

Assessment of Politeness Levels of Invitations and Replies to Invitations with Written and Spoken Data (The First Study)

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Abstract

This study investigates how the levels of politeness of utterances in English are evaluated by an English native speaker, using written and spoken data. The target speech acts in this research are the following: (A) inviting a boss/supervisor, (B) inviting a close friend, (A-P) a positive reply to an invitation from a boss/supervisor, (B-P) a positive reply to an invitation from a close friend, (A-N) a negative reply to an invitation from a boss/supervisor, (B-N) a negative reply to an invitation from a close friend. The main purposes of this study are to address the following research questions: (1) How linguistic politeness is assessed by a “lay” person; (2) How prosodic features affect the assessment of linguistic politeness. The researcher conducted a two-stage study in the United Kingdom in August 2014 in order to investigate these two subject matters. The first stage research, speech acts data collection, was carried out with four native English speakers living in Cambridge. The research results of this stage were published in the researcher’s recent work (Suzuki, 2015). In the second stage these utterances were assessed by four evaluators living in London, with regard to the degrees of their linguistic politeness.

In this paper the researcher attempts to discuss how the first informant (I-1)’s utterances were assessed by the first evaluator (E-1) with regard to the degrees of linguistic politeness. It also addresses the issues about the similarities and differences between the written and spoken data, as stated above.

The research results obtained in this study are expected to benefit (1) the linguistic study of politeness in Pragmatics, and (2) the ELT (English Language Teaching) in Japan, especially for the advanced-level learners who are supposed to use English for the work and the communal human networking.

1. Introduction

This work is the second installment of the research results report of a study on speech acts and linguistic politeness conducted with eight native speakers of English in Cambridge and London in the United Kingdom in August 2014. It is at the same time the first report of the research results of the assessment part, where evaluators were requested to judge the levels of politeness of the utterances using written and spoken data.

The whole research project⁽¹⁾ was designed to investigate the following: (1) how the speech act of *inviting* is performed formally and informally in English, (2) how they reply to invitations formally and informally in both positive and negative ways, (3) how their spoken and written responses are evaluated by assessors. (1) and (2) were performed by informants who live in Cambridge in the first stage research and the linguistic features of their utterances were analyzed and discussed in the researchers earlier work (Suzuki, 2015).

This report focuses specifically on (3) above, viz. “how their spoken and written responses were evaluated by assessors living in London”. The four “evaluators” in this second-stage research were requested to assess the levels of politeness of the utterances produced by the four first-stage research informants recorded in the written and the spoken formats. They first evaluated the utterances transcribed in the written format and then those recorded as spoken data. This second-stage research was designed to investigate the following two subjects: (a) how the levels of politeness of English utterances are

(1) This paper is a part of the outcome of research conducted under a Waseda University Grant for Special Research Projects (Project number: 2014B-135).

perceived and evaluated by native English speakers; (b) how similar and/or different written and spoken data are in terms of the impressions they create that could affect the evaluation of the degrees of linguistic politeness.

The investigator was motivated to concentrate on *inviting* along with replies to invitations for the study of linguistic politeness strategies because of its remarkable natures as described in more detail in a later section. This work also focuses on the impact of prosodic features on the evaluation of the levels of linguistic politeness. The author has been interested in this theme since he conducted research about this topic with Japanese informants for the study of Japanese linguistic politeness (Suzuki, 2007), as explicated later. This work is therefore a combination of (a) a study of how English linguistic politeness is evaluated, and (b) a study of similar/different impressions that written and spoken data create in the assessment of the degrees of politeness.

The investigation of the two areas (i.e. the study of politeness and that of an impact of prosodic features on the assessment of the politeness level) is thought to contribute to the study of Pragmatics and related linguistic studies as publications relevant to both of these two topics are not easily available.

It is also expected to make a contribution to the ELT in Japan for the following two points: (a) the exhibition of discourse strategies, utilizing lexical and grammatical strategies, for the performance of *inviting* and replies to it in formal and informal ways, (b) the presentation of prosodic features that affect the assessment of the politeness level. These can and will address the issues of the cultivation of “pragmatic competence” among the learners of English (cf. Kasper, 1997; Rose & Kasper, 2001). It is assumed that advanced-level learners of EFL (English as a foreign language) need to use English, performing speech acts and controlling the levels of politeness, for their work and human networking in an English-speaking community.

