Prosodic Mitigation of Face-threatening Riposte in Sports Media Discourse: A Phono-pragmatic Analysis

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ABSTRACT:

The current study focuses on the analysis of riposte in football press conferences through the phono-pragmatic approach to discourse analysis, with specific emphasis on the use of prosody in mitigating face-threats in interactions. Specifically, the study investigates how prosodic features interact with semiotic meaning and context in shaping pragmatic interpretations in institutional sports media discourse and mitigating the potential of the confrontational force of the utterances. An eclectic model is designed for the study and qualitatively applied on selected samples extracted from press conferences of Premier League managers. The results obtained confirm that the use of riposte in press conferences relies on careful modulation of prosody instead of aggressiveness. Restricted or moderately restricted F0, use of fall-rise and rise-fall tones, effective placement of pitch accent, and moderated intensity serve as means for softening rejection, disagreement, and evaluative stance expressed by the managers. Indirectness, humour, and interactional control also play a significant role in the reduction of the face-threatening potential while maintaining professionalism in journalist–manager interactions. Functionally, riposte is seen as one of the most important reframing strategies, next to interactional control and audience design.

Keywords: phono-pragmatics, prosody, riposte, sport contexts, politeness

1. Introduction

The interrelation between prosody and meaning is a problem that represents the very essence of linguistic theory because it deals with the question of the direct contribution of prosody to the interpretation of messages. As emphasized by Wharton (2012), prosody information cannot be viewed as encoding any determinate meanings in the way in which lexical information encodes them. In other words, the role of prosody is seen as largely context-dependent and open to interpretation. This view is in line with discourse-oriented theories of intonation.

In effect, prosody is considered more adequately as a facilitator in the process of interpretation rather than a medium for encoding any semantic information. Prosody provides guidance with regard to relevant contextual assumptions, as well as to the interpretive process itself. As House (2007) puts it, prosody can be viewed as helping to "guide the listener in how to proceed: how to access the relevant cognitive

context […] how to evaluate that contribution" (p. 369). This view highlights the procedural nature of interpreting prosody.

However, the interpretation of prosody results from the interplay between the processes of coding and the processes of inference. In other words, whereas prosody, especially in its linguistic form, can be viewed as involving the coding process, prosody in its more natural and emotional form tends to involve the process of inference. This represents the dual-process account of prosody interpretation, viewed as a hybrid between the phonology and pragmatics levels of language (Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Wharton, 2012).

Recent works in prosodic pragmatics reinforce the claim that prosody does not convey any fixed semantic meaning but is involved in the interpretation process instead. Prosody interacts dynamically with other communicational features, including the emotional aspect of language use, as pointed out by Romero-Trillo and Sadeghi (2024). Minor changes in prosodic parameters may have a significant effect on the interpretation process since different aspects of prosody help the hearer to assess the contextual situation better. Hence, prosody helps to achieve the meaning through the interaction with other communicational parameters and, thus, contributes to meaning indirectly.

Moreover, the relationship between prosody and meaning can be understood more specifically by considering the role played by prosody in organising information and guiding the interpretation of discourse. According to Romero-Trillo and Sadeghi (2024), prosodic features like tonicity and nuclear accent indicate which part of the utterance carries more weight in terms of salience or significance and helps distinguish given from new information. It suggests that prosody is procedural in nature and guides the attention of the listener. This means that it influences cognitive processing in discourse comprehension. Meaning, therefore, comes as a result of interaction between prosodic cues and contextual assumptions.

Prosody plays an essential role in the implementation of politeness strategies, put by Brown and Levinson (1987), by helping the speaker adjust force, tone, and interpersonal effect of their message. In addition to lexical and grammatical means, prosody variation helps convey indirectness, mitigation, and stance, which are crucial components of politeness. Research shows that prosodic parameters like pitch variation, intonation, and speech rate can indicate different levels of imposition and thus contribute to the assessment of politeness or face threat (Kalbos, 2024). Besides, earlier research into the prosody-pragmatics connection illustrates how intonation combines with context-related factors to communicate attitudes of certainty, hesitancy, and deference, among others, which influence politeness (Prieto & Rigau, 2011).

2. Phono-pragmatics

Phono-pragmatics explores the relationship between prosody and pragmatic meaning, in which vocal features are used as cues for interpreting the intended meaning. Prosody refers to a set of vocal features including the fundamental frequency (henceforth; F0) pitch, tonal contours, and intensity, which have the potential for being used both as gradient, paralinguistic cues and as organized phonological concepts (Wichmann & Blakemore, 2006). Although prosodic variation has traditionally been used for expressing emotions and attitudes, recent theories have shown its potential for identifying the meaning of utterance. In this regard, prosodic features including pitch and accent have shown potential for being used as crucial cues for hearers in order to arrive at intended interpretations.

Phono-pragmatics is proposed as an interactionally grounded approach in which meaning is understood as being constituted by the interplay between prosodic features and discourse context. As proposed in the work of Wichmann et al. (2009), the pragmatic effects of speech are not constituted by either linguistic form or prosodic realization in isolation; instead, they are integrated in the process of interaction. The multifunctionality of prosodic features is a significant aspect of prosodic interpretation. It has been found that the same prosodic feature might have different pragmatic functions depending on the discourse setting, while different prosodic features might

combine to convey a single interactional meaning (Wichmann et al., 2009). This shows that prosodic features must not be seen as a system of meaning in itself but rather as a flexible resource used by the speaker in strategic ways.

