

The Art of Fictional Conversation
Paralinguistic Vocal Features in Edith Wharton's
"The Last Asset"

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Introduction

The interest in paralanguage or, to adopt a broader term, nonverbal communication, which developed in the 60's with *Approaches to Semiotics* (Sebeok et al., 1964) and several seminal papers, such as, Trager (1958) or Crystal (1963), was mostly concerned with the phonetic part of paralanguage. More comprehensive studies were carried out at regular intervals (Crystal & Quirk (1964), Crystal & Davy (1969), Brown (1990) or again Poyatos (1993)), but it is only recently that stylisticians have taken the possible developments of "multimodal communication" on board (Culpeper (2001), Jobert (2003), McIntyre (2008) etc.) "Multimodal communication" considers both the verbal content of utterances and the other layer of meaning that accompanies speech i.e. nonverbal communication.

In this presentation, I shall go back to the original use of the term 'paralanguage' and focus on paralinguistic vocal features (PVF), leaving aside kinesics and proxemics. I shall examine how these traces of orality are used in fiction and more specifically how they are to be interpreted by the analyst. Edith Wharton's story "The Last Asset" will then provide a case-study.

1. A theoretical perspective

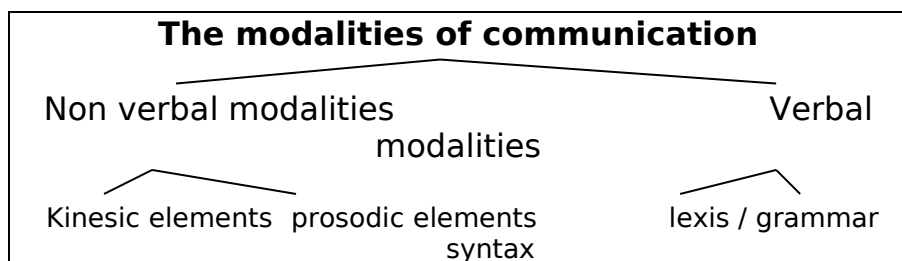
1.1. Human communication

Human interaction is not limited to the verbal content of utterances. Pragmatics has made clear that linguistic messages only become meaningful in context and that inferences are necessary to interpret them successfully. The clues to make such inferences are numerous

and include gestures and tone of voice that accompany verbal messages. These elements are often dealt with under the umbrella term of 'paralanguage'. As Abercrombie (1973) points out, the term 'paralanguage' gives the impression of a coherent and stable field, which is not the case. I shall therefore avoid the term 'paralanguage' as its definition varies considerably depending on the author. Crystal (1997: 277) suggests several definitions:

A term used in suprasegmental phonology to refer to **variations in tone of voice** which seem to be less systematic than prosodic features (especially intonation and stress). Examples would include the controlled use of breathy or creaky voice, spasmodic features (such as giggling while speaking), and the use of secondary articulation (such as lip-rounding or nasalization) **to produce a tone of voice signalling attitude, social role or some other language-specific meaning**. Some analysts broaden the definition of paralanguage to include kinesic features; some exclude paralinguistic features from linguistic analysis.

Several linguists have tried to account for these 'nonverbal elements' in their descriptive frameworks. Joly & O'Kelly (1989: 32), for instance, present the following diagram:



For these linguists, meaning equals expression plus expressivity. Along the same lines, Fernando Poyatos (1993: 126) presents what he calls the 'basic triple structure', made up of language, paralanguage and kinesics. He explains the relationship between these three elements as follows:

What makes language-paralanguage-kinesics a functionally cohesive structure [...] is, first of all, their common kinetic generator, and then their combined semanticity and lexicality and their capacity to operate simultaneously, alternate with or substitute for each other as needed in the interactive situation.

It could be argued that Poyatos pushes the comparison between language and kinesics too far. The two systems abide by dissimilar rules despite many surface similarities. Nevertheless, his approach has the merit of putting these three aspects of communication on an equal footing.

In this presentation, I shall mainly be concerned with what is sometimes referred to as 'tone of voice', that is a series of phonic / phonetic elements, more precisely called 'paralinguistic vocal features' (PVF).

