INTRODUCTION

- Verbal irony/sarcasm = intended meaning of an utterance is opposite to, or different from, the literal sense of the words used (Gibbs, 2000).
  
  E.g. | What a nice weather! (thunderstorm outside)
  
  - Can be conveyed:
    • lexically (e.g. exaggerated adjectives and adverbs),
    • nonverbally (e.g. facial expressions).
    • and through prosodic modulations (Bryant & Fox Tree, 2002; Attardo et al., 2003; Cheang & Pell, 2008).
  
  In French, sarcastic speech is slower and has a higher pitch level and greater intensity (Løvenbruck et al. 2013).

THE ISSUE

WHAT IS THE ACTUAL ROLE OF PROSODIC CUES IN SARCASM COMPREHENSION?

1. Importance of prosody (intonation, rate/rhythm, phrasing) as a cue for detecting sarcasm (Cheang & Pell, 2008).

2. Adult listeners have been found to identify sarcastic intent in content-filtered utterances (Bryant & Fox Tree, 2005; Rockwell, 2000).

3. Alternative view:
   1. It is mainly extralinguistic information (i.e., degree of incongruity between context and speaker and/or utterance) that signals sarcasm (Ivanko & Pexman, 2003).
   2. Irony cues are only employed if the common ground is not sufficient to indicate the intended message (Cutler, 1974).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Does context prevail on tune in sarcasm comprehension?

2. Can acoustic cues alone (without context) help in identifying sarcastic utterances?

HYPOTHESES

- H1: Sarcasm responses will be greater for sarcastically tuned vs. neutral utterances when no context is present.

- H2: Sarcasm responses will be greater when previous context induces sarcasm vs. literal meaning, independent of prosody.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

- Acoustic cues to sarcasm can be correctly identified in absence of contextual cues (59% vs 14%).

- Even when the context biases towards a literal interpretation, the sarcastic tune induces sarcasm interpretation in 12% cases.

- However, number of sarcastic responses differs between literal and sarcastically tuned utterances, independent of context.

- Future works will examine whether sarcastic tunes are better interpreted in presence of an ambiguous context (neither literal nor sarcastic).

REFERENCES