2. The researcher's previous studies about *inviting* and about the impact of prosodic features on the evaluation of the degree of politeness

The researcher has engaged in his project of the compilation of speech acts corpora (SAC) for recent years, investigating about 11 different speech acts mainly in English and Japanese. The target speech act of this study *inviting* has been treated in his previous four publications (Suzuki, 2007; 2009; 2012; 2015).

He has confirmed that this speech act has two dimensions as its unique quality, i.e. the nature of EXPRESSIVE and that of DIRECTIVE (Searle, 1979: 15) or those of Leech's CONVIVIAL and COMPETITIVE (Leech, 1983: 104), in these earlier studies (Suzuki, *ibid.*). This complexity derives from the two dimensions of this speech act, *inviting*, viz. an invitation for the sake of *S* (= the speaker) (i.e. a kind of *requesting*) and that for the benefit of *H* (= the hearer) (i.e. a sort of *offering*). The former nature evokes such formulaic expressions as *Would you like to ... ?*, *Do you want to ... ?*, *I was wondering if ...*, which are supposed to belong to the DIRECTIVE and COMPETITIVE category. On the other hand the latter is realized with a phrase such as *You should ...* and the use of IFID (*I would like to **invite** you to ...*), which can be regarded as the speech act expressions pertaining to EXPRESSIVE and CONVIVIAL (cf. Suzuki, 2012). This finding about the complexity of this speech act has motivated the author to study further about this speech act, as there are various patterns exhibited to perform this illocutionary act based on *Ss'* motives for inviting others.

The author conducted research about the impact of prosody on the evaluation of politeness and appropriateness in his earlier work (Suzuki, 2007). In the first stage of this research he asked Japanese assessors to evaluate the levels of politeness and appropriateness of utterances, transcribed in the written format, produced by Japanese informants to perform several different Japanese speech acts. In the course of this research, however, the researcher

sometimes found himself disagreeing with some of the assessments. This was because he had listened to actual utterances while transcribing them and received more or less polite/appropriate impressions from them. After the completion of the evaluation with the written data, he asked the same evaluators to assess the levels of politeness and appropriateness by asking them to listen to the audio data in the next stage. While some of the assessments were the same, others received higher or lower scores. This study suggested that the pitch, intensity and tempo, which are important components in the study of prosodic features, also affected the evaluation of the degrees of politeness and appropriateness. This previous study has kept motivating the author to investigate the impact of prosodic features on the assessments of the levels of politeness of English speech acts with these remarkable results.

3. Research procedures

In the first stage of this study, spoken data was collected from four informants in Cambridge concerning (1) invitations for their bosses ([A]) and close friends ([B]), (2) a positive reply to an invitation from their bosses ([A-P]) and close friends ([B-P]), (3) a negative reply to an invitation from their bosses ([A-N]) and close friends ([B-N]). The research guidelines and instructions for producing utterances for the first-stage informants are shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 *The first stage research guidelines & instructions*

| |
|--|
| <i>Guidelines</i> |
| (1) Perform the target speech act orally in two different ways (A&B). (2) Transcribe the spoken data (1). (3) Respond to the speech act (A&B) in both positive and negative ways orally (A-P, A-N, B-P, B-N). (4) Transcribe the spoken data (3). (5) Provide some background information about (1) and (3). |
| <i>Instructions for producing utterances</i> |

[A] Suppose you would like to invite your boss or supervisor to a party you are hosting at your place next month. What would you say to him/her?
 [A-P] How would you reply to an invitation like [A] in a **positive** way if you were invited by your boss or supervisor?
 [A-N] How would you reply to an invitation like [A] in a **negative** way if you were invited by your boss or supervisor?

[B] Suppose you would like to invite one of your close friends to a party you are hosting at your place next month. What would you say to him/her?
 [B-P] How would you reply to an invitation like [B] in a **positive** way if you were invited by one of your close friends?
 [B-N] How would you reply to an invitation like [B] in a **negative** way if you were invited by one of your close friends?

