



The mirror game: the interference of stereotypes in the speech of radio and podcast communicators

Jogo de espelhos: a interferência dos estereótipos na fala dos comunicadores de rádio e *podcast*

El juego del espejo: la interferencia de los estereotipos en el discurso de los comunicadores de radio y podcast

Tania Calderaro Morales* 

Léslie Piccolotto Ferreira* 

Abstract

Introduction: Radio and podcast listeners deduce personality traits when they listen to presenters, exclusively from the speech of these professionals. **Objective:** To identify the factors that interfere in the attribution of personality characteristics based on the voice, and to discuss how the audience's judgment can modify the performance of radio and podcast presenters. **Methods:** Through initial bibliographic survey, bibliographical references on voice judgment research were presented, considering sociocultural and gender aspects, and the interference of stereotypes in the behavior and speech of individuals. **Results:** Surveys of personality judgment by voice indicate that the listeners; assessment is based on the most striking and socially valued personality traits: the stereotypes. Considering that the same values are also shared by communicators, it is possible to suppose that they try imprinting characteristics in their speech that please the public. **Conclusion:** The attempt to correspond to stereotypes seems to result in the standardization of the speech of radio and podcast communicators.

Keywords: Voice; Radio; Stereotyping; Communication; Webcast; Speech; Speech Perception

* Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, SP, Brazil.

Authors' contributions:

TCM: literature review; study design

LPF: study conception and guidance; study design

Correspondence email address: Tania Calderaro Morales - tania.morales5@gmail.com

Received: 06/26/2021

Accepted: 02/04/2021



Resumo

Introdução: Ouvintes de rádio e *podcast* deduzem traços de personalidade quando ouvem os apresentadores, a partir exclusivamente da fala desses profissionais. **Objetivo:** Identificar os fatores que interferem na atribuição de características de personalidade a partir da voz, e discutir como o julgamento do público pode modificar a performance dos apresentadores de rádio e *podcast*. **Método:** Por meio de um levantamento bibliográfico inicial, foram apresentadas referências bibliográficas sobre pesquisas de julgamento de voz, considerando aspectos socioculturais e de gênero, e a interferência dos estereótipos no comportamento e na fala dos indivíduos. **Resultados:** Pesquisas de julgamento de personalidade pela voz indicam que a avaliação dos ouvintes se baseia nos traços de personalidade mais marcantes e valorizados socialmente, ou seja, os estereótipos. Considerando que os mesmos valores são compartilhados também pelos comunicadores, é possível supor que esses procurem imprimir na sua fala características que agradem ao público. **Conclusão:** A tentativa de corresponder aos estereótipos parece resultar na padronização da fala dos comunicadores de rádio e *podcast*.

Palavras-chave: Voz; Rádio; Estereotipagem; Comunicação; Webcast, Fala, Percepção de Fala

Resumen

Introducción: Los oyentes de radio y podcasts deducen rasgos de personalidad cuando escuchan a los presentadores, exclusivamente del discurso de estos profesionales. **Objetivo:** Identificar los factores que interfieren en la atribución de características de personalidad basadas en la voz y discutir cómo el juicio de la audiencia puede modificar el desempeño de los presentadores de radio y podcast. **Metodos:** A través de un estudio bibliográfico inicial, se presentaron referencias bibliográficas sobre investigaciones de juicio de voz, considerando aspectos socioculturales y de género, y la interferencia de estereotipos en la conducta y el habla de los individuos. **Resultados:** Las encuestas de juicio de personalidad por voz indican que la valoración de los oyentes se basa en los rasgos de personalidad más llamativos y valorados socialmente, es decir, los estereotipos. Teniendo en cuenta que los mismos valores también los comparten los comunicadores, es posible suponer que intentan imprimir en su discurso características que agraden al público. **Conclusión:** El intento de corresponder a los estereotipos parece resultar en la estandarización del habla de los comunicadores de radio y podcast.

