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SOUND SEQUENCES AND EXPRESSIVENESS IN A SPANISH COLLOQUIAL TEXT. THE PHONOSTYLISTICS OF ABUSIVE LANGUAGE

I. Introduction

Any text, no matter what its typological make up may be, is a structure where there is a constant interplay of lexical, syntactic, pragmatic, rhetorical and phonological features as parts of a holistic approach (Sandig/ Selting 1977). Such interplay is the result of a conscious or unconscious selection from the addresser which acquires stylistic significance the moment it is actualised by the addressee's reaction. In Spillner's words, 'style is ...the result of the author's selection from the competing possibilities of the language system and its reconstitution by the recipient reader (Spillner 1974:64).

Of them all, perhaps the analysis of phonological features stands out as one of the least controversial in the way stylistics is envisaged and characterised: all texts consist of a phonological component which fulfils a linguistic function together with an aesthetic one. And yet, following a strong rhetorical tradition, the aesthetic attributes have been exploited basically in written literary language, especially poetry¹ (Ullmann 1973, Carter/Nash 1990), with very little reflection in oral language and in other language varieties. The reason for this must be found, on the one hand, in the difficulty that has existed until very recently to handle spoken discourse, its phonological elements –particularly the suprasegmentals– not lending themselves very easily to a stylistic analysis until the advent of the tape recorder. Also, there is a general feeling that the aesthetic attributes of speech sounds are fully realised only in poetry on the ground that ordinary language is not so aesthetically conscious as literary language is; consequently, it has less recourse to phonaesthetic and other expressive effects.

Those effects are linked to the phonotactic patterns of a given language and to the interplay of phonology and semantics. Spanish, for instance, characterises itself by a fairly simple phonological structure where no more than two consonantal phonemes can precede syllabic nuclei and very few single phonemes are eligible in final position in a word². This simplified phonotactic pattern supports a phonaesthetic structure where phonemes and cluster constellations purport a not very complex network of symbolic connotations if we compare it, for instance, with the complexity displayed by the English system. Yet the 'Expressiveness

¹ According to Ullmann (1973:46) phonostylistics is one of the most active areas in the study of style. Obviously he was referring to the work done in literary stylistics. Few and far between are phonostylistic analyses of varieties of language other than literature. The symbolic nature of sounds was not encouraged by the father of modern linguistics, Saussure, who favoured a view of language based on the 'arbitrariness of the sign'. Authors like Jespersen, Cressot, Marouzeau, Wandruska, etc., did, however, tackle phonetic symbolism from a linguistic as well as from a psycholinguistic standpoint. See Ullman (1962 – Spanish edition 1991: 96-97) for further bibliographical references.

² Only exceptionally, word internally can syllables be checked by two consonants, as in *cons-trucción*; but even those cases are more often than not reduced to a single element in colloquial language (*cos-trucción*).

Principle' (Wales 1990:339) is present in all systems and manifests itself to a higher or lesser degree in all forms not only of written but also of spoken language.

One of those registers where phonaesthetic features can contribute to transmitting an intense expressive feeling is the language of abuse. Any derogatory word is tinged with expressiveness, but in this type of language, greater impact is achieved not just by lexical choice alone: the effect on the listener is fully contrived by the selection of those elements whose phonaesthetic values add strength and harshness to the message. They are a fundamental component of invective language, to such an extent that speech intensification –a primary function of strong talk– is usually weighted with a taboo expression. Stylistically speaking, nowhere else is style as selection so closely linked to a stylistics of reception as in a text of this nature.

II. Segmental phonostylistics

An incident that took place on March 8, 1996, involving the Chairman of the Athletic F.C. of Madrid and the Manager of Compostela F.C. will be used to highlight expressiveness in this type of language. We are fully conscious of the difficulty to specify phonotactic constraints in naturally occurring oral data –a difficult task, according to phonologists like Brown (1977:16), fully aggravated in this style of speech where emotions are at their highest. Our idealisation, however, will not seriously impair the general rules of the language due on the one hand to the simplicity of the Spanish phonological system and also to the fact that the interlocutors' speech moulds itself to the informal variety spoken in Castilian Spanish (Monroy 1980). The basis of our analysis will, therefore, be the symbolic function enshrined in the phonotactic combinations used by our interlocutors in their verbal duelling.

The whole sequence goes as follows:

Setting: MADRID, 8 March, 1996. 10.40 a.m. At the doorsteps of the Liga de Fútbol Profesional (LFP) building the following dialogue takes place between the Chairman of the Athletic F.C. of Madrid, Jesús Gil J. G.; that of Compostela F. C., José María Caneda (J. M. C.), and its Manager, José González Fidalgo (J. G. F.)

1. **Jesús Gil.** -¡Hombre! Ahí está el (1) *chorizo* que se ha metido con mis votantes de Marbella. Que se ha metido con mi club. Tú robas en el Compostela y yo dirijo el Atlético de Madrid.

2. **José González Fidalgo** -¡Tú eres un (2) *hijo de puta*!

3. **J. G.** - (2)¡*Hijo de puta* lo serás tú!

4. **J. G.F.** -¡El único (2) *hijo de puta* eres tú, que eres un (3) *payaso*, hostia!.

The Chairman of Athletic F.C. hits José González Fidalgo in the face

5. **J. G.** - Toma, toma..(hands a portfolio to one of his bodyguards).

