WHEN POINTING BECOMES MORE THAN POINTING: MULTIMODAL EVALUATION IN PRODUCT PITCHES

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Vitae

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ABSTRACT

The main function of a product pitch is to convince an audience of the validity of a product. This paper presents a study of evaluation as a persuasive strategy in product pitches.

We combine Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) and ethnographic methods to elucidate how speakers in product pitches use evaluation as a multimodal persuasive strategy that is realised through an orchestration of different semiotic modes. Our results show how words, intonation and gestures are used in combination to convey a persuasive evaluation of a product.

A better understanding of how evaluation can be conveyed persuasively to an audience can greatly improve our knowledge of product pitches and can help practitioners improve their performance.

KEYWORDS: persuasion, multimodality, product pitch, deictic gestures, pointing, evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

Product pitches are probably one of the most important genres in the business field and one that professionals are likely to deal with in one way or another in the development of their professional activity. The effectiveness of these presentations is decisive for many business transactions. Product pitches can vary depending on i) the type of product, ii) the communicative situation in which they occur and iii) the community of use. However, most of them share one main purpose: to persuade the addressee of the excellence of the product in order to make them buy it or fund it.

Literature about product pitches has adopted a very practical stance so far, with few studies approaching the genre from a (multimodal) discourse analysis perspective. Defining these oral presentations as a genre has not been a priority compared to, for example, identifying certain features that make them (un)successful. Consequently, scientific literature about this genre does not abound, and studies undertaking a definition of the genre or dealing with its multimodal nature are scarce, as we will

discuss in the following paragraph. In contrast, there are plenty of guides to pitching and articles in the business field that provide advice for practitioners. One example is Burzynski's (2013) 'How to pitch a product: Elements of a successful pitch', where he advises speakers giving pitches to show enthusiasm, find a personal connection with the audience (e.g. by telling stories and using narratives), sell the benefit of the product and focus on what is new and innovative. Nancy Duarte (2015), in 'Find the perfect mix of data and narrative', draws on the idea of the narrative and recommends telling a compelling story of how people will use the product and why it will change their lives. Another example is Clemence Leper's (2015) 'How to pitch an idea to anyone in 7 steps'. In this guide she advises to adopt a problem-solution approach, and to emphasize why your suggested solution is the best. She also recommends to use Cialdinis' (1984, 2001, 2006) principles of persuasion (i.e. reciprocity, consistency, social proof, liking, authority and scarcity) and to appeal to senses to convince the audience of the value of a product. The strong focus on making the pitch consumer-oriented (or audience-oriented) has been previously suggested by Rackham (1998), who argues that a possible cause for the failure of a pitch is to focus on the innovative features of the product instead of on the customer needs. The guide 'Engineering innovative products' by Woods et al. (2014), includes a chapter entitled 'The perfect pitch'. In it, they suggest structuring the pitch in five sections: 1) pain and solution; 2) value proposition; 3) market and competition; 4) company traction and go-to-market strategy and 5) finance. They stress the important role that evaluation plays in describing market and competition, and emphasize the need to fine-tune it appropriately: without highlighting the importance of a competitor and without choosing questionable comparison criteria.

Despite an increasing interest within the field of linguistics in academic pitches, i.e. three minute thesis presentations (Chang & Huang, 2015; Hu & Liu, 2018; Author, 2016), literature about product pitches has remained mainly within the business field. Daly and Davy (2016), for example, is the first study to deconstruct the entrepreneurial pitch paying attention to rhetorical, linguistic and discursive features. Their findings reveal a ten-stage discourse framework underlying most pitches and identify typical linguistic exponents and rhetorical devices. There are also some studies of particular relevance for this paper because of their focus on persuasion. Allison et al. (2017) examine 383 entrepreneurs seeking capital to support their proposals via the crowdfunding platform Kickstarter. They draw on the elaboration likelihood model

(ELM) of persuasion in order to examine how entrepreneurs successfully persuade potential funders to provide capital through the use of issue-relevant information and peripheral cues; and how the motivation and ability of funders influence the way in which persuasion occurs. Results show that the extent to which persuasion is primarily driven by issue-relevant information or peripheral cues is contingent upon funders' motivation and ability. Specifically, as crowdfunding experience and funding commitment increase (decrease), the influence of issue-relevant information (peripheral cues) on funders' decisions to provide capital increases, and vice versa. In the same line, Davies et al. (2017) focus on funders' perceptions on the product creativity. They draw upon a sample of 102 participants assessing ten different product pitches made by ten different entrepreneurs. Their results show that perceived product creativity is positively related to performance, both directly and indirectly. Furthermore, the indirect effect of product creativity depends on the extent to which funders perceive an entrepreneur to be passionate. Cestero-Mancera (2017, 2018) provides some of the few studies approaching the genre from a multimodal perspective. In these studies the author acknowledges the importance of non-verbal language in persuasive product pitches, and suggests a methodology to account for the contribution of gesture, gaze, position and intonation among other aspects.

Therefore, what recommendations from practitioners with first-hand experience with the genre, as well as research conducted in the business field, seem to bring to the fore is that:

1) product pitches are inherently persuasive,

2) presenting a product as a (better) solution to a problem that directly affects the audience lies at the core of a product pitch,

3) evaluation is a powerful tool to position your product,

4) persuasion in product pitches relies on both core information and peripheral cues,

5) persuasion in product pitches stretches beyond the merely linguistic (i.e. it is multimodal).

