

## INVESTIGATING PARALANGUAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF ONLINE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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**Abstract:** *The introduction announces the background and rationale of the research, as well as the context in which I have chosen to investigate paralinguistics, and the issues that I have tried to ascertain in relation to this topic. The starting point was a TedTalk video on six aspects related to the voice. On the one hand, the interest has been to determine whether and how these voice qualities really matter and influence the receivers' perception (in this case the students') in online meetings that do not use video feed. So, the first part of the study was conducted by the teacher on the students without their knowledge and conscious participation. On the other hand, in the second part of the research, the video on voice qualities is played for the students and used as a basis for discussion and a further quiz, made up of seven questions meant to determine: the students' previous awareness of paralinguistics, their opinion on its usefulness, their ability to exercise critical judgment in considering and comparing paralinguistic features, the extent to which they see paralinguistics practicality and relevance, how much of the information is internalized instead of merely received, and whether they are willing to implement and make use of it in their future communications. The activity then targets both informativeness, to teach students about the use of voice qualities, and to raise awareness of the importance of paralinguistics, making them conscious users of it in order to improve the way in which they both communicate and perceive the others in communication.*

**Keywords:** *paralinguistics, online teaching, foreign language teaching, survey, audio-video class materials*

### 1. Introduction

The context of the ongoing pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus has imposed, in some fields, the exclusive transfer of all activities in the virtual environment. This is also the case of teaching, which represents the focus of this study, more specifically the teaching of foreign language acquisition online at university level.

We need to first announce the *particulars about the actual situation of online teaching*, in order to better understand the features that make up the exact context in question. The teaching analyzed in our paper takes place at the Romanian-American University, using the Microsoft Teams platform, and refers to teaching

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English for specific purposes, in our case related to a blend between interculturalism and IT terminology, to third year students in Computer Science.

The study is about *paralanguage features* and their importance in the act of teaching, as we are trying to ascertain both how aware teachers and students are and should be of matters pertaining to this variable, as well as how the conscious use of these features by the teacher actually works and influences the perception of the receivers of communication, namely the students.

The *need to take heed of paralanguage naturally arose* from the conditions under which classes take place on Microsoft Teams, namely mostly with the camera off (for rationales which I have mentioned elsewhere, but which mainly reflect the desire to have better sound quality), which leaves what one hears and, respectively, transmits through his/her voice a crucial aspect in communication. In the absence of the visual elements, which make up, according to theorists of communication, most of the information and our perception drawn from a communication activity, paralanguage remains the essential exchange to which communication is actually reduced to. According to Mehrabian's equation, out of the 93% of the non-verbal, 38% are represented by the vocal qualities and 55% of the information is conveyed by the body, which means that the paralanguage has to find a way to compensate for, in our cases, the total absence of the visual elements, i.e. the 38% will expand, somehow pressed by the context, to encompass the other 55%. This passage has had to occur in a definite, unavoidable manner, and has needed to happen in the best possible way so as to be effective, with no specific training or even conscious attention, and with addressing the matter in zero amount of time. That is, at the beginning of the switch to exclusive online teaching, neither the teaching staff members nor the students had any clue as to the actual existence of this problem and need, let alone receive any input as to the manner in which this change of focus should be performed. Technical and organizational aspects required our immediate attention and diligence in learning about them, and such traits of subtlety and finesse as the ones that represent our concern in this study were neither primordial nor even present in our conscious approach to the activity that had presented itself as a necessity. The need for the voice to successfully take over the information supplied by sight was far from merely being realized. And even as it was, later on, raising to our consciousness, it still did not become self-explanatory. Intuitively, it was obvious that students did not see their teachers, and vice versa, but the impact was not so great, because there was something else that compensated, in the first stage of the online teaching process, for this shortcoming, namely that, being in the second semester of the academic year 2019-2020, we knew most of our students from the previous face-to-face encounters. Every teaching staff member kept the same groups as in the first semester. We could put a face to the voices, and the transition was smoother because of this important helpful element.

However, *the 2020-2021 academic year started with the challenge of having new students*, whom teachers no longer knew, and at this point the importance of

paralanguage really came into play, showing its true weight and relevance. The Romanian-American University thought about organizing face-to-face gatherings at the beginning of the academic year with first-year students, in order to give them a chance to meet their teachers in person at the headquarters of the institution (and vice versa), at least once before the actual beginning of the online classes, trying to compensate for the handicap of a future communication without ever having seen the people you would be communicating with. However, the problem of having classes with students and teachers whom you had not previously seen on a regular basis from preceding face-to-face activities was not only valid in the case of first-year students. The reorganization of the groups that every teacher was assigned according to the new timetables and syllabuses meant that, unless it happened accidentally, teachers would not have the same students at class, even in the case of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students. Hence, the same issue of communicating with new people with whom no visual appearance could really be associated remained with the more senior students as well.