Palabras clave: Voz; Radio; Estereotipo; Comunicación; Difusión por la Web; Habla; Percepción del Habla

Introduction

Many studies have been carried out in the field of speech-language pathology showing aspects related to oral expressiveness that can generate positive or negative impressions, regardless of the spoken content. In this sense, the studies follow various analysis or sample selection procedures. Studies involving different professionals, such as teachers^{1,2}, executives³, TV news presenters⁴, and contemporary philosophers⁵, show possible characteristics of identification by the form (sound) of what is said (sense). Given that the topic is also related to other areas, such as Linguistics, Sociolinguistics, Psychology and Communication, the analysis of the factors that impact the assessment of the speech of communication professionals in audio journalism and their effects on the performance of

these professionals requires a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach.

Presenters of radio and podcast programs communicate exclusively with their voices, which is a tool to present the content, and gain credibility and win the sympathy of the listeners. Thus, these communicators need to know the criteria for evaluating their speeches, so that they can improve their performance.

In these contexts, there is an almost exclusive impact of the voice, since this communication does not have gestural or visual resources that can also affect the listeners' assessment. The predominance of the voice, without the image of the presenter, results in a closer relationship between the audience and the communicator. This finding is in line with a study⁶ that analyzed the perceptions of people in two situations: when they were exposed exclusively



to the voice, and when they also had access to the image of who was speaking. The author of the study showed that when the image of the communicator is displayed, the audience's attention becomes more diffused, while exclusive access to the voice results in a greater concentration on the spoken content. The most intriguing aspect of this study is to verify that, without access to the image, the listener begins to mentally construct the figure of the presenters, attributing physical and even emotional characteristics to them. These characteristics are associated from the listener's interpretation based exclusively on voice and speech.

There are studies in the academic literature that aim to identify how personality is judged based on exclusive contact with the voice. The voice can include several personal characteristics, such as extroversion or introversion; assertiveness or insecurity; emotional stability or instability. In another study, Allport⁷ evaluated ten voice judgment experiments and the results of all of them show a pattern of association between vocal characteristics and personality traits. This shows that, on the whole, listeners tend to have the same perceptions and build similar mental images about the same presenter. However, this does not mean that the images they create are correct, since the presenters are not necessarily people with the same characteristics attributed to them by the voice. Although there is no consensus on this in the research, the study concluded that there is unanimity in identifying a pattern of judgment. Each voice conveys the same information, which leads to the conclusion that people tend to evaluate voices using the same criteria.⁷

By analyzing the ten experiments, the author was able to notice that listeners only notice the most striking aspects of speech, and not its set of nuances. As such, listeners are more sensitive to specific cues, which allow for general interpretations of personality traits. The study concludes that these simplifications are made from stereotypes, which are personality traits most commonly recognized by a social group⁷.

In this way, through a preliminary bibliographic survey, this Communication aims to identify how social values impact the attribution of personality characteristics from the voice, and discuss how the judgment of listeners can change the performance of radio and podcast presenters.

In order to understand how stereotypes impact listeners' assessment, this study also presents two bibliographic references on voice judgment research. On the one hand, the first bibliographic reference compared the effects referring to gender (female and male voices) and identified that listeners apply different evaluation criteria for the speech of men and women. On the other hand, the second bibliographic reference was conducted in two countries and identified that the judgment criteria vary according to the sociocultural values of each country. Then, this study refers to Goffman⁸ in order to discuss how behavior is shaped in life in society to match stereotypes and please others.

Finally, the study resumes the discussion in the context of radio and podcast, reflecting on the possible interference of stereotypes in the construction of communicators' speech. To this end, the study addresses the article by Professor Soulez⁹, from the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, to discuss the identity of media professionals.

Description

In order to achieve the objective, the researchers decided to include some bibliographic sources to discuss four aspects related to the stereotype. Initially, the study will present questions regarding gender stereotypes, then questions related to nationality stereotypes and, finally, it will address the influence of stereotypes on interpersonal relationships and speech.