(Adapted from Suzuki, 2015: 72-3)

The analyses and discussions about the data collected in this first-stage data collection are presented in the researcher's earlier work (Suzuki, *ibid.*)

In the assessment stage the researcher requested four assessors in London to evaluate the levels of politeness of the utterances, in both written and spoken formats, produced by the four informants in Cambridge, using the assessment scale shown in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 *Evaluation scale*

| |
|---|
| 7 = Extremely polite/formal, |
| 6 = Very polite/formal, |
| 5 = Polite/Formal, |
| 4 = Neither polite/formal or impolite/informal, |
| 3 = Impolite/Informal, |
| 2 = Very impolite/informal, |
| 1 = Extremely impolite/informal, |
| 0 = Assessment impossible |

After the evaluation stage, the evaluators were requested to (a) answer questions from the researchers about the backgrounds of their assessments, and (b) write down their observations about the differences/similarities between written and spoken responses through their reflection on their assessments.

The report this time aims to present and discuss the research results of the second stage research, viz. assessment of linguistic data collected in the first stage explicated above, focusing on the first pair: Informant 01 (I-1) – Evaluator 01 (E-1). The background information of these two persons is provided by Tables 3.3 and 3.4.

Table 3.3 *The informant’s background information*

| | Age group | Gender | Education |
|-----|-----------|--------|--------------------|
| I-1 | 31-40 | Female | Univ. postgraduate |

Table 3.4 *The evaluator’s background information*

| | Age group | Gender | Education |
|-----|-----------|--------|--------------------|
| E-1 | 21-30 | Female | Univ. postgraduate |

4. The results of data analysis

This section presents and discusses the results of this study, in which this particular evaluator (E-1) assessed the levels of politeness of the written and spoken utterances provided by I-1.

First the researcher attempted to confirm whether there is a statistically significant difference between the assessment of the written data and that of the audio data.

Table 4.1 *Contingency table*

| | A | B | A-P | B-P | A-N | B-N | Total |
|---------|-----|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Written | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 26 |
| Spoken | 6** | 4 | 5 | 4* | 4 | 5** | 28 |
| Total | 10 | 8 | 10 | 9 | 8 | 9 | 54 |

**The spoken utterance receiving a higher score

*The spoken utterance receiving a lower score

The result of the chi-square test, however, rejected the hypothesis that a

significant difference exists between the evaluation of written data and that of audio data in this pair ($p = .99$). Therefore it can safely be said statistically that E-1's assessments of the written and spoken utterances of I-1 were basically "similar". While accepting this similarity between the assessments of the written and spoken data in a statistical sense, the researcher would like to investigate the reasons why [A], [B-P], and [B-N] received different scores and others were given the same scores, as can be observed in Table 4.1. Therefore the researcher is going to analyze all the responses to discuss what made the assessments same or different.

For the purpose of investigating the prosodic features of the spoken data, *Praat*, a computer phonetic analyzer, was employed to scrutinize their pitch, intensity, tempo, and the intonation on the whole.

(1) Inviting

| | |
|-----|--|
| [A] | Hi Cally, I'm having a dinner party on Friday evening. I'd love it if you could come, it's gonna be from about 7 p.m., hope you can make it. |
|-----|--|

| |
|--------------------------|
| Scores: <W> = 4; <S> = 6 |
|--------------------------|

E-1 evaluated the written transcription of this utterance as 4 (=Neither polite/formal or impolite/informal), while she raised the score to 6 (=Very polite/formal) in the assessment of the spoken utterance. This means that the audio version gave a more polite impression by two notches when it was heard.

She pointed out that the following lexical items were conspicuous in the written transcription: *Hi / I'm / gonna / hope you*. These are rather informal expressions and therefore affected her assessment accordingly.

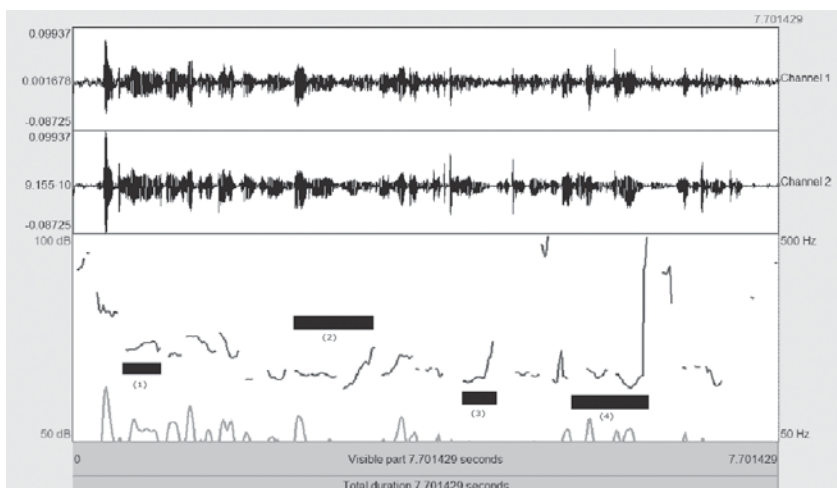
On the other hand, she described that the spoken utterance "was softly spoken" and "sounded gentle and polite" in spite of such informal or casual lexical features. As a result, this assessor raised her evaluation after observing such vocal features. Indeed, she said that she had been "distracted by the colloquial aspect in writing" in the retrospective interview with the

researcher about the assessment of this utterance.