Furthermore, the importance of persuasive evaluation in business discourse can be said to extend beyond the genre of product pitches. For example Bamford (2007) has

performed a study of discourse in business presentations which is particularly relevant to the present research. Drawing on Aristotle's three main aspects of persuasion (ethos pathos and logos), she claims that persuasion is achieved in this genre by appeals to reason (complex argumentations), appeals to the credibility of the speaker (achieved linguistically by statements of belief, positive evaluations, emphatics and hyperboles) and emotional appeals (achieved linguistically by means of personal testimonies and direct addresses to the audience). Interestingly, Bamford also acknowledges the importance of aspects such as body language and intonation, because they can reveal useful information about the communicative intention of the speaker. However, she does not undertake a systematic study of these features.

In fact, to the authors' knowledge, few studies deal specifically with the role of intonation or gestures in product pitches with the exception of Cestero-Mancera (2017, 2018) mentioned above, which focus on persuasive discourse in Spanish. Some corpus-based studies on Business English do consider intonation. This is the case of the studies derived from the Hong-Kong Corpus of Spoken English, developed at the English Department of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. This audio-corpus is divided into four subcorpora: conversations (natural conversations collected in a wide range of social settings), business (including job interviews, informal office talk, service encounters, presentations and Q&A sessions, among others), academic (students' presentations, lectures, seminars, tutorials, etc.) and public (interviews, speeches, press briefings, etc.). It includes native and non-native speakers, and it has been transcribed orthographically and prosodically applying Brazil's Discourse Intonation (DI) (Brazil, 1997; Warren, 2004). Based on the study of this corpus, Cheng (2004) provides an interesting example of the important role of intonation in service encounters. She shows how a hotel receptionist's use of intonation results in a too insistent and pressing discourse that does not suit the communicative situation nor is in line with the mission statement of the hotel as a company. With specific reference to product presentations, Lowe and Haws (2017) is a marketing study that investigates the role of pitch in product perception. They conclude that the pitch in a voice-over or background music can affect the way consumers perceive a product: a lower pitch conveys a larger product size. Along this line, Niebuhr et al. (2016) analyse the use of prosodic features in Steve Jobs' product presentations, to find out how intonation contributes to project a charismatic figure. With the aid of specialised software, they reveal important characteristics that make

Jobs' public addresses stand out from the rest. For example, Jobs' pitch range is particularly high for a male voice, and he produces a particularly varied pitch contour throughout his presentations. He also varies loudness, and, in comparison with other public speeches, produces shorter tone units in a relatively fast and fluent speech rate. In addition, this use of prosody frequently co-occurs with emphatic words that are elongated and pronounced louder for emphasis.

Regarding the role of kinesics in Business English, Hendon et al. (1996) have approached it from a cross-cultural perspective. They talk about non-verbal behaviour as a generic term, enclosing body language or kinesics, which in turn comprises gestures, body movement, facial expression and eye contact, and vocalics, which is every vocal activity that is not verbal, such as tone or volume. They point out how the interpretation of messages depends more on the non-verbal than on the verbal, and that non-verbal messages seem to have more credibility. Because of the relative importance of non-verbal behaviour, misunderstandings can create what they call 'cross-cultural noise' and hinder communication. Along this line, Chu et al. (2005) have studied the perceived importance of the influence of proxemics, kinesics and physical location in the development of cross-cultural negotiations, by means of questionnaires distributed among business actors with negotiation experience. Their findings showed, for example, that negotiators tend to interpret a kinesic sign such as moving closer or leaning forward as a marker that what is being said is important, and they were keener on cooperating with a person who smiles.

Multimodal studies of business discourse studying the integrated effect of different semiotic modes are scarce. Worth mentioning is Filliettaz (2004), which provides a very interesting study of service encounters focusing on the interaction of words and gestures. This author argues that in any communicative action there is a praxeological process, made up of collective goal-directed actions, and a communicative process of intercomprehension, and shows how speech and gestures can have different roles in each. He distinguishes four different scenarios. The first is gesture as co-verbal action, in which gestures co-occur with the linguistic utterance contributing to the communicative process. Words still carry the bulk of the interaction. The second is gesture as communicative action, in which gestures are a direct instrumental contribution to the social action, and also have a communicative value, because they are the response to a speech act that enables conversation to go on. The third is speech as

cogestural communication. In this case gestures are direct instrumental contributions to the social action and speech co-occurs to make this gesture interpretable, but gestures carry the bulk of the interaction. Finally, the last scenario is gesture as autonomous action. In this case there is a mismatch between gesture as instrumental act and communicative symbol. Gesture and speech can co-occur, but the gesture is not contributing to the communicative process but to the social action (i.e. a seller can hold out his hand to the customer to collect payment and close the selling encounter while saying thank you).