Gender stereotypes

It should be noted that stereotypes are also constructed from perceptions of gender. In this sense, the findings of a research carried out at Columbia University in the United States¹⁰ showed that male and female voices are judged based on different criteria. After realizing that previous studies on personality judgment through speech were conducted only with male voices, the author decided to investigate whether the public would have the same perceptions of men's and women's voices. Thus, the study presented speeches of both genders, randomly and the evaluators were asked to fill in two forms for each voice, one with vocal characteristics and the other with personality traits. There was a correlation in the pattern of voice and



personality association between evaluators, but it should be noted that evaluators used different parameters to assess female and male voices only for some personality traits. There were no important differences in the perceptions of male and female voices in some aspects, such as in relation to the degree of sociability. However, there was a different perception when approaching traits related to emotional balance, since the evaluators preferred female voices with little oscillation in pitch and intensity, while male voices, with more variations, are considered pleasant. Thus, the authors concluded that these differences are related to the stereotypes of each gender. The author believes that this may be due to a possible association that the public makes of emotional stability as a male attribute and, as such, a female voice with more oscillations would be reinforcing the negative idea of emotional lack of control associated with women.

There are some studies in Phonetics that help us to understand the biological origin of some gender stereotypes associated with voice. In this sense, the so-called Sound Symbolism Codes take into account the anatomical conditions in speech production, including two that are related to physiological differences between men and women: the Frequency Code¹¹ and the Siren Code¹², which will be explained below.

When defining the Frequency Code, Ohala¹¹ reports that there are atavistic origins for the association of a sense of strength to the sound of the low-pitched voice. The author applies Morton's theory¹³ about animal vocalizations to humans: species with greater physical complexion produce lower and more powerful sounds, while high-pitched vocalizations are produced by smaller and more fragile animals. Based on this theory, vocalization would be a signal of power or submission between animal species, which would depend on the physical potential of each one. By extrapolating this theory to humans, Ohala¹¹ draws attention to an aspect that is not reported among other animals, since among humans, within the same species, there are vocalization variations depending on the biological gender. As men and women have different dimensions in vocal anatomy, which results in lower voices in men, this difference in vocal potential within the same species is reported only among humans. Ohala¹¹ believes that this may be due to the fact that male acoustics have become more powerful and threatening in the process of

natural selection to enhance the male role of physical protection of the family nucleus.

Similar to the Frequency Code proposed by Ohala⁶, the Siren Code is also based on vocal anatomy distinctions between males and females. Gussenhoven¹¹ reported that breathy voice quality is more frequent in women due to physiological reasons that cause air leakage. The term "siren" refers to the siren, since the whispered voice in a woman conveys the sense of sensuality. In this sense, Addington¹⁴ reported that women with a breathy voice are perceived as feminine, small, immature and beautiful. On the other hand, the breathy voice in men is understood as a sign of artistic sensitivity. As such, Frequency Code and the Siren Code are codes of sound symbolism that explain the difference in voices between men and women as a result of variations in physical constitution. Although these variations are merely anatomical in nature, they generate meanings that reinforce gender stereotypes.

Eidisheim¹⁵ reports that the attribution of personality traits from innate voice characteristics is common and reflects gender and race prejudices. According to the author, the auditory perception associated with gender and race is influenced by oppressive social relationships.

Race stereotypes

Eidisheim¹⁵, who is a professor of musicology at the University of California, reports in her book "The Race of Sound" that the listener assumes the race of the person who sings by the sound of the voice. The author details the racist stereotypes related to voices identified as being of black people and highlights that the association between voice and race causes misperceptions. To this end, the author¹⁵ is based on the idea that the voice is not unique and innate, but collective and cultural and, above all, that the source of the voice is not in the person who produces the sound, but in the person who listens. In this way, listeners classify the voice based on their own criteria, which result from a social construction. According to this logic, listeners must self-analyze their own voice evaluation parameters to break vocal stereotypes.