One notable characteristic observed in the spoken data analysis, as shown in Figure 4.1 is the use of a “rising tone” ([1]⁽²⁾, [2]⁽³⁾, [3]⁽⁴⁾) and a “fall-rise tone” ([4]) applied to the parts in boldface with underlines.

<Hi ^[1]**Cally**, I'm having a dinner party on ^[2]**Friday evening**. I'd love it if you could ^[3]**come**, it's gonna be from about ^[4]**7 p.m.**, hope you can make it.>

Figure 4.1 Prosodic features of Response [A]



According to Leech & Svatvik (2002 [1975]: 24), a rising tone “expresses ‘uncertainty’ or ‘incompleteness’ or ‘dependence’” and is often referred to as ‘question-intonation.’” A fall-rise tone “combines the falling tone’s meaning of ‘assertion, certainty’ with the rising tone’s meaning of ‘dependence, incompleteness’” and “[a]t the end of a sentence, it often conveys a feeling of

-
- (2) 248.88 Hz → 266.60 Hz
 - (3) 203.16 Hz → 253.79 Hz
 - (4) 181.66 Hz → 329.34 Hz

reservation” (Leech & Svatvik *ibid.*: 25). Although this utterance is not a question itself, such connotations of the rising tone and the fall-rise tone are supposed to be expressing *S*'s 'dependence' on *H* and *S*'s polite intention to ask *H* if this plan/invitation is fine with him/her, along with *S*'s reserved attitude.

This evaluator is thought to have noticed *S*'s polite intention represented by such prosodic features as well as the gentle way she spoke to her boss. The evaluation of this utterance demonstrates a sharp contrast between the impressions created by the written and the spoken formats of the utterance data.

| | |
|-----|--|
| [B] | Hey, we're having a party next week. I hope you can come, and it's on Friday. Just come any time after seven and bring a bottle of wine. |
|-----|--|

| |
|--------------------------|
| Scores: [W] = 4; [S] = 4 |
|--------------------------|

While the evaluation of [A] was raised from 4 to 6, this utterance did not receive a higher score in the assessment of the audio data. This assessor said, regarding the A-B comparison, “both were informal and the situation was the crucial element in assessing politeness.” She also said, “[A] was more formal and [B] was more informal but they were both ‘just appropriate’ in this situation.” These explanations are understandable as the situation of [A] encouraged the informant to speak politely and that of [B] requested a casual invitation.

The prosodic feature of this utterance [B] is quite similar to that of [A], with three parts with a rising tone ([5]⁽⁵⁾, [6]⁽⁶⁾, [7]⁽⁷⁾). However, the last part, *bring a bottle of wine* ([8]⁽⁸⁾), was uttered with a falling tone, which “expresses

(5) 101.53 Hz → 329.81 Hz

(6) 188.69 Hz → 198.18 Hz

(7) 174.07 Hz → 177.05 Hz

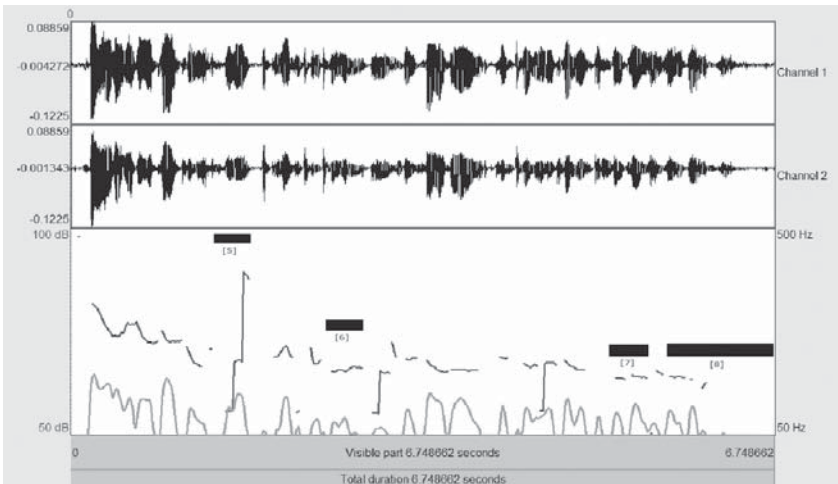
(8) 177.87 Hz → undefined Hz (due to a technical reason) *Praat* could not identify the last sound (wine), but it is lower than the part *bottle*, which is situated at 161.47 Hz.