I have chosen *students from the final year* because of their more senior age and experience both in the university and with the online platform and teaching. The idea was for them to have become familiarized with the Microsoft Teams and its settings and features so as to be able to focus on the subtle aspects at hand without disturbance and stress coming from other potential distractions. In other words, I picked students in the case of whom additional pressures had been naturally eliminated, so as to avoid their answers reflecting, more or less consciously, these rather than the topics at hand.

## **2. Endeavors to facilitate the study of the impact and relevance of paralanguage**

### **2.1 Phase one. Personal observations – conducting the study incognito**

The study has had *more components*. It basically started from a 10-minute TedTalk video on communication, *How to speak so that people want to listen*, delivered by Julian Treasure, available on YouTube. The video does not only address voice impact, it initially draws up some guidelines regarding what one should do so as to avoid being unpleasant and repelling people in communication in general. Thus, it begins by analyzing what Julian Treasure calls the “seven deadly sins of speaking”, as well as some principles to be applied for being efficient and likeable, united as the elements defined by the acronym “hail” i.e. honesty, authenticity, integrity and love [1]. In the second part, Treasure refers to a set of paralanguage tools that may improve communication exchanges, making them more effective – register, timbre, prosody, pace, pitch and volume – giving definitions for every one of them; then, towards the end of the video, the speaker provides examples of exercises meant to enhance natural voice qualities before one delivers an actual speech. It is this second part, which focuses on the voice, that is relevant for this research.

One way in which I have conducted my investigation was to *test some of the elements pertaining to paralanguage without making the students openly aware of*

*their existence in my discourse, or of the fact that I was subjecting them to any kind of test.* I initially checked the validity of the first tool described by the presenter – register. Understood as the ability to “locate your voice”, he illustrates it by mentioning the “falsetto” register, exemplifying it by pronouncing a few words on a really high pitch (i.e. the talk from “up here” in the nose), and, by contrast, from down in the throat (specifying that this is the location which most people speak from most of the time), but warns that the most impressive register is the one located in the chest, which gives “weight”, “power” and “authority” to the speaker and her/his words [2]. Poyatos, who speaks of resonance, notices indeed the presence of a “social perception” of voices that are “resonant, strong and rich”, and says that what they suggest are features such as “energy, good health, resourcefulness” [3]. Following Treasure’s definition, for a week, I used chest voice with the groups that I had seminar activities with, trying to take notice of what changed in their reactions, feedback and behavior, if anything. I performed the verification of the effectiveness of register on various groups, from various years of study.

The following week, I did the same with the second feature described by Julian Treasure, namely timbre, i.e. the way a voice “feels”; to explain this, he resorts to adjectives and metaphors such as “rich, smooth, warm, like hot chocolate” [4]. Poyatos defines it as a “permanent voice register”, “determined by the length and thickness of our vocal bands” [5]. By timbre Treasure refers not only to the natural traits of one’s voice, but the learned and exercised ones. He accepts the fact that, for some people, who are born with a more pleasant and nuanced timbre, there is a natural advantage in captivating people’s attention, but he says that timbre can also be moulded and worked upon intentionally, and that similar effects to what the voice can naturally do with innate endowment in this respect may also be obtained as a result of consciously using it in a certain manner and as a consequence of doing certain exercises. The nature of the subject that I teach, a foreign language that is also known to be melodious, due to the great number of vowels, has helped the testing of this particular feature, as I could use this specificity to the advantage of the point to be proven; I also strived to pronounce more beautifully or closer to native particularities, putting extra care in perfecting this aspect. Moreover, I used an additional trick for this week as an exception to the rule: I blended the usual, exclusive talk in English with sentences in Romanian; even though I normally carry out the class completely in English, using this language to give instructions about the exercises as well as any other comment that may arise in the seminar, I broke this rule to serve the purpose of my research, thus benefiting from access to and expression of two sets of pronunciations, from two different languages, so extra possibility for using a richer voice. Although this second tool referring to timbre was the core of my attention, I also resorted to some of the others mentioned in the video, and which I find to be mirroring timbre and more or less represent developments on it, to various extents. I tried to imagine my speech as if it were a song, using as many notes as possible, to encompass prosody. I used different