In turn, Baugh¹⁶ drew on his own experience as a black man to prove racial prejudice through the voice. In his experiment, carried out in the United States, he asked a white man, a black man





and a Latino man to record the same speech and the evaluators were asked to guess the racial origin of the voices. Almost all listeners got the authors of the voices right, which suggests a relationship of perception between voice and race. In a second stage of the study, the same men were instructed to call companies in different areas, as if they were potential clients requesting an appointment. Based solely on contact with the sound of voice in phone calls, the attendants refused to schedule meetings for most black and Latino men, but they accepted the appointment for white men.

Nationality stereotypes

A study carried out by Harvard University¹⁷ found an influence of sociocultural values in the perception of personality, through the voice. The experiment was carried out in the United States and Germany, and aimed to compare the results of voice assessments between these two nationalities. The result showed that the voices of people from the same country convey the same perceptions. On the one hand, if there is a homogeneity of personality traits revealed by the voice within each group, the differences are significant when comparing the groups formed by Americans and Germans, for example.

The experiment consisted of presenting the same speeches by Americans and Germans to evaluators from both countries. The findings showed that the voices of Americans were evaluated with sociability criteria, such as extroversion, friendliness and trust, while the voices of Germans were evaluated based on leadership criteria, such as assertiveness, dominance and competence.

The authors concluded that the speech of Americans and Germans show the most striking personality traits and considered desirable in their respective countries. Interestingly, the Americans evaluated the Germans, not by their own values, but by the values expected by the Germans. The same behavior was reported with the German evaluators in relation to the Americans. This result suggests that the assessment of personality by the voice is influenced by the stereotypical view of the other. In addition, it is possible to consider that individuals seek to apply the personality traits valued by their peers in their own voices, which would be a manipulation, whether consciously or not.

The influence of stereotypes on interpersonal relationships

This conclusion, that people who speak share the same social values as their evaluators and can adapt, or manipulate their speech, to make a good impression is in line with the study by Goffman⁸ of everyday human relationships. According to the author, when someone knows a person, they tend to evaluate them based on assumptions constructed by stereotypes, which allow for attributing psychological traits to them and predicting their behavior. This is possible from the concepts known and experienced in previous relationships with other individuals.

However, one must ask what would be the criteria to evaluate the voice if not the signals produced by the individuals themselves. The author also reports that these signs are produced from a calculation made in order to make a good impression. In addition, the author reports that people can manipulate their voices and pretend to be what they are not to correspond to a certain social status. In this way, this behavior can be understood as if they were roles played by people, which are not always intentionally. People themselves may not perceive the motivations of their actions, but the author believes that these actions are always guided by the need to positively impress others in order to obtain social acceptance.

In another study, Goffman¹⁸ also reflects on the relationship between speakers and audiences, and he reports that the speaker is not the interlocutor, but the public figure to whom the audience has no direct access. This spatial detachment allows the audience to discuss aspects of the personality of those who are publicly exposing themselves. According to the author, the audience observes and judges distant speakers, in a much greater way than they do with their close interlocutors. This is precisely because the audience does not have access to the real personality of the public person.

The influence of stereotypes in the construction of speech

The audience's perception of the speakers' personality refers to the Aristotelian concept of Ethos: the image of themselves that speakers provide to the audience through their speeches. According to



Aristotle, Ethos is on the border between the particularities of the speaking subject and the social norms that they represent as a public person. In this sense, Soulez⁹ uses this Aristotelian concept to analyze the relationship between journalists and the audience. In this same bibliographic source, he presents contemporary authors who reflected on the identity of the communicator with public exposure, and assumes that the audience forms their opinion about the speaker from stereotypes, from known categories. The author also cites Amossy¹⁹, who classifies stereotypes as fixed forms that a group adopts in relation to another. This author understands that the speaker who has public exposure takes on a stereotyped image to be more accepted and understood by the public.