The study of spoken Business English reveals that communication (verbal and non-verbal) is used to construe business relationships (Boden, 1994; Poncini, 2002). Indeed, interpersonal meaning has been shown to have the same importance as transactional meaning in business contexts (McCarthy and Handford, 2004). Because intonation and kinesics play an important role in the expression of interpersonal meaning, their contribution in business contexts needs to be considered. This is especially true of business situations that demand persuasiveness. Intonation and gestures play an important role in achieving a persuasive message, especially when this persuasion is intended to be subtle and indirect (Bamford, 2007). Further proof of the relevance of kinesic and paralinguistic features is the fact that interpretation of messages relies more on them than on verbal features, attaching more credibility to the former (Hendon et al., 1996). Likewise, the negative consequences of an inappropriate use of intonation are exemplified in Cheng (2004), and the important role of gestures in communicative actions both as instrumental acts and communicative symbols is revealed in Fillietaz (2004). Therefore, the contribution of intonation and gestures in inherently persuasive genres such as product pitches cannot be ignored, and it strongly suggests that persuasion in these genres is multimodal.

Previous research has shown how speakers combine different semiotic modes to realise different persuasive strategies (Author, 2015; Authors, 2015; Authors, 2018). One of these multimodal persuasive strategies is *evaluation*. Evaluation as a persuasive strategy occurs when speakers assess something in the hope that the addressee will accept and share this opinion (Bamford, 2007; Querol-Julián, 2011). Evaluation is not exclusive of product pitches, and it has been found to be realised through different semiotic modes in different genres. Hood and Forey (2005), for example, have pointed out how speakers in conference presentations can include multimodal expressions of

attitude in their introductions to subtly evaluate their presentations in positive terms and seek alignment with their audience. Also concerning conference presentations, Querol-Julián (2011) shows how evaluation is expressed multimodally in discussion sessions. A context in which evaluation is particularly prone to be realised multimodally is extreme case evaluations, which, according to Pomerantz (1986) are frequently used to legitimize claims when speakers expect possible counterclaims. In these cases, speakers also use head shakes or gestures to deny in advance these potential counter-arguments (Kendon, 2002).

It is the intention of this paper to probe into the use of persuasive evaluation in product pitches. The initial hypothesis of this study is that evaluation in product pitches is frequently used as a multimodal persuasive strategy realised through a skilful combination of semiotic modes. In particular, it is hypothesized that pointing gestures can acquire an evaluative function when they are used within a multimodal ensemble (Kress, 2003), that is, a combination of semiotic modes such as words, intonation and gestures. To test this hypothesis, examples of pointing gestures in product pitches will be analysed.

METHOD

In this study MDA and ethnographic methods (interviews and observations) are combined to analyse the use of evaluation as a persuasive strategy in a corpus of product pitches. A detailed account of this methodology can be found in Authors (2018) and Authors (in press). In the following paragraphs only a summary of the most relevant aspects is presented to facilitate the interpretation of results and support their discussion.

The event where the corpus of product pitches was gathered is organised by the Flemish government once a year. The pitches are actually part of a longer program that brings together entrepreneurs, design and business experts and (former) university students. During the program students team up with design and business experts to work for several months on a business plan to launch a product. The product pitches are the final step of the process, and they are organised as a competition during which one member of each team pitches the product in front of a jury. As a prize the winning team obtains support for the realisation of the business plan. The event was open to the general public. The presentations had a time limit of 3 minutes and there was a Q&A session at

the end (which means that the total duration including Q&A was always beyond 3 minutes).

A total of 7 presentations were recorded using a fixed camera that focused on the speakers and from these 5 were selected on the basis of good quality of the recording and availability of speakers for ethnographic interviews.

One of the speakers was English native and the other four were non-native speakers with good command of English. Only one speaker (native) reported having wide experience in pitching. The event took place in a medium-sized room equipped with a laptop, a screen, a projector and a pointer. There was no podium, and the speakers were mainly standing next to or in front of the screen and facing the audience. The size of the audience was 34 people (other members of the participating teams and general public) who were sitting in front of the screen. Speakers wore a lapel microphone and used the pointer to change slides in their presentations. None of them had written notes with them. Three of them used an explanatory style, while the other two memorised their presentations. The total size of the corpus of product pitches is 40 minutes. Table 1 provides an overview of the corpus.

Table 1. The corpus

1	**TITLE: Waxpert**					
	Speaker's Gender	**Speaker's English proficiency**	**Speaker's Expertise**	**Delivery**	**Support/ devices**	**Duration**
	Male	High	Novice	Explain	PPT Lapel mic Pointer	00:07:31
2	**TITLE: Anapad**					
	Speaker's Gender	**Speaker's English proficiency**	**Speaker's Expertise**	**Delivery**	**Support/ devices**	**Duration**
	Male	High	Novice	Memorized	PPT Lapel mic	00:07:55

					Pointer	
3	**TITLE: I-BAR**					
	Speaker's Gender	**Speaker's English proficiency**	**Speaker's Expertise**	**Delivery**	**Support/ devices**	**Duration**
	Male	High	Novice	Explain	PPT Lapel mic Pointer	00:08:01
4	**TITLE: Wigoh**					
	Speaker's Gender	**Speaker's English proficiency**	**Speaker's Expertise**	**Delivery**	**Support/ devices**	**Duration**
	Male	High	Novice	Memorized	PPT Lapel mic Pointer	00:06:12
5	**TITLE: Uxprobe**					
	Speaker's Gender	**Speaker's English proficiency**	**Speaker's Expertise**	**Delivery**	**Support/ devices**	**Duration**
	Male	Native	High	Explain	PPT Lapel mic Pointer	00:09:33

Observation sheets were used during the recording to collect information about the event, the physical environment, the product pitch and the speaker.