1.2. Paralinguistic Vocal Features (PVF)

Brown's (1990: 112) definition of PVF provides a good theoretical starting point:

Paralinguistic features of speech are those which contribute to the expression of attitude by a speaker. They are phonetic features of speech which do not form an intrinsic part of the phonological contrasts which make up the verbal message.

It is important, at this stage, to distinguish between a speaker's **permanent features** and **paralinguistic vocal features**. Permanent features are determined by age, sex, size, weight and so forth, as well as by the speaker's sociological background. These features constitute a speaker's norm. Although these features tend to be interpreted during verbal interaction, they do not fall into the category of PVF which are affective or attitudinal. It is the deviation from these permanent features or 'personal speaker characteristics' (Roach: 1983) that will be regarded as meaningful.

Several descriptive frameworks exist for PVF and the question of 'descriptive delicacy' (Leech, 2008: 12-13) is crucial as some of these frameworks are rather specialised. A phonetic study of PVF may imply minute distinctions between tiny acoustic differences in pitch or tempo which are generally not perceived by the human ear. Conversely, a study of PVF in fiction requires a more neutral, less specialised descriptive framework.

The framework presented here is a simplified version of Jobert (2003) and is an attempt to find a happy balance between theoretical soundness and simplicity of use. It derives from Crystal (1975), Brown (1990), Poyatos (1993) and Laver (1994). All the items present in this descriptive framework would deserve a specific presentation. Suffice to say that they are classified along a 'scale of linguisticness' spreading from the most linguistic features (para-prosodic features) to the least linguistic features (vocal qualifications). It is important to regard all these features as belonging to the same (para)linguistic category: they all add meaning to the verbal content of utterances.

These relative features are not exclusive and are often used in combination. Some correlations can easily be anticipated (a fast tempo along with a high pitch and a falsetto voice), while others are intuitively less likely but it is extremely difficult to exclude any given combination for certain.

Descriptive Framework for Paralinguistic Vocal Features

<p>1. Para-prosodic features</p> <p><i>Loudness</i> <i>Pitch</i> <i>Tempo</i> <i>Rhythm</i> <i>Pause</i></p> <p>2. Vocal qualifiers</p> <p><i>types of tension</i> - articulatory precision (precise / slurred) - articulatory setting (tense / lax) - lip setting (smiling / pursed)</p> <p><i>types of phonation</i> - falsetto voice - whispered voice - creaky voice - harsh /husky voice - breathy voice</p> <p><i>peripheral modes</i> - culturally coded onomatopoeia ("tsk", "tut" etc.) - intentional cough / throat clearing etc.</p> <p>3. Vocal qualifications</p> <p><i>Laughter</i> <i>Crying</i> <i>Sighing</i></p>

The combination of some of these features is typical of certain attitudes or emotions. Needless to say however, there is no direct mapping between a given feature and a particular emotion.

It has to be remembered that when dealing with written texts, references to PVF are not always straightforwardly encoded and that a certain amount of convention exists. If comments of the type "I love you', she smiled" are frequent, it is extremely rare to come across comments of the type "I love you', she said with deliberate

articulatory precision". Certain precautions are therefore necessary when dealing with the representation of PVF in fiction.

1.3. Paralinguistic Vocal Features in Fiction

Several linguists (Trager, 1958 for one) have noted that PVF are often found in fiction but only Gillian Brown (1990) gives literary examples for each and every PVF she presents. Even so, Brown is more interested in providing examples conveying the phonetic qualities of the different features she presents than in analysing the way they are actually encoded and, more crucially, decoded.

The phenomenon of paralinguistic encoding seems to peak at the turn of the 19th century with authors like Henry Galsworthy, Henry James or indeed Edith Wharton. It roughly corresponds to the Victorian era in Britain and the Gilded Age in the United States. In the same period, authors were also keen to encode their characters' dialects and idiolects (Chapman, 1994 or Jones, 1999). Narrators were still rather intrusive and commented generously on their characters' vocal peculiarities. There is thus a strong correlation between the presence of reporting clauses and PVF (see Bonheim, 1982).