In his article, Soulez⁹ also cites Ducrot²⁰ to support the idea that media communicators consciously expose personality traits to suit the social and moral values of the audience. In this context, Ducrot²⁰ takes up the Aristotelian concept of Ethos as the private personality behind the public speaker. The author divides the speaker into two dimensions: the enunciating speaker and their particular version. The first dimension of the speaker, who is a public figure, manages the aspects of their particular personality that will be exposed. Therefore, he believes that the enunciating speaker has control over the Ethos, which becomes the product of a speech and does not refer to a real person. Citing Sapir²¹, the author reports that speakers control what they believe is convenient to expose about themselves and project their image in accordance with social values.

Soulez⁹ concludes that the media ethos of communicators of communication vehicles follows the common norms and editorial strategies of the media organization. Therefore, he believes that communicators do not have creative autonomy in the way they express themselves, and project their public identity based on established social standards.

Final considerations

Returning to the discussion specifically about the performance of radio and podcast presenters, it is possible to assume that they also adapt their speech to meet listeners' expectations. In this sense, there seems to be an effort by communicators to meet the expectations of the audience, which leads to a standardization of speech. In addition to see-

ing this process in the Brazilian media, Rodero²² believes that radio presenters act by imitation, as they repeat formulas established by their peers.

As a mass communication vehicle that reaches a more heterogeneous audience, the radio seeks to meet the expectations of the audience as a whole. On the other hand, the podcast has a more segmented audience, which allows for more variations in speaking styles. However, it is still possible to notice the standardization in podcasts within each audience niche. Comparing the different podcasters in the same segment, it is possible to notice that they express themselves in a similar way, according to the specific profile of that group of listeners.

Similarly, speeches on the radio also seem to vary depending on the audience segment. Without further analysis, it can be said that there seem to be some particularities among the Brazilian radio journalism stations with the largest national audience. As such, the presenters of BandNews have a speech focused on the younger audience, using more slang when compared to CBN. In turn, Rádio CBN is characterized by a more serious speech, aimed at an audience of another age group. The presenters of Bandeirantes and Jovem Pan have speeches more focused on giving opinions, since the stations are aimed at an audience with a more defined ideological spectrum. Despite the specifics, there are speech patterns common to all radio stations, including characteristics that convey the impression of credibility, such as assertiveness in sentence construction, voice modulation and preference for lower tones.

There are some issues in reaching the conclusion that the speech of radio and podcast communicators adapts to the expectations of the public, and also to the editorial strategies of the station (in the case of radio). The first question would be whether these professionals are aware of these standardization mechanisms that influence their performance, but, even if they are not aware, they adapt to these standards. Reflection on this subject raises doubts as to whether there is room for authenticity and whether it is possible to some extent to find unique forms of expression on radio and podcasts.

In addition, there are also issues associated with gender stereotypes. Given that low-pitched voices are more valued, especially in journalism, men seem to have an advantage in meeting this audience criterion more easily. In this way, it is possible that women who work on radio or podcast





are forced to seek masculine speech patterns to give credibility to their work. The question remains from the audience's perspective: are women communicators discredited in advance by listeners, and would they need to increase their efforts to overcome stereotyped images?

In addition, the racial stereotypes associated with the voice raise attention on a possible process of "adapting" professional speech to characteristics more associated with the voices of white people to meet the standard of audio journalism companies. There is little presence of black people in the presentation of journalistic programs on the radio, as well as in prominent positions in the job market in general.

On the one hand, these issues deserve more in-depth reflection by researchers on this subject; while, on the other hand, radio and podcast communicators should also reflect on this, since they may lose autonomy over how they express themselves.

