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AN INTERACTIVE ANALYSIS OF HYPERBOLES IN A BRITISH TV SERIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR EFL CLASSES

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Abstract

This paper, part of an ongoing study on the analysis of hyperboles in a British TV series, reports findings drawing upon a 90,000 word corpus. The findings are compared to the ones from CANCODE (McCarthy and Carter 2004), a five-million word corpus of spontaneous speech, in order to identify similarities between the two. The analysis showed that TV series can be a useful tool for EFL learners when accompanied by explicit instruction in order to enhance communicative competence, and can be used to teach hyperbolic lexical items specifically. A sample lesson plan is also given for practical use in classrooms.

Keywords: *Hyperbole, TV series, corpora, EFL classes, communicative competence*

1. Introduction

This paper is the first attempt to present the findings of an ongoing study on the use of hyperbolic language in the British TV series *Coupling* and its potential applications in English as a Foreign Language (henceforth EFL) classrooms. This ongoing study, in its broad sense, aims to identify and analyze the hyperbolic use of the English language within two frameworks, which are constructed following

McCarthy and Carter's (2004) analysis of CANCODE (Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English) and Cano Mora's (2004) analysis of BNC (British National Corpus).

This article, however, focuses on the former framework, in which previously defined categories of hyperbole (drawing upon a corpus of five-million words) are taken as a basis for the analysis of the *Coupling* corpus (90,000 words). The primary aim is to show in what ways TV series may be a reflection of naturally-occurring spoken language following a set of criteria defined in sections two and four. Another aim, using statistical data, is to illustrate how the findings can be conducive to EFL classes, which is delineated within the theoretical framework and is supported by a sample lesson plan (Appendix 2).

The following section will help to give an understanding of the study of hyperboles and tropes in different research traditions and will form the background of the present paper. In section three, research questions are posed so as to direct the reader to the particular aims of the study. Section four will inform the reader on the methodology used for the analysis of the data. In section five, tables and figures will be supplied in order to help the reader compare the findings of the *Coupling* corpus and CANCODE. Extracts will also be given drawing upon the selection criteria and methodological framework, where relevant. The sixth section will bridge the findings to foreign language teaching. A good interpretation of this section should be accompanied by appendix 2, in which a sample lesson plan is presented. The concept of *Hyperbolic Competence in L2* is also introduced and defined in this section. The limitations of the paper are discussed in the conclusion.

2. Review of Literature

Hyperbole is defined as a form of extremity, an exaggeration that either magnifies or minimises some real state of affairs (Cano Mora 2004). For Kreuz *et al*. (1996), after metaphor, hyperbole is the most common trope. The term goes back to Aristotle, and "features throughout the historiography of rhetoric" (McCarthy and Carter 2004, p.151). Together with other tropes and types of figurative language, hyperbole has been studied largely within the area of literature and rhetoric. However, advancements within the areas of cognitive psychology and psycholinguistics have led many scholars to investigate the comprehension of figures of speech and hyperbole. Though, as Cano Mora (ibid.) warns, the bulk of psycholinguistic research has relied on artificial texts as stimulus materials.

Nevertheless, the theories of figurative language and tropes discussed within the cognitive and psycholinguistic traditions (Kreuz and Roberts 1995; Colston and Keller 1998; Colston and O'Brien 2000) have brought forth useful insights concerning the comprehension of hyperboles. Moreover, recent research has shifted the focus to natural data, rather than invented sentences, by means of large corpora of spoken language. This section will summarize the research on hyperboles starting from a psycholinguistic perspective and finishing with a more corpus and conversation analytic based one.

In their experiments, Winner *et al*. (1987) assessed comprehension of hyperboles (together with sarcasm and understatement) in 6-, 8-, and 10-year-olds. Their findings revealed that, in understanding hyperboles, the mean number of incorrect responses dramatically decreased (from 3.0 to 1.3) as the children got older.

They finally argued that it is the relationship between sentence meaning and speaker meaning that determines ease of comprehension of hyperbolic utterances.

Leggitt and Gibbs (2000) looked at people's emotional reactions to different kinds of ironic language, including hyperboles, within a cognitive appraisal framework. It was found that hyperbole is more consistently correlated with the less threatening statements, such as understatement and satire. They suggested that with overstatements, speakers make a big deal out of a problem, thus "suggesting hostile intentions toward the problems in the addressees, despite what the speaker intended to communicate" (ibid, p.21). This finding may be important for the present study, as unintended negative reaction can be problematic for foreign language learners.

