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# Prosody, polyphony and politeness. A polyphonic approach to prosodic configurations common to French and Spanish

**Abstract:** From a theoretical perspective based on the Theory of Argumentation in Language (*Théorie de l'Argumentation dans la Langue* – TAL) and the Theory of Polyphony (*Théorie de la Polyphonie Énonciative* – TPE), the present study describes and analyses polyphonic configurations that are disclosed through the use of certain voice traits; configurations which, unmistakably common to both French and Spanish, are manifested by what is said and what is prosodically shown in utterances. Within a French corpus and a Spanish corpus of naturally occurring discourse, the patent polyphonic dimension of intonation has been explored in order to demonstrate that locutors' utterances themselves reveal the orientation of enunciation through both the marking of the lexical and grammatical components and the prosody within which they are embedded. Through this study, the authors show how the locutor – the discursive character presented by the utterance as responsible for its enunciation – puts on stage a multiplicity of enunciators, or viewpoints, which allow him or her to protect the image of self, i.e., the locutor's own image, and expose, protect or enhance that of others. Polyphony is materialized in two different ways: one in which the enunciator embodied in the prosody reinforces the locutor's assimilation to the wording of the utterance and another in which the enunciator corresponding to the intonational feature does not match what is expressed through words.

**Keywords:** polyphony, politeness, prosody, enunciation, locutor, polyphonic configurations

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# 1 Introduction

The in-built linguistic axiom that posits that the act of speaking is attributable to only one voice has long been brought into question. Laying the groundwork for a polyphonic-argumentative theory, Ducrot (1984) characterizes *sense* in terms of a multiplicity of “voices” or “points of view” expressed through enunciation; these voices are enacted as an exchange, a dialogue or even a configuration of several simultaneous discursive characters. The studies carried out within the framework of the Theory of Argumentation in Language (*Théorie de l'Argumentation dans la Langue* – TAL) and the Theory of Polyphony (*Théorie de la Polyphonie Énonciative* – TPE) have demonstrated that the enunciation of words, syntagms and utterances reveals the staging of diverse argumentative viewpoints towards which the locutor – the discursive character that is presented by the utterance as responsible for its enunciation – usually adopts an active stance.<sup>1</sup> However, this polyphonic nature of language is not only exhibited in a lexical or grammatical way. In spoken discourse, other devices frequently prove relevant to the interpretation of meaning. In this article, we will explore the polyphonic effect of some prosodic marked forms such as *intense accent* (or *high-pitched prominence*) and *pitch level variations*; forms which are to be considered as meaningful linguistic devices that belong to the language system. We aim to demonstrate how the locutor adopts and manifests his or her position with regard to the aforementioned intonational features and, in doing so, s/he puts on the stage of the discursive arena a variety of enunciators or points of view which, in turn, allow him or her to protect the image of self, i.e., the locutor's own image, and expose or protect that of others. This study is part of a wider project which seeks to demonstrate that, much like words and syntagms, certain prosodic features convey argumentative instructions which uncover the polyphonic nature of sense.

The polyphonic essence of intense accent and pitch level changes are features common to different languages. In the present study, we will particularly concentrate on the polyphony exhibited by prosody in both French and Spanish enunciation. The cases analyzed belong to a corpus of naturally occurring discourse obtained from conversations, debates and interviews in which there is at times a mid to high degree of confrontation between participants. All the

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<sup>1</sup> Although some of the terminology in this article may be unusual in English, we prefer to use the translations from French (*enunciation, locutor, enunciator*), as Argumentation and Polyphony theories radically depart from the concept of *speaker* as understood by current discursive theories. For an approach to the TAL and TPE in English language see, for example, [http://www.academia.edu/912668/Slovenian\\_Lectures\\_by\\_Oswald\\_Ducrot\\_](http://www.academia.edu/912668/Slovenian_Lectures_by_Oswald_Ducrot_)

examples, except (6), have been extracted from a corpus of authentic spoken discourse and have been phonetically analyzed after the discourse intonation approach developed by Brazil (1997). We will explore how in contexts where conflict and confrontation are foregrounded, certain prosodic phenomena turn into the materialization of im/politeness strategies.

This article assesses how polyphonic configurations, which are easily perceived by competent hearers, are triggered when highlighting a word or a syllable or when producing changes in the pitch and intensity of the voice. By means of such configurations, the locutor always assumes a patent position; in fact, when noticeable intonational forms are used, the locutor's stance is clearly stamped and the degree of his identification with the viewpoint materialized through the prosodic marking becomes evident. This undoubtedly produces contextual effects that have a major impact upon the interpretive dimension. In what follows, we will firstly provide a brief account of the TAL, the linguistic theory on which our analysis is based, and a description of previous works dealing with the correspondence between prosodic marking and polyphony in Spanish (Section 2). Secondly, we will focus our attention on cases in which the polyphonic function of intonation unmistakably comes out as marked and produces contextual effects unveiling im/polite mechanisms, which may either disregard and threaten hearers' face-wants or enhance and save the locutor's own image (Section 3). Finally, we will characterize and reflect upon two different types of polyphonic configurations that come to light through prosody in spoken discourse (Section 4).

## 2 Theoretical background and brief literature review

### 2.1 French theory of argumentation and the theory of polyphony

Since the 1980s, the studies carried out within the framework of the French Theory of Argumentation in Language posit the central idea that words and utterances do not refer to objects of the world but to plausible discourses. According to this non-referential semantic theory, the use of a linguistic form will enable certain argumentative continuities and orient towards certain conclusions while restricting others. The value of words or utterances is not determined by the degree of truthfulness or the context in which they are immersed but by the intrinsic argumentative force and orientation with which they are

loaded and the conclusions resulting from them. In this light, the sense of an utterance should not be seen as the reflection of any behavioural intention on the part of a speaking subject but rather as a self-referential qualification that the utterance provides in its own enunciation. Such qualification consists of a series of instructions – illocutionary, causal, argumentative and polyphonic – that the interpreter must take into account in order to recuperate the sense of the utterance. The polyphonic theory, complementary to the TAL, rejects the postulate of the unicity<sup>2</sup> of the speaking subject and demonstrates that the enunciation of utterances as well as the use of “tool” words – such as connectors, operators, modifiers (García Negroni 1995; Ducrot 1995) and internalizers (Ducrot 2002; Carel and Ducrot 2005) – stage argumentative viewpoints, corresponding to different enunciators through which the locutor’s stance is manifested; many times the latter’s positioning may take the form of agreement, distance or disagreement with regard to those points of view. This theory proposes that any linguistic manifestation discloses the existence of a variety of discursive characters, i.e., the simultaneity of different “voices” which constitute the expression of sense.

Undoubtedly, sense is expressed through utterances but this does not mean that sense necessarily represents the speaking subject’s intentions. The TPE accounts for what is expressed within the utterance itself independent of the figure of the real speaker and therefore independent of the psychological intention, which might be supposedly revealed by the utterance.

According to this polyphonic perspective of sense, a multiplicity of “voices” are enacted through enunciation. In the light of this enactment, the figure of the *locutor* is defined as the discursive character who is assigned the responsibility for the enunciation. As such, he is not necessarily identified with the *empirical subject*, i.e., the speaking subject who, in spoken discourse, uses his speech organs in the production of a message. The locutor expresses his viewpoints through the staging of *enunciators* always assuming a position with respect to them. Finally, Ducrot (1984) posits a difference between the status of the locutor as L – (the character who is responsible for the enunciation, he who chooses the utterance) and that of the locutor as *lambda* ( $\lambda$ ) (the locutor considered as a discursive being that is able to announce his own feelings and to whom the *I* of the utterance is attributed). While the locutor L is the responsible for the enunciation,  $\lambda$  is a complete *persona*; the source of the utterance. Both L and  $\lambda$  are to be seen as discursive characters brought into existence by the sense of the utterance.

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<sup>2</sup> We use the term ‘unicity’ in accordance with Roulet (2011)



Most studies have focused on how polyphony is manifested through the use of linguistic forms themselves; in the next section we will demonstrate that polyphony may be also evoked and materialized through the prosodic substance of utterances; these are cases of what we will call *prosodically manifested* or *prosodically shown polyphony*

## 2.2 Unveiling the argumentative and polyphonic instructions of intonation

Although fairly new, in recent years the analysis of the polyphonic argumentative value of intonation<sup>3</sup> has been a matter of growing concern, giving rise to an uninterrupted series of studies. In this section we will provide a description of some of the most relevant findings in the field.

A ground-breaking observation about the connection between intonation and argumentation is found in Ducrot and Schaeffer (1995)<sup>4</sup> when they assert that certain intonational contours, what Bally (1932[1965]) calls *gestes de paroles* ('word gestures'), may, just like interjections, endorse the spoken word:

Manifester du mépris au moyen d'une intonation, c'est faire comme si on ne choisissait pas de le manifester, comme s'il se manifestait tout seul, débordant du cœur sur les lèvres. (Ducrot and Schaeffer 1995: 607)

'To manifest contempt by means of intonation is to be seen as if we did not actually choose to manifest it but, rather, as if it manifested itself, as if our heart overflowed our lips.'