‘certainty’, ‘completeness’, ‘independence’” (Leech & Svartvik *ibid.*: 24).

It is suspected that the grammatical structure of [8], the imperative mood, produced a less polite impression even in the evaluation of the spoken response. The use of command along with the falling tone is thought to convince E-1 that this utterance is appropriate for a close friend, not for a boss or a supervisor.

<Hey, we’re having a party [5]next week. I hope you can [6]come, and it’s on Friday. Just come any time after [7]seven and [8]bring a bottle of wine.>

Figure 4.2 Prosodic features of Response [B]



Two other plausible factors are the average pitch and the speed at which these two utterances were produced, as shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 *The mean pitch and utterance length of [A] & [B]*

| | Mean pitch | Utterance length |
|-----|----------------|---|
| [A] | approx. 226 Hz | approx. 7.70 seconds (29 words \approx 0.27 sec. per words) |
| [B] | approx. 212 Hz | approx. 6.75 seconds (28 words \approx 0.24 sec. per words) |

The differences in Table 4.2 may look subtle differences, but it can confirm the following: (1) *S* used her higher voice in [A] in order to “implicate self-humbling and thus deference (Brown and Levinson 1974)” (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 268); (2) *S* said [A] a little slowly probably to express a sense of politeness (Suzuki, 2007: 257-8)⁽⁹⁾. Indeed, E-1 described that [A] “was softly spoken” as presented earlier and it is assumed that its slightly higher pitch created such impression.

The impact of these prosodic features can be said “striking” in the case of [A] - [B] comparison, as the evaluator raised her score from 4 to 6 in [A] and did not change her rating in [B].

(2) Positive reply to an invitation

| | |
|-------|---|
| [A-P] | Oh, thank you. Yes. I'd love to come. I'm really looking forward to it. |
|-------|---|

| |
|--------------------------|
| Scores: [W] = 5; [S] = 5 |
|--------------------------|

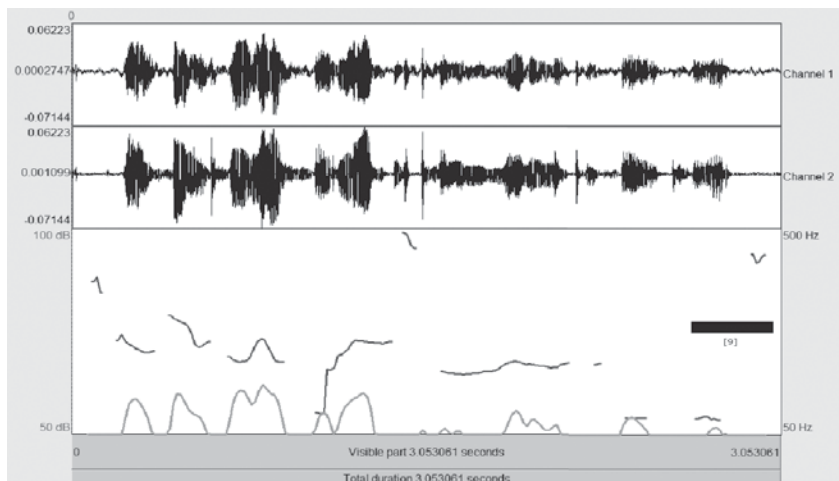
The evaluation of this utterance did not change after this assessor listened to the audio data and stayed at 5 (Polite/Formal). This means that this utterance looked and sounded polite/formal. One prosodic feature that led to the score 5 in the spoken response evaluation seems that the last part ₁₉*to it* had a rising tone (84.72 Hz \rightarrow 442.54 Hz). This part is assumed to express *S*'s “dependence” and also probably “deference” towards her boss.