In analyzing the recognition of verbal irony (including hyperboles) in spontaneous speech, Bryant and Fox Tree (2002) presented their participants with spontaneously produced ironic and non-ironic utterances from radio talk shows in written or auditory form, with or without written contextual information. The findings of their experiments suggested that both acoustic and contextual information are used when inferring ironic intent in spontaneous speech.

Although they did not refer specifically to hyperboles in their studies, Gibbs and O'Brian (1991) and Toplak and Katz (2000) studied the psychological aspects of understanding irony and the uses of sarcastic irony respectively. Gibbs and O'Brien claimed that there can be mismatches between speakers' intended meaning and listeners' comprehension and responses. From a psycholinguistic framework, Toplak and Katz (2000) contrasted the effects of making criticism directly with that of making it via sarcastic irony.

In a more recent study, Charteris-Black (2003) took a cross-cultural comparative perspective with a cognitive semantic approach. He revealed that English has a tendency toward metonymy whereas Malay has a tendency toward metaphor, which is explained with reference to cultural differences in attitudes toward facial expressions and in stylistic preferences: English has a preference for hyperbole and Malay for euphemism.

The use of hyperboles has also been of interest to critical discourse analysts (Van Dijk 1995, 2005; Rahimi and Sahragard 2006). From a collection of expressions used by right-wing British newspapers, Van Dijk (1995) showed how rhetorical hyperboles played a prominent role in the formulation of opinions. Additionally, upon analyzing speeches in Spanish Parliament with a critical discourse analysis approach, he found that semantic polarization can be emphasized by hyperboles (Van Dijk 2005).

After a predominantly psycholinguistic tradition in analyzing figurative language, some researchers started to enjoy the emergent conversation analytic perspectives in analyzing tropes. Drew and Holt (1998) analyzed a corpus of telephone calls recorded by a British family at intervals over a three year period. Following the conventions of conversation analysis, they investigated where in conversation figurative expressions are used, in terms of their sequential distribution.

In the new millennium, many researchers (Gibbs 2000; McCarthy and Carter 2004; Cano Mora 2004) have made use of corpora for analyzing the functions of tropes and hyperbole in naturally-occurring language, which has not been a reaction to the psycholinguistic experiments relying on invented sentences, but rather is claimed to be complementary to these. Considering hyperbole among five types of irony,

Gibbs (2000) studied sixty-two 10-min conversations between college students and their friends. He found that 74% of the hyperboles were viewed as humorous by at least one of the conversational participants, which is an important finding regarding the present study.

McCarthy and Carter's study (2004), the methodological and analytic framework of which is adopted here for the purposes of the present study, has been an enormous step towards the analysis of tropes in general using a large corpus. In analyzing the use of hyperbole in everyday conversation, they drew upon data from their 5-million word corpus of spoken English (CANCODE) and built a framework for the description and understanding of hyperbole in interaction. They used corpus extracts from concordances generated for key lexical items within core semantic fields such as time and number to illustrate hyperbolic expressions in context.

Using a list of criteria, which will be explained in section 4, McCarthy and Carter (ibid.) tried to reveal the degree of an item's hyperbole-proneness. As will be the case in this paper, an item's hyperbole-proneness was identified using five basic categories and was illustrated in numerical values: (1) expressions of number (millions of, hundreds of, etc.), (2) words referring to large amounts/quantities (masses of, loads of, etc.), (3) adjective modification of amount(s) and number(s) (adjective + amounts of, etc.) , (4) time expressions (years, weeks, hours, etc.), and (5) size, degree and intensity (enormous, endless, gigantic, etc.). It was also revealed that shifts in footing indicated by discourse markers (e.g. so) or narrative shift markers (suddenly) were very common within the linguistic environment of hyperboles. The same categories and selection criteria are adopted in this paper. McCarthy and Carter's (ibid.) study concludes that an interactive approach to hyperbole "is

indispensable for its proper understanding and the use of large corpora offers new insights with theoretical implications for the study of tropes" (p. 149).

The interactive dimension of hyperbole as an extension of the view that it is a joint activity between speaker and listener was also addressed by Cano Mora (2004), who used a data set of 10,158 words from the BNC. For her study, as was the case in McCarthy and Carter's (2004) study, only spoken language was subject to analysis. Cano More (ibid.) was primarily interested in listeners' reactions to hyperbole. She developed a framework (see Appendix 1) in order to reveal that listener response is crucial in understanding the nature of hyperboles. She found that relevant next contribution and back channel responses (e.g. yeah, mm, oh, etc.) were the most recurrent pattern of listeners' responses to hyperbole, which indicates understanding of the speakers' overstatement.