When dealing with PVF, writers can choose to encode either the phonetic feature or the attitudinal feature. Prototypically, two cases of paralinguistic comments exist:

She said loudly (phonetic feature encoded)
She said irritably (attitude encoded)

In either case, a certain amount of inference is needed and interpreting these comments is heavily dependent on the context. Indeed, a loud voice can be triggered by anger or by its opposite. Similarly, 'irritably' can be vocally translated as a loud voice or by its opposite, provided other phonetic features accompany the delivery. In 'The Last Asset', similar examples may be found:

'You've found him?' Mrs. Newell **exclaimed**. (265) (phonetic feature encoded).

For Brown (1990: 138-9) 'exclaim' implies an extended pitch span and possibly a deviant tempo (either slow or rapid) as well as a deviant placing in voice range (either raised or lowered).

'Well, then, I give my consent - it's all I've got left to give,' **he added philosophically**. (263) (attitude encoded).

Following Brown's framework, the adverb 'philosophically' could evoke a lowered placing in voice range, a slow tempo and possibly a creaky voice.

Sometimes though, both types are encoded simultaneously:

Garnett had halted before him **with deepening astonishment**.
'But you don't mean to tell me --? **He stammered**. (261).
(attitude and phonetic feature encoded).

Brown (1990) offers a set of relationships between the introductory verbs or adverbials used and the PVF. Obviously, these examples do not exhaust all the possibilities. Brown (1990) however comments:

The fact that authors do this, that readers habitually cope with it, and that readers-aloud often adopt the same sorts of paralinguistic features to express a given emotion or attitude, suggests that there are regular, conventional, relationships between some descriptive terms and the paralinguistic features which they evoke. (114).

Authors are pretty much aware of the problem of construing PVF and sometimes go to great lengths in order to make clear what a particular paralinguistic comment means:

But what I heard was a low insistent murmur, with pauses for reply in which no reply was made. It had an hypnotic quality which I had never heard in any voice: a blend of urgency, cajolery, and extreme tenderness, with below it the deep vibrato of held-in laugh that might break out at any moment. It was the voice of someone wanting something very much and confident of getting it, but at the same time willing, no, constrained, to plead for it with all the force of his being. (*The Go-Between*, 192).

Finally, PVF in fiction can either corroborate the actual content of an utterance (*redundancy*) or contradict it (*discrepancy*), the latter being much rarer:

'Assuredly not!' cried Garnett ('The Last Asset', 269).
'Do you know I love you?' the young man said, jocosely, to Isabel (*Portrait of a Lady* in Brown 1990: 114).

As Lyons (1972: 62) points out:

It seems to be the case that, whenever there is a contradiction between the overt form of a verbal utterance and the associated prosodic and paralinguistic features it is the latter which determine the semiotic classification of the utterance. [...] It may even be the case that we should recognize more than two levels

in the selection of the relevant features such as prosodic overrides verbal, so paralinguistic overrides prosodic.

As such, PVF ought to be regarded as *illocutionary force indicating devices* (IFIDs) and therefore crucial in terms of characterisation.

It could be argued that context or word-order trigger specific PVF even if they are not explicitly referred to in the text features I would call indirect PVF or IPVF. I shall concentrate on explicit PVF, what Schötz (2002: 6) calls 'paralinguistic lexica', especially when they accompany Direct Speech (DS). I shall therefore focus on paralinguistic comments located in reporting clauses, on what constitutes "Report of Speech" (RS).

