

The Perception of Charisma from Voice

A Cross-Cultural Study

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Abstract — This paper provides an overview of previous works on the acoustic parameters of charismatic voice and illustrates MASCharP, a scale for measuring the perception of charisma in voice. A study is then presented on the perception of charisma through the temporal and pitch structure of the voices of an Italian and a French politician. Results show some cultural differences in charisma perception and how acoustic features such as pitch (normal, higher, or lower) and types of pauses (short or long) can affect the Proactive-Attractive and Calm-Benevolent dimensions of charisma. The same dimension of charisma can be conveyed by different acoustic correlates of voice by connecting them to the dimension of leader extraversion-introversion.

Keywords — Charisma, voice, culture, political speech

I. INTRODUCTION

What is charisma? According to the classic notion introduced by Weber [1], charisma is an “extraordinary quality” of a person who is believed to be endowed with superhuman properties that induce people to acknowledge him as a leader. But it is not yet entirely clear what exactly this quality might be. As a preliminary conjecture, we might say that if a person is felt to be charismatic, there should be something in his/her way of being or behaving that causes others to attribute him/her with certain internal properties, properties that we might call “charismatic” traits. In this study, we try to dissect the charisma of a political leader for both the internal properties that make up his/her charisma, as well as the physical features through which these internal traits are conveyed. We address such questions as: what are the internal properties that make a political leader charismatic? And which aspects of his/her way of being or behaving display them as such? An initial distinction is that the internal properties of charisma may stem from either the leader’s mind or body: this can be due to the creative and charming ideas displayed by his/her words (charisma of the mind), or the leader’s visual appearance or voice. An example of a leader whose charisma that is considered to emanate from his mind is Mahatma Gandhi, who was not in fact an alluring speaker, but whose ideas and symbolic actions convinced and attracted millions of people. Other leaders, for instance Barack Obama, are charismatic not only because of their innovative ideas, but also for the charming way in which they express them.

This paper focuses on how charisma is displayed by a leader’s voice. Throughout previous work investigating the relationship between internal properties and the acoustic-prosodic features of charisma, [2] studied the correlation between acoustic, prosodic, lexico-syntactic characteristics of

political speech and the perception of charisma; [3] investigated the prosodic features of rhetoric utterances in French political speech in pre- and post-election discourse. Others examined the relationship between prosodic features and the perception of a speaker as a “good communicator” [4] or analysed the intonation contour of French political leaders’ speech and its idiosyncratic and contextual variations [5]. [2] also tested the influence of prosodic and lexico-syntactic characteristics of speech on the perception of charisma, by asking participants to evaluate these features in terms of adjectives like *charming*, *persuasive*, *enthusiastic*, *convincing*, *believable*, *powerful*, drawn from a previous study [6].

This work outlines previous and current studies on the perception of charisma from voice. § II presents a scale for measuring the perception of charisma through the acoustic parameters of a leader’s voice, and § III discusses two studies on how variation of two voice parameters affects the perception of charisma through: normal vs. disordered voice, and the intonation contours of different speech acts. § IV presents a brand new study on how the perception of charisma by French and Italians is affected by the voice parameters of pitch and pause duration.

II. MASCHARP: A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL MODEL OF CHARISMA

We will now specifically focus on the two sides of charisma: its internal properties as discussed in this Section, and the external features of their display discussed in the following two Sections. To address the former, we created a questionnaire in previous works [9, 10] to assess the perception of charisma from voice, which allows to distinguish various dimensions of charisma in voice.

Our work starts from a theoretical model of persuasion, [7, 8], according to which the persuader convinces the audience not only through *Logos* (rational arguments) and *Pathos* (the appeal to emotions) but also through *Ethos*: the persuader’s character, that triggers the audience’s trust. To trust a leader, followers must attribute him with *Benevolence* (a tendency to act in the audience’s interest), *Competence* (expertise, skills of event prediction and planning) and *Dominance* (the leader’s display of power for accomplishing the audience’s goals, possibly by prevailing in competition). Charisma can therefore be defined as a leader’s ability to display skills of *Pathos* (empathy and ability of feeling and transmitting certain emotions), *Competence* (creativity, innovation, divergent thought, vision), *Benevolence* (sociability and inclusiveness), and *Dominance* (energy of action, persistence) — a set of qualities apt to influence followers.