6. **J. M. C.** - Cuando vienes con guardaespaldas es cuando nos insultas.

7. **J. G.** - ¡Eres un (2) *hijo de puta* y un (4) *ladrón*!

8. **J. M. C.** - ¡Tú sí que eres un (2) *hijo de puta*, hombre!

9. **J. G.** - ¡Y el nombre de Marbella no lo vuelves a utilizar en tu (5) *puta vida*! Has faltado a los votantes de Marbella.

The Chairman of Compostela F.C. tries to turn round and goes for Jesús Gil, but he is held by his Manager.

10. **J. G. F.** - ¡Quieto, presi!, ¡Quieto presi!. ¿Que no ves que es un (2) *hijo de puta* el que está aquí, hostia?. ¡Que es un (2) *hijo de puta*!

11. **J. M.C.** - ¡No me toques los (6) *cojones*, (7) *mamón*! (meaning Jesús Gil).

12. J. G.F. - ¡Eres un (2) *hijo de puta*, (8) *cabrón!* (9) ¡*Me cago en tu puta madre!*

13. J. G. - ¡Has insultado a la gente de Marbella!...

The Chairman and the Manager of Compostela F. C. enter the building of LFP and close the door while Jesús Gil remains outside.

14. J. M.C. - Los guardaespaldas... Viene siempre con los malditos guardaespaldas. Si no, iba a saber lo que es bueno este (2) *hijo de puta*.

15. J. G. - ¡...Abre, abre... que a éste le voy a poner bien!

16. J. G. F. - ¿A mí? ¿Por qué me vas a poner bien a mí? ¡Hombre!

The main door of the LFP building opens

17. J.G. - ¿Tú quién eres para hablarte (sic) a mí?. ¿Tú quién eres para dirigirte a mí? (10) ¡*Desgracia(d)o!* ¡Habéis faltado a Marbella, habéis faltado a todos, habéis insultado y estás siendo unos (1) *chorizos!*...

18. J. G. F. - ¡El (1) *chorizo* lo eres tú!

19. J. G. - ... ¡Te lo voy a decir ahí (en el salón de la reunión) y aquí!

20. J. G. F. - ¡Aquí... Tú!... ¡Ahí!. ¡Ahí tenías que decirlo, pero no en la calle!

21. J. G. - Vosotros cobráis del Compostela y yo pongo dinero.

22. J. G. F. - ¿Tú?, ¿tú?... ¡Eso lo dices ahí arriba! ¡Tú, tú!... (addressing one of his bodyguards).

23. J. G. - ¡Hala!. ¡Tú (to the Manager) fuera, que a ti ni te conozco! ¡Tú (to Caneda), si quieres algo conmigo, a solas ahí! (in the street).