Face to face, semi-structured interviews were carried out with the speakers in order to obtain crucial information to interpret their use of evaluation and persuasion, for example the speakers' motivation to participate in the event, what they knew about the event beforehand or the way they prepared for it.

The next step was to identify a series of potentially persuasive points in the product pitches, which we call *rich points* (Authors, 2018; Authors, in press). Two rich points in each product pitch were selected for fined-grained analysis because they stood out as particularly persuasive in relation to the rest of the presentation. The identification, delimitation and selection of rich points were done using an inductive approach to video data (Goldman et al., 2007). The size of this subcorpus amounts to 3.8 minutes, which makes it modest but valid for qualitative analysis and in line with previous multimodal studies (Morell, 2015; Querol-Julián, 2011).To keep track of the rich points while preserving the anonymity of speakers, they were coded according to the genre, the initials of the speakers and then numbered (e.g. PPKE1 stands for Product Pitch, two first letters of speaker's name and first rich point in the presentation)

The use of rich points was adopted to avoid prioritizing any semiotic mode in particular and to keep the focus on the multimodal ensemble as a whole. Table 2 offers an overview of the rich points in the corpus of product pitches.

Table 2. Rich Points

Wigoh			
	Begin	**End**	**Duration**
PPKE1	00:00:00	00:00:47	00:00:47
PPKE2	00:02:10	00:02:18	00:00:08
Uxprobe			
	Begin	**End**	**Duration**
PPPA1	00:00:00	00:00:23	00:00:23
PPPA2	00:00:31	00:01:17	00:00:46
I-BAR			
	Begin	**End**	**Duration**
PPPI1	00:00:02	00:00:13	00:00:11
PPPI2	00:01:35	00:01:52	00:00:17

Waxpert			
	Begin	**End**	**Duration**
PPSE1	00:02:14	00:02:21	00:00:07
PPSE2	00:02:51	00:02:56	00:00:05
Anapad			
	Begin	**End**	**Duration**
PPTO1	00:00:42	00:01:14	00:00:32
PPTO2	00:01:38	00:02:10	00:00:32

The following step was a computer-aided multimodal analysis of the rich points with the software ELAN and PRAAT. The linguistic annotation tool ELAN[1] (EUDICO Linguistic Annotator) makes it possible to transcribe and annotate audio and video files and organise transcriptions and annotations on different tiers. The tool for phonetic analysis PRAAT[2] (Doing Phonetics by Computer) allows accurate measuring of pitch and intensity.

