

Prosodic expression of sarcasm in L2 English after explicit training

Femke Zandee^a, Nelleke Jansen^b, Laura Smorenburg^c and Aoju Chen^a

^a*Utrecht University*, ^b*University of Groningen*, ^c*Leiden University*

Sarcasm occurs frequently in everyday interactions and is typically expressed via prosody. However, speakers usually experience difficulty with expressing sarcasm prosodically in a second language. Recent research by Smorenburg and co-authors has shown that short prosodic training can already improve perceived sarcasm in Dutch learners of English (L2E learners). It remains to be investigated what exactly have changed in the prosodic production after training.

In this study, we analysed the production of sarcastic prosody by L2E learners (N=12) before and after the training in Smorenburg et al.'s study. The production data were elicited via a simulated telephone conversation task in which the participants were prompted to give a sarcastic response to a friend's remark. Mean pitch, maximum, minimum pitch, duration were extracted from the key word of each response (e.g. 'healthy' in 'She is a healthy lady) using ProsodyPro and were subsequently analysed using linear mixed-effect modelling.

We have found that prosodic improvement depended on utterance type and gender. The training helped L2E learners to lengthen duration in declaratives and tag-questions but not in wh-exclamatives and lower mean pitch and minimum pitch across utterance types to sound more sarcastic, similar to native speakers of English. Male L2E learners lengthened duration to a larger extent than female L2E learners, similar to female native speakers of English; female L2 learners did not lower mean pitch more than male L2 learners, different from female native speakers of English. We will discuss the nature of the prosodic improvement: L1 transfer and/or L2 learning.