have allowed us to describe the language of evaluation from a phonological perspective and to deal with the expression of emotion in reading aloud. Then, on the basis of these categories, we present an analysis of selected parts of a story for children, *The Story of Tilly*, as told by Jackie Torrence.

CATEGORIES OF APPRAISAL IN READING ALOUD

About reading aloud

As already said, we focus on evaluation as construed in reading aloud. We often read aloud for pleasure, for entertainment, and for pedagogical reasons in educational settings, for example. Reading aloud is also a tool for communication in scientific and academic events.

Following Brazil (1997) and Brazil et al. (1980), we consider this mode of reading an important component of oral communicative competence. Reading aloud is an interactive process between reader, text and audience and the reader aloud plays the essential role of translating the written text into an oral message; in doing so, the reader interprets the information provided by the text and meshes the new information with his “existing knowledge” (Brazil et al. 1980:83) on the basis of his state of convergence with his audience.

An experienced and proficient reader aloud will, therefore, be “sensitive to the social action that the discourse participants are engaged in at a given moment” (Keisanen 2007:253-254) and will hence make the necessary choices, verbal or non verbal, linguistic or paralinguistic, to maintain the “social interactional practice”. As a communicative process then, reading aloud implies the purposeful use of oral features which will guide the listener in the process of recovering the intended meaning.

Appraisal categories

Taking Martin & White’s approach (2005) as the point of departure, we resort to Eggins & Slade’s (1997) categories of appraisal (see Figure 1)

and establish a connection with brown's (1990) taxonomy of paralinguistic features (see Table 1). Before presenting our analysis, we will briefly refer to some theoretical considerations on which our taxonomy is based.

As we already said, appraisal, that is, how speakers show evaluation or take a stance, is one of the resources that construe interpersonal meaning; it operates at the discourse semantics level together with involvement and negotiation. Appraisal comprises three interactive subcategories or domains: *attitude, engagement and graduation* (Martin & White 2005). About engagement, which refers to the sources or voices of attitude, it will be enough to say that, in reading aloud, we are concerned with the stance or attitude taken by the reader; that is, we focus on the reader's voice.

Attitude and graduation, which have to do with emotions and their grading, are the domains which are central to our approach. Attitude (Eggins & Slade 1997, Martin & White 2005) can orientate towards one of the three areas of appraisal: *affect, judgement* or *appreciation*. Briefly, we can say that affect has to do with evaluations of feelings or emotions; judgement refers to evaluations of people's behaviour and appreciation has to do with the evaluation of things. Graduation, which, as stated above, is the other appraisal domain central to our approach, has to do with the effect produced by attitude. That is, attitude produces an impact on the listener and that impact can deliberately be reduced or increased by the reader aloud; in other words, graduation has to do with the ways in which the force of the attitude can be upgraded or downgraded. So we are concerned with how the effects of evaluation are minimized or magnified by the phonological decisions a reader aloud makes. And here, it is worth pointing out that, as Martin & White (2005:25) say, "texts themselves have more than enough meaning potential to be read in different ways."

Within the graduation domain, and instead Martin & White's (2005) proposal, we resort to Eggins & Slade's (1997) category of *amplification*, as we find it a more simple tool to analyze how readers aloud can "magnify or minimize the intensity and degree" (Eggins & Slade 1997:125) of their evaluations. Eggins & Slade identify three subcategories of amplification: *enrichment, augmenting* and *mitigation*. Enrichment means "adding an attitudinal colouring to a meaning when a neutral word could be used" (1997:133-4). Augmenting refers to how the attitudinal meaning is amplified or increased. And mitigation has to do with how speakers downgrade or reduce the force of their attitudes.

Figure 1 below shows the different categories of appraisal, as proposed by Egging & Slade (1997) and as used in our description of emotions in reading aloud.