Based on these criteria, a scale was developed to measure the above qualities in a leader [9]. In a qualitative study, a questionnaire on charisma was submitted to 133 participants (42 female and 16 male French people, 65 female and 10 male Italians), asking them to freely define what charisma is and what it is not, and to list public figures they considered as charismatic and non-charismatic. This resulted in four lists of adjectives: 106 French and 144 Italian adjectives describing charisma positively, and 105 French and 146 Italian adjectives describing it negatively. Then, by excluding synonyms, the 67 most frequent adjectives were selected according to the qualities above, 40 of which being positive and 27 negative, all grouped around the dimensions above, making up MASCharP, a Multi-dimensional Adjective-based Scale of Charisma Perception. In this scale, we cluster adjectives (in English for clarity purposes) like *enthusiastic, passionate, involving, empathic, welcoming* under *Pathos*, and those such as *extraverted, sociable* under *Benevolence*. The dimension of *Competence* groups qualities of cognition (*visionary, creative*), volition (*determined, enterprising*), and communication (*communicative, clear, persuasive*), while *Dominance* includes traits of high activation (*active, dynamic*), strength (*brave, energetic*). Lastly, a dimension of capacity for social influence emerges, that we define as “*Emotional induction effects*”, referred to adjectives like *attractive, influential, charming, seductive* (see Table 1).

TABLE I. The MASCharP SCALE: 67 POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ADJECTIVES RELATED WITH CHARISMA

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Positive Adjectives</i>	<i>Negative Adjectives</i>
<i>Pathos</i>	passionate, empathetic, enthusiastic, reassuring	cold, indifferent
<i>Ethos Benevolence</i>	extraverted, positive, spontaneous, trustworthy, honest, fair, friendly, easy-going, makes the others feel important	untrustworthy, dishonest, egocentric, individualistic, introverted
<i>Ethos Competence</i>	visionary, organized, smart, sagacious, creative, competent, wise, enterprising, determined, resolute, who propose, seductive, exuberant, sincere, clear, communicative	inefficient, inadequate, uncertain, faithless, unclear, menacing
<i>Ethos Dominance</i>	dynamic, calm, active, courageous, confident, vigorous, strong, leader, authoritarian, captivating, persuasive, convincing	apathetic, timorous, weak, conformist, unimportant, inspires fear
<i>Emotional Induction Effects</i>	charming, attractive, pleasant, sexy, bewitching, eloquent, influential	boring

The MASCharP was first validated in a perception study [10] wherein 40 participants (20 male and 20 female French students), had to assess all of these adjectives on a 7-step Likert scale after listening to acoustic stimuli. The results of the study revealed some latent dimensions that are activated by “charismatic” stimuli: out of 12 factors emerging in a first exploration, 3 factors were extracted accounting for 45% of the variance following Varimax rotation. Factor 1, ‘Proactive-Seductive’ charisma, groups the adjectives of dynamic force of the charismatic person, described as *vigorous, active, dynamic,*

brave, determined, along with adjectives of attraction and emotional and decision-making influence (*charming, engaging, seductive, sexy, convincing*). The adjective *visionary* strongly correlates with this Factor and indicates a feature of long-term view as being central to charisma. Factor 2, grouping together *wise, prudent, reliable, fair, intelligent, honest, sincere, sagacious*, represents the dimension ‘Benevolence-Competence’. Lastly, Factor 3 ‘Authoritarian-Threatening’ characterizes a sort of “dark” charisma, whereby the leader is attributed qualities like *self-confident, organized, leader, resolute*, but also *egocentric, cold, threatening, inspires fear, unreliable, dishonest, individualistic, authoritarian*: a negative kind of dominance.