This evaluator said that a “delighted way” could be felt in both written

(9) One assessor of this research raised her score regarding politeness level of an utterance after listening to its audio version, saying “The tempo of her speech was slow and sounded polite” (Suzuki, *ibid.*).

and spoken formats and the utterance “looked and sounded nice” in the retrospective interview. She also said that she felt that *S* was “happy”.

Figure 4.3 *Prosodic features of Response [A-P]*



It is unfortunately impossible to confirm what worked for the creation of such impression from the analysis of the prosodic features. The researcher thinks that the propositional contents represented such *S*'s “happiness” in these two formats.

| | |
|-------|---|
| [B-P] | Oh, yes. That would be fantastic. I'd love to come. I'm really excited! |
|-------|---|

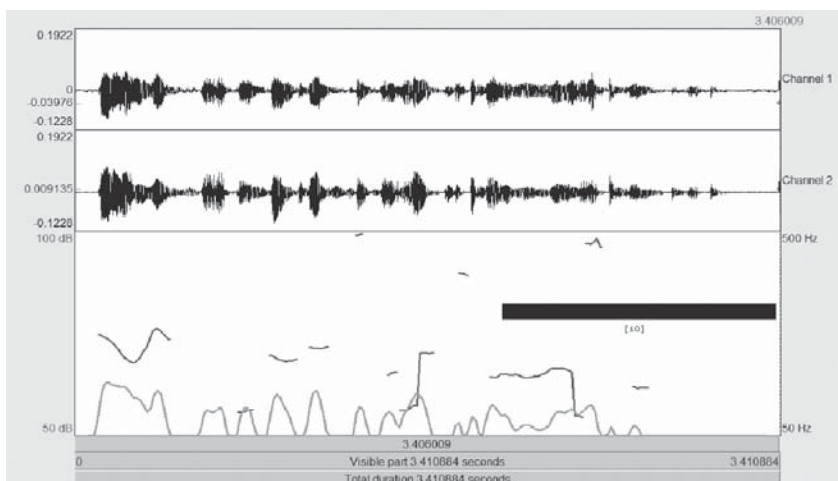
| |
|--------------------------|
| Scores: [W] = 5; [S] = 4 |
|--------------------------|

In contrast to [A-P], this utterance received a lower score in the assessment of the audio part. One thing the researcher noticed is that the last part ^[10]***I'm really excited*** did not sound as if *S* had been “really excited” with a falling tone and comparatively lower voice (Mean = 184.88 Hz). Besides that, this part does not have stronger intensity compared with other parts. Therefore the intonation of this part is rather flat and does not express her

“excitement” so much.

This assessor said that this utterance is “polite and formal” and “genuine, optimistic” in the interview. However, she must have noticed that it lacked politeness, or “excitement” which should have been expressed, when she heard it because of such prosodic features.

Figure 4.4 *Prosodic features of Response [B-P]*



(3) Negative reply to an invitation

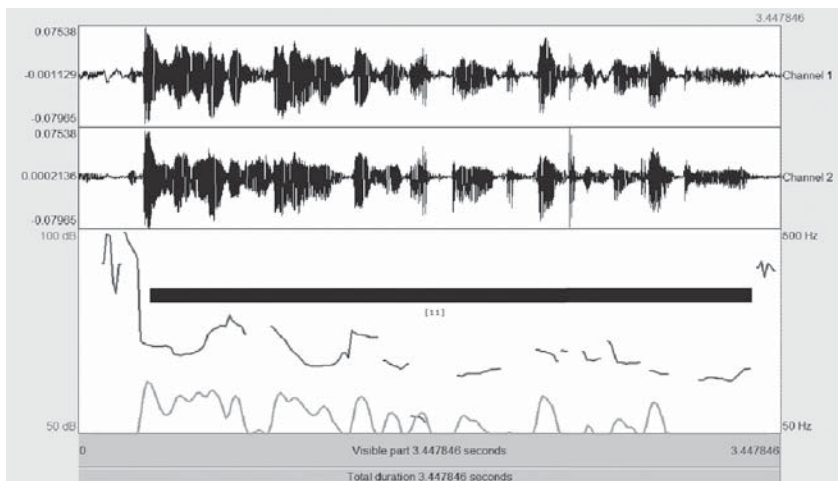
| | |
|-------|---|
| [A-N] | Oh, I'm really sorry. I'm busy that day, but thank you for inviting me. |
|-------|---|

| |
|--------------------------|
| Scores: [W] = 4; [S] = 4 |
|--------------------------|

The scores (4= Neither polite/formal or impolite/informal) were the same in the evaluation of both written and spoken responses. One possible prosodic feature that could have affected the assessment was the impression E-1 had: this informant had said this in a rather flat way. This feature can be observed throughout this utterance, except for the first and the last parts⁽¹⁰⁾, depicted in Figure 4.5.