paces, depending on the information that I was delivering. For instance, when I explained what a familiar exercise required students to do, I did that on a faster pace, since it was not a novelty and they were used to the respective type of activity; by contrast, I used a slower pace and different pitch when I needed them to pay attention to something new that I was introducing, stressing the salient concepts or terminology, or when I asked more sensitive questions, which required profundity of thought, such as about styles of communication (and more exactly, for instance, whether they had ever been passive-aggressive, when and why etc.). I also took into consideration not avoiding silence at times, leaving them the opportunity to ponder a little more on answers when they involved introspection or depth, instead of, perhaps, trying to fill the void of breaks in speech with paraphrases of the requirements and with extra explaining. In this second week, in other words, I took into account and applied all the other tools that were recommended as focuses of attention in the resource video. Paying attention to what happened, I came up with the following results.

In both weeks one of the clear and immediately noticeable results was the way in which the students' behavior mirrored mine in terms of their voice qualities. The serious, grave tone in the first week elicited more seriousness and promptness in responses from their part. In the second week they replied with more empathy and warmth. Also, if in the first week I sensed that my approach determined a more rigid discipline in the students, in the second they seemed less disciplined and felt more at ease, which in some cases meant the fact that they had instances when they walked away from the computer for a few minutes or confessed to having answered the phone or not having paid attention upon some moments. In terms of time taken to respond, in the first week students were more prompt and took less to reply, their feedback being, nevertheless, more within the directing lines of the question, more according to expectations, flatter, less interesting and imaginative, manifesting less creativity. In the second week, by opposition, students took more time to give answers, but these were less uniform, more original, bolder, less according to expectations, more digressive and proving the ability to draw up unexpected associations more easily and readily. The two-column table below tries to render a more synthetic outlook of the contrastive features that this exercise that I have proposed initially has yielded.

**Table 1. Comparative contrastive feature assignation as a result of students' behavior on the two weeks of incognito research**

WEEK ONE (CHEST VOICE)	WEEK TWO (VOICE: RICH, WARM, FULL, NUANCED ETC.)
seriousness	playfulness
indifference	empathy
discipline	lack of discipline
timidity	boldness
prompt response/short reaction time	slower response/long(er) reaction time
predictable answers	unpredictable answers
flatness	creativity, imaginativeness
disliked by students	liked by students

During the third week of November, I asked the students present in the previous two weeks to fill in a quick, one-question opinion poll to say which of the two weeks before it they liked more. I gave them no indication as to the things that I had done or observed in secret for half a month, so they were fed no potential objective reasons to make them tilt towards one option or another. I encouraged them to give an intuitive answer, on the model of what comes to mind first based on how they felt, without overthinking it. The condition to be able to participate in the poll was to have been present in both of the anterior two seminars. The number of the students who could answer, therefore, was only 32. All students, with four exceptions, opted for the second week. I asked each of the four students why they chose the first time period, and two of them had personal problems in the second, so there was a stress factor independent of the academic activity. The other two share a similar profile: they are shy, have much less English than the average per group(s) (being at a lower-intermediate level) and thus feel more comfortable in a drill-type English-learning situation, rather than in creative contexts in which they feel less willing to speak freely.

Further general conclusions deriving from phase one of this research, i.e. the incognito study that I have initiated, are as follows. The first week comes with the positive aspects of seriousness, discipline and promptness of response. In other words, it presents itself as a more predictable, *manageable and safer environment* for the teacher, and thus as less energy-consuming and non-threatening. In this first type, the class is more likely to go according to plan, which means less stress when it comes to *keeping the pace with the syllabus and lesson plans, more control when it comes to time management and sequencing per activities* and more predictable outcomes in general, when it comes to both student results and fulfilling the schemata that the teacher has proposed for herself/himself for the respective seminar. Interaction is more balanced and students' inputs are more uniform in terms of duration and even quality. Students get fewer opportunities to distinguish themselves through their answers, the situation as such favoring a kind of *uniformity among participants*. This obviously creates a *duller experience*, the element of surprise is virtually absent. The *teacher is a dominant figure*, and it appears that students perceive her/him as more powerful, more authoritative, to be feared in a certain sense even, but also more distant. In the theory of communication, the channel that gets illustrated is the circle, as there is a center ensured by the teacher, and the students, placed on the circle, are subordinate to this center and also equal among themselves [6]. In the second week, though, the situation changes dramatically. The *safety of the environment decreases significantly, as do its predictability and rigorous time management. The positive aspects enumerated for the context of study of the first week are precisely the ones that have to suffer in the second.* Patterning, in all its senses, is sacrificed. What is to be gained is *originality, creativity, a better mood and enjoyment of the class,*