This study uses the framework of McCarthy and Carter's (2004) study in order to analyze hyperboles in a British TV series and investigate their potential application in EFL classes. Although the corpus used in this study is not the product of naturally-occurring English discourse, the analysis showed that the conversations in *Coupling* exhibit almost the same features as natural conversations.

The theoretical background of this study is also supported by studies that were carried out in order to reveal the efficiency of TV series and programs in foreign language teaching (Liontas 1992, Alcon 2005, Zanon 2006). In her empirical study, for example, Zanon (2006) tested the efficiency of the use of the TV series *Stargate* for learning pragmatics in the EFL context. She found that, when accompanied by explicit instruction, the use of TV series may enhance language learners' pragmatic skills. Additionally, the use of corpora in foreign language classes was also claimed to

be very useful by many researchers (e.g. Knowles 1990, Adolphs 2006, O'Keeffe *et al*. 2007). However, space precludes a full account of the contributions of corpora here. It is worth mentioning that this paper is the first attempt to analyze hyperboles in a corpus gathered from a TV series and to establish links with foreign language pedagogy.

3. Research Questions

a) Following McCarthy and Carter's (2004) framework, which key lexical items within the five categories of hyperboles exist frequently in the *Coupling* corpus?

b) What are the similarities between CANCODE and the *Coupling* corpus in terms of the hyperbole-proneness of key lexical items?

c) How do speakers and listeners communicate hyperboles considering shifts in footing?

d) In what ways can a corpus analysis of hyperboles in a TV series be conducive to foreign language learning?

4. Method

Throughout this research, hyperboles have been identified and analyzed in conversations held in the British TV series *Coupling* (approximately a 90,000 word corpus). *Coupling* was written by Steven Moffat and aired on BBC2 from 2000 to 2004. The series consists of 28 episodes (four seasons) each of which are 29 minutes long. The show achieved decent ratings in the UK. Although *Coupling* centres its

episodes on male-female relations in the UK, Moffat speaks of the universality of the stories in *Coupling* when he says:

> "When writing comedy, you have to have the confidence to believe that there is only one type of relationship in the world, and we are all having it; that all men behave in the same way and so do all women; I fill the script with universals, and people seem to watch!" (BBC online).

As it was mentioned in section two, the framework for the analysis of hyperboles in *Coupling* was adopted from McCarthy and Carter's (2004) study, since they used a spoken corpus of five-million words. By doing so, the question of whether the conversations in a TV series are close to naturally-occurring conversations or not in terms of conversational conventions and lexico-semantic items has been answered. Drawing upon the similarities of the two corpora, therefore, it can be claimed that TV series can be helpful guides for language learners, as they reflect on naturally-occurring spoken language.

As was the case in our model study, the hyperbole-proneness of lexical items was identified using five basic categories: (1) expressions of number (millions of, hundreds of, etc.), (2) words referring to large amounts/quantities (masses of, loads of, etc.), (3) adjective modification of amount(s) and number(s) (adjective + amounts of, etc.), (4) time expressions (years, weeks, hours, etc.), and (5) size, degree and intensity (enormous, endless, gigantic, etc.). The keywords were detected with KWIC software. Concordances were taken into consideration while deciding whether an item was used hyperbolically or not. Additionally, the contexts in which hyperboles occurred were examined carefully so as to avoid potential misinterpretations.

In order to enhance reliability, the criterion for labelling hyperbole was also adopted from McCarthy and Carter's (2004) study. Hyperboles in the conversations, therefore, must display at least three of the following characteristics (pp.162-163):

* *Disjunction with context*: the speaker's utterance seems at odds with the general context.

* *Shifts in footing*: there is evidence (e.g. discourse marking) that a shift in footing is occurring to a conversational frame where impossible worlds or plainly counterfactual claims may appropriately occur.

* *Counterfactuality not perceived as a lie*: the listener accepts without challenge a statement which is obviously counterfactual.

* *Impossible worlds*: speaker and listener between them engage in the construction of fictitious worlds where impossible, exaggerated events take place.

* *Listener take-up*: the listener reacts with supportive behaviour such as laughter or assenting back-channel markers and/or contributes further to the counterfactuality, impossibility, contextual disjunction, etc.

* *Extreme case formulations and intensification*: the assertion is expressed in the most extreme way (e.g. adjectives such as endless, massive) and/or extreme intensifiers such as nearly, totally are used. These are not necessarily counterfactuals or absurd worlds, as many may be heard as (semi-) conventional metaphors.

* *Relevant interpretability*: the trope is interpretable as relevant to the speech act being performed, and is interpreted as figurative within its context, though there may also be evidence of literal interpretations being exploited for interactive/affective purposes.