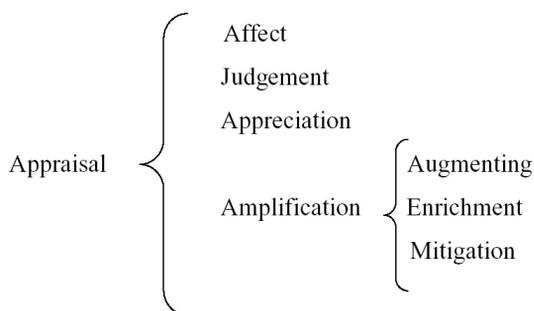


Figure 1: Categories of appraisal in reading aloud.

Working with the previous categories and connecting them to a number of paralinguistic features, we have been able to describe, from a phonological point of view, how readers aloud express attitudes and emotions. In other words, we have focused on the phonological features that are used to express evaluation and on how these features amplify the impact or force of that evaluation. Last, it should be pointed out that we consider that, phonologically, appraisal can be realised on one lexical item, on a clause or can prosodically expand over longer chunks of speech.

PARALINGUISTIC FEATURES

As already mentioned, within the interpersonal dimension of language, phonology plays an important role not only through intonation but also through other non-verbal features which are closely bound up with intonation and contribute to the affective meaning of oral discourse. These features, called paralinguistic features, have traditionally been considered as “additional, marginal, features of speech” (Tench 1990:477). That is, they are optional features which have usually been subsumed under the general concept of intonation. Nonetheless, paralinguistic features play a significant part in the realisation of affective meaning and may reinforce or contradict the verbal content of an utterance.

Paralinguistic features have drawn the attention of different linguists who have analysed and classified them from somewhat different perspectives

(Brown 1990, Couper-Kuhlen 1986, Crystal 1969, Tench 1990, among others). Brown (1990:112) defines paralinguistic features as those aspects of speech “which contribute to the expression of attitude by a speaker and do not form an intrinsic part of the phonological contrasts which make up the verbal message”. Paralinguistic features are culturally determined, as it seems that every speech community shares some notion of an abstract norm in speech, but they are also idiosyncratic features in the sense that every individual has his own norm; departure from that norm produces an *attitudinal* effect on an utterance and listeners interpret that some affective meaning has been added to the verbal content of the message. For Brown, then, paralinguistic are those features which are marked, that is, those which are perceived by listeners as departures from a speaker’s individual norm and that, when present in the message, are indicators of feelings, emotions and values. We should also point out that paralinguistic features often co-occur, each making its own contribution to the expression of attitude.

Summing up, we are mostly interested in the emotions and attitudes as phonologically constructed and expressed in reading aloud; that is, we are concerned with evaluation and the paralinguistic resources readers use to engage in taking stances in relation to the texts they want to communicate and the audience they address. Table 1 below presents the taxonomy of paralinguistic features together with a short description.

Paralinguistic feature	Variations from the norm
Pitch span: speaker’s total voice range	extended restricted
Placing in voice range: placing pitch spans somewhere in the total voice range	raised lowered
Tempo: speed of delivery	rapid slow
Loudness: degree of loudness or softness	loud soft
Voice setting: different vocal cords settings	breathy creaky
Articulatory setting: degree of tension of the articulatory tract	tense
Articulatory precision: degree of precision of articulation	precise slurred
Lip setting: posture of lips	smiling pursed
Timing of segments and syllables: lengthening of segments and syllables	extended
Pause: pauses deliberately used for rhetorical purposes	abnormal

Table 1: Paralinguistic features (adapted from Brown 1990)

On the basis of the above simple taxonomy of paralinguistic features, together with the categories of appraisal presented in Figure 1, we analyse and describe, from a phonological perspective, how evaluation may be seen to operate in spoken discourse and, specifically, in reading aloud.