*empathy*, and, I dare say, an *enhancement of brain functioning* as the students seemed to be able to draw more associations. The teacher is no longer a figure of authority necessarily in the traditional sense of the word, but, from what I have noticed, this authority is not lost but transformed. That is to say, the teacher receives, generally, and in a way, more respect based on precisely the freedom allowed, i.e. on the boldness of stepping outside what is still perceived as a normative way of holding the classes. The loss in terms of distance may make room for discipline derailments, but not some in what regards respect granted to the teacher, which may actually register a plus. The communication model in terms of channels for this week is the network, in which the leader or central figure is no longer obviously visible or immediately distinguishable in the interaction [7].

The chest voice impresses indeed, but it is more a domination tool than one that exerts genuinely free-will, involved responses. It is my impression that, in the context that I have endeavored to check its effects, it triggers a certain behavior by imposition rather than as a result of a sincerely collaborative attitude. In other words, it favors collaboration based on conformity rather than true inner conviction. It may also be about a sense of protection that it could inspire, but, if this were the case, it would have determined students to be proactive, and the type of feedback was more on the side of something correct, but mechanical and dry. In order to explain better the contrast that I am trying to illustrate here, if we were to analyze the type of reception among the four developed by Elihu Katz, behavior in the first week rather fit the instrumental, adaptive, utilitarian one (where positive attitude, meant to maximize reward and minimize punishment is a chief concern) and the ego-defensive one (maintaining face, image of self, the maximum favorable impression with a minimum of compromise), than the value expression and cognitive ones, which would more likely characterize the second week of interaction [8]. Out of the four types, the first two focus on the exterior and the other two on the interior of the individual, a reason for this being perhaps that the outside environment is perceived as more threatening and imposing in the first case, whereas in the second it is subdued, the person feeling comfortable enough and at ease so as to focus on his/her own thoughts and feelings and sharing them with the others. I, as a sender, on the other hand, felt that I was exercising more the power of coercion among those theorized by R.P. French and Bertram Raven during the first week, as compared to the second week, when it was rather all the other three – reward, reference, legitimacy and expert (so, minus coercion) – which somehow made the experience of the second week richer [9].

One more mention to be made here is the way in which motivation is enhanced by empathy, expression of self and freedom of expression in general (which is not a new discovery), as well as how these can be triggered and moulded by the conscious use of one's voice. A warm voice shows involvement, a personalized

type of interaction, and elicits a more truthful and involved feedback in its turn. It shows the presence of human touch and relates, in the minds of the receivers, to further valuable interpretations, such as caring for the others, being interested and respectful, wanting to achieve genuine communication. As a side conclusion, it is perhaps important to say that, as much as there are personalities that get through to people while on television, managing somehow to bridge a gap through artificial means of communication as if they were face-to-face with the audience, there are, equally, *voices* that can do that, which may be just as powerful an asset.

We may say that paralanguage alone gets to establish a very different type of setting and environment, if used intentionally and thoroughly. It not only dictates and illustrates power and status relations, but also impresses a wide variety of aspects of communication, such as the channel model used, emotive factors, motivation, creativity and, last but not least, the learning itself.

## **2.2. Phase two. Checking awareness and relevance of paralanguage in collaboration with the students**

Another part of the investigation was *the actual use of the above-mentioned video as class material to be discussed by students, and as a starting point to occasion a quiz*. I played the talk on Microsoft Teams directly from YouTube, sharing the desktop and the sound, which meant that they all watched it together, at the same time. Beforehand, in the guise of a preparation, I asked them to try to jot down as they listened the answer to some questions related to the main aspects introduced by Treasure in his presentation, namely to remember and define the seven “sins” concerning speaking, to tell me what the acronym “hail” stood for, as well as enumerate and describe the voice tools that they were about to hear information on. This was a regular seminar activity – eliciting answers based on a certain clip, subsequent to its viewing – except that it prepared the ground for a more in-depth analysis on paralanguage aspects, which meant to ascertain students’ awareness and perception of the importance and relevance of voice in communication situations. The initial resort to video-viewing was based on the already-verified logic that the use of technology in class, more precisely audio-visual materials “improves the outcomes of both students and teachers and increases the three types of engagement – behavioral, emotional and cognitive” [10].