III. PERCEIVING CHARISMA FROM VOICE

In trying to capture the “secret” that lies behind a charismatic voice, we have investigated two cases of variation in voice parameters in order to determine how the perception of charisma can be defined: the difference between normal and disordered voice as well as the types of speech act.

A. Charisma perception in normal vs. disordered voice

In a previous work [10], we studied the variation in the perception of charisma determined by voice disorder by considering a case of real variation in the parameters of voice caused by a traumatic event. In 2004, Umberto Bossi, the leader of Lega Nord – a party whose aims include the secession of the North of Italy (*Padania*) from the rest of the Italian nation – had a stroke that caused him severe language impairment. Though he achieved partial recovery through to speech therapy, his voice was still different from before the stroke. Our study compared the perception of Bossi’s charisma in two speeches delivered in the same context of communication (a monologue addressed to followers) some years before and some years after his stroke.

We hypothesised that listeners would attribute more charismatic qualities to a normal voice as opposed to a disordered voice due to the intonation contour.

1) Method

Two samples were collected from two speeches performed in 1994 (the pre-stroke condition –PRE–) and in 2011 (the post-stroke condition –POST–), respectively. For each condition (PRE and POST), 3 stimuli were selected for their type of speech act and consequently for their intonation contour: an assertion, an incitation and a rhetorical wh-question. As predicted by [11], according to which normal voice differs from disordered voice in F0 values, the PRE speech presented higher F0 means than the POST speech: PRE (F0 mean 178 Hz; min 101 Hz; max 241 Hz), POST (F0 mean 120 Hz; min 91 Hz; max 155 Hz). All means from the PRE differed significantly from the POST ($p < .001$). Forty French participants with no knowledge of Italian rated the stimuli presented in the section above via a HTML/PHP browser-based interface. Twenty of them listened to the PRE condition and twenty to the POST condition stimuli. The test took place in an anechoic chamber with participants wearing a Sennheiser HD 25-13 headphone. After listening to each stimulus, participants had to answer some check questions to confirm that the perception of the acoustic signal was optimal and that the

semantic content was not understood. They then had to express their judgment about the stimuli through the MASCharP 67-adjective scale on a 7-point Likert scale (0 = “totally disagree”, 7 = “totally agree”), with certain adjectives from the list substituted by their reverses (e.g., *warm* instead of *cold*) to avoid answer habituation. The average duration of the test was 20 minutes.

The results from the check questions demonstrated that perception was good and that there was no semantic comprehension. Therefore, the differences in perception between PRE and POST, the majority of which are significant (t -test, $p < .05$), must be due only to acoustic and not to semantic features. Out of the 67 adjectives used to measure the perception of charisma, about 33 adjectives reached significantly different values (t -test, $p < .05$) between PRE and POST speech, and most of them were rated higher for the PRE condition, thus illustrating our hypothesis that the PRE speech is more charismatic than the POST because of its acoustic features. The PRE speech positively correlated with most adjectives describing charismatic qualities. In the Pathos dimension, the speaker was perceived as *passionate*, *eloquent* and *enthusiastic* in the PRE and as *indifferent* in the POST condition. Results were quite inconsistent as to the dimension of Benevolence: the adjectives attributed to the PRE speech included *egocentric*, *dishonest* and *individualistic*, which in Table I are seen as non-charismatic qualities. As for the dimensions of Competence and Dominance, our hypothesis was almost completely validated: the speaker was perceived as *competent*, *smart*, *clear*, *seductive* in the PRE and as *unclear* in the POST; as *dynamic*, *authoritarian*, *confident*, *leader* in the PRE and as *boring* in the POST speech. These results validate the hypothesis of a higher attribution of charismatic qualities to a normal voice as opposed to a pathological voice due to acoustic parameters.

B. Charisma perception in different speech acts

The same study [10] on Bossi’s voice also tested the different perception of charisma in different speech acts depending on the different intonation contours. The hypothesis was that incitations might be perceived as more charismatic than rhetorical wh- questions, which in turn might be perceived as more charismatic than assertions.

