

Title:

The features and functions of paralinguistic clicks in English

Abstract:

This presentation will discuss the properties and functions of paralinguistic clicks in English. Clicks are unconventional speech sounds which appear phonemically in extremely limited distribution (Maddieson 2011). They occur much more often as non-phonemic, paralinguistic speech segments, often used to perform certain emotive functions (Gil 2011). As such, clicks are also found in English, where they are attributed with a number of different semantic roles (e.g. *tut-tut* expressing irritation). Although phonemic clicks have long been an object of interest for linguists (e.g. Sands 1991; Ladefoged and Traill 1994), paralinguistic clicks have received little attention. What is more, most works dealing with the paralinguistic usages of click sounds rely on anecdotal observations of the researchers, with little or no empirical support for their claims (e.g. Jones 2003; Gil 2011). The present study attempts to remedy this situation by providing empirical data on non-phonemic clicks in English.

The primary aim of the study is to examine what click types occur non-phonemically in English and what their roles are. In other words, the study aims at providing empirical evidence to the anecdotal observations found in the literature.

The work comprises two experiments. The first experiment investigates the production of clicks, i.e. what click types occur non-phonemically in English and whether certain click types can be directly linked to the corresponding meanings or functions. An additional aim of the experiment is to provide quantitative acoustic properties of the extralinguistic clicks, such as COG, duration and rise time. The second experiment examines the perception of clicks, i.e. whether there is a correlation between the production and perception of clicks in English and whether the same click types would be associated with the same meanings and functions as in the first experiment.

The results attest the existence of seven different click articulations which display considerable differences in both temporal and spectral properties in comparison to their phonemic counterparts. What is more, there is evidence to believe that clicks with high COG, i.e. bilabial, dental and alveolar clicks, are primarily used for expressing emotions, whereas clicks with a low COG, i.e. the flapped alveolar, palatal and lateral clicks, much more often perform onomatopoeic functions. No strong evidence has been obtained to support the claims that clicks also perform positive affective and signalling functions.

Selected references:

- Gil, David. 2011. "Para-linguistic usages of clicks", in: Matthew S. Haspelmath and Martin Dryer (eds.), *The world atlas of language structures online*.
(<http://wals.info/chapter/142>) (date of access: 17 Jan. 2012).
- Jones, Mark. 2003. Sum: Paralinguistic click. *The LINGUIST List*.
(<http://linguistlist.org/issues/14/14-1250.html>) (date of access: 18 Jan. 2012).
- Ladefoged, Peter and Anthony Traill. 1994. "Clicks and their accompaniments", *Journal of Phonetics* 22: 33–64.
- Maddieson, Ian. 2011. "Presence of uncommon consonants", in: Matthew S. Haspelmath and Martin Dryer (eds.), *The world atlas of language structures online*.
(<http://wals.info/chapter/19>) (date of access: 10 Dec. 2012).
- Sands, Bonny E. 1991. "Evidence for click features: Acoustic characteristics of Xhosa clicks", *UCLA working papers in phonetics*, 80: 6–37.