I used the regular seminar activity first in order to give the students a chance to get familiarized with the notions related to paralanguage and to provide some minimal theoretical background to have a basis for discussion. The students were not homogenous in the group in terms of their familiarity with the notions in question, and seeing the same material all at once leveled them a little, just enough to have something to start a conversation from, and brought them to a metaphorical common ground. Then, the idea was to determine them to ponder over these



elements of paralinguistics and their relevance as tools in discourse, and plant the seeds for further interest and study.

Insisting on the second part of the video and the voice tools, I asked them:

Question 1: *How many of the six features had you ever thought about and/or discussed in the context of how they may influence communication with the others, before seeing the video?* The students had to merely give a number.

Question 2: *How much do you think that these tools are effective?*, to choose from intervals – a) (almost) not at all; b) around 25% or more; c) around 45% or more; d) around 65% or more; e) around 85% or more.

Question 3: *To mention three among the six, the ones that you deem more important, in a random order.*

Question 4: *To pick the tools that you have personally and consciously used in your communications.*

Question 5: *Last but not least, would you personally do the exercises presented at the end of the video? and, in case the answer is no, to further state a reason by picking it from the following options: a) they are not useful; b) they are embarrassing; c) other reasons (lack of time, fear of disturbing people in your proximity etc.)*

Question 6: *Can you come up with other examples of instances of paralinguistics – conveying messages and meaning through the use of voice qualities (not words)?*

Question 7: *Are voice qualities and paralinguistics more important in our audio online encounters than in face-to-face ones? Would you have given the same answer previous to this discussion?*

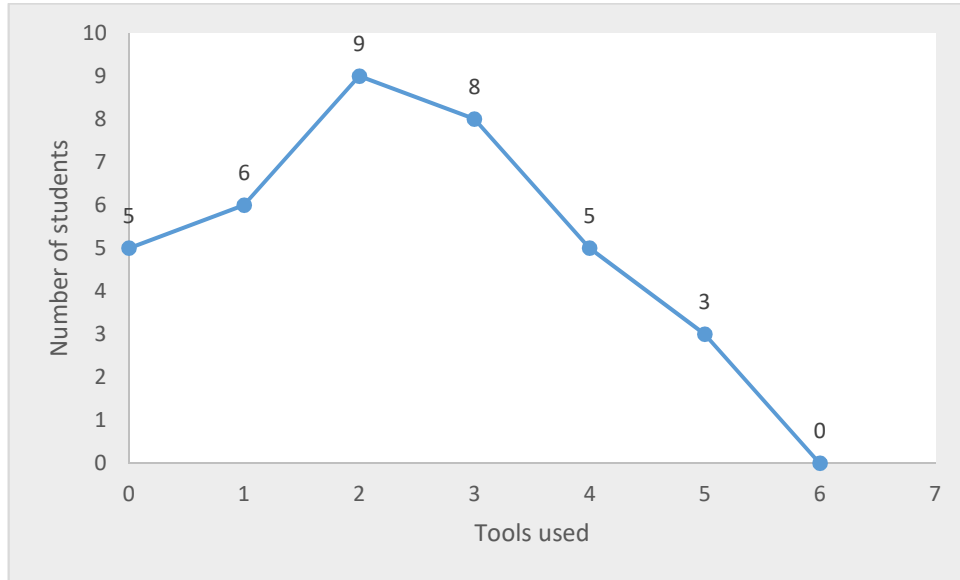
The questions were asked in the third week. The number of students that provided answers were, for most questions (we shall explain this at the right time), 36, out of three groups of 3<sup>rd</sup> year Computer Science ones. They had a questionnaire which they were required to supply answers for in a limited amount of time – ten minutes, answers which they then submitted to me.

For Question 1, the answers provided are centralized in the table below.