References

1. Biserra MP, Giannini SPP, Paparelli R, Ferreira LP. Voz e trabalho: Estudo dos condicionantes das mudanças a partir do discurso de docentes. *Saúde Soc.* 2014; 23(3): 966–78.
2. Arruda AF, Marquezin DMSS. Expressividade oral de professoras : análise de recursos vocais Oral expressiveness of teachers : analysis of vocal resources Expresividad oral de maestros : análisis de los recursos vocales. *Distúrb comun.* 2012 Sep; 24(2): 223–37.
3. Marquezin DMSS, Viola I, Ghirardi AC de AM, Madureira S, Ferreira LP. Expressividade da fala de executivos: análise de aspectos perceptivos e acústicos da dinâmica vocal. *CoDAS [Internet].* 2015 Apr [cited 2021 Jun 7];27(2):160–9. Available from: http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2317-17822015000200160&lng=en&tlng=en
4. Azevedo JBM de, Ferreira LP, Kyrillos LR. Julgamento de telespectadores a partir de uma proposta de intervenção fonoaudiológica com telejornalistas. *Rev CEFAC [Internet].* 2009 Jun [cited 2021 May 16]; 11(2): 281–9. Available from: http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1516-18462009000200013&lng=pt&tlng=pt
5. Constantini AC, Severo LS, Ferreira LP. Análise perceptivoauditiva e acústica do discurso de filósofos contemporâneos. *Caminhos em Linguística Aplicada [Internet].* 2021 Jul; 24(1): 22–36. Available from: <http://periodicos.unitau.br/ojs/index.php/caminhoslinguistica/article/view/3124>
6. Larrea O. Tesis Doctoral- Síntesis. Estudio sobre la escucha de la voz del locutor con y sin su imagen: análisis del proceso perceptivo y cognitivo del mensaje. *Hipertext.net.* 2015; 0(13): 11.
7. Allport GW, Cantril H. Judging Personality from Voice. *J Soc Psychol.* 1934; 5(1): 37–55.
8. Goffman, Erving. Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. *Am J Sociol Goffman, Erving.* 1959; 55: 17–25.
9. Soulez G. Semiótica do ethos. *Comun Mídia Consumo.* 2008;1(2): 92–118.
10. Aronovitch CD. The voice of personality: Stereotyped judgments and their relation to voice quality and sex of speaker. *Vol. 99, J Soc Psychol.* 1976. p. 207–20.
11. Hinton L, Nichols, J, Ohala JJ. *Sound Symbolism.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
12. Gussenhoven C. Foundations of intonational meaning: anatomical and physiological factors. *Top Cogn Sci.* 2016; 425: 434. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tops.12197>
13. Morton ES. On the occurrence and significance of motivation-structural rules in some bird and mammal sounds. *Am. Nat.* 1977; 855: 869.
14. Addington DW. The relationship of selected vocal characteristics to personality perception. *Speech Monographs.* 1968; 492: 503.
15. Eidsheim NS. *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre and Vocality in African American Music.* London: Duke University Press, 2019.
16. Baugh JC. Perceptions within a variable paradigm: black and white detection and identification based on speech. In Edgar W. Schneider, editor. *Focus on the USA.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins; 1996; p.169.
17. Scherer KR. Judging personality from voice: A cross-cultural approach to an old issue in interpersonal perception. *J Pers.* 1972; 40(2):191–210.
18. Goffman E. *Forms of Talk.* Filadélfia: University of Pennsylvania Press; 1981. 344 p.
19. Amossy R. *Imagens de si no discurso: A construção do ethos.* 2nd ed. São Paulo: Editora Contexto; 2005.
20. Ducrot O. *O Dizer e o Dito.* 2nd ed. Campinas: Pontes Editores; 2020.
21. Sapir E. *Anthropologie.* Paris: Éditions de Minuit; 1967. 382 p.
22. Rodero Antón E. Caracterización de una correcta locución informativa en los medios audiovisuales. *Estud mensaj periodis.* 2007; 13(13): 523–42.