Another variable to be considered throughout the analysis is the humorous effect of hyperboles, which is a part of the listener response. Humour was pointed out as one of the primary goals of exaggeration (e.g. Long and Graesser 1988; Roberts and Kreuz 1994). It is also important in that humour is an integral part of *Coupling*, and hyperboles were defined as sources of humour in various studies in the literature. Given that accompanying laughter by the listeners *sine qua non* is an absolute indicator of humour, the audience laughter sound effects were identified within the linguistic environments of hyperbole during the analysis.

5. Findings

In this section, the five categories of hyperbole found in our corpus will be discussed respectively, with reference to the findings of McCarthy and Carter's (2004) study in order to reveal the similarities between the items found in naturally-occurring spoken discourse and in the TV series *Coupling*. Examples will be provided from the *Coupling* corpus and statistical figures will be given so as to illustrate the hyperbole-proneness of key lexical items. The findings will be compared to those of CANCODE.

The first category to be discussed is expressions of number. In CANCODE, these hyperboles were identified as *dozens (of), zillions (of), millions (of), hundreds (of) thousands (of), billions (of)* and their singular forms. *Dozens of* and *zillions of* occurred just 14 times in the five-million word corpus, and were found to be 100% hyperbolic. In the *Coupling* corpus, among these lexical items, only *hundreds* and *thousands* were found, but they were found to be very hyperbole-prone as table 1 suggests:

	Total	Hyperbolic	Rounded	CANCODE
Hundreds	7	5	71,4 %	51%
Thousands	1	1	100 %	27 %

Table 1 Expressions of number

Although it seems that CANCODE and the *Coupling* corpus differ slightly in their expressions of number, the overall findings reflect that the majority of hyperboles occur within the category of size, degree and intensity in both corpora. Hyperbolic expressions of number are also rare in CANCODE. When we consider example 1 given below, one may observe that the hyperbole is followed by an

audience laughter sound effect, which indicates the humorous effect. Additionally, *Ooh* suggests a shift in footing into an exaggerated reactive frame. There are numerous examples of these structures in the *Coupling* corpus, which was also the case for CANCODE.

1) [Speakers are talking about a sofa to be bought by Susan and Steve in a bar. It is well known that it has never been easy for Steve to give opinions about something when he is asked to do so.] (Hyperbole and shifts in footing are given in **bold.**)

Susan: Hi. Hi, sorry I'm running late.

Sally: No problem.

Susan: Can't stay long. Late night shopping with Steve. We're at the furniture stage.

Jane: Good luck.

Susan: Oh, no, he's taken a real interest. He's had a pattern book for a week. I may need both your opinions on a sofa, by the way.

Jane: **Ooh**, I love giving opinions, **I've got hundreds**. (*Audience laughter sound effect*)

The second category, namely words referring to large amounts/quantities were found to be very hyperbole-prone in CANCODE. This category includes *masses (of), stacks (of), heaps (of), loads (of),* and *tons (of).* The hyperbole-proneness of these items ranged from 100% to 93%. In the *Coupling* corpus, *heaps (of), loads (of),* and *tons (of)* were identified as very hyperbole-prone ranging from 100% to 80%, which shows a positive correlation with the findings of CANCODE, as table 2 illustrates.

	Total	Hyperbolic	Rounded	CANCODE
Heaps (of)	1	1	100%	100%
Tons (of)	3	3	100%	93%
Loads (of)	5	4	80%	99,4%

Table 2 Words referring to large amounts/quantities

2) [Jane and Steve are talking about the relationship they used to have some years ago. Before this conversation took place, Jane had told Steve that she had never had an orgasm with him during their relationship.]

Steve: Jane.

Jane: Yeah?

Steve: Did you mean it? Did you really never have a single...you know?

Jane: **Of course** I didn't mean it. I **had tons of orgasms** and I loved you to bits, and I wanted to keep you forever and it broke my heart when you left me for Susan.

In example 2, the discourse marker *of course* suggests a shift of footing just before the hyperbole *tons of*. The role of discourse markers (e.g. *so*) was also emphasized by McCarthy and Carter (2004) in their analysis of CANCODE. In this case, hyperbole does not necessarily bear a humorous effect. Nevertheless, there are not too many examples of hyperboles which are not followed by an audience laughter sound effect. As can be seen in examples 3 and 4, the hyperboles *loads of* and *heaps of* are immediately followed by an audience laughter sound effect. Additionally, *Oh* again suggests a shift in footing into an exaggerated reactive frame.