A further development in phono-pragmatics is proposed by Romero-Trillo & Newell (2012), in which the relationship between prosody and meaning is discussed from the perspective of a fundamentally dynamic view of communication. In other words, pragmatics is not seen as a static relationship between language and context but as a dynamic process in which meaning is constantly constructed through interaction. This dichotomy between dynamic and static approaches to pragmatics puts emphasis on the role of prosody as an active factor in meaning construction rather than an accessory or subsidiary factor.

A Notable contribution to phono-pragmatics is the discourse-based model of intonation proposed by Levis and Wichmann (2015), which attempts to bring together the insights of the formal and functional perspectives of intonation. In this regard, the model draws on the Autosegmental-Metrical model of intonation (Pierrehumbert, 1980), which refers to the intonational structure in terms of the presence of tonal units such as High (H) and Low (L). At the same time, the model attempts to integrate the functional perspective of intonation in discourse, as discussed by Wichmann (2000). The framework also pays attention to some basic acoustic features which are central for the realisation of prosody. The features include the F0, tonal contours, pitch accents, and intensity. These features are seen as observable and measurable cues of spoken discourse. At the same time, the communicative significance of these features is not seen as fixed or inherent, rather, it emerges through interpretation in context (Levis and Wichmann, 2015).

Chen et al. (2018) have attempted to expand the scope of phono-pragmatics by showing that prosody is actually instrumental in shaping pragmatic inferences instead of merely accompanying semantic content. Thus, prosodic prominence actually channels attention towards particular interpretations, thereby limiting the range of inferences that can be made on a particular utterance. This is a context-dependent phenomenon in the sense that though there is a role for prosody in interpretation, there is a potential for contextual information to override prosody, thereby showing that meaning is actually constructed as a combination of prosody and discourse context. Furthermore, there is a suggestion for asymmetry in interpretation in terms of some meanings being default and others becoming salient only via prosody (Chen et al., 2018).

Another notable contribution to phono-pragmatics is the concept of Adaptive Context, which views meaning as a process in a state of constant modulation and located within the context of interaction (Romero-Trillo & Sadeghi, 2024). Adaptive Context results from the interaction of three different but interconnected contexts: the private context (interlocutors' inner knowledge and assumptions), the linguistic context (the evolving utterance itself), and the situational context (the external communicative setting) (see Fig. 1). Meaning does not emerge from any one context but from the constant alignment of the three contexts in the process of communication. Within the context of communication, the process of sifting out (i.e. contextual sifting) the irrelevant or competing meanings occurs to arrive at the most contextually appropriate meaning. However, the process is facilitated by the adaptive mechanisms in the form of prosodic and discourse cues.

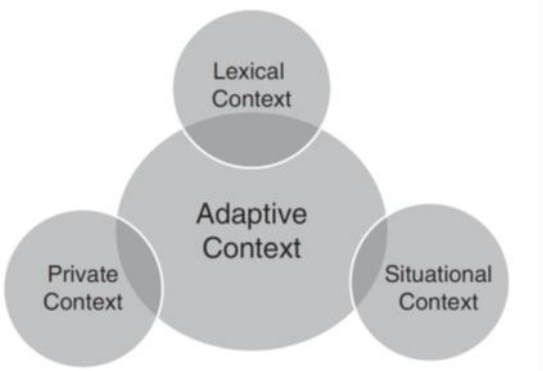

Figure (1): The Function of Adaptive Context (Romero-Trillo & Sadeghi, 2024)

This study adopts Levis and Wichmann's (2015) integrative model for the analysis of riposte in football press conferences. Their framework is based on the notion of context-dependent interpretation, which refers to the use of the prosodic features as a guide for the development of a range of potential inferences. The inferences include informational structure, communicative force, speaker attitudes, and interactional positioning, and are derived through the interplay between acoustic realisation and contextual factors. Such a perspective is based on the idea that intonation does not have a direct effect on meaning encoding. Rather, it is seen as a part of the inferential processes that guide the construction of meaning.

3. Riposte

From a linguistic lens, the term "riposte" is metaphorically borrowed from its use in swords-fencing to describe an immediate and strategic verbal response in conversations. In fact, a riposte is a reactive shift in the process of turn-taking that responds not only to a prior utterance but does so with accuracy, usually serving rhetorical or pragmatically motivated functions like counter-reply, humour, or deflection (Hutchby, 2001). Such a concept is strictly relevant in high-stakes interactional contexts where an act of riposte is differentiated from an ordinary reply in that the former is inherently strategic, employed to reflect dominance or social identity between interlocutors.

Speaking of the pragmatic functions mentioned above, namely, counter-reply, humour, or deflection, the scale of how these functions influence the management of social identity varies depending on contextual factors as well as paralinguistic cues. That is, the same act of riposte may have different potential inferences depending on the manner (how it is said), timing (when it is said), and the relationship between the interlocutors themselves. In this regard, Dynel (2011) asserts the centrality of Goffman's face theory (1967) and the context of situation in interpreting the function of riposte. In threatening or adversarial settings, a riposte can weaken an opponent's argument, as it functions as a counter-argument to mitigate a face-threatening act. On the other hand, in friendly cooperative settings, a well-timed riposte can enhance group relations, as it functions as a humorous act. Such a pragmatic perspective emphasise that ripostes have versatile functions that extend beyond mere responsiveness.

Dynel (2009) shows three techniques of performing ripostes, the first is done through interactional pun (i.e. punning ripostes), the second is based on the pragmatic ambiguity (i.e. pragmatic ripostes), and the third is made by rhetorical questions (i.e. rhetorical ripostes). What governs all of these types of ripostes is the addressor's "pretended misunderstanding of the preceding turn, which prompts him/her to skew the intended meaning and activate another one" (Dynel, 2009, p. 1292).