Ducrot (1995) also shows his interest in the effect of intonation on the argumentative instructions of de-realizing modifiers (*modificateurs déréalisants* – MD). He claims that an MD may alter its argumentative force from attenuation to inversion if a suitable prosodic feature is used, thus changing the conclusions derived from its application:

Tout ce qu'on peut dire, c'est que, plus il y a d'insistance sur l'adverbe, au moyen, par exemple, de l'intonation, plus on attend la conclusion négative, autrement dit, plus le MD a tendance à prendre la fonction d'inverseur. (Ducrot 1995: 152)

<sup>3</sup> We use the name *intonation* in accordance with Brazil (1997: ix–xi). This author proposes an analysis of prosody taking into account three systems: *prominence* (sentence stress), *key and termination* (pitch levels) and *tone* (pitch movement). Brazil uses the term *intonation* to refer to the combinatory simultaneous use of these three systems.

<sup>4</sup> Ducrot (1984: 211) comments on the significance of prosody in discourse for the first time when he points out that irony can often be interpreted as such because of the intonational features in which it is embedded.

‘All we can say is that the more we insist on the adverb, for example by means of intense intonation, the closer we are to a negative conclusion, in other words, the DM tends to fulfill the function of an inverse de-realizing modifier.’

The first prosodic studies carried out within the framework of the TAL and the TPE in Spanish are found in García Negroni (1995, 1998a), which describe the polyphonic instructions associated to the use of intense accent<sup>5</sup> in speech. This accent has been characterized as a constitutive mark of a type of modifier which was called *surréalisant*. Instances of the *surréalisant* modifier usually occur in a *p pero q* (‘p but q’) structure where *pero* (‘but’) introduces a modifier *q* which is not only co-oriented with the argument *p* but also argumentatively stronger than *p*. The following example has been extracted from our corpus of colloquial Spanish. The locutor is describing a severe punishment he suffered when he was a conscript in the military.

- (1) Por castigo, viste, pero MAL.  
‘To punish us, you see, but BADLY.’

This type of modifier is always immersed in an emphatic prosody and is very frequently used in colloquial spoken Spanish. It is interesting to observe how, in cases like this, the locutor rejects any neutral reading of *p* (*punish*) as an ordinary type of punishment and places it at the extreme of a scalar cline which admits only positive degrees.

Metalinguistic negation will provide another example of marked and prosodically shown polyphony.<sup>6</sup> We have argued that metalinguistic negation does not necessarily oppose a previous effective word and does not necessarily force a descending reading (‘less than’<sup>7</sup>). For us, what characterizes this type of negation is its capacity to reject the discursive framework imposed by a previous discourse while the locutor positions his enunciation in a different discursive

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5 In this work we will use the term *intense accent* to refer to a high-pitched allocation of prominence. Such a prosodic mark is associated to an increase in the articulatory energy and volume. It is worth noting here that although prominence is an attribute of the syllable, its communicative value affects the meaning potential of the tone unit where it occurs (Brazil 1997).

6 It is worth mentioning that this type of enunciation is usually, though not always, embedded in an emphatic prosody (Filmore 1985; Horn 1985; Forest 1992; Nolke 1992, 1994). The prosodic marking is a feature that favours its interpretation, especially in those cases where the negative utterance is not followed by a rectification (García Negroni 1998b, 2009).

7 According to Ducrot (1984), metalinguistic negation shares a descending effect with polemic negation. For a different approach of metalinguistic and metadiscursive negation, see García Negroni (2009).

sive framework (García Negroni 1998b, 2009). The following example, (2), belongs to our Spanish corpus. A couple is discussing a problem caused by a dispute about the TV remote control the previous night. L<sub>2</sub> (the husband) is trying to explain why he had hidden the remote control from his wife. The woman's discourse stages a locutor (L<sub>1</sub>) that labels the situation as unfair:

- (2) L<sub>1</sub>: ... Bueno, yo siento que es injusto.  
 L<sub>2</sub>: NO ES injusto porque ...  
 'L<sub>1</sub>: I feel it's unfair. // L<sub>2</sub>: It ISN'T unfair because ...'

The enunciation of the response reveals an L<sub>2</sub> who opposes the point of view staged by the L<sub>1</sub> of the previous utterance. This adjudicative reaction of L<sub>2</sub> comprises a disqualification of the previous enunciation. By not acknowledging 'unfairness' as a suitable appraisal of the conflictive event, L<sub>2</sub> rejects the inadequacy of the linguistic framework of L<sub>1</sub>'s enunciation. Here, the prosodic marking must necessarily accentuate the linguistic marking.

When analyzing the allocation of high-pitched prominence on verbs (Caldiz 2007, 2008), we have also demonstrated that an emphatic prosody itself evokes the existence of a new point of view which can be attributed to a virtual voice expressing the reversal of the polarity of the verb used in the utterance. Thus, we have been able to confirm how negation underlies affirmation.<sup>8</sup>

- (3) L<sub>1</sub>: La Argentina se VA a levantar.  
 'L<sub>1</sub>: Argentina WILL stand up.'

In this statement, extracted from a radio interview, the use of intense accent on *VA* calls to mind the opposite polarity of the verb. By means of the prosodic feature, the locutor brings the point of view of a new enunciator to the level of the ongoing discourse. Unlike (2), in (3) the intense accent itself is the only trace that reveals the existence of such an enunciator, whose point of view confronts a virtually opposing, or at least different, stance. In fact, there is a need to reconstruct this enunciator in order to understand the real sense of the utterance and the strong standing adopted by the locutor.

In another study about prosodically manifested polyphony, we have established that the argumentative value of a reply beginning with *pero si* ('but if') is determined by the pitch level of the utterance (García Negroni 2002). Therefore, if the reply occurred in a high key, the locutor would be staging an enunciat-

<sup>8</sup> This is very much related to what Escandell-Vidal (2011) describes as *verum focus*.

ator who expresses a refutation. Conversely, a low-pitched voice level would express confirmation or agreement with respect to the interlocutor's utterance.

Within the same theoretical line, we have also demonstrated that the prosodic pattern of the argument *p*, in a *p pero q* ('p but q') structure in Spanish – in which a mid-pitched falling tonic syllable is displaced at the left of the tone unit – is a sufficient condition to pre-announce a counter-argumentation, even when the argument *q* remains silent (Caldiz 2003, 2008, 2010b)<sup>9</sup>. Such cases always disclose a complex polyphonic structure. They usually occur as a concurring echo to a previous statement and express a mitigated agreement on the part of the locutor with regard to his interlocutor's argument.<sup>10</sup> In the following example, L<sub>2</sub> is narrating an event where he had to wait too long to be served at a restaurant. L<sub>1</sub> wants to know if the delay was due to the presence of a large number of people at the restaurant and L<sub>2</sub> confirms this suspicion but states that it was not the main reason for the delay:

- (4) L<sub>1</sub>: /¿Había mucha gente, che?/  
 L<sub>2</sub>: /HABÍA gente pero ... Además el lugar estaba lindo/  
 'L<sub>1</sub>: So, were there many people? // L<sub>2</sub>: There WERE people but ... Besides it was a nice place.'

A significant phonological feature to be noticed here is the mid-pitched voice level, which, in our view, is a sufficient condition to express enunciation continuity (Caldiz 2008, 2010a).

Continuing with our line of research, in a study about the prosody of the discourse markers *bien/bueno* ('well'), we have argued that a step up of the level of the voice after the occurrence of the particles accentuates their function (Caldiz 2013). We have noticed as well that a rise of the pitch level itself may play the role of what Portolés (1998) calls formulation discourse markers, a role that remains intact even when the particle is not present, thus revealing prosodically manifested polyphony.

As regards tone, in a study that aimed at identifying strategies used by author-locutors when reading aloud in Porteño Spanish, we have noticed that,

<sup>9</sup> Fonagy (1981) proposes the predictive function of intonation. Cases like the one in (4) are very frequent in the Spanish of Buenos Aires and they always anticipate a mitigated counter-argumentation.

<sup>10</sup> We should not be misled to believe that this prosodic pattern is the only one which can pre-announce a counter argumentation. An antecedent produced with a rise-fall may also anticipate a *pero* consequent in River Plate Spanish. However, we are still working on the predictive function of such pattern. In English, according to Blakemore (1989), a similar effect is produced when the antecedent 'p' in a 'p but q' structure bears a falling-rising intonation.

in order to facilitate the interpretation of the ongoing discourse, a rising-falling voice movement is used at points where old information must be reactivated (Caldiz 2012). This tone-choice admits the paraphrase ‘As I have already said’. By means of the circumflex voice contour the interlocutor understands that given information is to be reactivated in order to interpret the text. Example (5) shows a case in which the paraphrase and the tone coincide.

- (5) /↗↘ como se DIjo / el objetivo general es de diagnóstico ...  
 ‘↗↘ as has already been STATED / the general objective is a diagnosis ...’

The utterance in (5) refers to a character’s evolution in a novel; an evolution involving an initiation and learning which had been anticipated five pages earlier in the same text.

Finally, in (6) we present a fabricated example of prosodically manifested polyphony where there is a contradiction between what is said in the utterance and what is shown in the enunciation (García Negroni et al. 2012). Let us imagine a situation in which someone who has been accused of yelling responds with a shriek:

- (6) I’m NOT YELLing!

