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Using Video Clips to Illustrate How
Paralinguistic Variation Communicates Emotion

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Abstract
Aristotle’s explication of the available means of persuasion includes logic, character, and emotion as the three artistic proofs available to any rhetorician. Because emotion is the least understood rhetorical proof (Jorgenson, 1998), this lesson plan uses Aristotle’s definition of delivery (i.e., variations in rate, volume, and pitch) to illustrate how paralinguistic qualities reflect and elicit emotion. Educators are provided with the necessary materials and procedures for a 50-minute multimedia instructional event including the content and citations for a lecture articulating how paralinguistic variation reflects and elicits emotion, links to audiovisual illustrations of emotional paralinguistic variation, worksheets to structure student processing of the illustrations, and a think/pair/share procedure for efficiently integrating this lesson’s content into the students’ existing knowledge structures.

Courses
Hybrid Basic Communication Course, Public Speaking, Advanced Public Speaking, Persuasion, Rhetorical Criticism, Oral Interpretation, Nonverbal Communication, or Business and Professional Speaking.

Objectives
- To provide a common vocabulary for discussing the emotional significance of paralinguistic variation in terms of rate, volume, and pitch.
- To increase students’ understanding and awareness of the emotional meaning of paralinguistic variation in terms of rate, volume, and pitch.

Introduction and Rationale
Paralinguistic qualities of verbal speech refer to how words are spoken (Alberts, Nakayama, & Martin, 2010). The most prominent paralinguistic qualities are rate, volume, and pitch (Lucas, 2009; O’Hair, Stewart, & Rubenstein, 2012; Zarefsky, 2011). Rate is the pace of a speech measured in words per minute (Zarefsky, 2011), volume is

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the loudness of a speech (Zarefsky, 2011), and pitch includes the tonal quality of a speech. Pitch is measured in wavelength frequency, with greater frequencies producing higher pitches and lesser frequencies producing lower pitches (Lucas, 2009).

Variations in rate, volume, and pitch are significant because they indicate physiological changes that co-occur with emotional experience and expression (Planalp, 1999; Scherer, 1986). Increases in speaking rate signify excitement (Planalp, 1999). Decreases in rate signify thoughtfulness or solemnity (O’Hair, et al., 2012). Increases in volume signify higher levels of emotional arousal (Planalp, 1999) or enthusiasm (DeVito, 2000). Decreases in volume signify sadness or lower levels of emotional arousal (Planalp, 1999). Increases in pitch signify greater levels of stress (Zarefsky, 2011), and decreases in pitch signify sadness and lower levels of arousal (Planalp, 1999).

Empirical research demonstrates the emotional and persuasive influence of paralinguistic variation. Juslin and Laukka’s (2003) meta-analysis of 104 studies revealed that emotion-specific patterns of vocal expression reliably communicate discrete emotions, like sadness and anger. Other demonstrations show that emotionally-charged acoustic patterns are contagious, meaning that receivers non-consciously mimic the emotions embodied in those patterns (in Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). Perhaps the contagiousness of paralinguistic emotion explains why vocal variation elicits more perceptions of sincerity, credibility, and persuasiveness than monotone speeches (Burgoon, Birk, & Pfau, 1990). This lesson plan teaches communication students to identify and understand how a speaker’s paralinguistic variation reflects and elicits emotion for rhetorical purposes.

Description of the Activity

This five-step activity uses video clips to introduce the concept of paralinguistic variation and explain its indexical relationship to a speech’s emotional content. Step one draws students’ attention to the emotional significance of paralinguistic variations in a speech taken from an episode of the television series Mad Men (2007-present). Step two uses a worksheet to guide discussion of that speech. At step three, the instructor delivers a lecture defining paralinguistic variation’s emotionally significant qualities in terms of rate, volume, and pitch. Step four invites students to record and analyze the paralinguistic variation in a speech taken from the motion picture The Great Debaters (Winfrey, Roth, Black, Weinstein, Weinstein, & Washington, 2007). Step five concludes with a think, pair, share activity (Lyman, 1981) that debriefs students on the presence, meaning, and effect of paralinguistic variation in the step-four video.

Video Clips

The step-one video clip is from Mad Men (2007-present), the AMC dramatic television series about a mysterious and talented advertising executive set in 1960’s America. The specific video clip is taken from episode 13, The Wheel (Weiner & Taylor, 2007): 34 minutes, 55 seconds to 38 minutes, 1 second (3 minutes, 26 seconds). The clip depicts the lead character using low volume, a slow rate, and low pitch to associate a Kodak film projector with tenderness, sentimentality, and nostalgia. If the DVD is not available, the clip can be found by searching YouTube using the terms “Mad Men and
Carousel speech.” The step-four video is an excerpt from *The Great Debaters* (Winfrey, et al., 2007), a film that tells the story of America’s first nationally competitive African-American debate team from Wiley College. This clip depicts the Wiley team supporting racial integration against a team of White students from Oklahoma Christian University. The clip shows Wiley’s only female debater delivering a speech that progressively increases in volume, rate, and pitch until it reaches a crescendo of anger directed at the injustice of racial segregation. This clip is located 53 minutes, 27 seconds to 56 minutes, 40 seconds (4 minutes, 17 seconds) into the film. If the DVD is not available, the clip can be found by searching YouTube using the terms “time for justice and The Great Debaters.”