In addition, riposte can be viewed as a more general communicative practice extending beyond reaction to insult and embracing a wide range of utterance or situation types. Riposte is not characterised by opposition or aggression but is instead defined by a set of features that collectively account for its effectiveness. These features include

perceived immediacy, or the response being seen as produced more quickly than might be expected given its complexity; use of contextually optimal wording, or the utterance being formulated in a way that appears particularly appropriate or ingenious for the situation; and positive audience uptake, or the audience recognising and appreciating and sometimes evaluating favourably the response provided (Arab, 2020).

From an interactional lens, riposte is best understood as a phenomenon that arises from the sequential nature of the discourse rather than as an autonomous linguistic form. Riposte can be described as a second-turn response given in reaction to the preceding turn in the conversation. Therefore, the meaning and impact of the riposte cannot be examined in isolation from the interactive setting because they derive from the position in the conversation in which they occur (Chovanec, 2011). Additionally, ripostes show high potential in being used as stance-taking moves and verbal contest, where the speaker can resist, reinterpret, and undermine the previous contribution in the conversation (Chovanec, 2011). This shows the potential of ripostes in the negotiation of meaning and interpersonal positioning, where riposte is used in balancing confrontation and rapport in different communicational contexts.

For the purpose of analysis, the current study adopts Dynel's (2009, p. 1291) definition of riposte as its operational definition: "a quick and witty response to a preceding turn with which it forms an adjacency pair."

4. Methodology

This study designs an eclectic model (Fig. 2) for analysing ripostes phono-pragmatically, including the acoustic features, the context-dependent potential inferences, the pragmatic meaning, and the functions of riposte. The model is based on the phonological and discourse-oriented account of intonation presented in Levis and Wichmann (2015), specifically their treatment of acoustic features and context-dependent potential inferences, while extending this account to capture the pragmatic meanings that are aligned with the acoustic features as well as associated with riposte. The analysis starts by identifying the act of riposte in the selected football press conferences. Through PRAAT, the transcribed data are converted into a visual spectrogram to reveal the acoustic elements. The analysis then highlights the variable ranges and levels of different acoustic elements and examines how their interaction with semantic content leads to pragmatic inferences, which in turn facilitate the identification of the most common pragmatic meanings through examining the politeness strategies. Finally, this process leads to the identification of the most common functions of riposte in football press conferences.

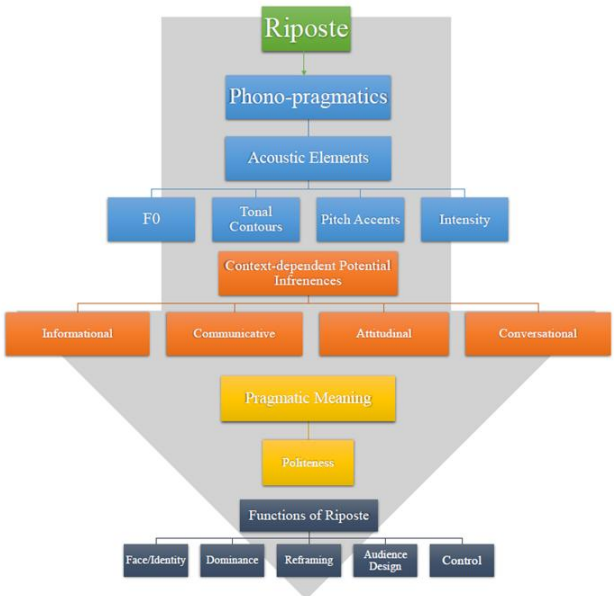

Figure (2): The Eclectic Model for the Phono-pragmatic Analysis of Riposte

4.1 Data Collection and Description

Data were obtained from the official YouTube channels of English Premier League clubs to ensure the authenticity, accessibility, and uniformity of institutional environment of all recordings used. The sample of analysis consists of four texts representing the following four native English-speaking managers: Steve Cooper (Leicester City), Sean Dyche (Everton), Eddie Howe (Newcastle United), and Russell Martin (Southampton). The dataset is drawn from the 2024/2025 English Premier League, which is selected on the ground that it represents the most recent fully completed season at the time of data collection, thereby ensuring both relevance and completeness of the discourse context.

The decision to focus on native English speakers has been made for the sake of research reliability and validity, as it minimises any possible impact of second language interference on prosodic realisation of linguistic forms. The texts in question primarily include pre-match press conferences, thus providing naturally occurring spoken discourse marked by spontaneous interaction and evaluative comments along with instances of riposte. Quality of audio material and its contextual characteristics have also been considered while compiling this corpus.

4.2 Data Analysis

Text (1)

Cooper: I'm only looking at Palace.

YouTube Link #1

Context: This is a pre-match press conference which was held on 12 Sept. 2024, ahead of Crystal Palace match. The journalist chooses not to focus only on the forthcoming fixture but asks about plans regarding the coming international break and squad selection. The journalist thus moves the focus off the coming match, thereby causing Cooper to bring the discussion back to the current event only.

The underlined utterance above is the riposte act, graphically represented in fig. 3.