In order to explain the contradictory sense of (6) we must recognize a double positioning of L. On the one hand, L makes λ responsible for the negative point of view, resulting from and opposed to the criticism he has received. On the other hand, L cannot help identifying himself with the viewpoint of the reaction, an emphatic involuntary exclamatory intonation. This is a prosodically manifested form unveiling uncontrolled anger.

As we have just seen, the polyphonic configurations that are evoked through the phonic substance always express the locutor’s stance. In fact, in such cases, the locutor emphatically adopts a positioning and identifies himself with the viewpoints evoked through the phonological realization of the utterance.

Having traced an outline of the results obtained in this novel line of studies, in the next sections, we will explore our French corpus and see how the polyphonic configurations of utterances are directly related to the performance of im/politeness strategies.

### 3 Hypothesis, methodology and data collection

The hypothesis formulated here is that in interactions where there is confrontation or conflict, both in French and Spanish, the occurrence of intonational features, through which the locutor stages and adopts viewpoints in his enunciation, affects the enhancement of the public self-image and the effacement of others' self-image. We seek to demonstrate that prosody plays a significant role in the art of argumentation and persuasion and the construction of ethos. We assert that the prosodic marking manifests the viewpoints of virtual voices; voices which, materialized exclusively through the intonational substance, put on stage the viewpoints of enunciators that express meanings without words. In other words, apart from being marked by the use of lexis and form, the intrinsic polyphony of an utterance is marked and shown by prosody. Basically, the locutor's stance is exhibited within the utterance in different ways, either said or shown. This attitude contributes to the construction of polite and/or impolite strategies which, outside the dimension of the utterance, produce contextual effects that regulate and influence the enhancement or defacement of the self-image or that of the interlocutors.

We propose that there are two different types of polyphonic configurations that emerge as marked and prosodically manifested in utterances and contribute to the construction of sense. The first type is the one in which there is an argumentative coincidence between what is said and what is shown by the prosodic cues; this means that lexis, form and intonation orient towards the same direction. The other type is one in which the sense of what is prosodically shown does not accompany the sense of what is expressed through words. This second type of polyphonic configuration is characteristic of ironical utterances and of cases like the one described in (6), which constitutes an extreme manifestation of an overt contradiction between the enunciator belonging to the linguistic marking and that of the prosodic feature. The way in which the meaning conveyed by these two types of configurations is actually interpreted by interlocutors may vary.<sup>11</sup>

To avoid theoretical inconsistencies, it should be borne in mind that it is essential for our study to differentiate between the contextual components of discourse and the intrinsically linguistic ones. As we have already pointed out, we must lay emphasis on the fact that our theoretical stance does not focus on

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**11** It is important to remember that we do not seek to account for speakers' intentions. Rather, we aim at disentangling the semantic mechanisms that are activated by the production of utterances with their intonational cues, which are considered an asset of the language system.

the speaker and his communicative goals. Rather, it concentrates on what the language that is used reveals about how an utterance should be interpreted. When an utterance is produced, its sense is determined by the instructions that refer to its enunciation (Ducrot 1984, 2004). What is interpreted does not necessarily have a one-to-one correspondence with what is intended. It is from an interpretive perspective that finds its roots in the language system that we perform this study. Therefore, we do not analyze the speaker as a human being producing discourse with a particular purpose in a particular context (although we do not deny this view of speakers). What we analyze are the discursive beings materialized within the utterance and the sense that derives from the viewpoints they stage.

It may seem, at first sight, that our theoretical stance, whose main purpose is, as previously stated, to account for sense as manifested from within the utterance itself, and the study of politeness may seem irreconcilable, or at least conflictive. It may be argued that it is incompatible to propose a polyphonic analysis of discourse together with a line of studies traditionally related to speakers' – not locutors' – rights, obligations and a desire to be accepted or not to be imposed. We should not forget that Brown and Levinson's (1987) seminal work on politeness, with their claim for universals in language usage, makes use of central notions such as intentions, strategies, context and purpose. The large amount of academic discussion derived from their original proposal does not deviate from this direction. Watts (2004: 19–20 and 2005: 50–52) describes the concept of politic behaviour as “forms of social interaction that have become institutionalised”. He posits that there is a natural desire to maintain a state of equilibrium in interpersonal relationships and those salient forms that deviate from “what is expectable” constitute the expression of polite or impolite behaviour. Watts' work is centred on speakers' conduct, and his view of politeness focuses on the individual and society. Also within a pragmatic stance, Briz's definition of attenuation (2005: 56) links the strategy of linguistic minimization to argumentation and agreement. Spencer-Oatey (2008), on her part, proposes a three-fold framework of interconnected aspects: *face*, *sociality rights and obligations* and *interactional goals*, which encapsulate issues related to identity, behavioural expectations and context. These are just a few examples that confirm how politeness studies are oriented towards speakers' behaviour and their roles as social beings.

Our study emerges from a different analytical standpoint, that of the semantic instructions inherent to the language system and their interpretive outcomes. We seek to demonstrate that, far from being conflictive, the articulation of both perspectives may shed light on an aspect of language in use that is still waiting to be developed. We propose a study of the self-referential

instructions with which utterances are loaded – independent of the empirical subjects' intentions – and the interpretive effects those instructions create; effects that necessarily have an impact on the image of self and other.

For the present study we have carried out a qualitative analysis of a television show and a presidential debate in French, with a total of approximately 40,000 words.<sup>12</sup> First, we went through the transcriptions and the audio-recording of the French corpus in detail and identified occurrences of high-pitched prominences at points of a significant degree of confrontation. Thus we have been able to compare what was *said* to what was *prosodically shown*. We have concentrated on two of the three systems from Brazil's model: *prominence* and *key and termination*;<sup>13</sup> it should be noted that the system of *tone* (pitch movement) has not been explored in this work. Next, we compared our findings and conclusions to those we had already obtained from our corpus in Spanish.

We have used PRAAT for the instrumental analysis of utterances to corroborate the initial acoustic perception.

## 4 Prosodic features, polyphony and politeness

Given space limitations, the present article cannot offer a thorough description of the state of the art of the studies of politeness and intonation. Needless to say, the bulk of works that concentrate on intonation and its im/polite effects is considerably smaller than the vast literature published about politeness studies in general. However, there is a growing interest in the communicative value of intonation in spoken discourse and its effect on interpersonal relations.

Brown and Levinson (1987) themselves do not fail to acknowledge the role of prosody in naturally occurring discourse. In fact, though not central in their study, they provide evidence of how in intercultural communication a prosodic choice may lead to unwanted misunderstandings (1987: 33–36) or how it may turn an off-record speech act into a bald-on-record one (1987: 133, 212). Spencer-Oatey (2008: 21, 28) also draws attention to the effect of tone of voice and intonation in rapport management. Similarly for the north-eastern American variety of English, Wennerstrom (2001: 159) proposes that prosody is an intrinsic feature of politeness, which she regrets has not been sufficiently explored yet.

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<sup>12</sup> We have analyzed a TV show, where a philosopher (Michel Onfray) debated with a group of panellists, and Hollande and Sarkozy's presidential debate.

<sup>13</sup> The system of *key and termination* analyses the communicative value of pitch level occurrences on prominent syllables.



Notwithstanding the increasing interest observed in Spanish at present, Hidalgo (2009) also claims that the link between politeness and intonation is still an area to be explored. He provides an outline of the existing works, highlighting the most salient linguistic features analyzed in this language to this day. Among these features he draws on the use of an intonational pattern fairly similar to that of interrogative forms to express politeness and the use of a circumflex tone when the negative adverb *no* is loaded with a concessive meaning. Hidalgo (2009) also expresses his concern about the small amount of research covering the field of impoliteness and intonation.

Willing to open up a path into the intrinsic linguistic instructions of intonational features and their interpretive potential, in this section, we will account for the polyphonic instructions manifested by the prominence and pitch level realizations of utterances. We will explore how these prosodic features may turn out to be local manifestations of face-saving manoeuvres and face-threatening acts. As we have stated, we will distinguish two different types of polyphonic configurations: one in which there is an argumentative coincidence between what is said and what is shown by the prosodic cues and another in which the sense of what is prosodically shown does not accompany the sense of what is expressed through words.