24. J. G. F. - ¡Vamos presi! ¡Vamos presi, joder!.

25. J. M. C. - ¡Cómo hablas cuando estás acompañado!

26. J. G. - ¡No, no!...

27. J. G. F. - ¡Deja de empujarme, joder! (to the bodyguard).

28. J. M. C. - ¡Por favor, usted! (to bodyguard). ¡Dígale a su jefe que no insulte cuando viene con ustedes?

29. J. G. - ¡Eres un (1) *chorizo*!.

30. J. M. C. - ¡Un (1) *chorizo* eres tú!.

31. J. G. - ¡Tú te lo llevas y yo lo pago. Has insultado a la gente de Marbella. Has insultado a mis votantes!.

32. J. G. F. - ¿Quién es este señor que viene empujándome?

33. J. G.- El que viene conmigo, que es igual.

34. J. M. C. - ¿Que viene contigo? ¿de qué?.

35. J. G. - ¡Si queréis, solos ahora!

36. J. M. C. - ¡Ya te dije que cuando quieras, pero cuando vengas sin gente!

37. J. G. - ¡Que no me nombres más!

38. J. M. C. - ...Cuando vengas sin gente.

39. J. G. - ¡Que no me nombres más, (11) *cobarde*!.

40. J. M. C. - ¡Que eres un (12) *maldito calamidad*!

41. Toni Fidalgo.- ¡Por favor, José María!

42. J. M. C. - ¡Tú vas a saber un día lo que es bueno!

43. J. G. - ¿Yo?.

44. J. G. F. - ¡Sí, tú!.

45. J. G. - ¡Tú eres un (4) *ladrón*!.

46. J. M. C. - ¡Tú eres un (11) *maldito cobarde*!.

47. J. G. - ¡Venga hombre. Sal aquí solo conmigo!

48. J. M. C. - ¡Si vienes con tres guardaespaldas, hombre!.

49. J. G. - ¡Quitaos vosotros! (to the bodyguards). ¡Déjame, déjame. Estoy yo solo aquí. Solo aquí!.

50. J. G. F. - ¡Solo conmigo!.

51. J. M. C. - ¡No vuelvas a tocar a mi gerente! ¡No vuelvas va tocar a mi gerente!

52. J. G. F. - ¡Eres un (13) *montón de mierda*!. ¡Un (13) *montón de mierda* eres tú, cabrón!.

53. J. G. - ¿Quieres que te pegue otra igual?

54. J. G. F. - ¡Otra igual!. ¡A ver si crees que no te la voy a devolver!. ¡Te la devolveré algún día!

55. J. G. - ¡Eres un (10) *desgracia*!

56. J. G. F. - ¡Y tú un (2) *hijo de puta*!

57. J. G. - ¡Yo a ti no te conozco de nada!

58. J. G. F. - ¡Algún día te la devolveré!.

59. J. G. - ¡Cuando quieras!

60. J. G. F. - (8) ¡*Cabrón*!

61. J. G. - ¡El nombre de Gil, ni nombrarlo, (2) *hijo de puta*!

62. J. G. F. - (2) ¡*Hijo de puta* eres tú!. ¡Tú eres el (2) *hijo de puta*!. ¡Tú, tú!

63. J. G. - ¡Baja, baja!...

64. J. G. F. - ..(14). ¡*La madre que te parió*!

65. J. G. - ¡Baja! (10) ¡*Desgracia*!. (3) ¡*Payaso*!. No vuelvas a utilizar el nombre de Marbella.

66. J. M. C. - (12) ¡*Calamidad*!.

67. J. G. - ¡Eres un (2) *hijo de puta*!

68. J. M. C. - (12) ¡...*Calamidad*!

69. J. G. - ¡...Eres un (4) *ladrón*!.

70. J. M. C. - ¿Por qué pegas a mi gerente? (15) ¡*Mamarracho*!

71. J. G. - ¡Tira, tira ...! (to the people who were in front of him). ¡Tira, tira... que hay que romperle la cabeza, hombre!. ¡Que a mí no me insulta más este (2) *hijo de puta*! ¡Que a mí no me insulta! ¡Que es un (1) *chorizo* y yo no! ¡Este vive del Compostela y yo no! ¡A mí me da igual... yo he venido aquí exclusivamente a ver si le rompo la cabeza!

72. ?... - ¡Cálmate Jesús, por favor!.

73. J. G. - ¿Cómo me voy a calmar si ha insultado a mi gente de Marbella?

The whole text may be characterised as a sequence of threadbare fixed expressions typical of this type of discourse where imaginative turns of phrases are out of question. Abusive language seems to consist of a tirade of a reduced list of expressions.

In the opening line we come across the word *chorizo* (1)³, used six times by the interactants. As a non-derogatory expression the word simply means 'sausage'. In a figurative sense though, it refers to a thief, a possible link between the idea of lengthiness, a characteristic of Spanish chorizo, and that of 'the long arm' typical of a thief. The phonaesthetic effect of the word rests on the overall patterning of consonants and vowels, especially the former. Thus we come across /t ʃ/, a phoneme with a rich symbolic value. It may evoke some sort of erotic or sexual feeling as in *chocho* (feminine sexual organ), *chica* (girl), *muchacha* (girl), *macho*, *pecho* (chest, breast), etc. It may also convey the idea of friendliness, very common in hypocoristic forms, as in *Chelo* (shortened for Consuelo), *Concha* (shortened for Concepción), *Merche* (shortened for Mercedes), *Chus* (shortened for Jesús), *chuchó* (dog),

³ In the text we have entered digits between parentheses to better locate the expression under analysis. Identical digit has been used in all instances where the same expression occurs.

fam.), etc. The third, and more relevant here, it can occur in a number of terms with a negative phonaesthetic affective value referring to a fickle, unreliable character or a shoddy action as in *chapuza* (shoddy), *chiflado*, *chaveta* (barmy), *chinche* (nuissance, *fig.*), *chorizo*, etc.

The second syllable in this last word opens with /r/, a consonant which is far less phonaesthetically productive in Spanish than the rolled vibrant phoneme /rr/⁴. Its expressive density when alone is similar to that of the lateral phoneme /l/ both conveying a feeling of smoothness totally absent in the corresponding rolled variety (compare *rizo* (curly) with, say, *caricia* (caress)), a feeling that fits the action of stealing. The last consonantal phoneme (/θ/) is usually attached to a sense of roughness or friction, particularly when followed by a low or back vowel (e.g. *rozar*, *brezo*, *mazo*, *rizo*, etc.).

The expression *hijo de puta* (son of a bitch –literary: of a whore), repeated by both interactants no less than fifteen times, stands out as probably the strongest words of abuse Spanish people can utter. Although it formally consists of three separate lexemes, they functionally behave as a single semantic unit, also shortened to *hijo-puta*. The mimetic detachment of the expression is contrived not so much by the intervening high stressed vowels (/i-u/ (hi- pu) but by the combined effect⁵ of their sonority and the harshness of the neighbouring consonants (/x/, /p/, /t/), all voiceless⁶ sounds. The first consonantal phoneme /x/ (<h> stands as a simple grapheme)⁷ is a fricative sound whose phonaesthetic value appears linked to a sense of roughness also present in words such as *raja*, *reja*, *hoja*, *teja*, *lija*, *bruja*, etc. /p/ as well as /t/ –the strongest elements in Spanish on a phonological-strength scale– evoke an abrupt, clipped sensation where the first plosive, a bilabial, serves to give vent to an unrestrained burst of rage in conjunction with /u/, a cool, distant vowel as Taylor & Taylor (1976:328) would define it. Besides, both phonemes stand out as the most prominent elements of the whole sequence. Notice how the invective begins with /t/ followed by /u/ (*Tú eres...*) and how the interlocutor retaliates with identical structure but in a reverse order (*El hijo de puta lo serás tú (2)*) the pronoun thus resuming and emphasising – it carries the main stress– everything that precedes. The presence of the personal pronoun fulfils then a double function: it certainly frames the object of the insult, but due to its phonological make up – voiceless plosive plus back vowel– it contributes to the enhancement of abruptness conveyed by the following fricative and the plosives, all of them voiceless too. The same occurs in (5) *Tu puta vida*, the pronoun being followed by just the hard plosives /p, t/. Two variants are introduced by the interactants to further intensify the expressive value of the phrase under analysis. In *El único hijo de puta eres tú* (You are the son of a bitch –lit. whore), the interplay of stressed back vowel with the nasal and velar plosive echoes as well as stresses the singularity of the characteristic attributed to the opponent. Similarly, in *Tú sí que eres un hijo*