[1] http://tla.mpi.nl/tools/tla-tools/elan/

[2] http://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat

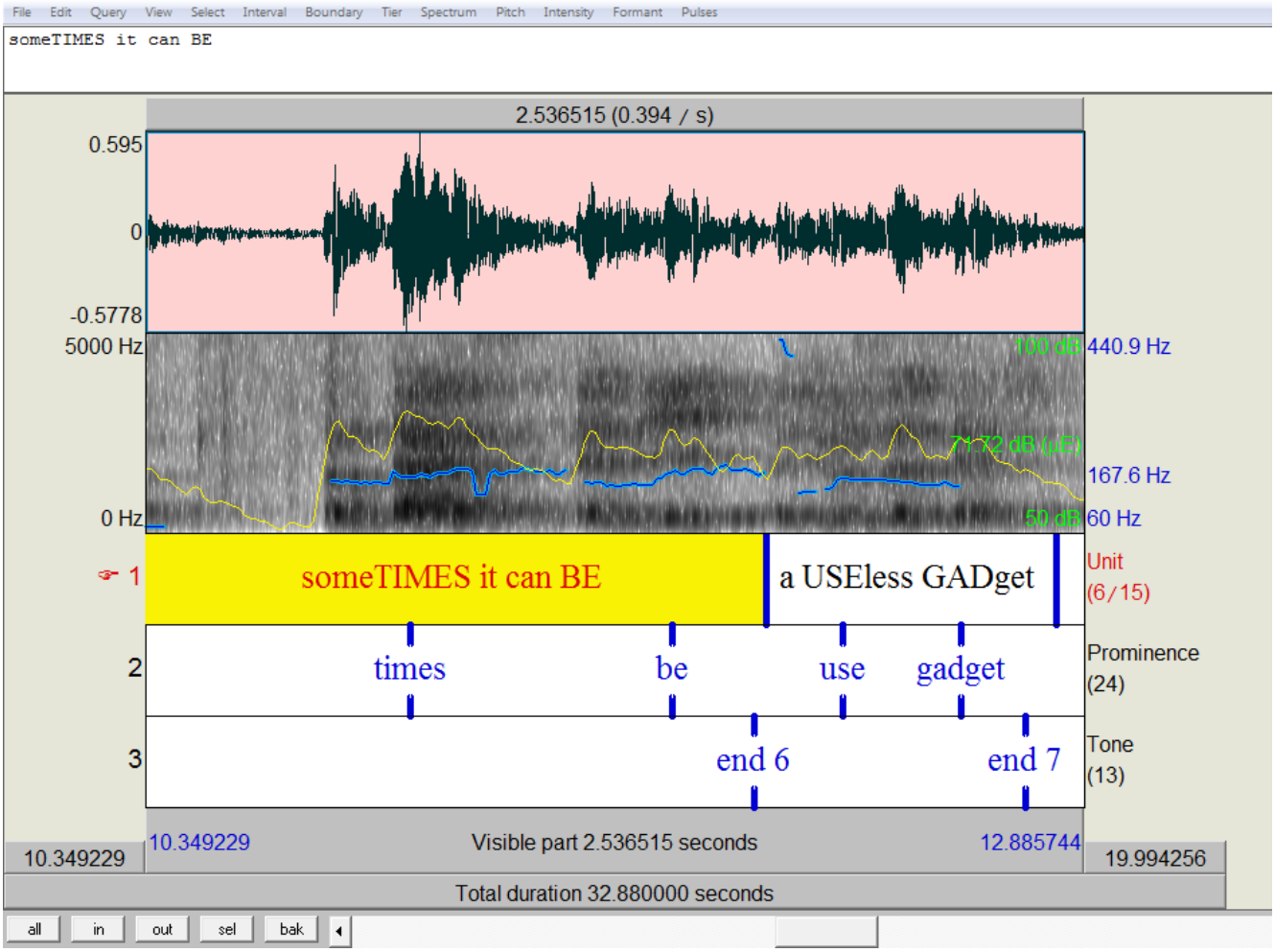

Figure 1. PRAAT tiers encoding prosodic transcription and annotations

For the prosodic analysis in PRAAT three tiers were created (Figure 1): one tier (Unit) contains the boundaries of the tone units, a second tier (Prominence) contains the position of the prominent syllables and a third tier (Tone) shows the position of the last syllable in the unit. Pitch and intensity measurements of each prominent syllable were used to determine Discourse Intonation (DI) parameters such as *key*, *termination and tone* (Brazil, 1997).

For the multimodal analysis the tier structure shown in Figure 2 was used.

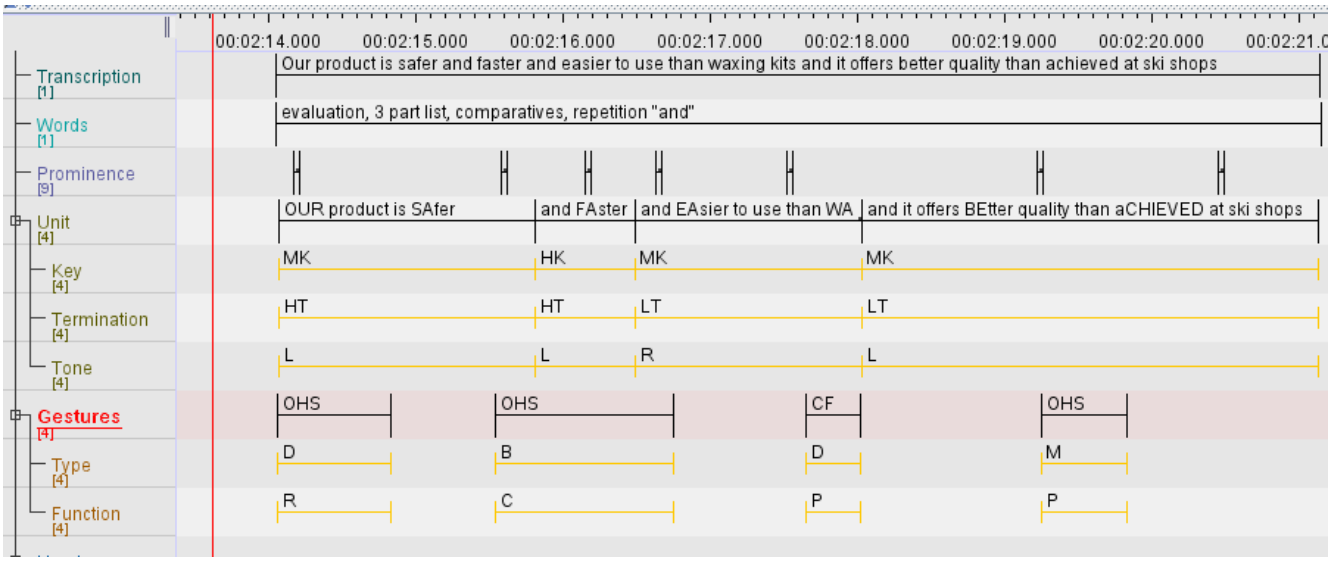

Figure 2. ELAN tiers encoding multimodal transcriptions annotations

The tier *'Transcription'* includes the orthographic transcription.

The tier '*Words'* contains annotations about grammatical, lexical and stylistic devices (such as evaluative language, three-part lists, symmetrical syntactic structures, inclusive pronouns, examples, comparisons, narratives, etc.) that can have an effect on persuasion (Carter, 1997; Hyland 1998, 2006, 2009; Lakoff, 1982).

The prosodic transcription tiers include a DI transcription (Brazil, 1997). The tier labelled '*Prominence*' is imported from PRAAT. In the tier named '*Unit*' upper case letters are used for prominent syllables and lower-case letters for non-prominent syllables. Tone, key and termination are indicated in three dependent tiers according to the system shown in Table 3:

Table 3. Transcription conventions for Tone, Key and Termination

Tone	Key	Termination
F: fall	HK: high key	HT: high termination
L: level	MK: mid key	MT: mid termination
R: rise	LK: low key	LT: low termination

The tier *'Gestures'* indicates the gesture family (Kendon, 2004). This tier hosts two other dependent tiers with data concerning the type and function of the gesture. The classification system draws from Bavelas et al. (1995), Kendon (2004), McNeill (1992), and Querol-Julián (2011), and is summarised in Table 4. For the purposes of this study the focus is on deictic gestures with a referential, pragmatic or interpersonal function.