## **4.1 Prosody co-oriented with what is said: Polyphony shown by high-pitched tonic syllables and their im/polite effect**

### **4.1.1 High-pitched tonic syllables and their polyphonic effect on verbs**

The TPE asserts that the locutor always adopts an active stance with respect to the enunciators he stages. The locutor is never indifferent; he agrees, disagrees or marks different degrees of distance with the viewpoints revealed in the enunciation. This is also true for cases in which polyphony is phonologically shown. Let us consider the following example in which the locutor's attitude is manifested through the use of a high-pitched prominence on the verbs of the utterance in order to introduce an opposition. The sequence has been extracted from the French presidential debate:

- (7) / ... les COMPTES (80.10 dB) (258 Hz) extérieurs de la France **ÉTAIENT** (77 dB) (189 Hz) / **ÉQUILIBRÉS** (75.8 dB) (163 Hz) / AUJOURD’HUI (79.51 dB) (198 Hz) / les COMPTES (79.75 dB) (230,5 Hz) extérieurs de la France / **SONT** (77.63 dB) (192.7 Hz) déficitaires ...  
 ‘... the French foreign accounts WERE / BALANCED /. TODAY, the French foreign accounts ARE deficient’

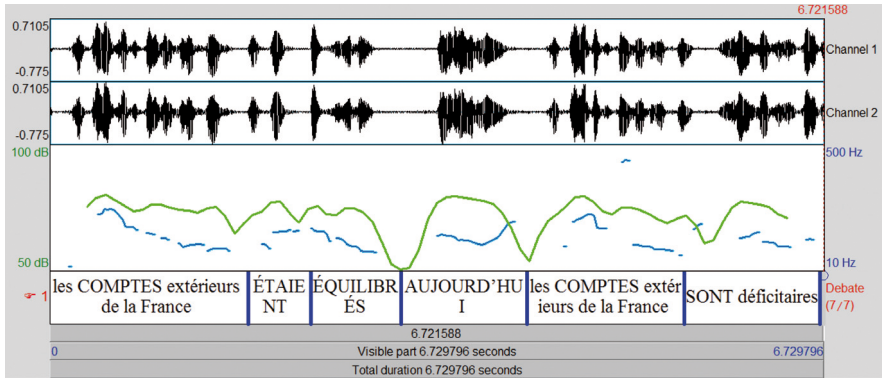


Figure 1<sup>14</sup>

In this example, we have centred our analysis on two of the six prominent words that unmistakably convey an opposition: *étaient/sont* (‘were/are’). When in the first tone unit, at the beginning of the utterance, *étaient* occurs with an emphatic prosody, it is not difficult to foresee an opposition between the past and the present forms of *être* (to be). From the very start, the enunciation calls to mind the presence of a locutor who introduces a conflict between an enunciator that represents a financially orderly past, *les comptes étaient équilibrés* (‘The foreign accounts of France were balanced’), expressed through the linguistic marking of the tense and the prosody, and another enunciator expressing the idea of a chaotic present, *aujourd’hui les comptes sont déficitaires* (‘today foreign accounts are deficient’). Even if the description of today’s economy had not been verbalized, the opposition would have become evident by the prominence and high key with which the past form of *être* occurs. In fact,

<sup>14</sup> The first two levels represent the stereo recording. The continuous line on the third level stands for the utterance intensity measured in dB and the non-continuous line represents the pitch contour and pitch level measured in Hz. We have divided the analysis in tone units; the wording of these units has been copied on the bottom line of the graphs.

the phonological emphasis itself embodies the point of view of an enunciator with which the locutor strongly agrees. The polyphonic effect of (7) is very similar to what we have explained about Spanish in example (3) (Section 2.2).

If we stop to see the contextual effect of such enunciation, we will notice that by means of comparing and highlighting an opposition between a flourishing past and a conflictive present, a face-threatening act is produced, one which defaces the interlocutor's image, in this case, that of the French president at that moment. The polyphonic configuration evoked in this utterance is to be seen as an accusation of the interlocutor's inability to run the economy of France. The locutor strongly adheres to the points of view expressed in the accusation.

A fairly similar polyphonic configuration is staged in (8), although the contextual effect is different and again, very much like in that in (3) (Section 2.2.), the opposed enunciator is only materialized through the phonic component, not through words.<sup>15</sup> The stretches in bold type are the ones that have been instrumentally analyzed.

- (8) Je parle de mon côté // **je suis de gauche** (68 dB) (99 Hz) // **je l'ASSUME** (78.15 dB) (248 Hz) // **Vous êtes de droite** (70 dB) (120 Hz) // **vous pouvez l'assumer** (76 dB) (100 Hz) **ou pas** (75.34 dB) (199 Hz).  
 'I speak from my side. I'm a left-winger. I ASSUME this. You are right winged. You may assume this or not.'

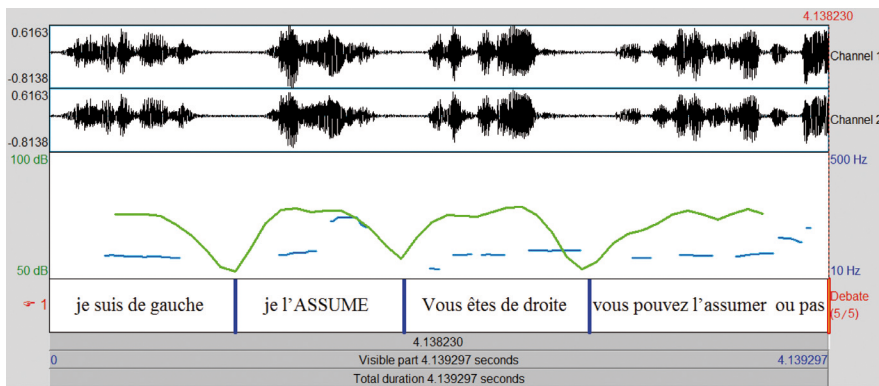


Figure 2

<sup>15</sup> The instrumental analysis of the two tone units in this example demonstrates the occurrence of a particularly high peak on *assume*.

In order to highlight a political perspective and simultaneously oppose another one, prosodic emphasis on the segment *je l'assume* ('I assume this') is produced. In this way a new enunciator is given the floor and once again we are face-to-face with a case of overt phonologically manifested polyphony which this time is exclusively materialized by the use of what we call intense accent. This new enunciator challenges a virtual viewpoint attributed to the interlocutor which allows a paraphrase: *You may believe that I, unlike you, do not assume my political positioning, but I do*. The strong prosodic mark on *assume*, unquestionably reveals the locutor's stance and cancels a probable criticism attributed to the interlocutor. The intonational characteristics of *assume* make it necessary for the locutor to reconstruct and reject a point of view – *je ne l'assume pas* ('I do not assume this') – not expressed at a segmental level, corresponding to the opposite polarity. As regards the contextual im/politeness effects, once again, the interlocutor's image is damaged or at least exposed; the threat, however, is not made baldly on record but implied by means of the way in which the intense accent is articulated. The use of high-pitched prominence on the verb of the utterance performs a role which is similar to that of an emphatic *moi*. The same effect would be caused by *Je l'assume, moi*, ('I do assume this') thus establishing an opposition between the locutor's attitude and that of the interlocutor(s). The prosody of the tone unit *je l'assume* anticipates what is later on explicitly said in this enunciation, the fact that it is not certain whether the interlocutor assumes his own ideological preference.

The allocation of prominence on the verb exhibited in the next example, (9), is particularly interesting due to the dislocation of the tonic syllable<sup>16</sup> towards the left of the tone unit.

- (9) //**Mais** (79.41 dB) (243 Hz) //**je SAIS** (77.40 dB) (232 Hz) **que les Français //ont eu ce sentiment** (70 dB) (85 Hz) //d'avoir toujours à être soumis à des séparations, à des clivages.<sup>17</sup>  
 ('... But I KNOW that the French have this feeling of being subject to separations, to divisions.')

<sup>16</sup> It is worth remembering that a tonic syllable must necessarily be prominent.

<sup>17</sup> It is interesting to observe the use of a high-pitched prominence on *mais*. The comparison and contrast with an initial *pero* in Spanish, probably non-prominent on instances like this, deserves further study.

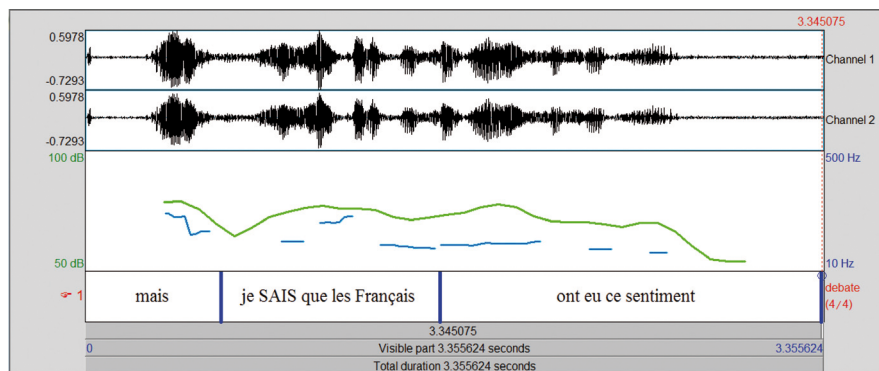


Figure 3

The tonic syllable displays an unmistakable case of prosodically manifested polyphony. It is worth noting that whereas (7) and (8) present a tonic syllable position that is typical of both French and Spanish, (9) shows a displacement to the left which is not as frequent in these languages as it is in English.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, when the tonic syllable shift takes place, prosodically manifested polyphony becomes even more palpable. The peculiar position of the tonic syllable constitutes the only trace that reveals the existence of an enunciator whose point of view confronts a virtually opposing, or at least different, position that has to be reconstructed to understand the sense of the utterance. In (9) the locutor adopts a stance with regard to an enunciator,  $E_1$ , whose attitude would be to express the locutor's lack of sensitivity about the feelings of the French people. By means of the phonological mark, the locutor evokes and adopts the stance of an  $E_2$  whose point of view may be paraphrased as follows: *You think I do not understand the French but I do understand them very well.* To sum up, by evoking an opposed enunciator which is materialized through the prosodic mark, the locutor refutes  $E_1$ 's divergent discourse, attributed to the interlocutor, and vehemently agrees with his own  $E_2$ 's viewpoint.