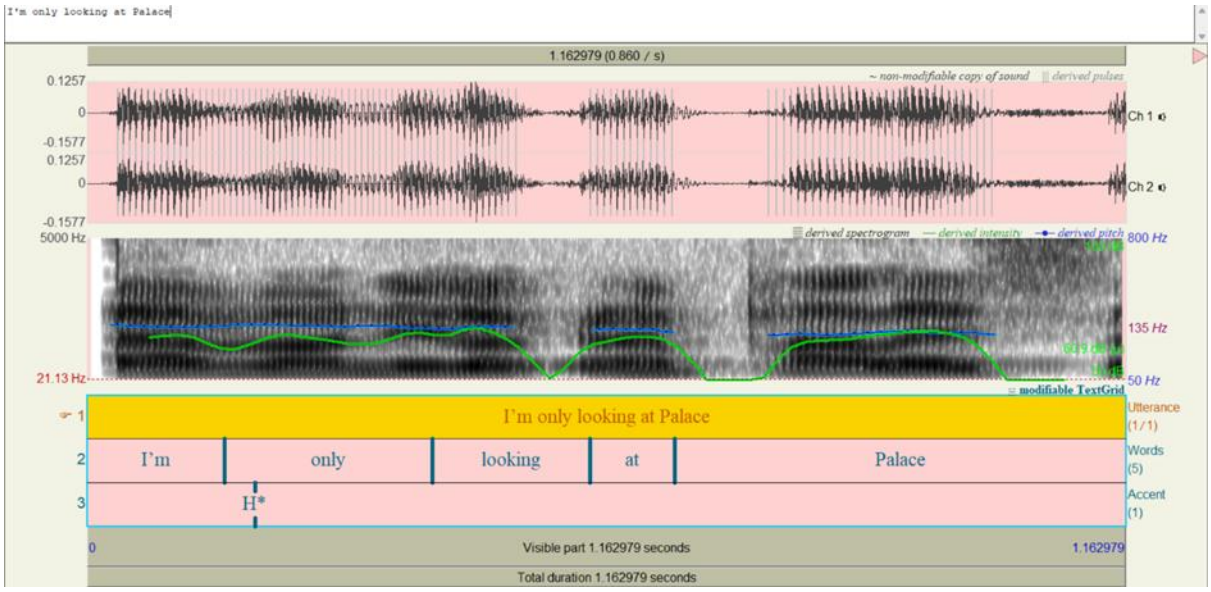

Figure (3): Praat Spectrogram of text #1

1. **Acoustic Elements**
   a. **F0**: From the blue pitch track above, it is evident that the instance of riposte is characterised by a rather restricted pitch range, where the mean value stands at 134.9 Hz, while the lowest and highest frequencies are 118.9 Hz and 147.1 Hz, respectively. This shows that Cooper adopts a controlled and stable pitch modulation strategy.
   b. **Tonal Contour**: The most dominant tonal contour is a falling pattern where there is a gradual decline in the F0 level throughout the utterance and toward the final lexical item "Palace". This indicates that the speaker uses a

terminal configuration that implies closure.

c. **Pitch Accent**: The utterance exhibits a high pitch accent H* which is prominently aligned with "only" – this being the point where the F0 reaches to its highest level without a preceding sharp rise. The importance of the pitch accent position in the word "only" is that it represents functional significance of restriction and exclusiveness, thus functioning as the focal element of the utterance. It is important to point out that the pitch accent does not coincide with the maximum intensity.

d. **Intensity**: The overall intensity values show moderate and relatively stable distribution (mean: 60.8 dB; maximum: 68.2 dB). There seems to be no clear relationship between peak intensity and pitch accent, this suggests that prosodic prominence appears to be mainly indicated by F0.

2. Inferences

a. **Informational**: In terms of information structure, the utterance encodes contrastive focus, mainly realised through the lexical item "only", which limits the scope of reference to single entity "Palace". The instance of riposte in this context does not introduce any new information, but rather limits the domain of information and effectively exclude any other alternative interpretations.

b. **Communicative**: The riposte functions mainly as a statement, based on the falling tonal contour, which is conventionally aligned with declarative force. Although in the form of a statement, it is simultaneously performative as a rejection and as a redirection of the question posed by the journalist, while maintaining the formal declarative nature of the utterance.

c. **Attitudinal**: The falling contour, combined with the restricted F0 range and moderate intensity, implies an assertive stance. In particular, the lack of any rise or pitch variation helps reduce confusion and makes the speaker's attitude more decisive and authoritative that shows Cooper's confidence in establishing the boundaries of discussion.

d. **Conversational**: The utterance conveys finality, as indicated by the terminal falling contour, which signifies the end of the exchange. The pattern of intonation discourages further elaboration with an intention of closure.

3. Pragmatic Meaning

a. **Politeness**: This utterance operates as an FTA directed at the journalist's positive face since it directly dismisses the relevance of the question. The speaker's riposte conveys a bald on record strategy, as the rejection is conveyed directly and without mitigation. The prosodic realisation minimises this effect to some extent:

- moderated intensity avoids being aggressive.
- controlled F0 range to maintain composed.
- a falling overall contour that reduces confrontational force.

Thus, such techniques serve to keep the interaction within acceptable professional bounds while the response is direct.

4. Functions of Riposte: This prosodic pattern—characterised by a restricted low-to-mid F0 range, a falling tonal contour, a H* pitch accent on "only," and moderate intensity—implies that Cooper employs the riposte mainly as a strategy of reframing, with interactional control and face/identity management as secondary functions.

Text (2)

Dyche: well, hopefully football.

YouTube Link #2

Context: This is a pre-match press conference held on 26 Sept. 2024, ahead of Everton vs Crystal Palace match. There was considerable media attention on Everton as well as off-field discussions about the club due to its poor performance. The journalist asks Dyche regarding the topics that Dyche would talk about with the media after the chaos dies down. Dyche humorously answers that hopefully they will talk about football instead.

The underlined utterance above is the riposte act, graphically represented in fig. 4.