**Table 2. Answers to Question 1**

0 tools	1 tool	2 tools	3 tools	4 tools	5 tools	6 tools
5 students	6 students	9 students	8 students	5 students	3 students	0 students

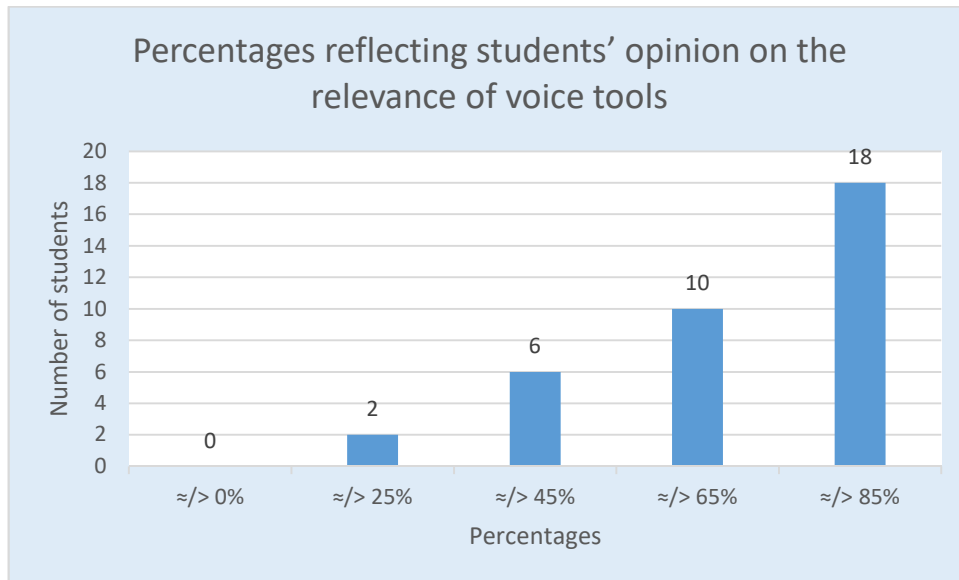
Chart 1. Image of students' awareness of the existence of paralinguistic tools



This first question tested previous awareness of the existence of these tools in the context of the influence that they can bring over communication acts. It is obvious from the chart above that most students were aware of only two or three tools, none having knowledge of all six. Over 50% knew a maximum of two tools, which means that awareness of them was low.

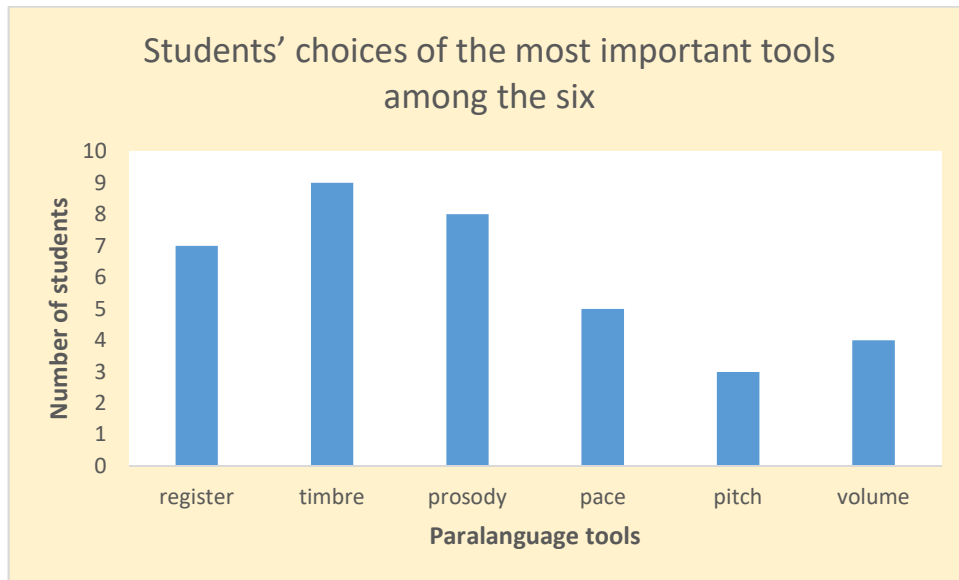
Question 2 still measures awareness, but subsequent to becoming privy to the talk in the video, asking students to rank the importance of the tools. Once exposed to them as explained in simple and synthetic terms in the clip, they are asked for their intuitive opinion, for a spontaneous answer after having been fed minimal information. These answers are raw, the result of an honest, on-the-spot reaction, which makes them valuable precisely because of the way they rely on intuition rather than study and thought-through processes; in case they point to the relevance of paralinguistic markers, this proves the validity of this factor in communication, since even individuals freshly-exposed to this logic are able to identify its importance. And this is precisely what happened, if we have a look at the results – a confirmation, through an intuitive feedback, of the weight that paralinguistic elements hold in communication. A salient aspect here is that 50% of the students, i.e. 18, thought that these elements have around or more than 85% importance in communication, which means an evident, overwhelming importance online, where the visual aspect needs to be taken over by paralinguistic.