2. Dialogue, realism and PVF in 'The Last Asset'

2.1. Edith Wharton and fictional dialogue

'The Last Asset', like many of Edith Wharton's short stories ('The Dilettante', 'Madame de Treymes' etc., see Jobert, 2006 & Jobert, 2009) is based on conversation and is therefore quite rich in terms of DS. In *The Writing of Fiction*, Edith Wharton writes:

The use of dialogue in fiction seems to be one of the few things about which a fairly definite rule may be laid down. **It should be reserved for the culminating moments, and regarded as the spray into which the great wave of narrative breaks in curving toward the watcher on the shore. This lifting and scattering of the wave, the coruscation of the spray, even the mere material sight of the page broken into short, uneven paragraphs, all help to reinforce the contrast between such climaxes and the smooth effaced gliding of narrative intervals;** and the contrast enhances that sense of the passage of time for the producing of which the writer has to depend on his intervening narration. Thus, the sparing use of dialogue not only serves to emphasize the crises of the tale but to give it as a whole a greater effect of continuous development. (55)

A cognitive stylistician would no doubt recognise the dichotomy between figure and ground applied to dialogue and narration. This is echoed by Elena Semino (2004) when she says:

The use of DS often results in the foregrounding of the utterances it relates to, since it gives us the impression that we are listening directly to the characters' voices, apparently without the mediating interference of the narrator.

This raises an interesting question I shall leave unanswered. To what extent are paralinguistic comments felt as narrative ‘interference’? I would empirically argue that short and unproblematic paralinguistic comments (corroborating the verbal message) of the ‘*she shouted*’ type pass unnoticed as they help the reader to hear the character’s voice whereas longer or problematic paralinguistic comments tend to distract the reader from the actual content of the DS and the focus seems to be on the comment as such. Many paralinguistic comments tend to be in a middle-of-the-road position and readerly attention can sway one way or the other.

2.2. PVF foregrounding in ‘The Last Asset’

From the outset, speech is presented as a major component of the story. Two Americans meet in a French restaurant and the reader is told the younger one frequents the place because of ‘the enjoyment of his old friend’s conversation’ (244), a conversation which has ‘the crisp and homely flavour of a native dish’ (244). The story actually starts with DS and the accompanying report of speech carries parapro-sodic information:

‘The Devil!’ Paul Garnett **exclaimed** as he reread his note. (242).

The first utterance is not addressed and is based on presupposition. The first interaction between the two participants also carries paralinguistic information: ‘the dry gentleman [...] **remarked with a smile**’ + DS (242); ‘Garnett **returned the smile**’ + DS (242); ‘Garnett **said with a smile**’ + DS (243) and DS + ‘the young man said, pouring his wine **with the smile of youthful incredulity**’ (243).

Not all of the paralinguistic comments are as straightforward as those above, but they can nevertheless be easily recovered: ‘He leaned back [...] **rambling on with gentle garrulity** while Garnett attacked his omelette’ + DS (243) or again DS ‘the latter proceeded, **revolving the cigar meditatively between his thin lips**’ + DS (242). The kinesic information may be interpreted as a clue to the actual manner of delivery. The conversation conveys an impression of ease and vocal harmony is thereby created: the scene indeed opens on a conversation between two well-to-do gentlemen.

The old gentleman’s voice quality is commented upon at length: ‘[he] spoke in the thin rarefied voice which seems best fitted to emit sententious truths’ (242). So is his competence in French: ‘[he] spoke French with the accent of one who has formed his notion of the

language from a phrase book' (244). The only disharmonious paralinguistic comment precisely accompanies his attempt at the language: 'the old gentleman [...] twisted his lean neck round to **cackle out** with perfectly unbending American intonation: 'Gassong! L'addition, silver play'" (242).

The entire episode thus foregrounds speech and although the topic of the first utterance is temporarily lost of sight, the reader is plunged into a world where vocal nuances are many and are bound to play a crucial role. The reader is retrospectively given the reason for Garnett's exclamation, which reactivates readerly interest in this somewhat puzzling beginning:

He himself, for instance [...] was beginning to feel like a squeezed sponge at the mere thought of her: and it was this sense of exhaustion, of the inability to provide more, either materially or morally, which had provoked his exclamation on opening her note (246).

The reason for Mrs. Newell's coming to Paris is to ask Garnett to find her husband she left years before and to convince him to give his consent for his daughter to marry into a French family. The whole plot is therefore built upon Garnett's rhetorical talent and the ensuing conversations actually structure the plot of the story.