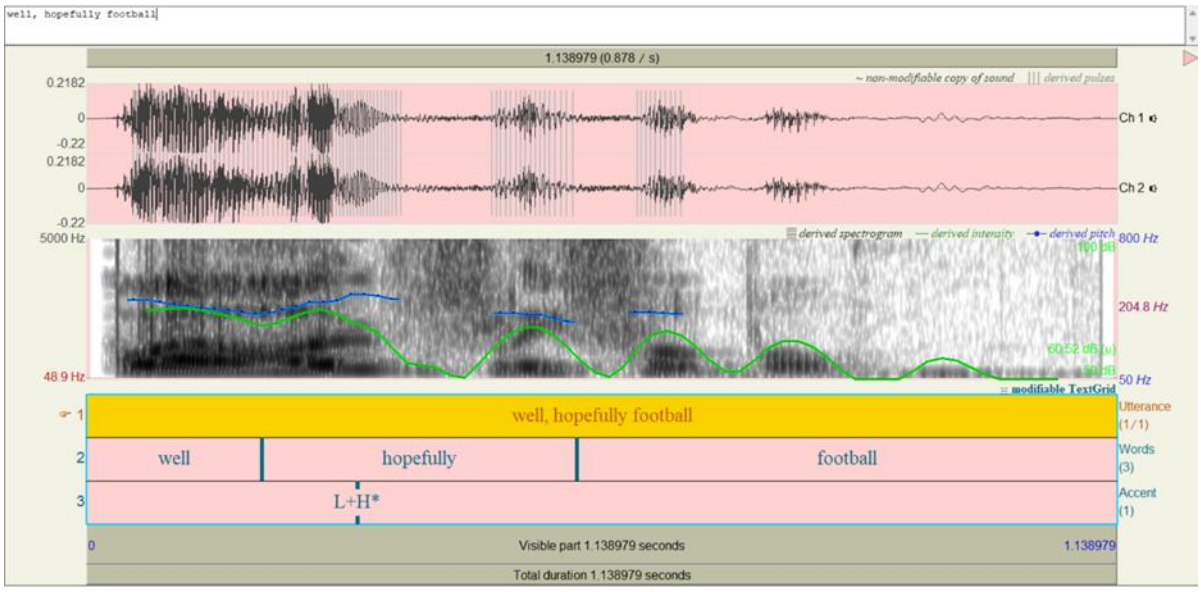

Figure (4): Praat Spectrogram of text #2

1. **Acoustic Elements**
   a. **F0**: From the blue pitch track, it is evident that the instance of riposte is characterised by a relatively high pitch range situated within the upper region of the speaker's F0 span, where the mean value stands at 204.7 Hz, while the minimum and maximum frequencies are 155.6 Hz and 269.7 Hz, respectively. This clearly shows that the speaker utilizes an F0 modulation technique, allowing for significant variations during the speech event instead of limiting the prosodic range.
   b. **Tonal Contour**: The most dominant tonal contour is a rise-fall pattern, where F0 moves downward through the lexical item "well" and sharply rises towards the accented syllable in "hopefully" before gradually moving downwards to the final element in the utterance, "football." This indicates stance-taking rather than neutral information delivery.
   c. **Pitch Accent**: The utterance displays a rising pitch accent L+H* which is positioned on "hopefully"—where the F0 shows a noticeable low-to-high movement reaching to its peak. The use of this accent contributes to making the lexical item "hopefully" the focal element within the utterance, emphasising the speaker's stance toward the situation under discussion. It is important to note, however, that the intensity of the accented syllable (69.8 dB) does not correlate with the maximum intensity point in the utterance; on the contrary, there is a decrease in intensity with a simultaneous rise in pitch.
   d. **Intensity**: The overall intensity values show moderate and variable distribution (mean: 60.5 dB; maximum:

75.2 dB). Although some local peaks can be identified, these do not correspond to the accented syllable, this suggests that prosodic prominence appears to be mainly indicated by F0, whereas intensity plays a secondary role.

2. **Inferences**
   a. **Informational**: In terms of information structure, the utterance primarily functions as a contrastive focus, emphasizing football-related discussion against the off-field chaos implied by the journalist. "Hopefully" is emphasized to reveal the speaker's evaluative stance toward what football press conferences should ideally be about.
   b. **Communicative**: The riposte functions as a statement, despite the use of interrogative-like prosody at certain stages of the contour. The utterance ultimately expresses an evaluative assertion about what the media should focus on.
   c. **Attitudinal**: The rise-fall contour, the relatively high F0 range, and the L+H* pitch accent on "hopefully" conveys both irony and assertiveness. Dyche humorously critiques the overabundance of off-field talk about the club, while at the same time reveals his preference for returning to football-related topics.
   d. **Conversational**: The utterance conveys finality, as Dyche bring closure to the interaction, since he successfully concludes their exchange by reformulating in a humorous way the assumption put forward by the journalist. The falling pitch track towards the final element of the utterance contributes to the sense of interactional closure.
3. **Pragmatic Meaning**
   a. **Politeness**: The speaker's riposte performs a positive politeness strategy, as the speaker uses humour and contextual understanding to maintain harmony with the journalists while criticising the surrounding discourse. The prosodic realisation minimises the FTA to some extent:
   - The rise-fall overall contour reduces baldness.
   - The moderated intensity mitigates aggressiveness.
4. **Functions of Riposte**: This prosodic pattern—characterised by relatively high F0 range, a rise-fall tonal contour, a L+H* pitch accent on "hopefully," and moderate intensity—implies that Dyche employs the riposte mainly as a strategy of reframing, that is to redirect the discussion from trivial off-field speculations toward football itself, with audience design as a secondary function, evident in the humorous manner.