⁴ On the different expressive values that can be attached to this phoneme such as linearity (e.g. *recto*, *regla*, *raya*, etc.) or circle-shaped form (e.g. *rueda*, *redondo*, *rodeo*), see De Bruyne (1995).

⁵ As Carter and Nash write, ‘vowels and consonants enter into complex combinatory patterns suggesting a complex perception of whatever external event stimulates the onomatopoeia’ 1990:122).

⁶ This only applies to Castilian Spanish where /x/ is always pronounced as a voiceless sound. Things are different in other Hispanic accents where /x/ is a much softer sound.

⁷ In the *DRAE - Dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy* - we find that this grapheme ‘...stands for no sound’. What it really means is that in Standard Spanish it stands for no phoneme. The aspiration of <h> is heard though in some rural areas of Spain (speakers of leonés dialect and in the Canary Islands) as well as in South America (Lapesa, *Historia de la lengua española*, pp. 478, 487, 519 *passim*). In Standard Spanish <h> can be aspirated in expressions like *cante hondo*, *hachís*, and a very short etc.

de puta (you really are the son of a bitch –lit. whore) *sí* acts as a reinforcer of everything that follows, *que* contributing with the initial voiceless velar plosive to the cathartic effect of the expression. These and other examples reveal that the key derogatory term *puta* can collocate with almost any noun in the language: just about anything can be called ‘whore’ (life, machines, instruments, animals and people - men as well as women)⁸.

The first round of abuse before coming to blows ends up with an insult and blasphemy:...*que eres un payaso* (clown), *hostia!* (Holy Sacrament). The first noun evokes negative overtones in its figurative sense –much commoner than the non-figurative sense. In its phonological structure we find two voiceless consonants, plosive (/p/) and fricative (/s/), plus one voiced element (/j/)⁹. This heads the main stressed syllable whose nucleus is a detached, low vowel. The voiced palatal plosive –a sound with ambivalent phonaesthetic qualities due to its phonetic variability in the Spanish speaking world– has in our text clear pressure-exertion overtones thus intensifying the hardness of the initial plosive, further increased by the presence of the two identical low-vowel nuclei. The final sibilant sound serves to lengthen and sustain the phonetic effect of the two previous consonants. *¡Hostia!* on the other hand, is a common exclamation, so common in contemporary Spain that it appears as a catch-all expression of younger generations: as well as men, it is increasingly used by many young women. The overall presence of this expletive is a good indication of the different shades of expressivity it can convey. Like the English *Bloody hell*, it can be mere conversation filler, but it can also be used to express disbelief, surprise and bewilderment or, like in our example, anger. The stressed back vowel checked by the voiceless sibilant (./ós/) introduces a sense of stridency singularising the anger that is soon given vent by the abrupt presence of the voiceless alveolar plosive /t/. Notice too how the initial syllable, apart from being stress carrier, shares with the final syllable of the preceding word the same elements (./...os ós.../) thus intensifying the disparaging sonority of the sibilant.

A very powerful phonaesthetic cluster in Spanish is the combination of voiced plosive plus /r/ that we find in words like *cabrón* (bastard), *ladrón* (thief) or *desgracia(d)o* (poor devil). In ordinary speech /b, d, g/ are realised as fricatives /β, ð, γ/ (e.g. /laðrón/), but under emotional pressure they can have a plosive realisation. The vicinity of rolled /rr/ and the presence of a nasal contribute significantly to the powerful expressive effect of such clusters. /br/, in particular appears as head of words whose meaning is tinged with a negative aura as in *brusco, bronco, bruto*, etc., sharing this phonaesthetic effect with English
 (e.g. *brat, brute, brash*, etc.). With smaller phonaesthetic possibilities, /gr/ can have different, opposing expressive values depending on the quality of the nucleus: if what follows is a low vowel plus a nasal, it conveys a positive feeling (e.g. *grande, grandeza, gracia...*); followed by a high, back vowel has a negative onomatopoeic effect (e.g. *gruñir, grumo, grueso*).

Mention has been made to the presence of a nasal as a booster of plosive plus /r/ clusters. As the most sonorous segments in language, nasals –/n/ in particular– are pivotal in the

⁸ When the word applies to animals or objects, it adds a pejorative meaning to the noun that it qualifies (e.g *la puta impresora*). With humans the sense of the word ranges from an acceptable, pally expression if used in a friendly context (e.g. *¡Qué puta eres!* – applied both to men and women) to a very offensive insult if used on its own and applied to a woman (*¡puta!*).