2.3. A quantitative approach

It appears that DS is not evenly distributed in the story and a somewhat regular pattern seems to emerge. Indeed, apart from Chapter I, which, being the first chapter, has a special function, chapters are either mostly devoted to conversations or totally deprived of them. This seems to exemplify Edith Wharton's view of how dialogue works. Dialogues appear at moments of climax and the rest of the narrative simply builds up to these moments or offers prospective or retrospective commentaries on them.

Chapter	Topic	Number of pages	Number of turns	Paralinguistic comment
I	Conversation between Garnett and a fellow American	3.5	13	11 (84%)
II	Presentation of Mrs. Newell's background	4.5	1	1
III	Conversation between Garnett and Mrs. Newell	6	49	20 (40.8%)

	about Hermione's wedding			
IV	Garnett's pondering about his role as a go-between	3	0	0
V	Conversation between Garnett and Mr Newell who happens to be the American gentleman of Chapter I	5.5	37	20 (54%)
VI	Conversation between Garnett and Mrs. Newell / Garnett and Hermione / Garnett and Mr. Newell	5	68	30 (44.1%)
VII	The wedding	4.5	3	1
Total			171	83 (48.5%)

Apart from Chapter I, the ratio between unmarked DS and DS with paralinguistic comments is pretty stable and relatively significant (between 40.8 and 54%). These figures correspond to what happens in the first Chapter of *The House of Mirth* in which 42% of the utterances carry paralinguistic information (Jobert, 2003). Not only is the presence of DS noticeable but the fact that +/- 48% of DS should be accompanied by paralinguistic comments reinforces the importance of speech and voices in the story. Although this lies outside the scope of the present study, NRSA appear in great number, which emphasises even further the importance of spoken words. For instance:

Garnet, in reply, related without comment his conversation with Hermione, and the message with which she had charged him. He remembered her words exactly and repeated them without modification, heedless of what they implied or revealed. (269)

Finally, similes or comparisons are sometimes used to describe speech. Their effect is to draw the reader's attention, not so much to the spoken words this time but to the author's awareness and sensitivity to voice presentation:

She delivered these facts in a high decisive voice, which had a **note like the clink of her many bracelets and the rattle of her ringed hands against the enamelled cigarette case** that she held out to Garnett. (250).

Or again,

She had manufactured for herself a personality independent of geographical or social demarcations, and **presenting that remarkable blend of plantation dialect, Bowery slang and hyperbolic statement, which expresses the British idea of an unadulterated Americanism.** (247).

If we now focus on the four main characters, the results we obtain are not at all surprising. Garnett speaks with the three other characters and consequently has more turns than any of them. Hermione only speaks to Garnett and therefore has the smallest number of turns. Mr. and Mrs Newell have an almost equal number of turns.

If we compare the turns conveying paralinguistic information, here again, things appear pretty coherent. Garnett is the go-between and as such is less emotionally involved than the others (26.8%). The differences between the other characters are not meaningful considering the number of turns they have. All in all, it can be said that for each character, one turn out of two is 'paralinguistically' marked.

	Mr. Garnett	Mrs Newell	Mr. Newell	Hermione
Turns	67	40	37	17
Turns (PVF)	18	26	16	9
	26.8%	65%	43.2%	52.9%

This first approach indicates that PVF are evenly spread in conversations and that they are evenly attributed to the characters if we make an exception for Garnett whose position is somewhat different.

These results indicate that PVF are very much present in Wharton's text but it becomes obvious that a merely quantitative approach is not sufficient to assess their functional importance. It is necessary to look at them both qualitatively and in context. The first conversation between Garnett and Mrs. Newell will be used as a test case.

3. PVF in practice

The first conversation between Garnett and Mrs. Newell is of utmost importance as it determines the entire plot. The external factors between the two participants are pretty easy to determine. The reader learns they have been friends for years and although Mrs. Newell belongs to the well-to-do society, she has, in the past, needed Garnett's money. The reader therefore expects a rather symmetrical conversation between the two participants. The reader has been warned that Mrs. Newell is rather forceful and that Garnett is somewhat reluctant to play along with Mrs. Newell's whims and fancies.