3) [The couple, Susan and Steve, are talking about Susan's previous relationship with Jeff. Jeff is an extreme example of a nervous person, especially when he is with women.]

Susan: You know about him and me. Right? The nervous thing?

Steve: Well, yes, but don't worry about it. Jeff makes **loads of women** nervous. (*Audience laughter sound effect*)

4) [The characters are all gathered in Patrick's flat to see a pornographic video, which they thought was about Susan.]

Jane: Anyway, what are you all doing here, and why wasn't I invited, huh? Is it something fun?

Susan: **Oh**, **heaps of fun**. We were watching videos about me. I'm being played by Britt Ekland. (*Audience laughter sound effect*)

Adjective modifications of amount(s) and number(s) were found the least hyperbole-prone items in CANCODE. For example, *Adj.+numbers of* had a hyperbole-proneness of 2%, which is an insignificant number. In the *Coupling* corpus, no examples of such structures have been identified; therefore no explanations regarding their use will be supplied. For details, see McCarthy and Carter (2004).

	Total	Hyperbolic	Rounded	CANCODE
(Adj) amount(s) of	4	0	0%	28%
(Adj) numbers of	5	0	0%	2%

Table 3 Adjective modification of amount(s) and number(s)

The fourth category consists of time expressions like *hours, years, seconds, months, weeks, minutes* and *days*. These expressions are frequently used in naturally-occurring discourse, which was also revealed in CANCODE. However, only a small percentage of these expressions is used in a hyperbolic manner. In the *Coupling*

corpus, the most frequently found hyperbolic expression is *years*, with 3 occurrences. Yet, *seconds* is more hyperbole-prone with a percentage of 25. When the two corpora are compared, one may observe that there is only a slight difference in terms of hyperbole-proneness:

	Total	Hyperbolic	Rounded	CANCODE
Years	44	3	6,8 %	9%
Hours	6	1	16,6%	15%
Seconds	4	1	25%	6%
Months	21	0	0%	5%
Weeks	6	0	0%	3%
Minutes	29	0	0%	2%
Days	20	0	0%	1%

Table 4 Time expression

5) [Susan, Steve and Jeff are at the hospital. Jeff is talking about why he prefers watching lesbian videos.].

Susan: Jeff--

Jeff: Also, in bloke-driven porn, you run the risk of potentially dangerous eye slippage.

Susan: Eye slippage?

Jeff: **If**, in the climactic **seconds**, your eye slips from the girl to the bloke, the sudden shock can cause a whiplash event. (*Audience laughter sound effect*)

As can be understood from example 5, the discourse marker *if* suggests a shift of footing just before the hyperbolic use of *seconds*. Audience laughter effect is also present just after the hyperbole, as in the case of many examples in the corpus. It may

also be argued that it is not always solely the hyperbole that creates the humorous effect, but the co-occurrence of hyperbole with other metaphors or any contextual lexical items. Nonetheless, the existence of audience laughter sound effect is observed in many hyperbolic time expressions throughout the data, as can also be seen in example 6.

6) [Patrick is explaining why he needs a pretend-wife for his meeting with Ivan to Steve and Sally in a bar.]

Steve: So what do you need a pretend-wife for?

Sally: It's to do with some bloke at his office.

Patrick: No, no, no. Different office, different firm. This guy, Ivan...I see him at conferences and stuff. He's the same level as me, but we're always competing. Cars, office size, toilet breaks.

Susan: Toilet breaks?

Patrick: I can retain for **seven more hours** than he can. (*Audience laughter sound effect*)

The last and the most important category of hyperbole to be dealt with in this study is size, degree and intensity. The items included in this category are *endless, gigantic, massive, enormous, huge, vast, nearly* and *almost*. CANCODE and the *Coupling* corpus show almost a direct positive correlation considering size, degree and intensity in terms of hyperbole-proneness. In both corpora, this category has supplied the most number of examples as table 5 indicates.

	Total	Hyperbolic	Rounded	CANCODE
Endless	1	1	100%	100%
Massive	3	3	100%	90%
Gigantic	2	2	100%	100%
Enormous	14	13	92,8%	98%
Huge	5	5	100%	93%
Vast	3	**2**	66,6%	60%
Nearly	18	1	5,5%	9%
Almost	14	0	0%	4%

Table 5 Size, degree and intensity

As table 5 suggests, the results of the analyses of both corpora are parallel to each other, with a high degree of hyperbole-proneness and number of hyperbolic uses. In example 7 given below, *Oh* again suggests a shift in footing into an exaggerated reactive frame, achieved by the lexical item *huge*. In example 8, however, a humorous remark is made by Sally that is followed by audience laughter sound effect. This time, the co-occurrence of *huge* and *enormous* strengthens the hyperbolic effect. The humorous effect strengthened by the co-occurrence of hyperboles can also be observed in example 9, in which *huge* and *tons of* are used together and this results in audience laughter sound effect again.