40 French participants with no knowledge of Italian rated the stimuli presented in the section above via a HTML/PHP browser-based interface. 20 of them listened to the PRE condition, and 20 to the POST condition stimuli. The test took place in an anechoic chamber. After listening to each stimulus, participants had to answer some check questions to confirm that the perception of the acoustic signal was optimal and that the semantic content was not understood. Then they had to express their judgment about the stimuli through the MASCharP 67-adjective scale on a 7-point Likert scale (0 = “totally disagree”, 7 = “totally agree”), with some adjectives from the list substituted by their reverses (e.g., *warm* instead of *cold*) to avoid answer habituation. The average duration of the test was of 20 minutes.

The hypothesis was confirmed through the participants’ answers based on the MASCharP scale. The speech act of incitation influences the perception of charisma more than the

assertion and the rhetorical question. In particular, for the dimension of Competence the incitation elicits adjectives such as *competent* ($F(2, 123)=3.114$; $p < 0.048$), *resolute* ($F(2, 123)=6.767$; $p < 0.002$), *enterprising* ($F(2, 123)=8.515$; $p < 0.001$), *clear* ($F(2, 123)=3.046$; $p < 0.05$), *exuberant* ($F(2, 123)=4.232$; $p < 0.017$) and *communicative* ($F(2, 123)=2.705$; $p < 0.05$). More than other speech acts, the incitation has a significant effect on the perception of the speaker’s emotional state (see adjectives as *passionate* ($F(2, 123)=2.999$; $p < 0.05$), *influential* ($F(2, 123)=9.359$; $p < 0.001$) and *enthusiastic* ($F(2, 123)=4.765$; $p < 0.010$)). Assertion, on the other hand, evokes more non-charismatic qualities such as *indifferent* ($F(2, 123)=3.459$; $p < 0.035$) and *unclear* ($F(2, 123)=3.662$; $p < 0.029$). Lastly, the rhetorical question does not influence a specific dimension of charisma.

IV. CHARISMA AND CULTURE

The studies above showed the effect of ‘normal’ versus ‘disordered’ voice and of the type of speech act on charisma perception: voice is perceived as more charismatic in normal rather than in pathological conditions, and incitation is perceived as more charismatic than assertion or rhetorical wh-question. These results are based on the cross-cultural perception of voice acoustical correlates pattern of pitch contour, duration, intensity and voice quality. In this section we present a study that tests the effect on charisma of pitch frequency and pause duration on the perception of charisma traits in participants from two cultures, French and Italian. The role of speech in charisma perception across cultures has been already studied by [12], who showed that there is a correlation between higher F0, higher and more varied intensity, longer duration of stimuli, and downstepped pitch contours and certain traits that describe the charisma positively. The presence of disfluencies, on the other hand, is negatively correlated with charisma judgments, and that differs in different cultures [12].

As for voice as an emotional signal, some studies have recently pointed out the central role of culture by giving a more complex account of the process of charisma perception. Within the stream called “emotional culture” by [15], cultural expectations and emotional scripts are at work in both emotion regulation and expression [16, 17]. [24] and [25] identify *institutionally oriented cultures*, with strong norms prescribing strong control and regulation of emotions to fulfil institutional roles and standards vs. *impulsively oriented cultures* with lower regulation and control in public and institutional contexts.

Overall, a leader will be perceived as more charismatic if he expresses his emotions coherently with his cultural expectations of emotional expression. Throughout literature on the cultural differences in communication, [14] describes French communication and expression style as characterized by “indirectness and eloquence”: French orators tend to prefer nuance and tact, and they tend to discuss a point indirectly and make reflective pauses. These considerations led us to see if French participants differ from the Italians in their perception of charismatic voice and which dimension of charisma is affected by the manipulation of acoustic features as pitch frequency and pause duration.

Our hypothesis for the perception of charismatic voice is based on the fact that the evaluation of a political leader can also be differentiated by cultural scripts that might, for example, give high importance to public and institutional contexts and the leader's ability to manage and adapt himself to cultural scripts.