The assessor said that this utterance had been written and spoken in a “dismissive way” and was “informal”. She also pointed out that *S* said “just busy” and provided no reason. Probably the propositional content decided the levels of politeness of this utterance, as well as the “rather flat” intonation described above.

Figure 4.5 *Prosodic features of Response [A-N]*



| | |
|-------|---|
| [B-N] | Oh, I'm really sorry. I've got plans that day. I hope you can have fun, um, and I hope we can meet up another time. |
|-------|---|

| |
|--------------------------|
| Scores: [W] = 4; [S] = 5 |
|--------------------------|

This utterance received a higher score (5 = polite/formal) in the assessment of the audio part, although *S* meant to say this casually to her close friend.

(10) We can observe some high sound at the end of this response, but it is suspected to be some sort of noise. It was left in this figure as it was impossible to identify what kind of sound it had been. (The utterance itself continued until the end of this figure.)

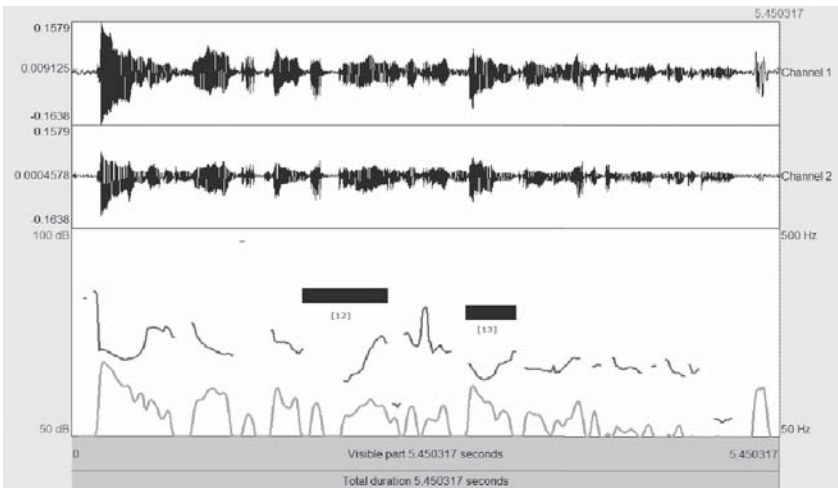
The assessor talked about the different impressions she received from the two different formats of the response as follows:

<W> sounds dismissive, ellipsis, colloquial, just “busy”, no excuse

<S> genuine & warm, emphatic holistically

The researcher himself received a warmer impression from the audio data, in contrast to the “dismissive” impression from the flat intonation of [A-N]. As can be observed in Figure 4.6, the intonation of this utterance has noticeable higher and lower sounds. Besides, the parts ^[12]*that day* and ^[13]*have fun* have a rising tone and they seem to be giving more “apologetic” and “nicer” impressions.

Figure 4.6 *Prosodic features of Response [B-N]*



As specified in the evaluation scale, the score 5 means “Polite/Formal” and this indicates that E-1 felt I-1’s “consideration” towards her close friend from the prosodic features. This is a remarkable result as [A-N] received 4 in both assessments. In the author’s earlier study, some informants in the first

stage said that they would show more consideration towards their friends as they need to maintain the friendly relationship with them. On the other hand it seems that a “dismissive way” is more suitable when they are rejecting an invitation from someone of higher status.

(4) Retrospection of the assessments

The final stage of this research was the comprehensive retrospection of the evaluation by the assessor. The following is what E-1 wrote down.

Although I mostly found similarities between written and verbal responses, I found the verbal responses more polite and formal. The written responses, while still polite, were more colloquial which did not often seem fitting with the situation, e.g. when addressing someone of higher status than you (a boss). When I heard this spoken, however, I did not notice the informality or colloquialness in this format. Sometimes, the written text appeared more negative and dismissive, e.g. the writer couldn't attend but gave no reason, whereas when spoken, it sounded more genuine.