7) [Susan and Steve are discussing how emotional women become when they are pregnant.]

Susan: I never want to live through a silence like that again.

Steve: It was a fairly major silence apart from the sniffling. Why are pregnant women so emotional?

Susan: Hormones.

Steve: **Oh**, hormones. Everything's hormones now. Some of them were **huge**, weren't they?

8) [Patrick and Sally are trying to solve a relationship problem, as Sally disallows Patrick in doing something.]

Patrick: But--what--I didn't know there'd be disallowing.

Sally: It's a relationship. We have to discuss things now, Patrick. There is a time for just taking off and enjoying yourself, and that time is over. Now we have to have **huge, enormous** discussions first, with crying. (*Audience laughter sound effect*)

9) [Jeff is trying to avoid a one-night-stand, since he has a girlfriend, but he is nervously rambling on, which is his usual characteristic.]

Wilma: She really does exist, this girlfriend?

Jeff: **Oh**, she exists. She's very much an existent person. She's got **tons of** existence. Well, not too much existence. I don't mean **she's huge** or anything. She's somewhere between completely imaginary and a truck, if you can picture that. (*Audience laughter sound effect*)

Wilma: Sounds great.

Jeff: But how are you supposed to prove you've got a girlfriend?

As McCarthy and Carter (2004) argue, any study of hyperbole "cannot be exhaustive, since hyperbole may be both conventional and creative, and the possibilities for linguistic creativity are infinite" (p. 150). However, key lexical items have to be identified to prepare a data set for analysis, therefore some may be missed. In example 10, for instance, the hyperbolic effect is created by sequencing extreme positive adjectives. In example 11, hyperbolic effect is created by the use of a superlative. Yet, this study has adopted McCarthy and Carter's (2004) criteria and

these items have not been considered. Nevertheless, as was mentioned in the introduction, this paper is part of a study in progress, and the following papers will be more comprehensive and will include hyperboles as given in the examples below.

10) [Steve is looking for ways to dump Jane and is discussing the issue with Jeff.]

Steve: **So** last time I dumped her, we had like **amazing, fantastic, borderline illegal** sex. Then, she thinks we are back on.

Jeff: Oh, that's ridiculous.

Steve: I know. One swallow does not make her my girlfriend.

11) [Jeff is nervous, as he thinks that Steve and Susan will talk about him on their first date.]

Jeff: Do you know **the biggest turn-off** on a first date?

Steve: You?

Jeff: Discussion of mutual friends.

The overall findings reveal that the hyperboles identified in the *Coupling* corpus have much in common with the ones found in CANCODE, a five-million word corpus of spoken English. The statistical results given in Figure 1 and Figure 2 below clearly indicate that words referring to large amounts/quantities, and those for size, degree and intensity are the most common types of hyperboles. Another finding is that more than 60% of the hyperboles are followed by audience laughter sound effect, which shows that hyperboles help to create a humorous effect both in ironic and non-ironic contexts. Drawing upon all these findings, one may claim that in EFL settings, TV series can be used in order to enhance language input, which will become intake when accompanied by explicit instruction.