<sup>18</sup> Spanish and French, as well as most Romance languages, are characterized by the allocation of the tonic syllable on the last content word of the tone unit. The displacement of the tonic syllable towards the left is usually seen as a resource to focalize or contrast. It is not our intention to disregard these postulates but, from a polyphonic perspective, we observe that through the dislocation of the tonic syllable the locutor overtly expresses the viewpoint of an enunciator whose presence is materialized exclusively by means of the prosodic substance.

All the cases described up to now belong to high-pitched prominences on verbs. In the next section we will focus on the polyphonic effect of high-pitched prominence on adjectives and adverbs. We will concentrate on how the prosodic marking expresses, evokes or enhances a high degree.

#### 4.1.2 High-pitched prominence on adjectives and adverbs: Extreme degree and polyphony

In this section we will concentrate on cases where the prosodic marking occurs on high degree or on gradable items. In the next two examples of prosodically manifested polyphony, we will focus our attention on the intense accent exhibited in the scalar lexical items *toutes* and *tous* (*all*). In both cases we observe the use of what has been described as *accent d'insistance* ('insistence accent') or *accent didactique* ('didactic accent') (Lucci 1980; Léon 1994). In (10) and (11), the high-pitched prominence of *toutes* and *tous* does not admit the possibility of a neutral reading of the scalar argument evoked for these acts of enunciation. This argumentative effect is comparable to that of the Spanish example (1) in (Section 2.2.).

- (10) //l'**innovation** (78.10 dB) (163 Hz) // **dans TOUTES** (81.35 dB) (275 Hz)  
**nos entreprises**//  
 ('... the innovation of ALL our companies ...')

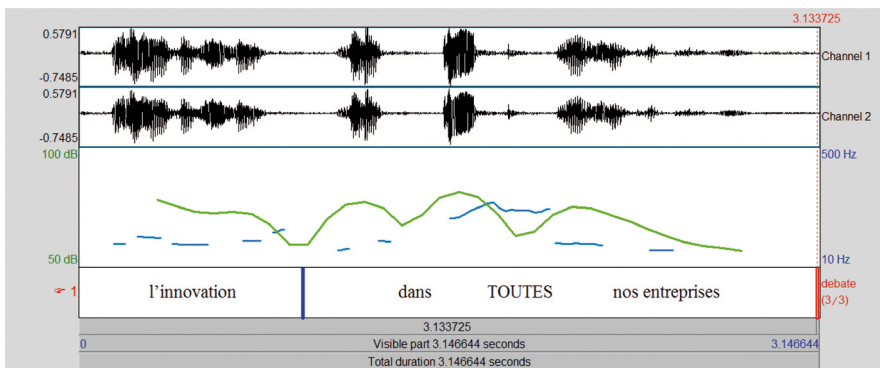


Figure 4

- (11) //**Parce que je PENSE** (78.02 dB) (250 Hz) **que nous sommes TOUS**  
 (73.61 dB) (263 Hz) **Français //**  
 ('because I THINK that we are ALL French ...')

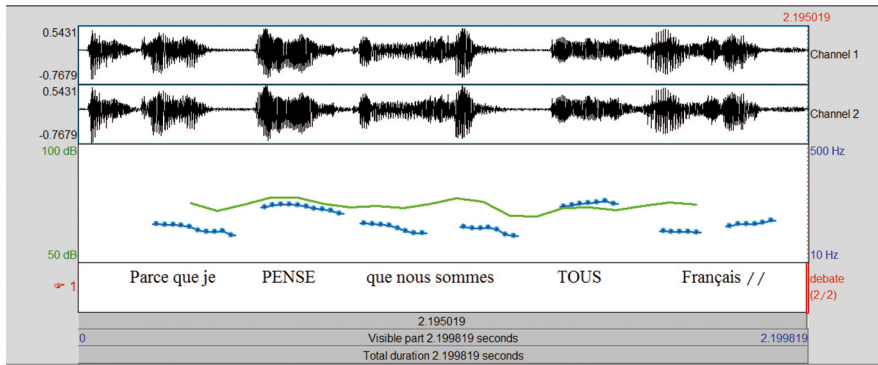


Figure 5

In each one of these utterances marked by prosody, the locutor rejects the use of an ordinary scalar continuum and simultaneously places his argument at the extreme of an extraordinary one (García Negroni 1995, 2003). Thus in (10) and in (11), when enunciating *toutes* or *tous*, with an accent which is intrinsically associated to extreme arguments, the locutor refuses to consider any weak qualification associated to the characterization of the description at stake. There is an opposition between an  $E_1$ , corresponding to an intermediate element of an ordinary cline, and the  $E_2$  dwelling at the top of the extraordinary scale which is evoked and embraced by the locutor.

In the next example, an accusation against the interlocutor's unproductiveness and natural incapacity to support constructive ideas is presented. We may observe a patent peak of the voice pitch every time *tout* is uttered; in this way *tout* becomes a *surréalisant* modifier. The tone units in bold type correspond to the graph below:

- (12) //**Vous avez voté non/ à TOUT** (81.16 dB) (346.8 Hz) / **vous avez essayé de démolir / TOUT** (78.99 dB) (344 Hz) / vous avez été contre / TOUT //
- (‘You have voted no for EVERYthing, you have tried to abolish EVERYthing, you have been against EVERYthing’)

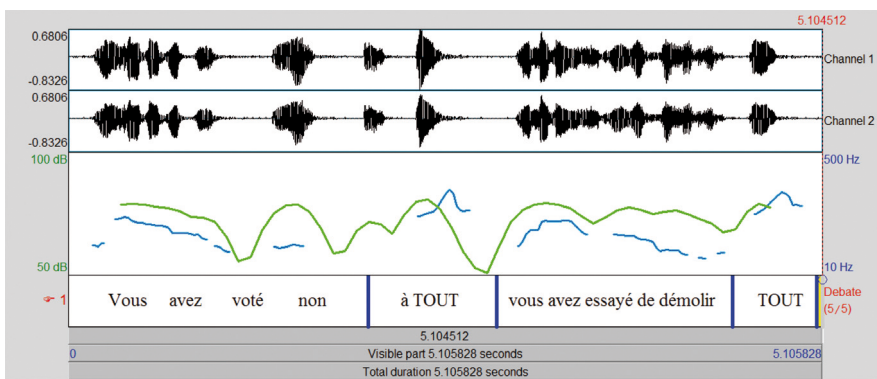


Figure 6

It is worth recalling that intense prosody is a typical mark of intrinsic *surréaliste* modifiers. Such modifiers, as we mentioned in Section 2.2., are characterized by the fact that they are verbalized with special emphasis; polyphony being always exhibited and marked.

When thinking about the contextual effect of utterances, as in (11) and (12), one cannot help associating them with a strong locutor's positioning that reveals a tough opposition between the self and the other. Both utterances have been extracted from a debate where candidates have agreed to conform to the rules and standards of the communicative event at play. Seen from a politeness perspective, we claim that the locutor within the utterance evokes and adopts a dominant stance that does not admit disagreement. There is a latent struggle for power and the context calls for a linguistic behaviour that dodges impoliteness and enhances the image of self. The use of high-pitched prominence that results from the evocation of an extreme degree constitutes a sign of power materialization without violating politic behaviour.

Similar polyphonic and local effects can be evoked by the characteristic stress shift of what in French phonology is called as didactic or insistence accent (Lucci 1980; Léon 1994). Let us consider (13) and (14) where the words with a shifted stress are placed at the foreground of the enunciations, thus restricting the possible argumentations derived from them:



- (13) ... **un Gigantesque** (78.90 dB) (227 Hz) **effort de formation** (65.89 dB) (83.25 Hz).  
 ('A gigantic effort of formation ...')

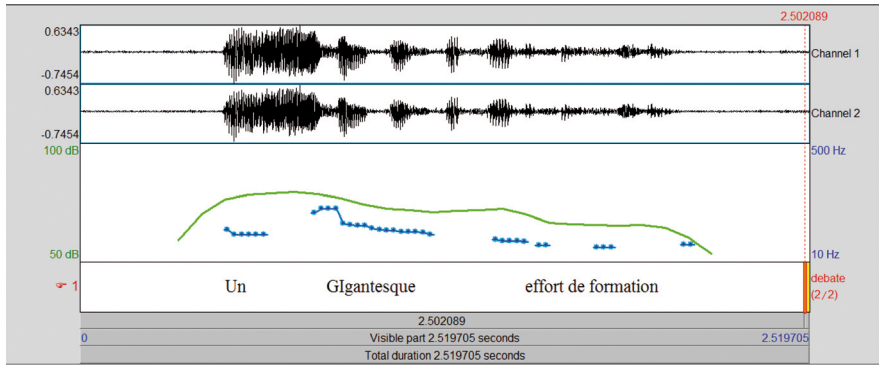


Figure 7

- (14) **L'Allemagne** (78.67 dB) (183 Hz) **fait // le CONtraire** (79.43 dB) (276.3 Hz) **// de la politiqu** (71.92 dB) (176.75 Hz) **que vous proposez** (72.66 dB) (110.09 Hz) **aux Français** (72.66 dB) (110.09 Hz).  
 ('Germany makes the OPPOSITE from the politics that you propose for the French ...')

