Using Punctuation as a Marker of Sincerity and Affective Convergence During Texting

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INTRODUCTION

• Human communication increasingly relies on technology
• Text based communication (TBC) lacks communicative richness, as compared to face to communication (Harris & Paradice, 2007)
• However, typographic cues may add informativeness by mimicking tone of voice in TBC (Riodan & Kreuz, 2010)

• Gunraj et al. (2016) found one word response with ending period is perceived as rude/ insincere

GOAL: determine the effect of punctuation on the interpretation of intonation during TBC.

RESEARCH QUESTION: Does intonational punctuation impact perceived sincerity and increase a reciprocal use of punctuation (i.e., emotional contagion; Chartrand & Bargh, 1999)?

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS: N = 21 KSU undergrads, (11 female; mean age = 19.5 yrs)

DESIGN: Two between subjects conversational tone conditions: Positive or Negative Conversational Tone

PROCEDURE: A pseudo-texting conversation with a fake texting partner (i.e., the computer; see Fig 1)

Participants responded to the computer’s statements by selecting one of five predetermined response options that varied on punctuation.

• After selecting a response bubble, participants rated the sincerity of the computer’s text message

FIG. 1 Negative (left) and Positive (right) texting environment. Participants chose (middle) from the five response options ranging from positive (exclamation) to negative (period).

MEASURES & RESULTS

• SINCERITY RATING: Pixel associated with a range of sincerity

• PUNCTUATION ALIGNMENT: Did the participant select the same punctuation as the pseudo-confederate?

LINEAR MIXED EFFECTS REGRESSION

• SINCERITY RATING: Participants rated the negatively valenced conversation as significantly more insincere than the positive condition

• PUNCTUATION ALIGNMENT: increases as a function of sincerity rating for negative condition

FIG. 2 Means and standard errors for sincerity ratings by conversational tone condition

FIG. 3 Average sincerity rating by punctuation alignment between the pseudo-texting valence conditions (positive v. negative).

DISCUSSION:

• Participants are sensitive to the use of punctuation as a cue to conversation tone
• Emotional contagion occurred at different rates for positive and negative contexts (e.g., grew more slowly for the negative context)
• It is possible that participants were following rules of social engagement (e.g., don’t be rude to a stranger, at least in the beginning)

CONCLUSION

Texters (college-aged) tend to use punctuation to communicate tone of voice. This may shape the interpretation of valence, pushing the conversation to become positive or negative.

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References