⁹ In the literature on the phonology of Spanish this sound is usually considered a voiced palatal affricate (Alcina/Blecua 1975:374). My view is that it is rather a voiced palatal: plosive entering into identical symmetrical relations held between Spanish voiceless and voiced plosives : [j] after nasal (e.g. *conyuge*), [J] between vowels (e.g. *payaso*). For further comments, see Monroy (1980:81-106).

configuration of most sound effects. In the words under consideration, their presence following a back vowel yields the most resounding sequence of the Spanish language: the suffix **-ón**. It is not an accident that most Spanish augmentative forms should have this ending, phonaesthetically attached to the idea of large-scale, big volume, largeness, etc., further emphasised by the presence of the primary stress always attracted by this syllable. This is how the first two words under analysis acquire full symbolic significance, also present in two other expressions of abuse uttered by J. M. C.: ...*cojones* (bollocks) and *mamón* (scrounger, berk). Notice again how in both cases the back vowel /o/, the primary stress carrier, is checked by nasal, preceded by a voiceless fricative¹⁰ and another nasal respectively. In the first case, the suffix *-xón-* combines the idea of largeness with that of coarseness, while in the second the presence of a previous nasal, preceded in turn by another nasal, enacts the onomatopoeic effect of a complete fool.

A combined effect of nasals, vibrant /rr/ and affricate phonemes with low and back phonemes is found in *mamarracho* (scarecrow), another word of abuse used by J.M.C. The term is much more expressively loaded in Spanish than the corresponding English translation may reflect. Here the impact of resounding sonority conveyed by the two bilabial nasals is further strengthened by the presence of rolled /rr/. On the other hand, /tʃ/ evokes an unreliable character as pointed out above, the whole word reflecting a felicitous onomatopoeic expression where the person is defined as a sight or a scruffy person.

Although not so strongly phonaesthetic as the cluster /br/, the encounter of vibrant plus voiced plosive as coda and head of two contiguous syllables produces a negative phonostylistic effect. It occurs in the word *cobarde* (coward), where this group is preceded by plosives heading back and low vowels, and it is also apparent in words like *mierda* (shit), *burdo* (coarse), *gordo* (fat), etc. In these and other similar expressions, <rd> conveys clear overtones of unpleasantness.

III. Phrasal phonostylistics

As stated above, the simplicity displayed by the Spanish phonological system is very far from the complexity found in other languages. Only plosives plus liquids can constitute an acceptable cluster in our language, hence phonostylistic values are much more stringent than the ones found in a language like English with plenty of consonantal clusters. There are, though, suggestive patterns that are the result of sense groupings such as the ones found in *maldito calamidad* (bloody trouble), *no me toques los cojones* (do not take the piss), *montón de mierda* (lump of shit), *la madre que te parió* (get stuffed), or *me cago en tu puta madre* (I shit on your fucking mother), all taken from the text under analysis. The consonantal patterning displayed by these expressions is as follows (notice that they appear listed from less to more powerful abusive load, although phoneme position has been slightly altered to better reflect the recurring elements):

¹⁰ According to Lang (1990:12) /k/ (as well as /r/ and /x/) produce a phonaesthetic negative effect suggesting 'harshness or unpleasantness'. Beinhauer (1968:87-88) too remarks that initial /k/ is linked to obscene language as words like *coño*, *cojones*, *carajo*, etc., testify. As we shall discuss further down it is difficult to ascribe phonaesthetic values to most Spanish single phonemes, the phonetic symbolism resting rather on the effect produced by individual sound combinations in specific contexts.

Expressions													
<i>Maldito calamidad</i>		m		l		D			t	k		l	m d
<i>No me toques los cojones</i>	n	m			t		k	l		k x		n	s
<i>Montón de mierda</i>		m	n		t	D						m	d
<i>La madre que te parió</i>		m		l		D	k		t	p		r	
<i>Me cago en tu puta madre</i>		m			t		k	y	t	p		r	m d

The first thing to note is a pattern strikingly similar. These expletives begin with a nasal stop which reappears as the opening segment of the last word in two instances, the remaining three initiating with plosive stops instead. Between the nasal stops, strings of plosives are arranged significantly, enhancing the feeling of vigorousness attached to this group of consonants. Thus in our first example, voiceless plosives are surrounded by the voiced segment /d/-/ð/ (-/d-t-k-ð/), with the two final consonants of each word in loose alliteration (/d-t d-ð/. /). In general terms, /a/ –the only Spanish low vowel– is, unlike English /ʌ/¹¹, neutral as regards its symbolic character, but in this context it conveys a sense of unpleasantness usually attached to this phoneme when it happens in polysyllabic words (e.g. *alambrada*, *canallada*, *calamidad*, *barbaridad*, etc.). The repetitive presence of the low vowel /a/, the final one bearing the main stress, contributes to the mimetic effect of sheer annoyance. The same unpleasant feeling is found in the combinatory consonantal patterns of our second example where the harsh voiceless plosives /t-k-k/ are framed by nasal stops; here only mid vowels intervene repeating themselves as a beating echoic pattern /o-e o-e ooo-e/.