Table 4. Transcription and annotation conventions for gestures in *Gestures tier*

Gesture family:	Gesture type:	Gesture function:
R: ring (Kendon, 2004)	I: iconic (represent concrete objects and events) (McNeill, 1992)	**R: referential (represent some aspect of the content)** (Kendon, 2004)
G: grappollo (finger bunch) (Kendon, 2004)	M: metaphoric (represent abstract ideas) (McNeill, 1992)	**I: interpersonal (regulate interaction)** (Bavelas et al.,1995)
OHP: open hand prone (palms down) (Kendon, 2004)	B: beat (repetitive gestures that usually mark the discourse flow) (Kendon 2004; Bavelas et al., 1995)	**P: pragmatic (show attitude or perlocutionary meaning)** (Kendon, 2004)
OHS: open hand supine (palms up) (Kendon, 2004)	**D: deictic (point to something)** (Kendon, 2004)	C: cohesive (link parts of discourse) (McNeill, 1992; Querol-Julián, 2011)
CF: close fist		

Once the MDA of the rich points was completed, the focus was laid on the ones that featured the use of evaluation as a multimodal persuasive strategy, or in other words, the rich points in which speakers were using words, gestures and intonation to persuasively evaluate their products.

Ethnographic interviews were used as a final step to discuss preliminary results with speakers. This exchange made the analysis more reliable. The speakers were prompted to offer their interpretations before hearing the researchers', and both views (often concurring, but occasionally different) were integrated in the discussion. These interviews did not have a predefined battery of questions, but they all included at least the following aspects (Authors, 2018; Authors, in press):

i) Explanation of the content and purpose of the interview;

ii)Visualisation of the excerpts analysed with the speakers: playback methodology or prompted recall (Norris, 2011, p. 59);

iii) Checking of the orthographic transcript;

iv) Discussion of aspects the analysis had revealed as relevant for the persuasive effect (e.g. a particular use of intonation or a gesture);

v) Exchange of interpretations regarding the intent and potential effect of these aspects.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This paper presents a combined multimodal and ethnographic analysis of evaluation as a multimodally realised persuasive strategy. The results of this analysis show that speakers in the corpus of product pitches use evaluation as a multimodal persuasive strategy with a frequency of 2.9 times per minute. This frequency is obtained as follows: number of instances of the evaluation/ total duration of the rich points subcorpus in minutes. The following graph (Figure 3) presents the number of times per minute that speakers use evaluation and the distribution per modal realisation, i.e. how many times per minute speakers evaluate using words, intonation and gestures.

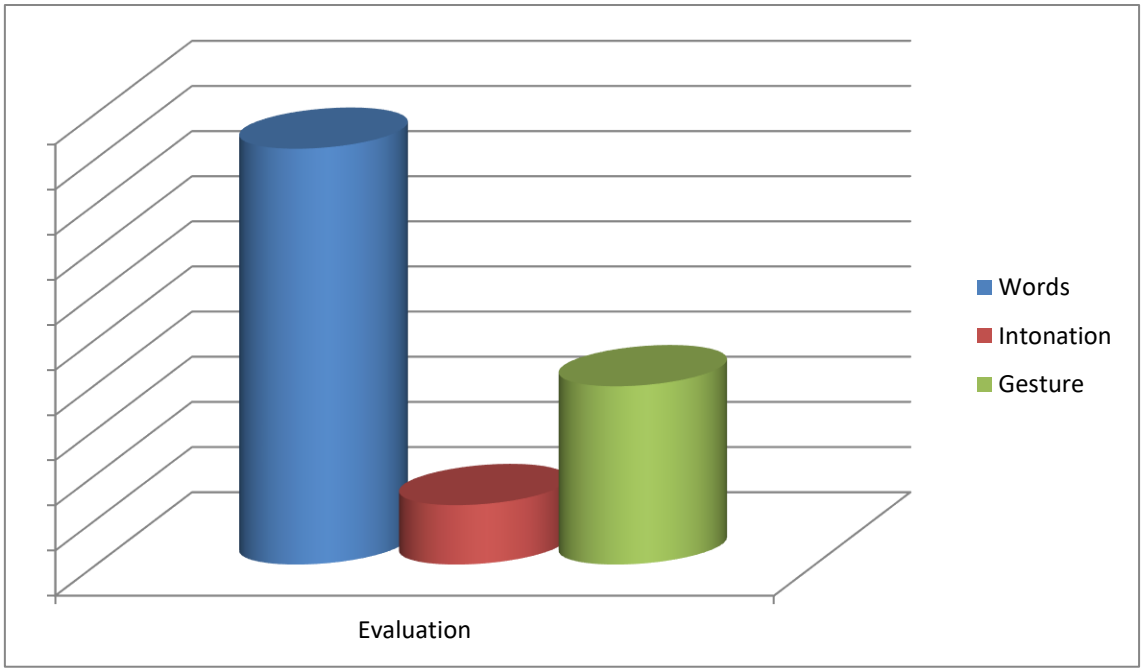

Figure 3. Evaluation in product pitches according to modal realisation

Although the graph shows that words are the most frequently used semiotic mode, it can be seen that gestures also play a significant role, followed by intonation. This supports the initial hypothesis that evaluation in product pitches is multimodal. However, what we believe is most revealing about the data is not the individual quantitative contribution of each semiotic mode, but the way in which evaluation can become more effective as a persuasive strategy when it is realised as a skilfully orchestrated multimodal ensemble. In this sense, we take a different approach to Filliettaz (2004), because our focus is not on identifying which mode takes the bulk of interaction, but rather on the joint effect of all the modes studied.