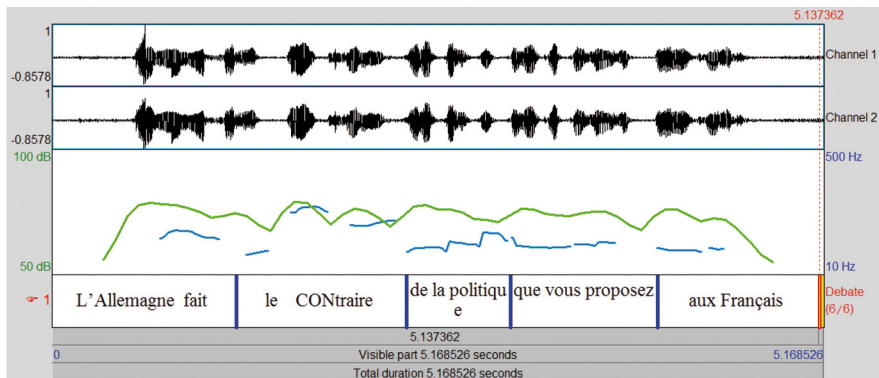


Figure 8

The locutor in (13) is using a high degree word to qualify the effort made by the French population in past years. The word *gigantesque* ('gigantic') itself is an intrinsic *surréalisant* modifier and, as such, it evokes an extreme scalar degree that does not admit a weak reading of the locutor's argumentation. The prominence on the secondary stress of the word reinforces the extreme degree and reveals the locutor's strong positioning with respect to the viewpoints he is evoking. The enunciation of *Gigantesque* should be interpreted as *truly gigantic*.

As regards the accent shift towards the first syllable on *contraire* in (14), it is also perceived as a manifestation of the locutor's positioning and as a means to establish a difference or opposition between self and other's argumentation. Such stress shift on two syllable words producing similar argumentative and contextual effects has been detected on multiple occasions in the French corpus. This has been observed in words like *jamais* ('never'), *blesse* ('hurt'), *créé* ('created'), *million* ('million'), *laxisme* ('laxity'), *premier* ('first'), *souffert* ('suffered'), *heurtée* ('confronted'), to mention just a few.<sup>19</sup> The use of emphatic secondary stress of three-syllable words like *gigantesque* is very frequent in both French and Spanish.<sup>20</sup> However, a stress shift occurring on two-syllable words has only been observed in the French corpus; in Spanish, contrary to what takes place in French, at least three syllables are needed for such change to occur.

Another recurrent feature that is characteristic of both French and Spanish spoken discourse and responds to this first type of polyphonic configuration – one in which the prosodic pattern and the wording of the utterance are co-oriented – is the re-accentuation of words that provide information which is already common ground.<sup>21</sup>

In our French corpus we have observed that repetition and emphatic re-accentuation are frequently used as strategic devices that project the locutor's stance. Let us consider the following extracts:

---

**19** According to Morel and Danon-Boileau (1998: 62), these are cases of lexical emphasis. These authors propose: "L'emphase lexicale se caractérise par un remontée mélodique sur la syllabe initiale du mot. Cette remontée initiale (...) a toujours fonction d'opérer un soulignement du terme ainsi marqué. (...) L'emphase lexicale a essentiellement un effet rectificatif". 'Lexical emphasis is characterized by a melodic increase on the initial syllable (...) it always has the function of highlighting the word which is thus marked (...) the lexical emphasis basically produces a rectifying effect.'

**20** It is interesting to point out that in Spanish, which can be said to be a language with "free" stress, this phenomenon is very frequent in the broadcasting of news, public reading and the speech of politicians (Hualde 2005: 221–246).

**21** As we have already pointed out, Spanish and French show a preference to maintain the tonic syllable at the end of the tone unit (Cruttenden 1997; Hualde 2005); as a consequence, lexical items that constitute shared information are often re-accented.

- (15) JAmais notre déficit commercial n'a été aussi déséquilibré. JAmais 'NEVER has our trade deficit been so unbalanced, NEVer.'
- (16) L<sub>1</sub>: On est sur le thème du pouvoir d'achat. Avec vous, c'est très simple, **ce n'est JAmais** (77.71 dB) (197 Hz) **de votre** (74.84 dB) (110.8 Hz) **faute.** (64.01 dB) (38.27 Hz) (...) Ce n'est JAmais de votre faute. Vous aviez dit 5 % de chômage, c'est 10 % de taux de chômage. Ce n'est pas de votre faute, c'est la faute à la crise, JAmais VOUS.  
 'L<sub>1</sub>: We are talking about the purchasing power. It is simple for you, very simple. It is NEVer your fault. (...) It is NEVer your fault. You said there was a five percent unemployment rate but it's a ten per cent. It is never your fault, it is the crisis. It's NEVer YOU.'

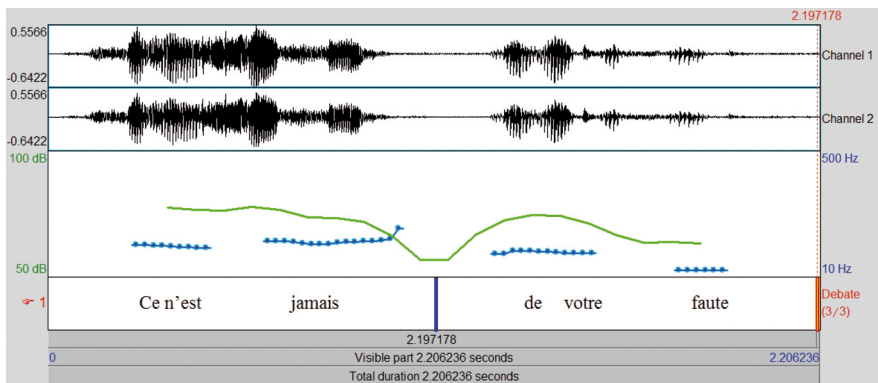


Figure 9

In (15), the wording together with the occurrence of a high-pitched prominence on the repetition and re-accentuation of the item *jamais* (*never*), where just as in (14) an oxytone is produced as if it were a paroxytone, constitute an overt bald-on-record face-threatening act. The polyphonic configuration displayed in (15) comprises a locutor staging several enunciators. Firstly, there is an E<sub>1</sub> corresponding to a presupposition: *there is deficit with the French trade balance*, simultaneously there is an explicit affirmation corresponding to an E<sub>2</sub> that expresses that today's trade balance is unsteady and deficient. This, in turn, calls to mind the viewpoint of an enunciator, E<sub>3</sub>, which expresses '*the trade balance of France was better in the past*'. The negative viewpoint embodied in the emphatic repetition of *jamais* corresponds to an E<sub>4</sub>; through this new enunciator, the locutor adopts a strong critical attitude with respect to his interlocutor and asserts the interlocutor's responsibility for the economic crisis. The

peak of prominence on *jamais* is noteworthy and its repetition evokes the viewpoint of an  $E_5$ , whose existence is materialized through the intonational mark; this new enunciator stresses the locutor's accusatory stance. The meaning of this utterance must be contextually interpreted as an imputation of the interlocutor's administrative inefficiency. The linguistic features of repetition and high-pitched prominence with their polyphonic instructions make the bald-on-record FTA (face-threatening act) stronger.

In (16), the repetition of *Ce n'est jamais de votre faute* ('It is never your fault') is actually an accusation of the interlocutor's denial of responsibility. We encounter here a type of polyphonic configuration by means of which the locutor stages an ironic enunciator. Every time the locutor states the interlocutor's innocence he is actually staging an enunciator whose viewpoint is attributed to the interlocutor, not to himself. It is evident that in this affirmation there is an underlying enunciator whose viewpoint, *Ce n'est pas de ma faute* ('it is never my fault'), is attributed to the interlocutor. In each of the repetitions the locutor adopts a divergent position from that of this enunciator and takes distance from it. This positioning is strengthened by the intense prosody of the utterances, which evokes and embodies a new enunciator that expresses the locutor's accusatory attitude. If an emphatic prosody were used in a Spanish translation of these utterances, the word accent would not be affected but the polyphonic and argumentative effects would be much alike.

All the examples provided in this section exhibit prosodically manifested polyphony made especially visible by means of a high-pitched prominence. The locutors always show an active stance, a strong assimilation with the viewpoint embodied in the enunciation of the utterance; an assimilation that highlights the locutor's agreement or disagreement with his interlocutor. Up to now, we have focussed our attention on cases in which there is a co-orientation of what is said and what is prosodically shown. In the next section, we concentrate on cases where the absence of a marked intonational form constitutes a mark in itself and brings to light an opposition between what is said and what is revealed by the phonological marking.