Phonaesthetic density is evident in the third instance with the accumulation of nasals standing in a kind of alliterative reverse patterning (/m-n-n-m/). The word *montón* itself is a good example of phonetic symbolism, hugeness being captured by the high-sounding nasals in conjunction with the mid back vowel /o/. This combination constitutes one of the most typical phonaesthetic patterns in the language used to convey such a feeling as the words seen above (*cabrón*, *mamón*, etc.) patently testify. Sound design in the following noun, however, is a case of what Carter and Nash call a ‘phonetic metaphor’ (1990:123) rather than phonetic symbolism in the sense that mimetism is more arbitrary than fixed. Here the nasal stop in *mierda* (shit) marks the transition between the tirade of the preceding nasals and the group of vibrant plus voiced alveolar plosive /r-d/. We have on the one hand the union of /m/ plus /r/, a happy combination of resonance and vibrancy modulated in this case by the presence of /d/. Although members of a different syllable, /r/ when followed by /d/ can evoke a smooth sensation present in words like *verde* (green), *cuerda* (string), *muérdago* (mistletoe), or a more slushy, nebulous feeling as in *horda* (hord) or the example under consideration.

More tellingly, the fourth expression (*La madre que te parió*¹² –The mother that bore you) captures the unrestrained anger of the speaker by means of the whole set of voiceless plosives /-k-t-p-/. An almost identical pattern is found in our last example (*Me cago en tu puta madre*)

11 According to Jespersen (1922) this low vowel is ‘dull’ or ‘dump’ and suggests dislike or unpleasantness.

12 This is a multi-faceted expression: it can be applied to a person to show admiration for his/her physical attributes or it can be used as an insult as in our case. Intonation here does not play a decisive delimiting role. Rather it is context what decides the expressive value of this phrase.

where the strong language used is appropriately wrapped up in the same set of voiceless plosives (-k-p-t-/).

Vowels too play an important role in the overall phonaesthetic effect of each expression. The first instance is characterised by the repeated use of /a/ and /e/ -three times each. In the final example, /a/ prevails over the rest of the vowels both in terms of frequency and of salience: it carries two (the third one corresponds to /u/ (-pú-)) out of the three primary stresses of the whole sequence (-ká- -má-). Despite the presence of /e/, the whole texture oozes out a negative overtone due to the presence of back vowels.

IV. Prosodic patterns

Let's now turn to the prosodic characteristics of the transcript. One thing that strikes the reader/listener is the brevity of the interventions in this kind of language. Obviously, there is not much time for reflection when we speak in anger, the interactants snapping at each other in a non-stop flow of abuse. Typically the participants deploy co-occurring linguistic cues from all levels of grammar: lexico-semantics, syntax and prosody. Although all of them are relevant in any analysis of style, this is particularly so in instances of 'interactional stylistics' (Sandig/Selting 1997). For reasons of brevity we shall focus our attention just on one prosodic level: intonation¹³. Following O'Connor and Arnold (1973), our approach envisages oral language as a succession of tone units definable as chunks of discourse with a distinctive tonality. A fundamental characteristic of this phonological unit is the nucleus, an obligatory element which shapes the internal structure of such unit. Tonic syllables affected by the nucleus are more salient and more information-loaded than the rest. The nucleus is in fact the only compulsory element of a tone unit, the remaining facultative components being the 'head' (a segment covering from the first stressed syllable up to the nucleus), the 'pre-head' (the unstressed chunk preceding the head) and the 'tail' (what comes after the nucleus). In theory we shall consider two types of pre-heads (high and neutral), five types of head (high, low, descending, ascending and stepping) and nine types of nuclear pitch variation (high rise, high fall, low rise, low fall, rise-fall, fall-rise, mid-rise, mid-fall and level).¹⁴ In practice, however, we shall see that, contrary to what one might expect, only few patterns occur in this type of language.

Besides these intonation features, occasional use will be made of the following prosodic conventions:

Table 1. Prosodic features (adapted from Crystal 1977:94-95)

BASIC PROSODIC SYSTEMS			
PITCH RANGE	LOUDNESS	TEMPO	RHYTHMICALITY

¹³ An excellent summary to the theoretical background to both Spanish and English intonation is provided by M. Luisa García Lecumberri and her thesis *Intonational Signalling of Information Structure in English*. Universidad del País Vasco.

¹⁴ For further information, see Monroy (2000) 'La percepción de la función actitudinal y su incidencia en la enseñanza de la entonación del inglés a hispanohablantes'. *Proceedings of the XVIII AESLA Conference*. Barcelona. In press.

High	FORTÍS(SIMO)	ALLEGRI(SIMO)	^ = clipped syll. If affecting several syll produces 'staccato' effect.
Low	FORTE	ALLEGRO	
Monotone	PIANO	ANDANTE	
	PIANIS(SIMO)	LENTO	
Lively	CRESC(ENDO)	LENTIS(SIMO)	: =drawled (e.g si: =síii). If affecting various syllables produces 'legato' (leg) or glissando effect.
	DIMIN(UENDO)	accel(erando)	
Wide		rall(entando)	
Narrow			
PAUSES .	. = very brief	- = Normal (own usual pattern)	
	-- = double duration	--- = triple duration.	
OTHER CONVENTIONS: =	// =	Simultaneous conversation
	tonal unit boundaries		

The dialogue opens with the Chairman of Athletic of Madrid F.C. portraying and characterising his opponent by means of a number of descriptive expressions. After the initial exclamation of surprise, he starts describing his enemy as a lousy fellow who has dared to attack those people from Marbella who voted for him and who has also attacked his football team.

