

## Special issue

Antonio Hidalgo Navarro

# Introduction

---

**Antonio Hidalgo Navarro:** University of València. Val.Es.Co. Research Group, (IULMA). Facultad de Filología, Traducción y Comunicación, Avenida Blasco Ibáñez 32, 46010 Valencia, Spain, e-mail: Antonio.hidalgo@uv.es

This special issue of the *Journal of Politeness Research* results from a series of novel perspectives that in recent years have led some linguists, both pragmatists and phoneticians, to investigate im/politeness through the study of phonic strategies. Some approaches have been carried out from more intralinguistic perspectives and others from more socio-pragmatic positions; some have focused on segmental patterns and others on suprasegmental traits or on paralinguistic strategies; however, all of them explore the role played by these phonic strategies in expressing im/politeness.

Given the fact that im/politeness can be expressed linguistically in many different ways, and given that each language encodes such im/polite linguistic resources differently, some facts can be stated regarding the aforementioned novel line of research:

- The study of the phonic component of im/politeness is still an emerging linguistic perspective. Although some work has been done in the English-speaking world, it is still particularly incipient.
- Works in Romance languages, even in those with a high cultural impact, are still scarce. However, research from this new, more general perspective would be very useful, allowing researchers to make significant headway and to incorporate other socio-cultural traditions.
- Research carried out so far in this field is still quite atomistic, to the detriment of the progress in research.

With consideration of all these facts, the present issue addresses the phonic im/polite marks and focuses on the prosodic level of language, mainly because the prosodic component is the more immediate and evident (but by no means the simplest) aspect of the phonic level. On the other hand, the choice of a

group of Romance languages (namely Spanish, French, Italian and Catalan) as the focus of this issue satisfies the need to offer a comparison between neighbouring languages, both geographically and socio-historically. The potential coincidences or (dis)similarities in phono im/polite linguistic behaviours found in two or more of the languages under study might be extended to other languages, perhaps related socially but not genetically. It must not be forgotten that the phenomenon under study is essentially socio-pragmatic and cultural.

The result of these 'new' concerns is the present set of papers: a body of works with different perspectives, heterogeneous in their theoretical approaches, we might say, but united in how to confront the problem, i.e., in the linguistic and pragmatic perspective adopted as their starting point. Common criteria for all studies presented are the empirical observation of linguistic facts, the contextualization of the phenomena studied, the use of instrumental methods and the rejection of intuitive, subjective or non-objective researcher impressions. As a result, we have taken a first, unified step towards a better understanding of the expression of im/politeness in Spanish, French, Italian and Catalan by means of prosodic resources.

Firstly, the contribution by Hidalgo and Cabedo is conceived as state of the art work on the topic of this special issue. The paper justifies the importance of prosody in expressing im/polite meanings. Prosody is not merely a dressing of our messages; its complex nature binds together (be it simultaneously or not) the intonation, the speech rate and/or the duration. It is precisely the complex nature of prosody that makes it essential to be careful with the prosodic factors implied: the audio source must be free from interference and noise, the units must be clearly set beforehand, and so on. Only thus can regularities be found within the melodic patterns and within the acoustic conditioning factors of im/politeness, be it the pitch, duration or speech rate. Additionally, the applied character of the research on phono im/politeness is highlighted since it might be conceived as a useful tool for helping second language learners acquire pragmatic competence and avoid intercultural socio-pragmatic misunderstandings.

Hidalgo and Cabedo's introductory study (scattered with illustrative examples) is followed by Estellés and Albelda's specific analysis of a particular pragma-prosodic problem: the use of evidentials as im/polite devices and their potential prosodic specializations. In this paper, the general perspective of the volume is materialized in the study of the interface between discourse markers, im/politeness and prosody in oral discourse. The degree of specialization of the former is compared in two sets of discursive genres: a more general one and a political, parliamentary genre. The authors carry out a thorough empirical

analysis and state two main ideas of interest for future works on the prosody of discourse markers as well as on evidentiality:

- (a) The gradual distribution of prosodic marks in evidential markers, depending on their discursive value: they are prosodically more marked when serving self-image activities, and less so when they are neutral (purely evidential). The use of evidential markers in im/polite situations seems to be associated with an ‘intermediate’ degree of prosodic mark use.
- (b) The possibility of extending the study of the interface between discourse markers, im/politeness and prosody to other areas, such as the characterization of certain discourse genres; in this sense, the use of mitigating prosodic marks on evidential markers is virtually nonexistent in parliamentary discourse.

French is the subject language of García-Negróni and Caldiz’s paper. Their contribution confirms the profitability of using prosodic marks in im/polite pragmatic activities. From a cross-disciplinary approach derived from Ducrot’s Poliphony and Anscombe and Ducrot’s Argumentation Theory, the authors aim to prove the ability of prosody (more precisely, stress and tonal variations) to confirm the presence of different discursive enunciators (points of view), allowing the speaker to protect his/her image, as well as that of others. The authors posit the existence of (a) one kind of prosody that is *co-oriented* with what is said (e.g., the use of intensity stress in stressed syllables with an emphatic im/polite value), and (b) a second kind of prosody that is *non co-oriented* with the words uttered, thus creating situations of discursive polyphony (e.g., when a neutral prominence is used as a means to enhance in some ironic productions). This perspective seems to open the door to new and promising possibilities in the study of complex pragmatic and/or prosodic phenomena, such as irony.

Another cross-disciplinary piece is Gili and Bazzanella’s paper on Italian. The authors study the essential role of prosody (and, more specifically, intensity) in expressing im/politeness, assuming the *global context* and *local context* concepts as relevant for their investigation. The global context (the culture surrounding speakers, their socio-economical situation, their sex, age, etc.) and the particular conditions of the communicative act (situation, relations between conversationalists, use of gestures, etc.) are both aspects that should be taken into account in the process of describing im/politeness. Within this diversity of factors (and always bearing in mind the necessity of properly contextualizing all the prosodic behaviours in order to determine their effective role in each case), variations in intensity might affect:

- (a) The illocutive act (e.g., commands may seem more or less urgent depending on the intensity used by speakers)

- (b) The propositional content (changes in intensity may vary the illocutive force of an act, e.g., when rising intensity must be understood as a prosodic device to produce irony rather than as an exclamatory form of expression)

Finally, Devís and Cantero's paper evidences the existence of melodic characteristics revealing mitigating forms of politeness in Catalan. The particularity of this article derives from the application of a careful and detailed acoustical analysis model that allows the extraction of a stylized (i.e. standardized) melodic curve, so that there is no room for any error arising from the analysis of a physically defective corpus. Besides the acoustic phase, the work also develops a perceptive phase where the devices unveiled in the former phase are submitted to evaluation. Informants seem to confirm up to six prosodic mitigating traits in Catalan. The fundamental principle of this contribution is that these melodic forms of polite mitigation are not a part of the linguistic code; they are instead paralinguistic codes perhaps not shared by all native speakers of the language, but at least shared by a specific community. This latter claim could relate to the differences between geographic areas, social spheres, etc.

In short, this volume represents a step forward in the study of im/politeness from a prosodic perspective, maintaining significant scientific criteria derived in all cases from solid (although diverse) theoretical foundations and from empirically appropriate and instrumentally meticulous analyses. It is now time to develop this process with further research devoted to delving into the issues raised here.

Antonio Hidalgo Navarro  
Guest Editor