## 4.2 Prosody not co-oriented with what is said: Polyphony shown by neutral prominence face effacement and enhancement

When analyzing our corpora we noticed that in French as well as in Spanish, a neutral prosody frequently accompanied the production of blatant FTAs.

The following cases are just some examples of utterances in which the weightiness of the FTAs is mitigated by the neutral intonation they were produced with. The absence of a prominent peak, manifested through a high-pitched voice level, which is characteristic of contrast, is precisely what marks prosodically manifested polyphony.

Example (17) was obtained from a television interview in Buenos Aires. The interlocutors are discussing how young people's reading habits have radically changed these days. The interviewer ( $L_1$ ) believes that reading text messages or extracts from the internet is positive. The interviewee ( $L_2$ ) disagrees with this viewpoint.

(17)  $L_1$ : ... puede ser que esté mucho con la computadora **puede ser que lea así, pero al menos lee.**

$L_2$ : **Bueno pero ...** (55.76 dB) (159 Hz). **No lo sé** (67.68 dB) (198 Hz) Pero lo que quiero decir es que la lectura salpicada ... puede traer consecuencias en los modos de razonamiento.

' $L_1$ : ... maybe they spend too much time on the computer but, at least, they read something.

$L_2$ : I don't know. What I mean is that fragmented reading may bring consequences affecting the ways of reasoning.'

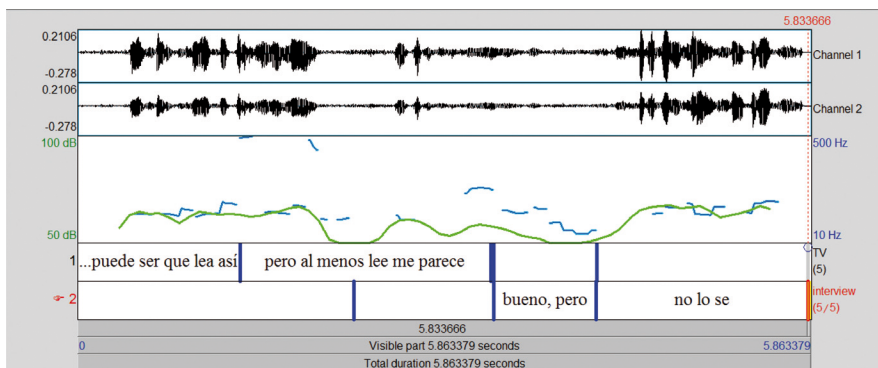


Figure 10

The neutral prosody with which 'well but' (*bueno pero*) and 'I don't know' (*No sé*) are produced does not coincide with  $L_2$ 's opposed stance, thus the disagreement is attenuated and the weightiness of the FTA reduced.

(18) presents an utterance extracted from the French television talk show; the host wants to find out about a project in which the guest performs certain

activities – like the growing of vegetables, the teaching of healthy cooking, etc. – which are not at all related to his academic life.

(18) L<sub>1</sub>: ... C'est assez curieux parce que ça, c'est pas le travail d'un philosophe ... normalement.

L<sub>2</sub>: // **Ça** (65.12 dB) (229 z) **dépend** (50 dB) (98.8 Hz) **des philosophes** (75,52 dB) (98.96 Hz)// Et dans la tradition philosophique sûrement pas.

'L<sub>1</sub>: It's curious because that is not normally a philosopher's job.// L<sub>2</sub>: That depends on the philosopher. Traditionally it's not.'

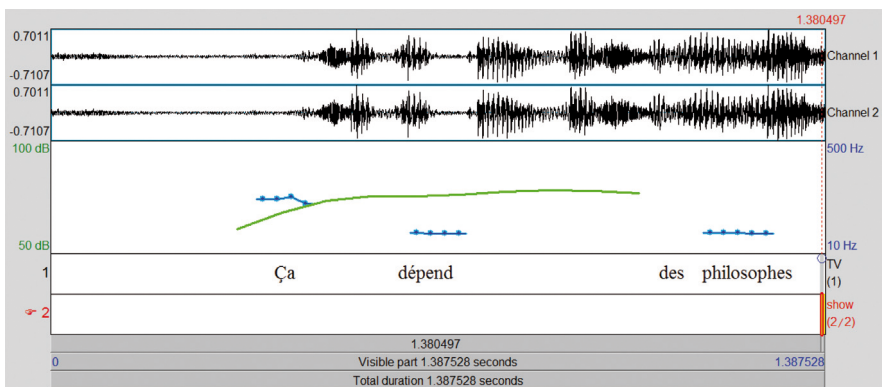


Figure 11

L<sub>2</sub>'s non-emphatic response *ça dépend des philosophes* may be locally interpreted as a mitigated reaction. From a polyphonic perspective, we may say that the locutor stages two enunciators: while E<sub>1</sub>, related with what is said, expresses a point of view of disagreement with his interlocutor, E<sub>2</sub>, the enunciator corresponding to the prosodic substance, does not seem to accompany that disagreement, thus producing an apparent effect of politeness.

When analyzing a case like this, we might be misled to believe that the absence of an outstanding prosodic mark means that there is no enunciator expressed through prosody. However, the absence of an intense accent manifested through a high-pitched voice level, which is characteristic of contrast, becomes a mark that discloses prosodically manifested polyphony. Polyphony is marked and shown precisely because the neutral prominence does not conform to what is expected from a contrastive standard.

In (19) the topics discussed are religion and freedom. The locutor's stance at this point reveals hostility (the interlocutor's attitude is in fact described as

*perverse*), but the non-reactive enunciator of a neutral prosody does not seem to match this positioning. In fact, the locutor stages attenuating viewpoints manifested both in the wording of the utterance (cf. the de-realizing modifier *un peu* / ‘a bit’ in *un peu pervers* / ‘a bit mischievous’) and in the neutral intonation. Further on, the use of the concessive expression *convenez quand meme* (‘at least you’ll agree with me on that’), endorses the attenuation. However,  $L_2$  doesn’t seem to identify himself with these mitigated points of view, i.e., he does not make these points of view the goal of his enunciation; thus, (19) is loaded with a strong censorious argumentative force.

(19)  $L_1$ : Oui mais là vous êtes en train de dire: ‘il nous faut de l’interdit pour qu’on puisse le dépasser et en jouir’.

$L_2$ : Exactement!

$L_1$ : // **C’est un peu** (77.14 dB) (166 Hz) **pervers** (77.14 dB) (142.5 Hz) // **non** (78.17 dB) (197 Hz) //, convenez quand même!<sup>22</sup>

‘ $L_1$ : yes, but you are saying: ‘Prohibition is necessary so that we can violate it and feel pleasure’. //  $L_2$ : Exactly. //  $L_1$ : That is a bit mischievous, at least you’ll agree with me on that.’

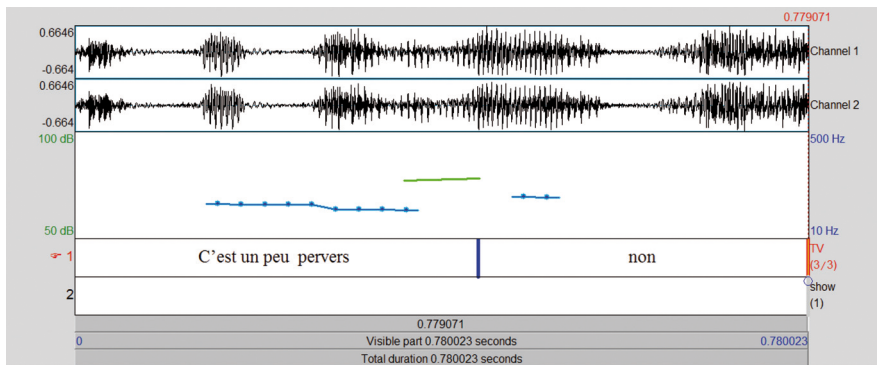


Figure 12

<sup>22</sup> It is important to recall what Brazil (1997: 40–66) says about determining whether a pitch level in context is high, mid or low. Each speaker has a particular voice register and the different levels are determined as high, mid or low by comparing the pitch level of a particular prominent syllable against those of the neighbouring prominent syllables by the same speaker. The speaker in (18) is a man with a naturally high-pitched register; therefore 77.14 dB and 166/142.5 Hz are considered as relatively neutral, non-intense, prosodic realizations.



A very similar non-intense prosody on FTAs is shown in the remaining examples. The bald-on-record FTA, explicitly expressing disagreement with the interlocutor in (20) is also produced with neutral intonation; the first speaker exhibits throughout an average normal voice pitch of approximately 135 Hz<sup>23</sup>:

- (20) L<sub>1</sub>: // **Une fois de plus je suis** (77.02 dB) (180 Hz) **en désaccord**  
 (76.40 dB) (131.6 Hz) **avec vous** // . **Parce que je pense moi ...**  
 L<sub>0</sub>: **J'espère** (68.85 dB) (152 Hz) **bien** (66.50 dB) (131 Hz)  
 'L<sub>1</sub>: once again I disagree with you, because I think ... // L<sub>0</sub>: I hope so.'