This activity works best in a classroom with a computer connected to a mounted video imager. Before class, save the step-one and step-four video clips on an external storage device, like a flash drive. The video’s format must be compatible with the player(s) on the classroom’s computer. Alternatively, the clips could be streamed from YouTube or played directly from the DVDs.

**Response and Analysis Forms**

The step-one emotional response form guides the students’ responses to the step-one video clip and structures the step-two discussion. Similarly, the step-four paralinguistic analysis form guides analysis of the step-four video clip and structures the step-five discussion. Create and print as many step-one and step-four response forms as there are students in the class, plus one additional form for the instructor.

**Lecture Materials**

Prepare a short lecture (i.e., about 10 minutes) that defines paralinguistic variation and illustrates it with the definitions of rate, volume, and pitch. The lecture should conclude with an explanation of how variations in rate (slow versus fast), volume (quiet versus loud), and pitch (low frequency versus high frequency) reflect and elicit emotion.

**Procedure**

1. Distribute an emotional response form containing the instructions and questions provided below. Ask students to follow the instructions on their emotional response form. When students are ready, play the *Mad Men* (Weiner & Taylor, 2007) video clip. Following the clip, give students a minute or two to complete the emotional response form. While they work on the form, cue the step-four video clip (5-10 minutes).

   Instructions: While watching the video clip, consider the following questions. After viewing the clip, briefly record your responses.
   
   - Question 1: What is the emotional tone of this speech?
   - Question 2: How did this speech make you feel?

2. Invite students to verbally report their responses on the emotional response form. Students will likely report that the speech elicited sadness or reflection. If students
initiate an explanation of how the clip affected them, use it to transition to the
prepared lecture (5-10 minutes).

3. Deliver the lecture. At its close, introduce step four of the activity, and hand out the
step-four paralinguistic analysis form containing the instructions and questions listed
below (5-10 minutes).

   Instructions: While watching the video clip, consider the following questions.
   After viewing the clip, briefly record your analysis.
   • Question 1: What is the emotional tone of this speech?
   • Question 2: How did this speech make you feel?
   • Question 3: How did the speaker’s use of rate, volume, and pitch reflect and
     communicate her emotional state?

4. Give students a minute or two to read the instructions on the paralinguistic analysis
   form. When students are ready, play The Great Debaters (Winfrey et al., 2007) video
   clip. Following the video, give students a few moments to individually complete
   their paralinguistic analysis forms (5-10 minutes).

5. Ask students to discuss their paralinguistic analysis with a nearby student. Announce
   that student pairs will be asked to share their discussion with the entire class. Give
   pairs three minutes to discuss their analysis. After they begin, start timing and
   announce the time every 60 seconds; this will keep students on task. After three
   minutes, invite students to share their discussion with the entire class (5-10 minutes).

Debriefing

   The think, pair, share component in step five creates an apt context for this
activity’s debriefing. It provides students with three distinct opportunities to articulate
their understanding of emotionally meaningful paralinguistic variations in rate, volume,
and pitch. First, individual students articulate their understanding in writing on the
paralinguistic analysis form; second, individual students verbally represent their
understanding to a partner; and third, student pairs prepare to verbally articulate their
understanding to the entire class. At this stage, achievement of the activity’s objectives is
virtually guaranteed by the instructor’s active involvement in guiding the students’
interpretations of the step-four video’s depiction of paralinguistic variation and its
relationship to the step-four video’s emotional content.

   Students tend to observe that the speaker’s indignation and passion are
underscored by her steadily increasing rate, greater volume, and higher pitch. Students
often further acknowledge that the speaker is demanding action on the issue of racial
injustice. Ask students to consider how the speaker’s meaning would have been different
had she slowed her rate and lowered her volume and pitch. Students generally report that
the speech would have sounded more like surrender than a call to action. Instructors
should conclude the activity by relating paralinguistic variation to the specific form(s) of
speaking implicated in their particular courses.

Appraisal

   This activity provides students and instructors with a common vocabulary for
recalling and representing the emotional significance of paralinguistic variations in rate,
volume, and pitch. That vocabulary can then be the basis for specifying how vocal variation usefully punctuates a speech’s emotional content. Because students are often emotionally affected by the video clips, they may be more likely to recall the lesson when preparing or improving their own speeches. Research shows greater memory for emotionally arousing narratives (Cahill & McGaugh, 1995). Finally, this activity’s use of several teaching modalities (e.g., audiovisual media, class discussion, dyadic interaction, and didactic lecture) has the potential to engage students of various learning styles.

References