A. The effect of pitch and duration on charisma perception

To test the effect of pitch and pause duration on the perception of charisma we conducted a perception study, to investigate first the effect of these variables in all participants, and then the cultural differences of such effects. Our hypothesis is that pitch and pause length significantly influence the perception of charisma's traits. As for voice pitch, previous studies based on the cross-gender perception of pitch show that speakers with lower pitch frequency are perceived as more 'dominant' [20; 21] or 'attractive' [20; 21], while others [12] investigate both cross-gender and cross-species perception of pitch that attribute it a general meaning of "dominance" vs. "submission". A speaker with higher pitch frequency would actually be perceived as more 'subordinate' [14; 22]. The most relevant result that these studies yield is the importance of voice pitch frequency in the perception of individuals' traits. Regarding the pauses, [23] showed that silent pause duration is an essential parameter in both linguistic and psychoacoustic perception of continuous political speech.

1) Method: speech material and perception study

The study presents a factorial between subject design with three independent variables: pitch (normal, higher, lower), pause (short, long), and the participants' nationality (Italians or French). The dependent variables were: voting behaviour and the perception of charismatic voice (67 adjectives).

a) Stimuli

We extracted speech stimuli from the political speeches of an Italian (Luigi de Magistris, S-IT) and a French politician (François Hollande, S-FR). Speeches were performed in front of followers during a rally. The speech materials were all retrieved from various archives available to the public on the web¹. For each speaker (S-IT and S-FR), we selected one stimulus. To test our hypotheses of the perceptual relevance of pitch frequency and pause duration we performed acoustic manipulation of these two parameters. We finally obtained 6 stimuli, for each politician: S-1 (natural pitch, long duration pauses), S-2 (pitch increased of 1 semitone (ST), LP), S-3 (pitch decreased of 1 ST, long pauses), S-4 (natural pitch, short pauses), S-5 (pitch increased of 1 ST, short pauses), S-6 (pitch decreased of 1 ST, short pauses). For acoustic manipulation we used Audacity [27]. We used implemented algorithm for pitch manipulation. For the manipulation of pause duration we used a method similar to the gating paradigm [20]. To increase pause duration we added Brownian noise generated with the same amplitude as the middle segment of the original speech pause. We added it in sequence every 10 ms from the middle of the original pause. To decrease pause duration we truncated the sequence every 10 ms from the beginning of the original pause. While increasing or decreasing

speech pause we made sure to maintain the natural aspect of continuous speech for our stimuli.

b) Perception test

Ninety-six participants took part in a perceptual study. To avoid biases induced by comprehension of the verbal message, similar to [14] (where judges were asked to attribute personality traits based on nonverbal vocal behavioural cues in an unknown language) we asked 48 Italian participants (P-IT) with no knowledge of French to rate stimuli from S-FR speaker, and 48 French participants (P-FR) with no knowledge of Italian to rate stimuli from S-IT speaker. For each group of participants (P-IT and P-FR) every stimulus condition (S-1, S-2, S-3, S-4, S-5, S-6) was rated by 8 participants. The test took place online through LimeSurvey [28]. After listening to each stimulus participants had to answer some check questions to verify that the perception of the acoustic signal was optimal and that the semantic content was not understood. Then they had to express their judgment about the stimuli through the 67 adjectives inventory of the multidimensional scale of charisma (see Table I) on a 7-point Likert scale (0 = "totally disagree", 7 = "totally agree"), with some adjectives from the list substituted by their reverses (e.g., warm instead of cold) to avoid answer habituation. The average duration of the test was 15 minutes. Lastly, participants had to communicate their political orientation, if any was held.