The use of pointing gestures in the corpus clearly illustrates the claim made in the previous paragraph. Speakers occasionally differentiate their products or show the benefit they can provide using pointing gestures. Such gestures would probably not be considered evaluative or particularly persuasive if taken in isolation, but they become so when they are integrated in a multimodal ensemble and work closely with other semiotic modes to convey a persuasive message. In the following paragraphs we analyse three examples that illustrate this finding.

The first example is PPSE1. In this rich point the speaker presents a waxing device for ski equipment, and compares it to competitors to show the advantage it offers. Figure 4

shows the use of words, intonation and gestures in this particular moment of the presentation. In the transcript shown in the figure prominent syllables are capitalized, syllables below or above the line represent a lower or higher pitch and arrows indicate rise or fall tone.

Figure 4. Deictic evaluation in PPSE1

The speaker points backwards to the screen as he pronounces ‘waxing kits’ (i.e. competitor products), but keeping his body orientation towards the audience. This is important because by doing this the speaker is making sure the audience does not focus on the image projected but on himself, consequently it seems to suggest that what is being projected does not deserve attention. In addition, the pointing with a close fist (CF) and extended thumb suggests that the exact location is not important (Kendon, 2004). Therefore, the gesture can be interpreted as disregarding, negatively evaluating what is being pointed at, and acquires a pragmatic function. The effect is supported by the comparative adjective used to describe his product immediately preceding the gesture (‘easier to use’), and the referring (rising) tone that presents the information as shared with the audience and agreed upon, as if adding ‘as you already know’. In fact, the speaker recalled during the interview how he had already mentioned this topic before, hence his treating it as shared knowledge. During the interview the speaker also explained that the gesture is partly a result of his training, because he was taught never to turn his back to the audience, but agrees that the way of pointing is disregarding and entails a negative evaluation that he hopes the audience will share.

This example shows how the speaker adopts a problem-solution approach in his pitch, as suggested by Woods et al. (2014) and Leper (2015), but most interestingly, it also shows how a multimodal ensemble orchestrated through gestures, words and intonation helps the speaker to achieve an appropriate evaluation of his product: credible and without unintentionally highlighting competitors (Woods et al., 2014). On the other hand, in line with Cheng (2004), it is also interesting to note the powerful and at the same time subtle effect of intonation in presenting this positive evaluation of the product as shared knowledge and consequently as already agreed and not open to discussion.

The second example is PPTO2. In this pitch the speaker is presenting a tablet with pictures of the body that doctors can use to communicate more easily with their patients. The market idea is to use this product as merchandising that pharmaceutical companies can give to doctors as presents and in this way advertise their products. In this rich point the speaker is explaining that this is already common practice among pharmaceuticals, and is trying to convince the audience that his product can be a much better gift for doctors compared to the merchandising that they usually receive. As he makes this comparison he uses explicit verbal negative evaluation of his competitors ('a useless gadget'). Simultaneously, he moves his left arm towards the screen behind him where a picture of these competitor products is shown, again without shifting the focus from the audience (Figure 5). In addition, the gesture is very unspecific. Note how the hand stays open in an OHS (open hand supine) gesture and there is no extended finger, so much so that it is not clear what he is pointing at exactly. This conveys lack of interest and suggests to the audience that the image projected is not important and not worth paying attention to. Therefore, the deictic gesture again acquires a pragmatic function. A flat, unenthusiastic intonation further contributes to create this effect. According to the speaker, the gesture was a way of 'wiping off' competitors, something which is very coherent with the initial interpretation. As in the previous example, a combined use of words, intonation and gesture helps this speaker in achieving a desirable evaluation, particularly in preventing competitor products from receiving too much attention from the audience (Woods et al., 2014).

a USEless GADget

Figure 5. Deictic evaluation in PPTO2

We would like to turn now to a slightly different example in which the speaker uses a multimodal ensemble including pointing gestures to evaluate not the product, but the problem which this product is trying to solve and the attitude of the audience towards this problem. Table 5 shows the transcript and intonation used in this excerpt. Figure 6 shows the most relevant gestures.