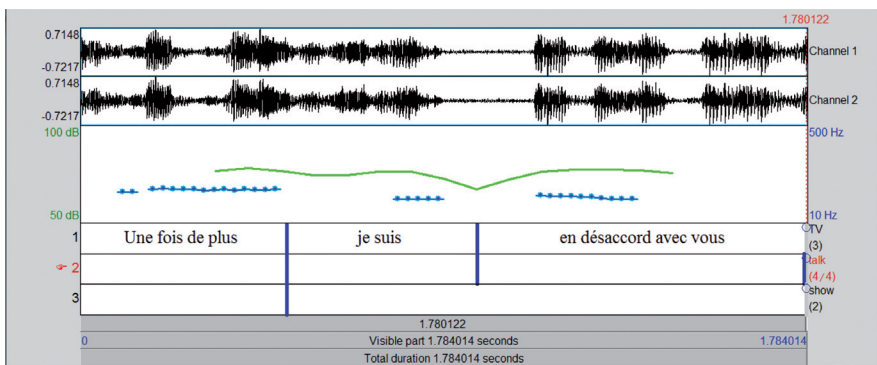


Figure 13

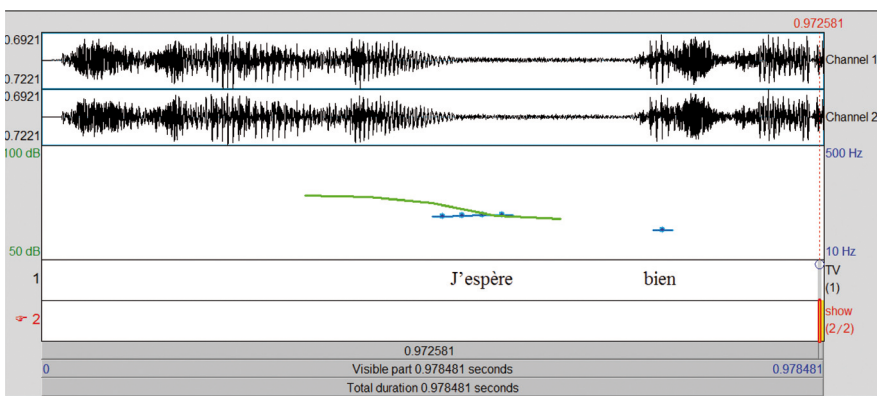


Figure 14

<sup>23</sup> We have established the average voice of this speaker by measuring his prominent syllables on stretches of discourse where he did not manifest a confrontational attitude.



L<sub>1</sub> expresses disagreement with the interlocutor's argumentation but the enunciator corresponding to the prosody does not seem to be aligned with the attitude of opposition.<sup>24</sup> Therefore the absence of an enunciator matching what is said and related to the interlocutor's opposition must be considered as a mark in itself. Thus, the impolite speech act of disagreement is masked by an ostensible attenuating polyphonic point of view. As it can be seen, the neutral prosody marks and shows the staging of a viewpoint that behaves in a way that resembles that of de-realizing modifiers (Ducrot 1995), i.e., modifiers whose application moderate the argumentative force of the utterance. We should again take notice of the locutor's double positioning: on the one hand, he adopts the point of view of what is said (he insists on his disagreement with the interlocutor) and on the other, he assimilates himself to the prosodically shown enunciator. This double positioning explains the mitigation of the FTA. The locutor L<sub>0</sub> expresses agreement with the interlocutor (i.e., *j'espère bien*/ 'I hope so'), but by adopting a sarcastic attitude he keeps distance from his interlocutor. The enunciator embodied in the prosody coincides with L<sub>0</sub>'s sarcastic attitude and reinforces it.

(21) was extracted from the presidential debate. Here, L<sub>2</sub> adopts an ironical stance which unveils a complex polyphonic arrangement.

- (21) L<sub>1</sub>: ... si vous voulez que je vous passe le projet, je vous le donnerai.  
 L<sub>2</sub>: // **Je serais** (69.36 dB) (108 Hz) **serais très heureux** (72.08 dB) (117.9 Hz) // parce qu'il y a plusieurs projets et puis vous changez plusieurs fois.  
 'L<sub>1</sub>: If you want me to give you the Project, I will. // L<sub>2</sub>: That would make happy because there are plenty of projects and finally you change your mind plenty of times.'

When L<sub>2</sub> announces his supposed happiness, he is evoking an ironical viewpoint attributed to the locutor as λ. As L, he does not identify himself with that point of view. By means of the causal construction, whose function is to manifest the absurd, and of the neutral prominence, which accentuates L's stance, L sets distance from λ.

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<sup>24</sup> It is worth mentioning in passing that cases like these, in which explicit disagreement is prosodically attenuated, seem to be more frequent in the French corpus. We found only two similar occurrences in Spanish. However, as this is not meant to be a quantitative analysis, we did not go into details concerning the number of occurrences in French.

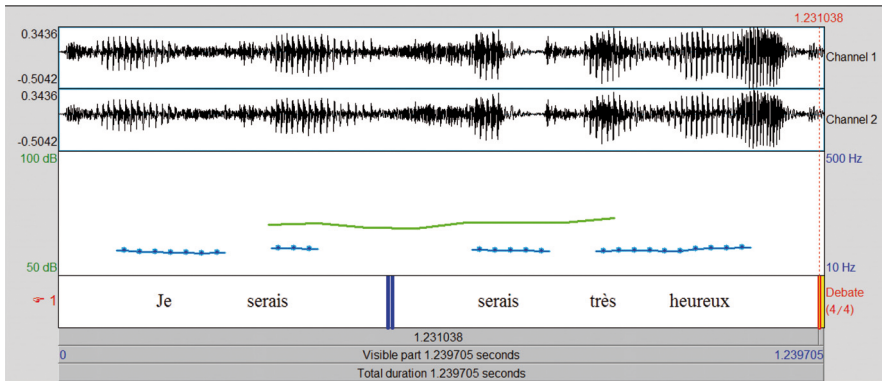


Figure 15

The cases we have just described coincide with the traits proposed for the second type of polyphonic configuration described in Section 3. Here, the apparent absence of an expected enunciator belonging to the suprasegmental level, which enhances the argumentative orientation of the wording of the utterance, should actually be interpreted as a strong presence of prosodically manifested polyphony. In fact, the use of neutral prominence reinforces the locutor's stance with regard to the: disqualifying in (18), (19); sarcastic in (20); ironical in (21); or at least opposing argumentation of the utterances as in (17) and (20). The apparent lack of reaction on the part of the locutor is an illusion; a linguistic artifice that unveils his solid stance; and the opposition between the confrontational wording and the soothing intonation becomes a mark in itself. This serves a double purpose in interaction: it is an effacement maneuver against the image of others and a clear protection of one's own image.

## 5 Final remarks on prosody, politeness and polyphony

In this study, we have briefly reviewed the literature on the correlation between polyphony, argumentation and prosody to finally concentrate on the polyphonic configurations displayed by what is said and what is prosodically shown in utterances; configurations which are unmistakably common to both French and Spanish. We have explored the patent polyphonic dimension of intonation in discourse and managed to demonstrate that the use of certain

voice traits unveils the staging of viewpoints that contribute to the construction of sense.

We have shown how utterances describe the orientation of their own enunciation through both the marking of the lexical and grammatical components and the prosody within which they are embedded. Polyphony is materialized through two different types of configurations: one in which the enunciator embodied in the prosodic marking reinforces the locutor's assimilation to what is said in the utterance and another in which the enunciator materialized through an intonational feature does not match what is expressed through words.

Once the intrinsically linguistic polyphonic nature of utterances had been described, we discussed the contextual im/polite effects they could produce. It is important to highlight that the hearer interprets the discourse at the foreground of the communicative event as totally and absolutely goal driven (Spencer-Oatey 2008). For example, the overt reaction (as in (8), *je l'ASSUME* and (9) *Mais je SAIS que les Français ont eu ce sentiment*), or the lack of an open reaction (as in (20), *J'espère bien*), the neutralization of contrastive prominence (as in (20), ... *une fois de plus je suis en désaccord avec vous*), to mention just a few, are to be seen as producing an influential effect upon the audience; undoubtedly the real interlocutor to whom the discourse is addressed.

We feel inclined to say that none of the two polyphonic configurations conforms to the standards of what is understood as politic behavior, i.e., non-salient social behavior involving mutual consideration for others (Watts 2003). The locutors from our utterances manifest a variety of viewpoints – materialized through words and through intonation – that might be considered as a violation of the principle of mutual consideration. It may be argued that the mid-pitched voice level and the neutral prominence have an attenuating effect that benefits and protects the image of others and of one's own image. However, many of the utterances produced with a neutral intonation do not give the impression of having been uttered in order to reach an agreement; on the contrary, there is an almost permanent and irrefutable attitude of preservation of the locutor's own image. The enunciation, at times, shows overt absence of deference under a veil of seeming politeness.

To conclude, once again, we assert that our purpose in this work has not been to explore speakers' intentions or contextual features; what is said does not necessarily have a one-to-one correspondence with what is intended. In this light, our stance deals with discourse interpretation from a linguistic dimension that is rooted in the language system and necessarily produces effects in the context of interaction. We hope to have been able to demonstrate

that certain intonational realizations are loaded with semantic values that, much like words and utterances, display the polyphonic nature of sense.

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