2) Results and Discussion

a) Voting behavior

The main results point out a main effect of pause ($F(1, 95)=5.44; p<0.05$) on vote preference, with higher rating means for short pauses (4.12) than for long ones (3.7). Gender difference had no significant effect, but although we found an interaction close to significance with pauses while for political orientation: short pauses are preferred by right wing voters as compared to long pauses, which are preferred by left wing voters. No cultural difference was found between the Italian and French group.

b) Charisma perception

We performed an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to identify the latent dimensions evoked by the manipulated stimuli and to reduce the ratings of the 67 adjectives of the MASCharP to a small number of factors. We obtained two factors explaining 43% of the variance (respectively the first 26%, the second 17%), shown in TABLE II. We obtained a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p=.0001$) and an optimal Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) measure of Sampling Adequacy (.81). The two factors show a high level of reliability (respectively, Factor 1 ($\alpha=.83$, i.i.= 0.42); Factor 2: $\alpha=.82$, i.i.= 0.41). We therefore proceeded by computing two different variables through the sum of the score of the 34 items for Factor 1, 12 items for Factor 2. We thus obtained an index of perception (Fig. 3) of a Proactive-Attracting charisma (Factor 1) (min=1; max=6.5; mean=3.5; DS=1.19) and an index of Benevolent-Calm charisma (Factor 2) (min=1.3; max=6.54; mean=3.4; DS=1.07). These two Factors help us to better understand and to compare (through bifactorial correlations) the dimension that most affects the voting intention of French and Italian participants: the significant correlations: while Italians tend to attribute more importance to their vote to the

¹ Luigi de Magistris: www.rai.tv, www.radioradicale.com; François Hollande: www.elysee.fr, www.dailymotion.com, www.francebleu.fr.

Proactive-Attractive dimension ($r=.615$, $n=48$, $p<.000$) than for that of the Calm-Benevolent ($r=.408$, $n=48$, $p=.004$), French participant attribute to both the same importance to both (Proactive-Attractive: $r=.461$, $n=48$, $p<.001$; Calm-Benevolent: $r=.410$, $n=48$, $p=.004$). We then ran a MANOVA analysis to test the effect of independent variables (pitch, pause and nationality) on the two charisma Factors and we found the same main effect of pause on the Proactive-Attractive Factor ($F(1, 95)= 5,868$; $p<0.025$): short pauses affect the perception of a ‘dominant’, ‘passionate’ and ‘seductive’ dimension of charisma more than long ones.

TABLE II. ROTATED COMPONENT MATRIX. FACTORS EXPLAINING THE 43% OF THE VARIANCE OF THE PERCEPTION OF CHARISMA FROM ITALIAN AND FRENCH STIMULI PERCEPTION THROUGH THE MASCHARP’S 67 ADJECTIVES

Factor 1 Proactive-Attractive		Factor 2 Calm-Benevolent	
dynamic	0.607	trustworthy	0.664
attractive	0.434	reassuring	0.615
charming	0.467	sincere	0.564
authoritarian	0.558	honest	0.668
captivating	0.659	calm	0.54
bewitching	0.587	prudent	0.491
exuberant	0.576	quiet	0.53
extraverted	0.552	wise	0.582
clear	0.658	collaborative	0.817
communicative	0.754	competent	0.634
convincing	0.761	organized	0.624
courageous	0.669	altruist	0.752
creative	0.486	warm	0.463
determined	0.782		
visionary	0.429		
who propose	0.495		
resolute	0.763		
seductive	0.443		
spontaneous	0.392		
confident	0.615		
pleasant	0.361		
active	0.498		
passionate	0.749		
sagacious	0.644		
clever	0.708		
leader	0.551		
empathetic	0.434		
vigorous	0.795		
seductive	0.49		
persuasive	0.698		
positive	0.647		
stimulating	0.673		
strong	0.792		
Variance 26 %		Variance 17%	

A more complex interpretation needs to be rendered for the Calm-Benevolent Factor. Pauses duration play a different role in perception with respect to the participants’ nationality and pitch. MANOVA analysis shows an interaction effect between nationality and pauses ($F(1, 95)= 5,287$; $p<0.025$; see Fig. 1) and between nationality, pauses and pitch ($F(1, 95)= 3,502$; $p<0.05$; see Fig. 2 and Fig.3). Ratings for Calm-Benevolent charisma differ for Italians that perceive a leader as ‘prudent’, ‘wise’ and ‘altruist’ while listening to short pauses, whereas French perceive these charisma traits when they hear long pauses. What [12] found in their study on “filled pauses” as not charismatic is not the same for “empty pauses”; which actually reveal a state of reflection, mostly coherent with the more indirect French style of communication [14].