Table 5. Deictic evaluation in PPPA1

Orthographic transcription
You have an app. That app is important to your business, important to your business success. Because of that, you care about how your users experience that app, and you care about how your users feel about that app. But sometimes, you deliver a bad experience. Sometimes, you deliver a real bad experience.
DI transcription
1. you HAVE an APP ↘

2. that APP is imPORtant to your business	↘
3. imPORtant to your business sucCESS	↘
4. beCAUSE of THAT	↗
5. you CARE about how your users exPErience that app	↗
6. and you care about HOW your users FEEL about that app	↘
7. but SOMEtimes you deliver a BAD experience	↘
8. SOMEtimes you deliver a REAL bad experience	↘

Figure 6. Deictic evaluation in PPPA1

It is noticeable that the speaker addresses the audience using the personal pronouns 'you' and 'your' throughout to get them involved. The use of evaluative and emotionally loaded lexicon is also quite prominent ('important', 'real bad', 'you care', 'how your users feel'). Regarding intonation, he uses fall tones in most of the units, treating the information in this extract as mainly new. This use of intonation draws attention towards the problem or market gap. On the other hand, it also contrasts with the way he is presenting a potentially familiar situation to the audience through his words ('You have an app', suggests that this situation is taken for granted). Concerning

gestures, it is noticeable how deictic gestures with an extended finger pointing to the audience try to get them involved and convey the idea that they are directly affected by the problem presented (i.e. your app may be delivering a bad experience for customers), and that they should do something about this. In this sense they can be considered referential, pragmatic and also interpersonal. The speaker confirmed during the interview that he was using a potentially familiar situation to create a sense of 'shared conspiracy'. He also agrees that part of the intention is raising awareness about this potential jeopardy. In fact he described his gestures as 'scolding' and agrees with the idea that they are meant to prompt people to consider a potential danger or problem and react to it (Author, in press). This example also illustrates how the speaker resorts to rational and emotional appeals, in line with Bamford (2007), in a multimodal way: he presents the threat as credible through his use of words and intonation, and at the same turns it into something frightening because his pointing gestures convey that it can directly affect the audience.

The examples of product pitches discussed in this section show how evaluation can be realised multimodally for a more powerful persuasive effect. In particular, it is remarkable how the combined effect of the three modes analysed results in something greater than the mere sum of its parts. A pointing gesture in isolation would probably not be considered evaluative or persuasive per se, but it can become so when it is considered as part of a multimodal ensemble. At the same time, we believe that the nuances that each semiotic mode adds to the ensemble make it possible for speakers to accurately fine-tune their evaluations to achieve a persuasive effect, as previous literature advises (Bamford, 2007; Woods et al., 2014). A carefully orchestrated multimodal ensemble will allow speakers to direct the attention of the audience as desired (e.g. keeping them focused on the speaker or the product and not on competitors), adjust the level of explicitness (e.g. when an explicit negative evaluation of a competitor is not acceptable a subtle gesture or use of intonation can supply this effect), or appeal to credibility and emotions (e.g. presenting a threat as real).

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study confirm the initial hypothesis that evaluation in our corpus of product pitches is used as a multimodal persuasive strategy. They also highlight the important role of pointing gestures in this process. Speakers in our corpus orchestrate

different modes into coherent, evaluative multimodal ensembles, frequently including deictic gestures. In the examples analysed speakers point at projected images of competitors and evaluate them negatively in comparison with their own products, with different degrees of explicitness. Alternatively, they point at the audience while they evaluate the problem that their product is trying to solve, but always using a combination of semiotic modes implying at least words, intonation and gestures. It is precisely this combination of modes that allows speakers to fine-tune their evaluations to create the desired persuasive effect on the audience (e.g. presenting their product as a better option without losing credibility or highlighting a competitor). Therefore, it can be concluded that speakers should master the use of different semiotic modes to follow the advice offered in specialised guides to pitching and design effective product pitches.

From a methodological point of view, the combination of MDA with ethnography in this study offers the possibility of triangulating results, which is of crucial importance in a study that relies to a great extent on communicative intentions. The input received from the speakers is vital to elucidate the intended communicative effect of a complex multimodal ensemble. Even if speakers tend to be more self-conscious of their use of words, and frequently lack the metalanguage to discuss their gestures and intonation, they are still in a privileged position to explain what they were trying to achieve with their orchestration of semiotic modes. The use of ethnographic methods also contributes to prevent a tendency to overestimate the importance of each aspect analysed, which is a consequence of the minute analysis made available by MDA. Discussion with speakers can help assign the appropriate importance to each mode and keep the focus on the bigger picture, i.e. the context in which they appear, or the ensemble orchestrated.

The study presented in this paper focuses on three modes: words, intonation, and gestures. This decision is derived from the need to make the multimodal analysis feasible, but the multimodal ensemble that is orchestrated in product pitches is considerably more complex. As it can be seen from the results presented in this paper the contribution of each mode is mutually interdependent, and this makes it difficult to delimit or exclude them. This is the case of visuals in the examples discussed, which were out of the scope of the analysis, but still contributed very prominently to the evaluative and persuasive effect intended by the whole multimodal ensemble and occasionally became essential to interpret the rest of the modes. For example, the fact that deictic gestures often pointed at a projected image of a competitor product is

essential to provide the gesture with an evaluative function. Also the body orientation of the speaker is of crucial importance to direct the attention of the audience as desired.

Therefore, further research should expand the scope of the multimodal ensembles studied to offer a more comprehensive view. This could shed more light on the complex ways in which evaluation is conveyed in these highly persuasive oral presentations, as more modes are revealed to contribute to it. Likewise, larger-scale studies might help to increase the generalisability of the results. These findings will help us discern what makes product pitches effective and convincing. They can also be used to improve materials for training in the field of Language for Specific Purposes (LSP), ultimately benefiting practitioners who use this genre in the development of their professional tasks.

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