

Desarrollo del discurso y la pragmática - Discourse and pragmatic development -**Desenvolupament del discurs i la pragmàtica****3-year-olds' sensitivity to a speaker's polite stance through audio-visual prosody**Iris Hübscher¹, Laura Wagner², Pilar Prieto^{1,3}

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While the scaffolding role of gesture has been repeatedly shown (Kelly, 2001; Butcher & Goldin-Meadow, 2000), the picture is less clear for children's ability to access more complex pragmatic meanings through audio-visual prosody. The present study investigated 3-year-old American English-speaking children's sensitivity to recognize a speaker's polite stance in their native language encoded through audio-visual prosody in requests such as the following: 'Can you give me the ball, please'. While the lexicon was kept the same in both the polite and not-polite condition, distinct pitch contours (L* L% -not-polite vs. L* H%-polite), and facial gestures (stern face -not-polite vs. happy face-polite), were used. Children were asked to place the requested object in the basket in front of the twin that asked more nicely. In order to investigate the children's sensitivity to pitch/prosodic patterns in comparison with gestures in the perception of polite stance, the materials were presented in three different conditions: (a) with prosody and non-verbal cues available (audio-visual); (b) with just non-verbal cues available (visual-only); (c) with just prosody available (audio-only). Children were asked to place the requested object in the basket in front of the twin that asked more nicely. We obtained results of 36 participants, each performing in 6 test trials which leads to an overall of 216 answers. The results showed that 3-year-old children overall performed significantly above chance and thus are clearly able to access a polite stance encoded through audio-visual prosody ($p < 0.001$). Interestingly, there was no significant difference between the performance in the individual conditions ($p = 0.730$) and not only in the audio-visual and visual-only condition but also in the audio-only condition children also performed significantly above the mean ($p < 0.05$). The results indicate that 3-year-olds actively use prosodic, as well as facial gestural features, as powerful indicators of politeness.

References

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- Kelly, S. D. (2001). Broadening the units of analysis in communication: speech and nonverbal behaviours in pragmatic comprehension. *Journal of Child Language*, 28(2), 325-349.