1) Jesús Gil.- [High, forte, andante]

- a) |₁ ↗HOMBRE!
- b) |A hí está el (1) chorizo que se ha metido con mis votantes de Mar¹ ↗Bella.| [.]
- c) |Que sè ha metido con mi¹ →CLUB.| [--]
- d) |'Tú robas en el Compos→TEla| [.]
- e) | y ` yo dirijo el Atlético de Ma¹ →DRID|¹⁵

The unceremonious statement is presented in a mid to high key beginning with a descending head and a low fall nucleus on MarBella (nuclei appear in small capitals). But contrary to the orthodox view that the nucleus, at least in English, is the focal point of the intonation unit (Tench 1996:53), it is the word 'chorizo' rather than 'Marbella' which stands out as the more significant and striking term of the tone unit. Thus while the nucleus falls clearly on MarBella, the focus of the information happens to occur on 'chorizo'. There is then a disjunction between the intonational pattern with one single intonational unit and the nucleus at the end, and the semantic level with 'chorizo' as focal point of a major unit followed by the nucleus on a comment, therefore minor, clause. Similarly, in c), it is the anaphoric head with 'metido con' (attacked) that causes greater impact than the nucleus on CLUB. Again in (d) and (e) the speaker, by means of an antithesis, opposes his enemy's alleged action of stealing to his own of running Athletic of Madrid F.C., both actions causing greater effect on the listener than the sustained and falling nuclei on 'Compostela' and 'Madrid' respectively.

15 Three types of level tone are distinguished: high, represented by a small <h> preceding a horizontal arrow; low, represented by a small <l> before the arrow, and mid level represented by the horizontal arrow without further qualification. Also, in the case of descending tones, we represent the low fall with a downward arrow preceded by a small 'l' (i.e. ¹ ↘) to distinguish it from the high fall, represented by just the arrow. In the case of the heads, we have introduced a small vertical arrow (^) to reflect a pitch movement lower than the preceding tone sequence.

The following statements scattered in the text further confirm the phonaesthetic character of mid heads plus mid or fall nuclei as carriers of a deprecatory, reproving attitude.

6. |Cuando` vienes con los guardaespaldas es cuando nos in¹SULTas|
14. |Los guardaes²PALdas...|^ Viene siempre con los guardaes¹PALdas |
21. |Vo 'sotros cobráis del Compos→TEla | y 'yo pongo di¹NEro |
36. | 'Ya te dije que 'cuando³ QUIERas | pero cuando 'vengas⁴ sin¹GENte |
71. a. | Que a` mi no me insulta más ese hijo de¹PUTa | [.]
 b. |Que a` mi no me in¹SULTa | [-]
 c. |Que 'es un chorizo y yo →NO | [-]
 d. | 'Ese vive del Compostela y yo →NO | [.]
 e. |A `mi me da i¹→GUAL |
 f. |` Yo he venido aquí exclusivamente a ver si le rompo la ca¹BEza |

Very little, if anything, has been written on the prosodic composition of any Spanish register, and so there is no way to check the validity of this information, but my impression is that the overall patterning of this phonological paragraph with a high (descending or level) head plus a mid or low fall nucleus conveys a sense of definiteness, of a categorical character to the statements. Together with this, there are other intervening elements¹⁶ that cannot be ignored: the pitch level is fairly high and narrow; loudness ranges from 'mid' to 'forte'; tempo moves between andante and occasionally allegro, and a clipped rhythmicality characterises the speech of the interlocutors, J. G. in particular.

Gross insults, as the ones reflected in the excerpt below, constitute interesting cases of exclamations. Intonationally, they follow the predictable pattern of very emotional language.

- 2) |¡ Tú eres un (2)hijo ⁴de ¹PUTa!|
- 3) |Hijo ¹de ⁴puta lo serás →TÚ!|
- 4) |El ¹único (2) hijo de puta eres →TÚ,| que` eres un (3) pa ¹YAsO,| ¹HOSTia!|
- 7) |¡` Eres un (2) hijo de puta y un (4) la ¹→DRÓN!|
- 8) |¡ 'Tú sí que eres un (2)hijo ⁴de ¹PUTa,| ¹HOMBRE!|
- 12) |¡` Eres un (2) hijo de ¹PUTa, |(8) ca ¹BRÓN! | (9)¡Me 'cago en tu puta ¹MAdre!|
- 40) |¡Que 'eres un (12) maldito⁴ calami→DAD!|
- 45) |¡'Tú eres un (4)⁴ la→DRÓN!|.
- 46) |¡ 'Tú eres un (11) maldito 'co ¹BARde!|.

¹⁶ Oswalt (1994:320) summarises Scherer's results on vocal indicators of emotional states. His findings related to anger correspond pretty closely to our impressions.

52) |¡ 'Eres un (13) montón 'de ^{1\`}**MIERda!**!| ¡ Un (13) mon'tón de mierda eres →TÚ,| ca →BRÓN!..|

This word duelling is a brisk, punchy exchange of invective where each intervention consists of no more than three tone units - usually just one- all uttered in a mid or high key, which are characterised by the presence of high sustained heads and a falling nucleus. This pattern seems to be very commonly used with phrasal interjections as it gives extra weight to the message. The tone, nonetheless, is not necessarily just a falling one: it can be a high or a low fall, but also a level one. A falling tone will signal an intense feeling, high or low fall depending both on the speaker's degree of anger and on the type of head used. A high head uttered in a high key will be followed by a mid or low fall nucleus. But a sustained, high or mid level tone is very common too, particularly in cases of marked tonality if the nucleus falls on the last syllable of the tone unit as exemplified in 3, 4, or second tone unit of turn 52.