This explanation confirms that E-1 did notice some significant or noticeable differences between the written and spoken responses, which the quantitative analysis (the chi-square test) dismissed earlier. Furthermore, it confirms that in some cases “consideration” can be communicated through prosodic features in the audio format, even when an utterance contains some informal or colloquial expressions that are salient in the written format. On the other hand, intonation can lower the evaluation as can be confirmed in the case of [B-P]. These findings are telling that audio data can create some different impressions from that produced by written transcriptions.

Another interesting observation of E-1 is that she was aware that some expressions looked inappropriate when used to address “someone of higher status than you (a boss)”. The researcher himself had received the same impression from such informal expressions as a non-native English speaker, and his observation was supported by this native English speaker. Still, the “genuine” or sincere attitude towards a boss/supervisor was conveyed by prosodic features in spite of such “colloquialness”. This also suggests that in

this particular linguistic community (the areas including Cambridge and London) it is acceptable that one uses informal or casual expressions when they are addressing a person of higher status.

5. Discussions

We have so far observed how the degrees of politeness were evaluated by E-1, with two different data formats. It is of significance that the evaluator did notice the different impressions produced by the written and spoken utterances, while the quantitative analysis did not confirm the significant difference as discussed earlier.

It is also of interest that I-1 had used informal expressions towards her boss/supervisor, which was noticed by E-1 (and the researcher himself) in the written format. This may be suggesting that the horizontal distance (i.e. how close or distant *S* and *H* are) is dominant over the vertical distance (i.e. the power relation) in some English speaking communities. This was at least evidenced in this particular study and seems to have some implications for linguistic studies and the pedagogy of ELT in Japan about politeness.

For linguistic studies, we have reconfirmed that various social factors (e.g. *distance, power, formality of the situation*) should be taken into consideration in the assessment of the levels of politeness. Formality or informality of certain words, phrases, sentences, and grammatical structure cannot be assessed in an “absolute” scale, as some of the research results of this study have demonstrated. One cannot say that informal expressions are never used when a person is addressing someone of higher status. Moreover, we should understand that controlling prosodic features is one effective way to convey “consideration towards others” and/or something opposite. For example, [B-N] received 5 (polite/formal) in its assessment with audio data after receiving 4 (neither polite/formal or impolite/informal) in the written response evaluation. In contrast, the spoken response of [B-P] was assessed as 4 while its written format received 5.

Regarding ELT in Japan, there are two things that could be taught in

class. The Japanese EFL learners tend to think “showing deference” with polite expressions is obligatory when they address someone of higher status, due mainly to “L1 transfer” of the use of *keigo* or honorific expressions — showing a sense of *wakimae*/discernment (cf. Hill *et al.*, 1986; Ide, 1989). While it is generally true that using polite (or “not impolite”) expressions is a safe linguistic strategy in English as a foreign language, they should also learn that familiar and informal expressions can be appropriate (and more suitable) if the boss or the supervisor is close enough. This information will help the learners, especially at the advanced level, to understand what sort of language use is appropriate considering the type of human relationship they have with *H*.

It is also recommended that the use of prosodic features (viz. pitch, intensity, and tempo) to show “consideration towards the others” be taught to the Japanese EFL learners, especially to the ones at an advanced level. They should learn how to behave informally or casually in proper ways in language, with proper prosodic strategies, once they have established a close relationship with someone of higher status.

6. Conclusion and future directions

This study has examined how the levels of politeness of English utterances were evaluated by a native English speaker. It also succeeded in identifying some similar and different impressions that were created by written and spoken data. It is meaningful that this study has confirmed that *S* can control prosodic features to make his/her utterance polite/formal or appropriate in the situation. At the same time it has been confirmed that prosodic features can create less polite impressions. The results of this study suggest that the studies of linguistic politeness should incorporate the use of audio data since the prosodic features can affect the evaluation of the degrees of politeness and appropriateness in certain situations.

The research results have also provided some implications to ELT in Japan: (1) learning how to speak politely and casually when inviting others

and replying to invitations from them; (2) learning how to behave informally or casually towards someone of higher status who is close enough; (3) learning how to control prosodic features to show “consideration towards others”. The lessons about these will benefit the advanced EFL learners, who are supposed to live or work where English is used as the language of the community.

The researcher intends to continue to analyze the research data of three other pairs in this research project and to put out publications about the research results. The further findings are expected to reveal more about how English politeness is assessed and about the similarities and differences between the written and spoken data.

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