The conversation hinges on an **announcement** and a **request** (both from Mrs. Newell). Mrs. Newell announces her daughter's wedding and asks Garnett to find her husband after many years of absence, in order to obtain his consent. Both the announcement and the request will come as a shock to Garnett. We therefore expect a certain amount of politeness strategy on Mrs. Newell's part as she is the one asking for a favour and a certain amount of surprise on Garnett's part.

3.1. A linear approach

Chapter III starts rather abruptly with a statement by Mrs. Newell. This conveys a sense of *in medias res* and suggests that greetings and introductions have been sorted out before and that Mrs. Newell is now coming to the important topic of the conversation.

To start with, the paralinguistic lexica are unmarked with reporting clauses such as 'she said', 'she repeated', 'he remarked'. Despite the *in medias res* effect however, the reader notices that the 'grooming talk' is not entirely over yet. The paralinguistic register changes slightly while the announcement proper has not been made: 'she delivered these facts in a high decisive voice', 'said the young man with mild irony', 'exclaimed Mrs Newell'. There is thus a well-structured crescendo culminating with the announcement of Miss Newell's wedding:

'Hermione is to be married.'
Mrs. Newell **brought out the words impressively**, drawing back to observe their effect on her visitor. It was such that he received them with a long silent stare, **which finally passed into a cry of wonder**. 'Married? For heaven's sake, to whom.'

It is worth noticing that the paralinguistic phenomena are not located in reporting clauses as before but are made more conspicuous by being syntactically separated from DS proper. Furthermore, they are clearly associated with kinesic information ('drawing back') and backchannels ('to observe their effect on her visitor'), which implies some conscious rhetorical strategy. Interestingly, Mrs. Newell's DS is commented upon retrospectively whereas Garnett's DS is explained before it is actually uttered. Finally, Mrs. Newell's DS alone would not suggest any paralinguistic information whereas Garnett's DS alone implies exclamation and wonder. The paralinguistic comment could thus be regarded as redundant if it wasn't for the pause it implies ('which finally passed'). The following paragraph corroborates this reading:

Mrs. Newell continued to regard him with a smile so serene and victorious that he saw she took his somewhat unseemly astonishment as a merited tribute to her genius.

While previously, Mrs. Newell was presented anticipating her interlocutor's reaction, here Garnett interprets Mrs Newell's reaction to his reaction. The interpretation of backchannels is thus at the core of the exchange and the paralinguistic information is used both by the participants and by the reader.

The second climax in the conversation is the disclosure of the existence of Mrs. Newell's husband. Garnett does not understand his role in the marriage and takes the subject rather lightly:

'You've sent for me to fix the day?' **he inquired humorously.**
'To remove the last obstacle to its being fixed.'
'I? What kind of obstacle could I have the least effect on?'

The adverb triggers a jocular type of delivery which has an impact on the preceding DS as well as on his second turn. The fact that Mrs. Newell's DS should not be accompanied by any paralinguistic comment suggests her tone of voice is somewhat different. She answers Garnett's locutionary act and ignores the illocutionary force. Paralinguistic lexica enable authors to dissociate the locutionary and the illocutionary for the benefit of the reader. In real conversation, such dissociation is not possible. This hypothesis is confirmed by the following exchange:

Mrs Newell **met his banter with a look which quelled it.**
'I want you to find her father.'
'Her father? Miss Hermione's - ?'
'My husband, of course. I suppose you know he's living.'
Garnett blushed at his own clumsiness. 'I - yes - that is, I really knew nothing-' **he stammered, feeling that each word added to it.** If Hermione was unnoticeable, Mr. Newell had always been invisible. The young man had never so much as given him a thought, and it was awkward to come on him so suddenly at a turn of the talk.
'Well, he is - living here in Paris,' said Mrs. Newell, **with a note of asperity which seemed to imply that her friend might have taken the trouble to post himself on this point.**

Indeed, no paralinguistic comment helps to interpret her state of mind but the reference to her attitude and the interpretation provided implies a somewhat neutral delivery in contrast with Garnett's light tone. It is only in her last turn that Mrs. Newell's irritation is clearly stated with the reference to "a note of asperity". Garnett's reaction is construed both in attitudinal as well as in phonetic terms and the two notations frame his DS.