CONNECTING PARALINGUISTIC FEATURES AND APPRAISAL

Below we present part of an analysis of *The Story of Tilly*, beautifully read aloud by Jackie Torrence.¹ Our analysis focuses on the expression of attitude, trying to associate paralinguistic features and appraisal. *The Story of Tilly* may be considered a good example of a multi-unit account in which “any linguistic or paralinguistic feature of language, or a linguistic construction for that matter, can function as a stance marker” (Keisanen 2007:254). We describe the way in which Ms Torrence, the reader aloud, uses paralinguistic features to take a stance, that is, to perform “a public act, which is recognizable, interpretable, and subject to evaluation by others” (Englebretson 2007:14-15). In other words, we are interested in how the reader aloud expresses the emotional positioning of the different characters involved in the story and on how she creates different atmospheres and feelings through the use of paralinguistic features.

The story is about a little girl, Tilly, who lives with her parents in a little house in the mountains. As the house has no electric lights, Tilly’s bedroom is quite dark when she goes to bed and, every night, Tilly plays the same game before she falls asleep. There are three different stages in the story: orientation, complication and resolution (Labov & Waletzky 1967, in Eggins & Slade 1997:233) and, in each stage, the reader aloud constructs the emotional setting by making a very effective use of paralinguistic features. In the introduction or orientation, there is a general description of the setting, and the presentation of the routine exchange between Tilly and her mother when time to go to bed arrives. The second and longest stage or complication obviously includes the central part of the story: a detailed description of the game Tilly plays every night and of the emotions the game evokes. The third stage is the end of the story in the form of a very short but effective resolution. Undoubtedly, the lexico-grammatical content of the story guides listeners through the different stages, but it is the use

1. *Speak Up*, Año IX, Número 100, Diciembre 1993, Barcelona: RBA Revistas, SA, p.14.

of non-verbal vocal features that highlights the transition from one stage to the next one and the subsequent changes in attitude and emotions.

In the first part of the story, the reader aloud resorts to extended timing of segments with the purpose of amplifying the evaluative meaning of different chunks of discourse. In other words, the paralinguistic feature extended timing of segments may be associated with the appraisal category of amplification and, more precisely, with the subcategory of augmenting. The story begins with the clause “I have a little friend who lives *way* = up in the mountain” and Ms Torrence makes the diphthong in *way* abnormally long.² The extended timing on *way* upgrades the degree of how high up and far up in the mountains Tilly lived (see Table 2, Example (1)). Something similar occurs when the house where Tilly and her family live is described as “a *beautiful* = little house”. The extended timing on *beautiful* magnifies the feeling of the love for the house, that is, the love for home, which Tilly and her parents have (see Table 2, Example (2); see also Example (4)).

Every night Tilly’s mother sends the little girl to bed by saying “Tilly, it’s time to go to bed” (see Table 2, Example (5)). The reader aloud resorts to raised placing in voice range and smiling lip setting, which tints the order with love and affection. After the girl complains that she does not want to go to bed without a candle, Ms Torrence reads Tilly’s mother’s reply in a slow tempo, with precise articulation and pitch level back to normal: “Tilly, you’re too little to take those candles up the stairs. There’s nothing up there.” (See Table 2, Example (7)) the use of slow tempo and precise articulation highlights the fact that going to bed without a candle is not a negotiable matter. Tilly’s mother is really serious about it. Then, the mother repeats the order: “Now go - - - to bed” (see Table 2, Example (8))³. This time, Ms Torrence leaves aside the smiling lip setting and produces an abnormal pause, which makes the order sound still kind but firm. The effect of this abnormal pause may be connected with the appraisal category of affect and the subcategories of dissatisfaction and firmness.

Tilly insists and challenges her mother’s order to go to bed without a candle: “But I don’t want to go to bed. It’s dark up there. I don’t want to go up the steps. Would you give me a candle to carry up the steps?” (See

2. = is used as a convention to indicate extended timing of preceding segment or syllable (see Table 2).

3. - - - is used as a convention to indicate an abnormal pause (see Table 2).

Table 2, Example (6)). Ms Torrence reads aloud Tilly's words with pursed lip setting and a creaky voice. The effect is to reinforce the idea that Tilly feels uneasy and miserable because she is afraid of going to a place where there are no electric lights. These appraising paralinguistic features can be said to belong to the category of affect and the subcategories of unhappiness and frustration.