Text (3)

Howe: no, I'm one for stats, if they favour us

YouTube Link #3

Context: This is a pre-match press conference held on 20 Sept 2024, ahead of Newcastle United's away match vs Fulham. The journalist brings out some of the positives of the Newcastle team, including their excellent record under the leadership of Howe in comparison with some other top teams playing in the Premier League, and remarks that Howe rarely makes any comment about the stats. Howe jokingly remarks that he only loves stats that positively support his team.

The underlined utterance above is the riposte act, graphically represented in fig. 5.

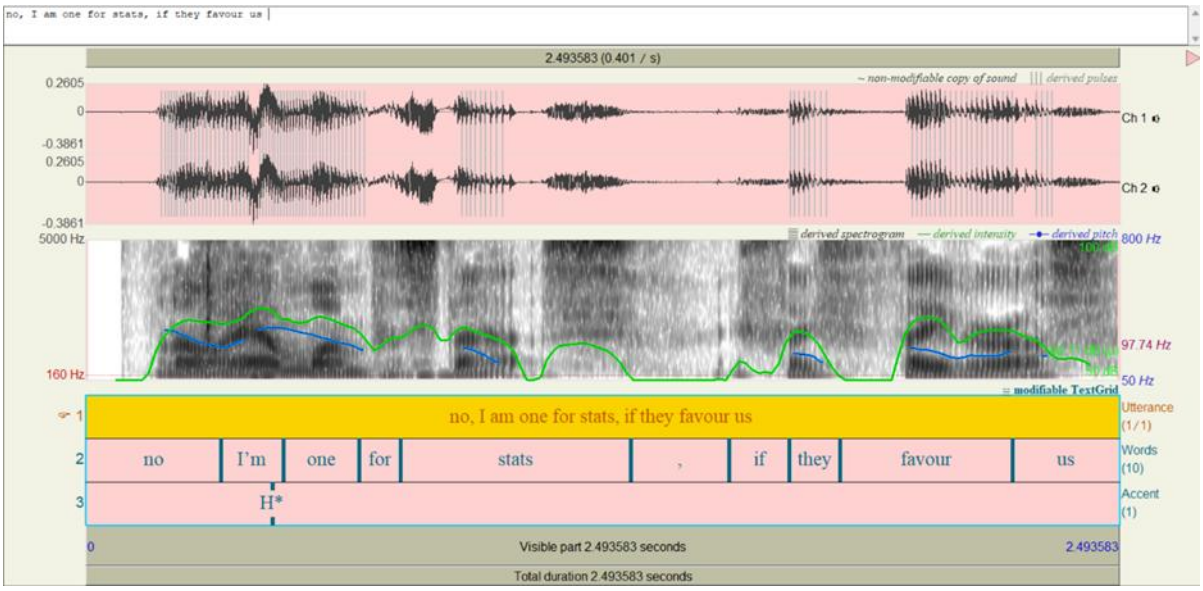

Figure (5): Praat Spectrogram of text #3

1. **Acoustic Elements**

   a. **F0**: From the blue pitch track, it is evident that the instance of riposte is characterised by a relatively low-to-mid pitch range, where the mean value stands at 97.7 Hz, while the minimum and maximum frequencies are 70.6 Hz and 140.3 Hz, respectively. This indicates that the speaker's pitch movement remains controlled throughout the utterance.

   b. **Tonal Contour**: The overall tonal contour is a fall-rise pattern, which starts high then falls downward from the accented syllable before it goes slightly upward toward the final element. This contour pattern implies conversationally humorous and evaluative stance that aids in mitigating the humorous self-referentiality in the riposte.

   c. **Pitch Accent**: The utterance displays a high pitch accent H* which is prominently positioned on "I'm" – where the F0 is elevated to its highest level without a preceding sharp rise. This is pragmatically significant as the pitch accent foregrounds the speaker's self-positioning within the utterance, especially through his humorous admission that the statistics become favourable for him when they support his team. It is important to point out that the intensity value of the pitch accented syllable (74.2 dB) is closely aligned with the maximum intensity (75.3 dB), indicating that both F0 and intensity contribute to the prominence in this instance.

   d. **Intensity**: The overall intensity values show high intensity distribution (mean: 60.1 dB; maximum: 75.3 dB), where the increased intensity matches the stressed part of the utterance. This correlation between the pitch accent and the peak intensity stresses the importance of the speaker's stance and creates an element of humour conveyed through the riposte.

1. **Inferences**

   a. **Informational**: In terms of information structure, the utterance primarily functions as a contrastive focus, contrasting the manager's usual indifference towards stats with the humorous admission that stats become interesting when they favour his team.

   b. **Communicative**: The riposte functions as a statement, as indicated by its declarative nature, marked by the fall-rise tonal contour that adds

another layer of interpretation, which conveys an evaluative riposte to the question posed by the journalist but reformulated in humour.

c. **Attitudinal**: The fall-rise contour, together with H* pitch accent on "I'm", implies a mix of irony and assertiveness. Howe shows his disagreement with the journalist's assumption but softens it through composed prosodic manipulation, as signalled by the low F0 range.

d. **Conversational**: The utterance conveys intimacy; since the self-deprecating utterance used by the speaker makes the interaction friendly. The lack of terminal falling tone at the end of the utterance prevents the riposte from sounding confrontational.

2. **Pragmatic Meaning**

a. **Politeness**: The speaker's riposte performs a positive politeness strategy, as the speaker uses humour and contextual understanding to maintain harmony with the journalists while accepting the compliment implied in the question. The following prosodic cues allow the speaker to maintain conversational solidarity:

- The fall-rise overall contour reduces the self-referential humour.
- The high intensity reinforces engagement and involvement.