Besides the intonation contour, other prosodic systems help shape the phonaesthetic profile of exclamatory abusive language: the pitch range used is high and narrow and with a degree of loudness that ranges between forte and fortissimo. The tempo allegro fits the intense feelings of the interlocutors and the accumulated tension derived from the situation. Pauses are very brief and there is a clipped rhythmicality which transmits a staccato flavour to the whole utterance.

The overall tone of commands shows identical level of hostility, enacted partly by conspicuous lexical units (insults) as well as by a narrow range of tone variation with the pre-tonics playing a decisive role. Thus in the following examples:

- 9) |Y el¹ nombre de Marbella no lo vuelvas a utilizar en tu ^{1\`}**PUTa vida** |
- 10) |^{1\`}**QUI**eto |^{1\`}**PRES**i |^{1\`}**QUI**eto, |^{1\`}**PRES**i...|
- 11) |'No me 'toques los co ^{1\`}**JONES**,| ca →BRÓN |
- 15) |^{1\`}**Abre**,| ^{1\`}**Abre**.| que a 'este le voy a poner ¹→**BIEN** |
- 23) |^{1\`}**Hala** | 'Tú ^{1\`}**FU**era,| que a` ti ni te co ^{1\`}**NOZ**co |
- 27) |'Deja de empu ^{1\`}**JAR**me, |jo ^h→**DER** |
- 51) |'No vuelvas a tocar 'a mi ge ^{1\`}**REN**te |
- 61) |El 'nombre de Gil, 'ni nom ^{1\`}**BRAR**lo, | hijo de ^{1\`}**PUTa**.|...

we find the overriding presence of high heads, uttered in a high key, followed by a high or mid fall tone, a pattern very typical of interjections as pointed out. Just as common is the high, mid or even the low-level tone in cases where the nucleus falls on the last syllable of a final exclamatory expression (e.g. *joder*, *cabrón*). The accompanying prosodic features share with interjections similar pitch range, loudness, tempo and rhythmicality.

Questions too share a high pre-tonic movement In our sample they are mostly of a wh-type.

- 16.a. |¿A ^h→**MÍ**? |
- b. |¿Por qué me vas a poner bien a ¹→**MÍ** |^{1\`}**HOMBRE**? |
- 17.a. |¿ Tú quien eres para hablarte (sic) a ¹→**MI**? |
- b. |¿ Tú quién eres para dirigirte a ¹→**MI**? |

.....

22.|¿^{1\`}**TÚ**? |¿^{1\`}**TÚ**? |....

.....

32.|¿ Quién es ese señor que viene empu ^{1\`}**JÁ**ndome? |

.....

34. | *¿Que 'viene con [↗]Tigo? | ¿De [↘]QUÉ? |*

.....
43. | *¿[↗]YO? |*

.....
73. | *¿[↗]Cómo me voy a calmar si ha insultado a mi gente de Mar^{1↘} [↗]BELLA? |*

As with statements, the tone of the wh-questions is extremely unfriendly, hostility showing in the use tone units starting from a high key and high heads. The following nucleus is either low fall or simply low level depending on whether the final lexical element carries the stress on the pre-final or final syllable respectively. In Castilian Spanish this type of tone may be kinaesthetically linked to different degrees of unexpectedness, ranging from a lively reaction to mild surprise. Alternatively, it can also be used to express a strong dissent as examples 16 b, 17, 32, the second tone unit of 34, and 73 show. Yes/ no questions share with wh-questions identical high key. Nuclei, though, are mid high rise, typical of a surprised, but also a reproachful attitude.

Conclusion

It is important to underline what was stated at the beginning: that the stylistic effects pinpointed in the analysis of this or other texts are the result of the stylistic choices made by the interactants as noticed and interpreted by the listener/ reader. This is the first requirement of any theory of style that claims to be communication-orientated. The listener/ reader, is then a central element in this situation. And if style is then reader dependent, it cannot be envisaged as an immanent, fixed characteristic of a text. It is, instead, a dynamic process available to different interpretations depending on the reader's interests and knowledge.

Mention has been made too of the fact that although there is, in theory, general agreement that style covers all linguistic variation that takes place in both spoken and written discourse, in practice there is still a tendency to apply this notion to both literary and non-literary *written* texts too. Phonostylistics in particular has been confined to literary language until very recently, considering that phonological expressivity could only be the preserve of poetic language. The language of insult, besides being a special case of interactional stylistics, constitutes an interesting ground for expressivity which becomes prominent in this type of discourse. The message transmitted rests not so much on linguistic variation as on the choice of specific lexico-semantic units whose phonological elements evoke appropriate phonaesthetic reactions. Unlike literary language, where there may be a danger of 'over-milking' the significance of certain phonetic patterns, in this speech style phonology and lexical choice produce a kind of resonance, increasing the expressive character of the utterance. In this way, sequential sound combinations coupled with prosodic effects yield probably the most aggressive type of discourse in the language, since as S. Burgen (1996) would remark, we are what we speak and never more so than when we speak in anger.

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