After this first exchange between Tilly and her mother, the reader aloud resorts to the use of several long, abnormal pauses which mark the beginning of the transition to the second and main part of the story: the game. The stance taken by the reader is to anticipate that something mysterious is coming up or about to happen. These abnormal pauses co-occur with other paralinguistic features, such as precise articulation and a soft voice, which help magnify the feeling of suspense, insecurity and uneasiness when the little girl at last goes to bed and climbs the "eight - - - dark - - - stairs" (see Table 2, Example (9)).

Once Tilly is on her way to her room, the second part of the story begins. Ms Torrence exploits practically the whole range of brown's taxonomy of paralinguistic features. In a very effective way, she takes the audience through the different stages of the game played by Tilly, and successfully conveys the feelings that these stages arouse.

The alternating fast and slow tempi in the reading denote the different emotions that Tilly goes through before falling asleep. Rapid tempo reflects the pace at which Tilly goes to bed; fast tempo co-occurs with smiling lip setting and this is perceived as an indication that, when Tilly realizes that she must stop complaining and go to bed, the little girl obeys her mother's order and starts to perform an activity which she seems to enjoy: "Tilly went up the stairs, went through the door, over to her bed, leaped in and pulled the covers over her head." (See Table 2, Example (10)).

Once in bed, Tilly begins to plan what to do because she is not sleepy yet. Then the slow tempo used by the reader aloud denotes Tilly's thoughtful attitude: "I'm not even sleepy. Well, what do you do, in a little dark room, before you fall asleep? Why, play a game of course!" (See Table 2, Example (11)). The exclamation is read with raised placing in voice range, showing the little girl's happiness about her idea. Tilly starts her imaginary game; she begins to hear the scary voice of someone or something, coming up the stairs and getting closer and closer. Rapid tempo is resumed by

the reader aloud when Tilly gets nervous and tries to think about how to escape from the voice: “All I have to do is get up and go downstairs and get in bed with Mummy and Daddy.” (See Table 2, Example (12)). In this context, the paralinguistic feature of tempo may be said to belong to the category of affect. As to the subcategories, it seems to us that it often depends on the other paralinguistic feature or features with which rapid or slow tempo co-occurs.

Throughout the story, Ms Torrence makes a very effective use of the paralinguistic feature of voice setting. When Tilly asks for a candle to go up the stairs, the girl’s creaky voice - and pursed lip setting - makes her sound a helpless and miserable child. Then, when Ms Torrence refers to the moment Tilly hears “something on the bottom of the stairs” (see Table 2, Example (13)), the use of breathy voice is immediately associated with the fear that Tilly feels. To read the part of story that refers to the creature that terrifies Tilly every night, Ms Torres resorts to a number of paralinguistic features; besides a creaky voice, Ms Torrence uses extended timing of segments, slow tempo, abnormal pauses, precise articulation and tense articulatory setting. The use of all these features results in an atmosphere of fear, terror, despair and insecurity as the creature gets closer and closer saying: “Tilly, Tilly, Tilly, I´m coming up the stairs to get you” (see Table 2, Example (14)).

Tilly’s imaginative game comes to an end when the reader suddenly says: “get you” (see Table 2, Example (15)), in a very loud voice, which dramatically contrasts with the overall normal, unmarked degree of loudness of the rest of the story. In this instance, the use of loud voice has the double effect of unexpectedly bringing the game to an end and of springing a real surprise on the audience.

Finally, in the third and last part of the story, Ms Torrence uses practically no paralinguistic features except for very slow tempo throughout: “there was nobody on the stairs at all. It was just a game that Tilly played every night before she fell asleep. And that’s the end of that.” (see Table 2, Example (16)).

Table 2 below shows examples of some of the paralinguistic features used in *The Story of Tilly* and the connection with different categories and subcategories of appraisal.

