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

Miran Oh
Stony Brook University / miran.oh@stonybrook.edu

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

□: lower pitch in power-high ■: higher pitch in power-high

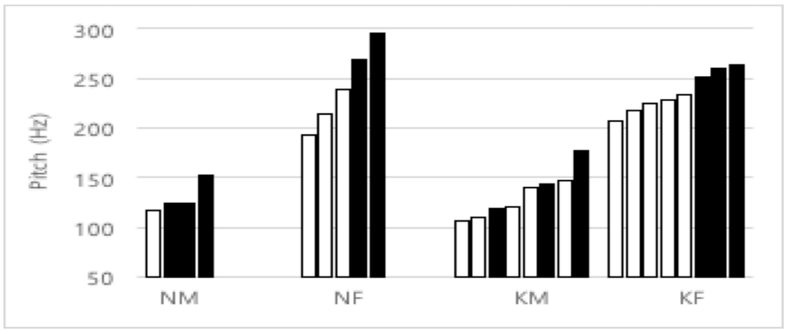

Figure 1: *Individual speakers' mean F0 (Hz) in all 12 sentences.*

⇨ Speakers mitigate their pitch in a socially difficult situation in a way that are similar to their own.

RESULT II – SPEECH RATE

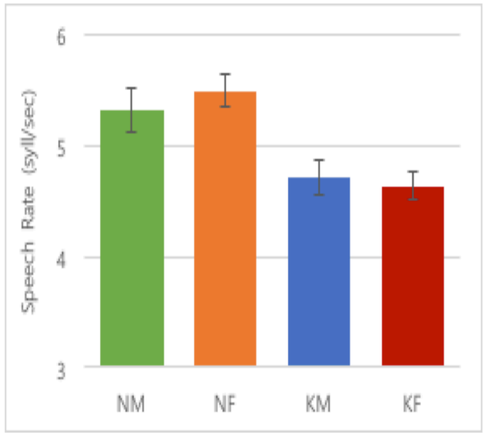

Figure 2: *Mean speech rate ratio (syll/sec) and standard deviations of four groups: NM, NF, KM, and KF.*

• 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).

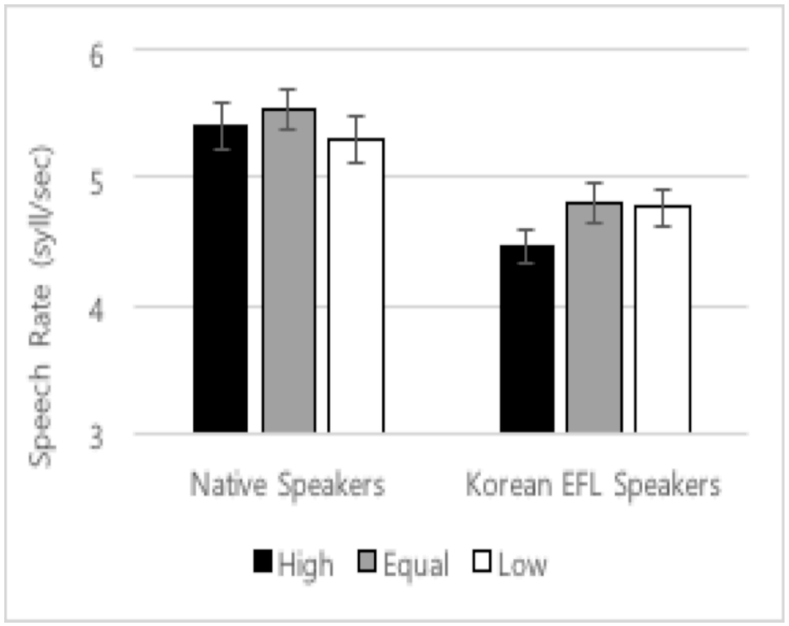

Figure 3: *Native and Korean EFL speakers' mean speech rate ratio (syll/sec) of three power relations: high, equal, and low.*

• No effect of power relations in the native English (L1) speech ($F(2, 105) = .097$, $p = .5$)

⇨ English L2, but not L1, speakers had slower speech rate in power-high situations than in power-equal ($p = .016$) and in power-low ($p = .031$) situations.

RESULT III – INTENSITY

• No significant group or power difference in general (figure 4)

• Standard deviations are bigger for L2 (may be related to proficiency level).

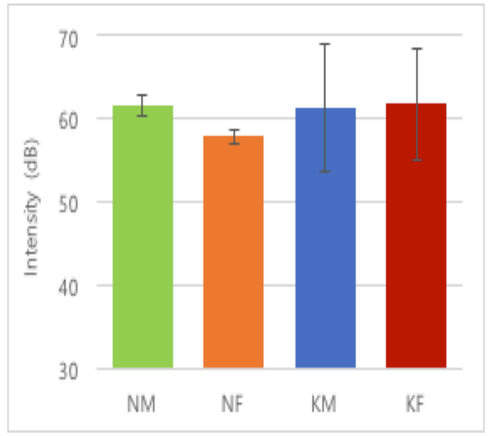

Figure 4: *Mean intensity (dB) and standard deviations of four groups: native males (NM), native females (NF), Korean males (KM), and Korean females (KF).*

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

[1] Y. Ohara, "Finding one's voice in Japanese: A study of the pitch levels of L2 users," in A. Pavlenko, A. Blackledge, I. Piller, and M. Teutsch-Dwyer (eds.), *Multilingualism, Second Language Learning, and Gender.* Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2001, pp. 231– 256 [2] P. Brown, and S. Levinson, *Politeness: Some universals in language usage.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 1987. [3] S. Grawunder and B. Winter, "Acoustic correlates of politeness: prosodic and voice quality measures in polite and informal speech of Korean and German speakers," in *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Speech Prosody, 100316,* Chicago, IL, 2010, pp. 1-4.

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