Chart 2. Percentages reflecting students' opinion on the relevance of voice tools



The first two questions were general, assessing awareness in broad lines. They focused on quantities and numbers and a bird's eye view on paralinguistic characteristics, rather than on content. Starting with Question 3, the students are required to filter the information more thoroughly and give opinions on the introduced notions as a result of having assessed and compared them. To be able to do that, they have to gain and prove an understanding of these, and the ability to perform more complex mental processes of critical judgment, evaluation, comparison, decision-making in relation to context and reference etc. I did not require them to make a top three, because I wanted to avoid instilling in their minds the tendency to judge these features in terms of hierarchies, or to approach these in the sense of "either-or". The idea is rather to become mindful of them, integrate all of them (or as many as possible) and acquire the ability to identify and use them in communication. Hence, the results count the number of occurrences of every of the six notions, and are synthesized in Chart 3 below.

Chart 3. Students' choices of the most important tools among the six



The other definitions provided in the video were for: prosody as not speaking on “one note”, monotonously, or choosing the right prosody according to the type of sentence (e.g. not make an affirmative sentence sound like a question); pace as the speed with which one speaks (fast speed may show excitement, slow speed shows desire to emphasize) and, under this umbrella, silence is not an enemy and can be used at times meaningfully; pitch (high and low) may show intention, level of calm etc.; volume, with the observation that high volume does not always get more attention, and sometimes being quiet may achieve that better [11]. These elements have been defined differently by theorists. For instance, prosody is seen by Swati Johar as more complex a notion, including “characteristics of speech such as pitch, rhythm, stress and loudness” [12]. However, we will take the definitions presented by Julian Treasure in the video as reference.

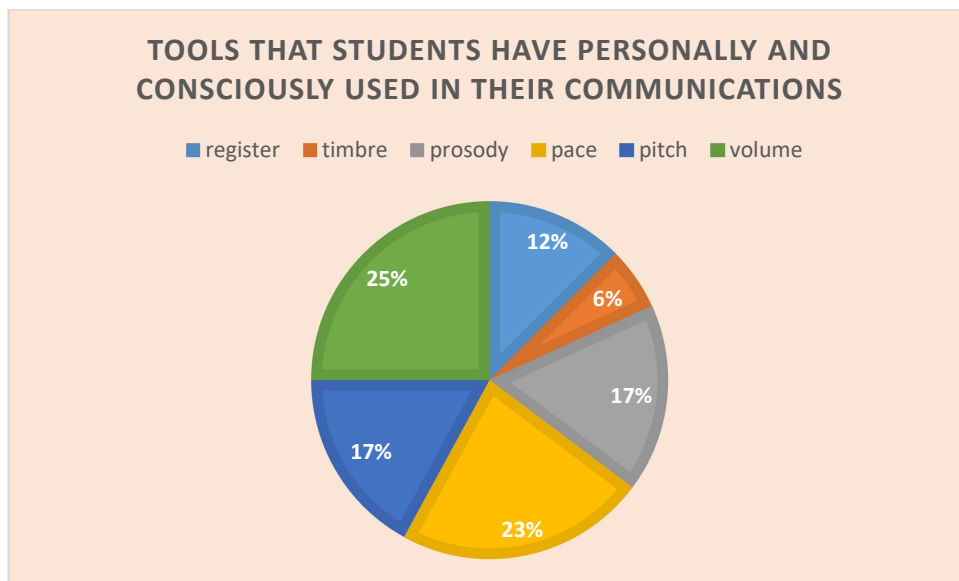
What we notice from the chart is that, interestingly, the most referred to notions are, in descending order, timbre, prosody and register. The other notions, respectively, in order, pace, volume and pitch, which have received fewer mentions, are simpler to understand and less complex in terms of the ingredients that go into their semantic and conceptual makeup. Within logical predictions, students would have been more likely to choose these simpler concepts rather than the more complex ones that are harder to grasp, especially given their relatively low level of awareness of these from beforehand. Nevertheless, they have shown preference for the more complicated notions, which points to their intuitive ability to envisage paralinguistics as a subtle and manifold process instead of seeing it

simplistically and mechanically. This choice of the students is promising in terms of the way in which they will be able to internalize paralinguistic relevance in communication in the future.