	Stretch of discourse	Paralinguistic features	Appraisal	
	Word /words	Category/categories	Category	Subcategory
1)	... who lives <i>way</i> = up in the mountains	timing of segments: extended	amplification	augmenting
2)	<...and it's a <i>beautiful</i> = little cabin>	- timing of segments: extended - articulatory precision: precise	amplification	augmenting
3)	<no - - - electric - - - lights>	- abnormal pauses - tempo: slow - articulatory precision: precise	amplification	enrichment
4)	<i>All</i> = around the house	- timing of segments: extended	amplification	augmenting
5)	<Tilly, it's time to go to bed>	- placing in voice range: raised - lip setting: smiling	affect amplification	- security - mitigation
6)	<but i don `t want to go to bed. it `s dark up there. i don `t want to go up the steps. would you give me a candle to carry up the steps?>	- voice setting: creaky - lip setting: pursed	affect	unhappiness frustration
7)	<Tilly, you're too little to take those candles up the stairs. there's nothing up there>	tempo: slow - articulatory precision: precise	affect	security firmness
8)	now, go - - - to bed	- abnormal pause	affect	dissatisfaction firmness
9)	<eight - - - dark - - - stairs>	- abnormal pauses - tempo: slow - articulatory precision: precise	affect	insecurity, suspense, uneasiness
10)	< Tilly went up the stairs, went through the door, over to her bed, leaped in>	- tempo: faster - lip setting: smiling - placing in voice range: raised	affect	happiness, cheerfulness
11)	<i'm not even sleepy. well, what do you do, in a little dark room, before you fall asleep? why, play a game of course!>	- tempo: slow - articulatory precision: precise - lip setting: smiling	affect	satisfaction
12)	<all i have to do is get up and go downstairs and get in bed with mummy and daddy>	- tempo: rapid - voice setting: creaky	affect	satisfaction

13)	<she heard something, something on the bottom of the stairs>	- voice setting: breathy - tempo: slow - loudness: soft	affect	insecurity, restlessness uneasiness
14)	<Tilly= Tilly= Tilly=>	- voice setting: breathy and creaky - timing of segments: extended - articulatory setting: tense	affect	insecurity terror fear
15)	to <get you>	- loudness: loud - articulatory precision: precise	affect	fear surprise
16)	<there was nobody on the stairs at all. it was just a game that Tilly played every night before she fell asleep. and that's the end of that.>	tempo: slow	affect	calmness

Transcription conventions: *s* = extended timing in previous segment or syllable; --- abnormal pause; < > boundaries.

Table 2: Examples of coding of paralinguistic features for appraisal in the *The Story of Tilly*.

CONCLUSION

In this work we have tried to explore the relationship between the use of paralinguistic features as a phonological component of speech and the language of evaluation in oral discourse, more precisely in reading aloud. With this purpose, we related Eggins & Slade's (1997) categories of appraisal with Brown's (1990) taxonomy of paralinguistic features. We mainly concentrated on two categories: (1) affect, that is the expression of emotional states, and (2) amplification, that is the reader's aloud grading of attitudes and emotions. It seems to us that it is possible to associate paralinguistic features and appraisal in an attempt at establishing a phonological domain for the description of the language of evaluation. This simple approach has proved useful in the description of read-aloud texts and the ways in which proficient readers take stances and express emotions at a level other than the lexico-grammatical domain.

It should be pointed out, however, that, in the course of our analysis, it was often difficult for us to decide which category of appraisal a certain paralinguistic feature related to, and, on several occasions, we concluded that one paralinguistic feature could be related to more than one category.

Appraisal and paralinguistic features seem to intertwine and work together, and this connection should be explored more thoroughly through systematic research. Perhaps the paralinguistic domain should be given a new status within appraisal in oral discourse since paralinguistic features constitute a non-verbal framework of optional ways in which speakers or readers express evaluative meanings of different kinds.

Despite the limited scope of our work, we hope that it arouses interest in the possible relationship between these non-verbal features of speech and appraisal, and encourages further investigation. It seems to us that other studies could, for example, also explore the connection between paralinguistic features and the appraising categories of judgement and appreciation.

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