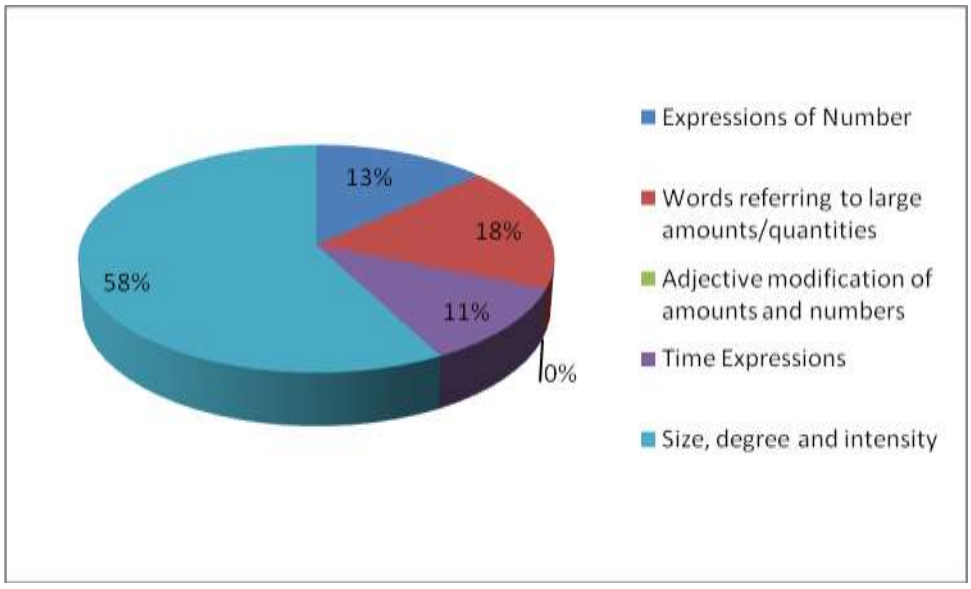

Figure 1 Hyperboles in different categories (Coupling corpus)

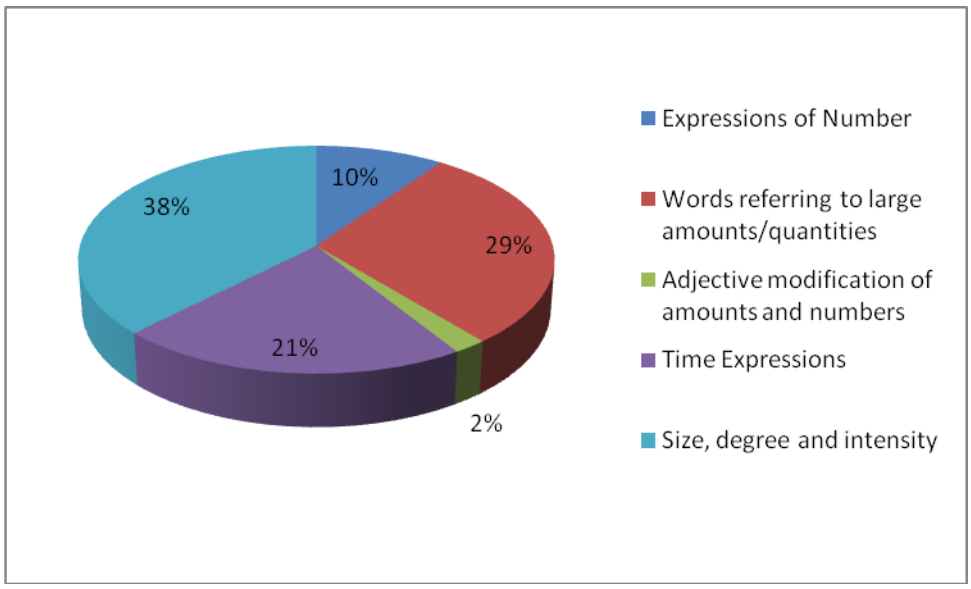

Figure 2 Hyperboles in different categories (CANCODE)

6. Educational Implications

Cano Mora (2004) states that the application of an interactive approach to hyperboles in the area of foreign language teaching may be useful to raise students' awareness, in that *figures of speech* are part of everyday speech, and therefore can be taught as part of students' communicative competence. Both her findings, and the

analysis of hyperboles in the *Coupling* corpus signal that hyperboles are generally communicated easily drawing upon the shared knowledge of the interlocutors. However, do we have evidence to claim that this will also be the case for second language (L2) learners? Can L2 learners easily respond to and contribute to hyperbolic language?

In order to find the answers to these questions, further studies should be carried out which may try to reveal whether hyperboles bear problems for foreign language learners or not. Here, I suggest the term *Hyperbolic Competence in L2*, which can be defined as competence in understanding, responding to, and using hyperboles in a learner's L2 as a means of magnifying or minimising reality through purposeful exaggeration in order to accomplish related pragmatic goals. *Hyperbolic Competence in L2* can be regarded as a part of communicative competence in general.

As the analysis carried out in this paper shows, TV series like *Coupling* include extensive use of hyperboles, primarily as a result of the intended humorous effect. The role of humour in language learning has long been discussed in the literature. It is the case that students are more eager to study with materials that are fun. By making use of extracts from the TV series *Coupling*, the students will not only gain hyperbolic competence in their L2, but can also expand their vocabulary. This will, inevitably, have a positive effect on listening and speaking skills as well. See Appendix 2 for a lesson plan for enhancing *Hyperbolic Competence in L2* and for teaching the most frequent hyperbolic items, which indicate size, degree and intensity.