The conversation between Mrs. Newell and Garnett ends neatly, with the arrival of Baron Schenkelderff.

3.2. PVF and politeness

There is no question here of providing a comprehensive analysis of politeness in this passage. There are, however, several explicit correlations between PVF and im/polite behaviour. The lack of paralinguistic lexis in certain passages can be accounted for by the type of speech utilised. For instance:

'You know Hermy is really very handsome in her peculiar way. I don't think you've ever appreciated her,' Mrs. Newell summed up **with a note of exquisite reproach**.
'I've appreciated her, I assure you; but one somehow didn't think of her marrying - so soon.'
'Soon? She's three-and-twenty; but you've no imagination,' said Mrs. Newell.

Mrs. Newell's Face Threatening Act is corroborated and explained paralinguistically (although the adjective 'exquisite', absent from the Penguin edition, might be a source of interpretative anxiety). Here, the locutionary and the illocutionary acts add up. Mrs. Newell's second turn is similar to her first. She takes up the adverb 'soon' to contradict Garnett and delivers another FTA. As such, another paralinguistic comment would not only be redundant but probably awkward. This chunk of dialogue is followed by a long stretch of discourse devoted to Garnett's thoughts before some NRSA creep into the text once more, providing a natural transition for the following DS:

'Oh, they're made - everything is settled,' **said Mrs. Newell, looking him squarely in the eye**. 'You're wondering, of course, about the *dot* - Frenchmen never go off their heads to the extent of forgetting *that*; or at least their parents don't allow them to.'

Garnett murmured a vague assent, and **she went on without the least appearance of resenting his curiosity: [DS]**

The indication 'looking him squarely in the eye' seems to indicate Mrs. Newell keeps the pressure on her interlocutor but that the previous tone of reproach has somewhat worn off. The following reporting clause removes all doubt and confirms the paralinguistic register has changed and that the utterances are delivered in a rather neutral way.

In the following exchange of turns, only the first one is accompanied by a paralinguistic comment:

'Well, he is - living here in Paris,' said Mrs. Newell, **with a note of asperity** which seemed to imply that her friend might have taken the trouble to post himself on this point.

The other exchanges are related without even a reporting clause. This has to be construed as the sign that, by default, the preceding paralinguistic comment applies. This pleads for a paralinguistic reading based on a more comprehensive conversation analysis of dialogue. PVF have to be integrated as explicit hedges triggering a given paralinguistic register.

Concluding remarks

Given its limited scope, this presentation does not exhaust all the possible uses and implications of PVF as interpretative tools. However, several observations can be made. Theoretically, PVF ought to be regarded as a coherent whole rather than a set of random features to be called upon if and when necessary. Whatever the descriptive framework chosen, it must be user-friendly even for non-phoneticians. The gap between phonetic descriptive minutia and what is usually perceived by the human ear has to be bridged. Similarly, flowery or impressionistic terms (an 'orotund voice' for instance, often found in the literature on PVF) ought to be avoided. This framework has to be adapted then to what is usually found in fiction. The discrepancy between PVF and their written representation (paralinguistic lexica) has to be taken into account.

Practically-speaking, paralinguistic encoding is to be regarded as a dynamic process and the analysis of short extracts shows that PVF do not work at sentence but at discourse level. PVF can be forward or backward pointing and apply to smaller or longer stretches of dialogue. A particular paralinguistic comment may remain active over a number of turns or simply apply to the chunk of DS it is attached to.

As such, PVF ought to become part and parcel of the conversation analyst's toolbox as they are explicit emotion markers that can reveal the illocutionary force of an utterance. Follow-up work should be carried out on the way PVF are taken into account when reading aloud, comparing for instance a paralinguistic analysis to a recording of a text. Another field of research could also be devoted to the translation of PVF, thus highlighting cultural similarities and differences.

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