4. **Functions of Riposte**: This prosodic pattern—characterised by relatively low F0 range, a fall-rise tonal contour, a H* pitch accent on "I'm," and high intensity—implies that Howe employs the riposte mainly as a strategy of audience design, employing humour to maintain and reinforce rapport with the audience, and the function of reframing as a secondary role.

Text (4)

Martin: no, I don't enjoy it either …

YouTube Link #4

Context: This is a pre-match press conference held on 13 Sept 2024, ahead of Southampton's home match vs Manchester United. Southampton and Manchester United. Southampton was under tremendous pressure after a difficult beginning to their season in the Premier League, thereby increasing scrutiny on Southampton's manager Russell Martin. The journalist wants to know whether the pressure of media criticism overloads him or whether he actually likes this attention. Martin promptly rejects the idea of enjoying media criticism.

The underlined utterance above is the riposte act, graphically represented in fig. 6.

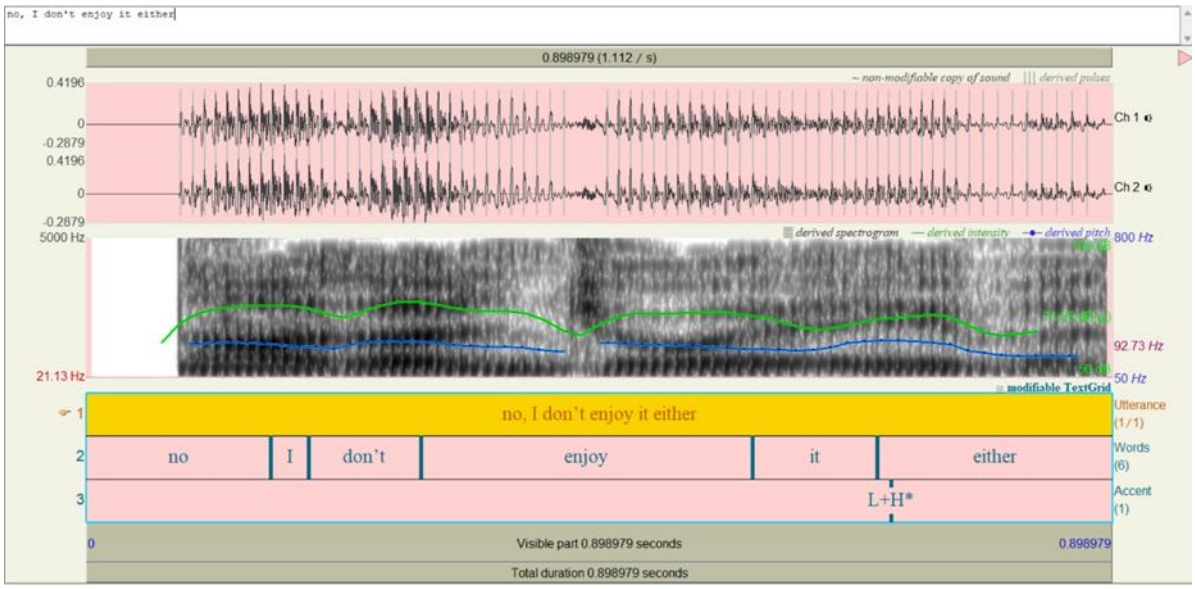

Figure (6): Praat Spectrogram of text #4

1. **Acoustic Elements**
   a. **F0**: From the pitch track, it is evident that the instance of riposte is characterised by a relatively low pitch range, where the mean value stands at 92.7 Hz, while the minimum and maximum frequencies are 76.2 Hz and 105 Hz, respectively. This suggests that the speaker adopts a controlled modulation of F0 to maintain a stable prosodic profile.
   b. **Tonal Contour**: The most dominant tonal contour is a rise-fall pattern, whereby there is a slight rising movement of the F0 track toward the final element of the utterance "either" followed by a downward movement into closure. This tone contour helps achieve a controlled affective stance, which reflects that the speaker maintains restraint from a strong emotional reaction to the idea presented by the journalist that he enjoys being is under criticism.
   c. **Pitch Accent**: The utterance displays a rising pitch accent L+H* which is positioned on "either" – where the F0 shows a clear rising movement reaching to its peak. The placement of this accent highlights "either" as the focal element, implying that the speaker, like other managers in similar contexts, does not appreciate scrutiny. It is important to point out that there is a correspondence between the intensity of the accented syllable (71.3 dB) and the mean intensity (71.6 dB), meaning that prominence is achieved more through pitch movement and positional emphasis rather than exceptional intensity.
   d. **Intensity**: The utterance displays a high intensity level (mean: 71.6 dB; maximum: 77.1 dB) and remain constantly stable throughout the utterance. However, the absence of alignment between the accented syllable and the local peak implies that intensity functions a cue of restrained engagement rather than aggressive emphasis.
2. **Inferences**
   a. **Informational**: In terms of information structure, the utterance primarily functions as a contrastive focus, as the speaker clearly opposes the assumption proposed by the journalist that he may enjoy media scrutiny. The prominence located on "either" emphasises the contrastive interpretation, as the speaker position

himself with other managers who similarly reject such scrutiny.

b. **Communicative**: The riposte functions as a statement, as indicated by its declarative nature and the falling tone at the end. This utterance provides a straightforward reply that counteracts the journalist's presupposition.

c. **Attitudinal**: The rise-fall contour, along with the L+H* pitch accent, implies assertiveness. However, it demonstrates emotional control. The low F0 range helps to minimise dramatic expressiveness, while the following mutual laughter after the riposte creates some sense of irony and interpersonal harmony to soften the rejection expressed in the riposte.

d. **Conversational**: The utterance conveys finality, as Martin closes down the need to express any additional information by indicating that his stance is non-negotiable.