7. Conclusion

Throughout the paper, an interactive analysis of hyperbole in the TV series *Coupling* has been presented, in light of specific research questions and the general

framework highlighted in the methods section. The findings reveal similarities between naturally-occurring discourse and the use of language in the TV series. Finally, educational implications have been drawn so as to enhance communicative competence of L2 learners with specific reference to *Hyperbolic Competence in L2*. A sample lesson plan (Appendix 2) is supplied as a reference for teachers of EFL worldwide.

There are, however, many limitations which should be considered in future research. First of all, a conversation analytic framework with an emic perspective should be used so as to reveal a broader perspective in understanding hyperboles. In line with that, extracts should be given using the conventions of conversation analysis. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, this paper is a product of an ongoing study and such limitations can be overcome in the future. Secondly, the discourse of TV series, unlike naturally-occurring language, requires a three-channel model in analyzing the humorous effect of hyperbole. In other words, audience laughter sound effect affects the nature of interactivity. Lastly, listener responses should also be analysed, as illustrated in appendix 1. In this study, this analysis has been undertaken by the author, since this is an ongoing study, as mentioned in section 1. Despite these limitations, it is believed that in countries where English is taught and spoken as a foreign language, TV series like *Coupling* may be used to provide comprehensible language input for L2 learners.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 A framework to analyze listener reactions to hyperbole (Cano Mora, 2004, p. 18)

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="7">Positive evidence</td><td colspan="2">Back channel responses</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="6">Relevant next contribution</td><td>Literal remark</td></tr>
<tr><td>Humorous remark</td></tr>
<tr><td>Laughter</td></tr>
<tr><td>Take-up and continuation of figures</td></tr>
<tr><td>Collaborative completion</td></tr>
<tr><td>Repetition or figurative paraphrase
Non-verbal response</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Negative evidence</td><td>Non-recognised hyperbole</td><td>Missed hyperbole and/or negation or correction
Request for clarification, confirmation, repetition</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">H ignores hyperbole and/or shifts topic</td></tr>
</table>

Appendix 2 A sample lesson plan for teaching hyperbole through extracts from the TV series *Coupling*

Time: 50 minutes

Level: B1/B2 (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)

Materials needed: For one-computer classrooms: A teacher controlled computer with media software, a DVD drive and speakers, and a projector.

Objectives: At the end of the lesson:

1) the students will have learned some basic vocabulary of hyperbolic language, which indicates size, degree and intensity.

2) the students will be able to detect hyperbolic use of language in contexts where available.

3) the students will be able to understand the conversational signals (shifts in footing, back channel responses, etc.) that prepare a hyperbolic effect.

4) the students will be able to use hyperbolic language in order to create a humorous effect or signal affective meaning.

5) the students' *Hyperbolic Competence in L2* will be enhanced, which will be conducive to their communicative competence.

Sequence:

Warm up (10 minutes):

The teacher starts a discussion relating to the TV series the students have watched so far. After selecting the ones that the students report to be funny, the students start to discuss in groups of five what kinds of features help to create a humorous effect for the audience.

Watching some extracts from *Coupling* (20 minutes):

The teacher introduces *Coupling* with reference to the main characters and the general plot of the series. Contextual information is also supplied for the setting (London) and the pub culture in the U.K. The teacher then shows the students two or three conversations: first with subtitles, and then with no subtitles. The two examples given here can be used as reference:

12) [Season 4, Episode 6]

Sally: Oh, my god, Susan. How do you feel?

Susan: I don't know what to feel.

Steve: We're about to have a baby. This is no time for feelings!

Sally: Okay. You need underwear.

Susan: I need really, really **enormous pants**.

Patrick: Don't worry, she's got **loads**. (*Audience laughter sound effect*)

13) [Season 4, Episode 6]

Jane: Oh, Oliver! What have I told you about being too keen?

Oliver: too keen?! Too sodding keen?! Jane, I have been risking life and limb to get your attention! I've been balancing on your window ledges! I've **nearly** taken this door apart with my bare hands! (*Audience laughter sound effect*) I've been here since seven-thirty! Seven-thirty, Jane!

Jane: Oh, Oliver. It has been a long time since you've had sex, hasn't it?

Oliver: Why do you say that?

Jane: It's seven-thirty-five.

Working on the forms (20 minutes):

After watching the video files, the teacher focuses on related vocabulary, the syntactic environment and the conversational conventions in the dialogues. A total of five or six

hyperboles from the *Coupling* corpus are supplied within conversations. The students are asked to form groups to create their own conversations using hyperboles that may have a humorous effect. The students share their dialogues with the teacher and other students.

Homework:

The students are asked to search for scripts from British movies or TV series using the Internet and bring examples of hyperboles to the class for the next lesson.

About the author

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