On the other hand, as it was to be anticipated, when it came to picking the tools that they have used before, the answers for Question 4 tilted towards the less complex tools among the six exemplified in the video, as visible in Chart 4 below. The “easiest” tools, namely volume, pace and pitch amassed together a percentage of 65%, in comparison with prosody, register and timbre, which totaled 35%. We further notice that prosody is perceived as the more accessible notion among the three that are more “alien” in nature, having acquired a percentage equal to that assigned to pitch, namely 17%. Also, we need to state the fact that timbre, the tool rated by students as the most relevant and perhaps the most complex, has received only 6% in terms of previous use, which means that it is also the one which students were least aware of.

Since this interrogation bears on tools that students have used previously and also *consciously*, the five students who gave the answer 0 to Question 1 were asked to skip the current one.

Chart 4. Tools that students have personally and consciously used in their communications



To Question 5, regarding the openness to do the suggested exercises to enhance voice qualities, 47.22% of the students (17) answered positively as far as their willingness to try them, whereas 52.77% (19) said no. Apparently, only approximately half of them see the usefulness and importance of such exercises. However, the second part of the question, in which those unwilling to practice the

drills are asked to justify their refusal, revealed interesting aspects. Among the three options that they had at their disposal, the numbers looked like this: two opted for a) they are not useful, six opted for b) they are embarrassing, and eleven opted for c) other reasons. Hence, we may conclude that unwillingness to perform the drills is mainly not caused by failure to see their relevance, but rather by other reasons such as embarrassment, shyness, fear to disturb etc. Out of all thirty-six students, only two end up not really understanding or agreeing to the importance of paralanguage in communication, which is roughly 5%, a small proportion indeed.

Question 6 elicited other examples of paralanguage from the students that represented the focus group. What is interesting here is that the five students who could not provide an answer to the first question were able at this point to make suggestions of instances of paralanguage, with the afterthought made possible by watching the video. The most common answers included the following examples: snorts and grunts that denote disapproval, yawns, laughter, sneezes and coughs to show boredom and/or disagreement. The replies show that the respondents can differentiate between laughter, coughs, sneezes and yawns occurring naturally, on the one hand, and these manifestations being intentional, on the other, and thus meant to convey hidden meanings. Indeed, studies in paralanguage confirm that yawning, when it is not a physiological act and is filled with non-verbal meaning, may point to something being “tiresome”, “boring” and to the intention of “terminating” an encounter [13]. Coughing and throat-clearing could hide, when used as non-verbal cues, “anxiety”, “embarrassment”, “annoyance” or “social attention-getting” [14].

The last question, 7, was meant to check students’ input regarding whether paralinguistic cues play a greater role in audio-only online encounters than in face-to-face ones. The answer was, unanimously, yes. For the second part of the question, a number of the respondents admitted that they would have said no, before seeing the video, namely, to be precise, ten out of thirty-six, which is a roughly more than a quarter of them. This reveals the benefits of watching the video on paralanguage and the instructiveness of the activity.

### **3. Conclusions**

This paper has tried to highlight the results of a research conducted on the relevance of paralanguage in online teaching. The study consisted of two main parts. In the first, the teacher was interested in assessing the effect of conscious and intentional use of voice features in the audio online teaching of foreign languages, to check the influence these have on the students. The results show, beyond any doubt, that indeed reactions can be modified by resort to these ways of signaling beyond the conscious level. Feedback was different, and, quite importantly, the subjects were not consciously aware of what caused the change or even that there was a change in the environment, unless that was pointed out to them, and would have rather attributed their disposition to other factors – for instance, personal or

random causes, such as private problems or mood. The first part of the study was done, as it were, secretly, and constituted individual research. The second, however, included the students and relied on their insights. It started from a simple regular class activity to then draw on paralanguage and go further into past and present experiences and awareness related to this subject comprised in the form of a quiz.

In this paper, I have presented the synthesized results using tables and charts, in an attempt to show: an evolution in terms of students' awareness related to paralanguage as well as their openness to the topic, their opinions, and perhaps a change in outlook as far as this issue is concerned. Results prove that any material that draws attention towards paralinguistic concerns opens up a new horizon, as well as the possibility to improve communication, by performing it more knowingly and empathetically, rather than randomly. The research has also revealed the fact that students may have been privy to some instances of paralanguage without fully realizing that these are not merely fragmentary, interpretable products of their intuition, but shared knowledge to a great extent, the kind that has been theorized on. In this, they have gained some vision on how communication is indeed a complex process, and on how paralanguage can be used to the benefit of all actors involved in communication acts.

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