The second significant interaction effect is on the Calm-Benevolent Factor: Italian participants perceive a leader’s attributes of altruism, reassurance, reliability and honesty while exposed to short pauses with normal or higher pitch, while French participants perceive Calm-Benevolent charisma when exposed to long pauses with normal or lower pitch.

Fig. 1. Interaction effect between Nationality and Pause.

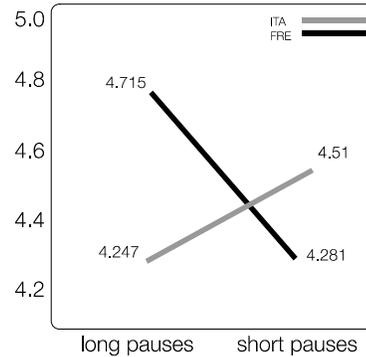


Fig. 2. Interaction effects between Nationality, Pause and Pitch. Italian participants.

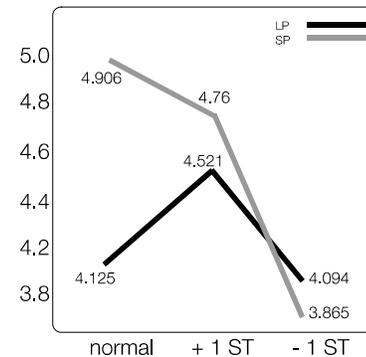
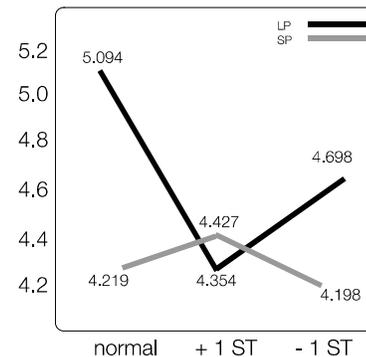


Fig. 3. Interaction effects between Nationality, Pause and Pitch. French participants.



V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our study explored the role of culture on the perception of charismatic voice. If some studies [12] on charismatic speech already demonstrated the relevance of speech features as speech rate or intensity across cultures, they also found that in

some contexts, as is the case for non-native judges, acoustic parameters as speech rate are no longer perceived as being charismatic.

Our acoustic stimuli do not account for semantic content because they are uttered in a language that our judges did not understand. But even in these conditions, we found some interesting differences. For both groups of participants, short pauses elicit perception of Proactive-Attractive charisma, even if the ratings for Italian participants are higher. This difference between Italians and the French is coherent with previous studies on discredit in political debates [29]. For the perception of Calm-Benevolent charisma Italians are more likely to trust a speaker who uses short pauses and normal or higher pitch, while French participants prefer long pauses with normal or lower pitch.

In conclusion, our results seem to demonstrate a cultural influence on the perception of charisma and on the interpretation of its signals: Italians and the French appreciate a Proactive-Attractive leader more than a Calm-Benevolent leader, though with slight differences. Both therefore perceive a Calm-Benevolent charisma while listening to short pauses, even if the perception differs for pitch. This might mean that they differ in the interpretation of this “human sociability” (Calm-Benevolent). Italians attribute it more to a high-pitch voice with shorter pauses, whereas the French prefer low-pitch voice and long pauses.

Since high-pitch voice associated to fast-speaking rate recalls an extroverted and possibly exhibitionist personality whereas low-pitch voice associated with slow-speaking rate evokes a more introverted and reflective personality [22], this might mean that the French consider a leader with traits of reflectiveness and introversion as more endowed with Calm-Benevolent charisma, while Italians attribute this kind of charisma to more brilliant and trustworthy leaders (though Italians probably also want a leader possess characteristics of human sociability).

Can these results be connected to “emotional culture” coherence? Is it also possible that a reliability dimension along with altruism, being a part of charisma, could be affected by different acoustic features such as pauses or pitch, interpreted yet further for two different cultures? Our first answer based on these initial results seems to be affirmative.

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