CREAKY FILLERS AND SPEAKER ATTITUDE: DATA FROM SWEDISH

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ABSTRACT

Spontaneous data from Swedish are presented which suggest that “creaky voice” associated with the filler "EH "UH" is related to the realization of the speaker attitude “uncertainty” in the sense of “indecisiveness” as regards the optimal way to linguistically code referents and predicates. It is suggested that creaky fillers express a certain degree of speaker indecisiveness as regards the most relevant way in which to express the content of a proposition. The idea follows from the assumption of the existence of an “accessability hierarchy” (Ariel, 1988) that constrains the way information is coded in relation to the assumed background knowledge of conversational partners.

By comparing three different phonetic realizations of "EH", it was observed that creaky "EH" occurred in contexts that non-creaky realizations of "EH" did not; non-creaky fillers appeared to be more related to non-interactional features, i.e., prominence marking on the one hand, and discourse segment boundary marking on the other hand.

It is suggested that the considerable drop in fundamental frequency (pitch) associated with creaky "EH" could create an intonational mismatch with respect to the preceding discourse. The intonational clash could signal by means of pragmatic inference, an attitude of uncertainty.

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The assumed attitude of uncertainty associated with creaky fillers is supported by the fact that other interactional devices are sometimes present in utterances containing creaky EH, for example, *liksom* “like”, a pragmatic particle associated with uncertainty as well as to politeness. In order to strengthen the ideas presented here, however, more extensive data need to be analyzed.

1. **SPEAKER ATTITUDES AND SPEECH PLANNING**

The complex relationship between speaker attitudes and their expression in terms of language structure is an area of investigation where pragmatic research has made and continues to make important contributions. Nevertheless, the interface between linguistic coding and attitudinal structure continues to be an area that we know relatively little about. We do know, for example, that speaker attitudes related to propositions about to be uttered are often expressed by the use of main clause verbs. Predicates like *believe* and *know* associate a relatively high degree of “certainty” or assertive force on the part of the speaker as regards the truth of the following proposition: for example, *Mary knows that Bill is sick*. On the other hand, non-assertive verbs like *doubt* indicate that the speaker is relatively uncertain about the truth of the following proposition: for example, *Mary doubts that Bill is sick*. Thus the degree of speaker “certainty” or “assertive force” is linguistically coded to a certain degree. In Swedish, the distinction between assertive and non-assertive verbs has clear grammatical consequences. Assertive verbs can, for example, be followed by embedded main clauses, i.e., clauses whose word-order is always the same as main clauses’, whereas non-assertive verbs can only be followed by subordinate clauses, whose word-order differs from main clauses (Andersson, 1975; Roll, 2006). This patterning is common in the spoken language, although not totally accepted in written Swedish.

The linguistic coding of speaker attitudes in relation to more interactive and social aspects of communicative structure related to features such as “referent accessibility” (Ariel, 1988; Fretheim and Gundel, 1996) and “politeness” (Brown and Levinson, 1987) is less well-known, but research is slowly uncovering many of the subtle aspects of the mapping between speaker attitudes and their linguistic coding in different contexts. Thus forms for expressing referents are assumed to be used in accordance with an “accessiblity hierarchy”, where referents assumed to be highly accessible to the hearer are frequently expressed in terms of, for example, pronouns, and definite NPs, whereas inaccessible referents are more often expressed with, for example, full proper NPs and indefinite NPs, often modified. Thus when introducing what is assumed to be a new referent into a discourse, a speaker will not be expected to use a pronoun or a first name, but rather an indefinite NP or a proper name, or both: for example, *I worked for a man called John Smith* and not *I worked for John*, since the latter expression would imply acquaintance with the referent.