3. **Pragmatic Meaning**

a. **Politeness**: The speaker's riposte performs a bald on record strategy, as the speaker responds to the claim of the journalist in a straightforward manner without minimal mitigation. However, despite the lack of verbal mitigators, the polite tone of voice along with the laughter from both parties serves as a means of reducing the FTA to some extent:

- The rise-fall contour softens the baldness of the riposte.
- The low F0 range reflects emotional control.

4. **Functions of Riposte**: This prosodic pattern—characterised by relatively low F0 range, a rise-fall tonal contour, a L+H* pitch accent on "either," and high intensity—implies that Martin employs the riposte mainly as a strategy of face and identity management, as he does not show any welcoming attitude towards criticism but maintains a calm and composed image. with secondary functions of interactional control and audience design, demonstrated through humour and laughter that jointly create harmony with both the journalist and the wider audience.

4.2 Results and Discussion

After conducting a qualitative analysis of the four selected texts, it becomes apparent that there is a regularity concerning the use of prosody in mitigating the face-threatening potential of riposte within football press conferences. In this sense, riposte is performed through the use of controlled prosody to keep the professional balance while indirectly resisting, redirecting, and challenging journalists' presumptions.

At the acoustic level, prosody contributes to face threat mitigation by manipulating the speaker's F0, tonal contour, pitch accent, and intensity. There is a noticeable tendency towards relatively narrow F0 range (low-to-mid or mid-high) in texts (1), (3), and (4), thus, signifying interactional control and emotional restraint rather than direct confrontation. Though text (2) demonstrates a relatively wide pitch range, the combination of rising and falling contour with moderate intensity does not make the riposte sound overtly aggressive. Accordingly, it can be concluded that the wider pitch range does not necessarily increase face threat because of its interactional meaning.

Tonal contour proves to be the most powerful mitigating device in the selected data. In particular, fall-rising contour in texts (3) makes utterance indirect, humorous, and evaluative, which helps to decrease the possible confrontational force of the riposte. Similarly, rising-falling contour used in texts (2) and (4) decreases prosodic sharpness, balancing assertion with emotional control. Despite the fact that falling terminal contours in text (1) are not accompanied by high level of pitch movement, the moderate intensity of speaking contributes to reducing interpersonal hostility. It means that tonal contours should be considered not only as intonational patterns but as interactional strategies for controlling the face threat level.

The importance of pitch accent placement in prosodic mitigation of face threat is also found.

In particular, prominence in selected texts is usually placed on words having certain evaluative or contrasting meaning, e.g., "only," "hopefully," and "either." It allows focusing on the evaluative stance rather than on aggressive confrontation. Furthermore, achieving prosody prominence not through intensity but through pitch modulation allows the speaker to stay conversationally reserved, as in texts (1) and (4).

Intensity is the third important acoustic feature used for prosodic mitigation. Regardless of some intensity peaks in texts (1), (2), (3), and (4), it generally remains under control. Thus, it can be argued that the lack of constant correlation between the peak of intensity and the placement of pitch accent implies that speakers consciously try to avoid aggressive loudness. However, moderate intensity helps speakers to remain engaged with their audience in the interactionally acceptable way within institutionalised discourse.

As for the inferential meaning conveyed through prosodic mitigation, it can be stated that speakers consistently avoid verbal aggression in spite of the disagreement and implicit rejection contained in ripostes. Texts (2) and (3) demonstrate humour being used as an additional tool of mitigation, which is supported by the rise-fall and fall-rise contours creating interactional flexibility and decreasing aggressiveness. In turn, in texts (1) and (4), emotional restraint is provided by narrow pitch range and the corresponding contour movement that helps speakers to reject journalists' assumptions. Prosody analysis also supports the effectiveness of politeness analysis.

Specifically, the use of prosodic resources allows speakers to perform face-threatening acts without creating interpersonal conflict. Despite the fact that some ripostes tend to approach bald-on-record expression, the use of prosodic control significantly minimises face threat. Controlled F0 range, moderated intensity, non-aggressive contour movement, humour, and laughter altogether make interaction with the interlocutor smoother and decrease face threats in an institutionalised context. Consequently, prosody should be treated not as an accessory emotional feature but as an essential component of the interaction.

As for the functions, riposte assists in fulfilling reframing functions. The second and less important functions include interactional control, audience design, and face management. In all cases, prosodic mitigation allows speakers to retain power and status as well as to minimise any potential interpersonal costs of performing certain ripostes.

5. Conclusions

According to the research findings, riposte in football press conferences is perceived as a strategically controlled type of face threat mitigation rather than a case of overt verbal aggression. Speakers always resort to prosodic modulation to counter, refute or reframe journalists' assumptions while keeping balance within the conversation and remaining professionals.

Prosodic mitigation is accomplished with the help of F0 range control, tonal contour, pitch accenting and intensity regulation. Controlling pitch range contributes to emotional regulation of communication, fall-rise and rise-fall contours facilitate assertion since they involve evaluation, humour and indirectness, pitch accents direct the listener towards evaluating stance and contrast. As for intensity, the findings indicate that its role in prosodic mitigation is inferior to that of pitch range since, despite performing interactionally sensitive actions, speakers choose not to raise their voices. As a result, it can be stated that prosodic mitigation in the context of riposte implies more intonation regulation rather than acoustic aggressiveness. Pragmatically, prosody becomes a means to mitigate face threats since speakers perform face-threatening acts, yet keep a friendly attitude towards the interlocutors due to humour, indirectness, emotional moderation and mutual understanding. From a functional perspective, riposte acts primarily as a tool of reframing. At the same time, there is another set of functions of riposte such as interactional control, audience design and face mitigation.

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