

## Introduction

- How does a speaker let a listener know that he/she is speaking sarcastically?
- Recently, researchers have suggested that specific words, collocations and even phrases (e.g., Kreuz & Roberts, 1994; Utsumi, 2000), can act as cues to the listener that the speaker’s utterance is meant sarcastically.
- For example...
  - Adjective-adverb collocations: (e.g., *That’s a lovely pink, uh, satin-ish dress.*)
  - Interjections: (e.g., *Oh, Um, Uh, Well*)
  - Frozen phrases (Haiman, 1998: e.g., *“Don’t you just love it when...”*)
- There have also been claims that paralinguistic cues (i.e., gesturing, eye-rolling, smiling) are cues to sarcastic intent (e.g., Kreuz, 1996).
- Furthermore, it has been suggested that the relationship of the interlocutors (e.g., Kreuz & Caucci, 2008) can influence how and how often speakers use sarcasm.
- The purpose of this project was to identify the specific facial and lexical cues used, as well as assess the role of common ground, in the production of natural sarcastic utterances.

## Participants

- 29 pairs (17 friend and 12 stranger) were recruited from the Audiology and Psychology departments at the University of Memphis.
- Participants were told the purpose of the study was to investigate social interaction.

## Procedure

- Participants were recorded in a conversational setting in the Social Interaction Lab while engaging in tasks designed to elicit natural sarcasm (see Materials).
- Common ground was manipulated to determine whether it affects the cues used to signal sarcastic intent.
- Naturally produced sarcastic utterances were compared to sincere/literal utterances from the same speaker in the same task. This was done in order to have a baseline for comparisons.

## Materials

- Participants were given three tasks designed to elicit sarcasm in a natural way.
- Tasks were randomized between sessions and included commenting on badly-dressed celebrities (Hancock, 2004), creating a meal for a person that they hate (Coates, 1991) and discussing bad restaurant experiences (see pictures to the right).

Social Interaction Lab at the School of Audiology and Speech Language Pathology



“Prepare a meal for a person you hate” (Coates, 1991).

“Discuss with your partner the fashions you see” (Hancock, 2004).

## Results (1): Facial Cues

- Facial gestures were coded using a taxonomy adapted from Louwerse et al. (2007).
- Results showed a significant difference in number of smiles, laughs, nods, and looks to partner for sarcastic statements compared to the literal utterances (see below).

### DIFFERENCES IN FACIAL CUES FOR SARCASTIC & LITERAL STATEMENTS

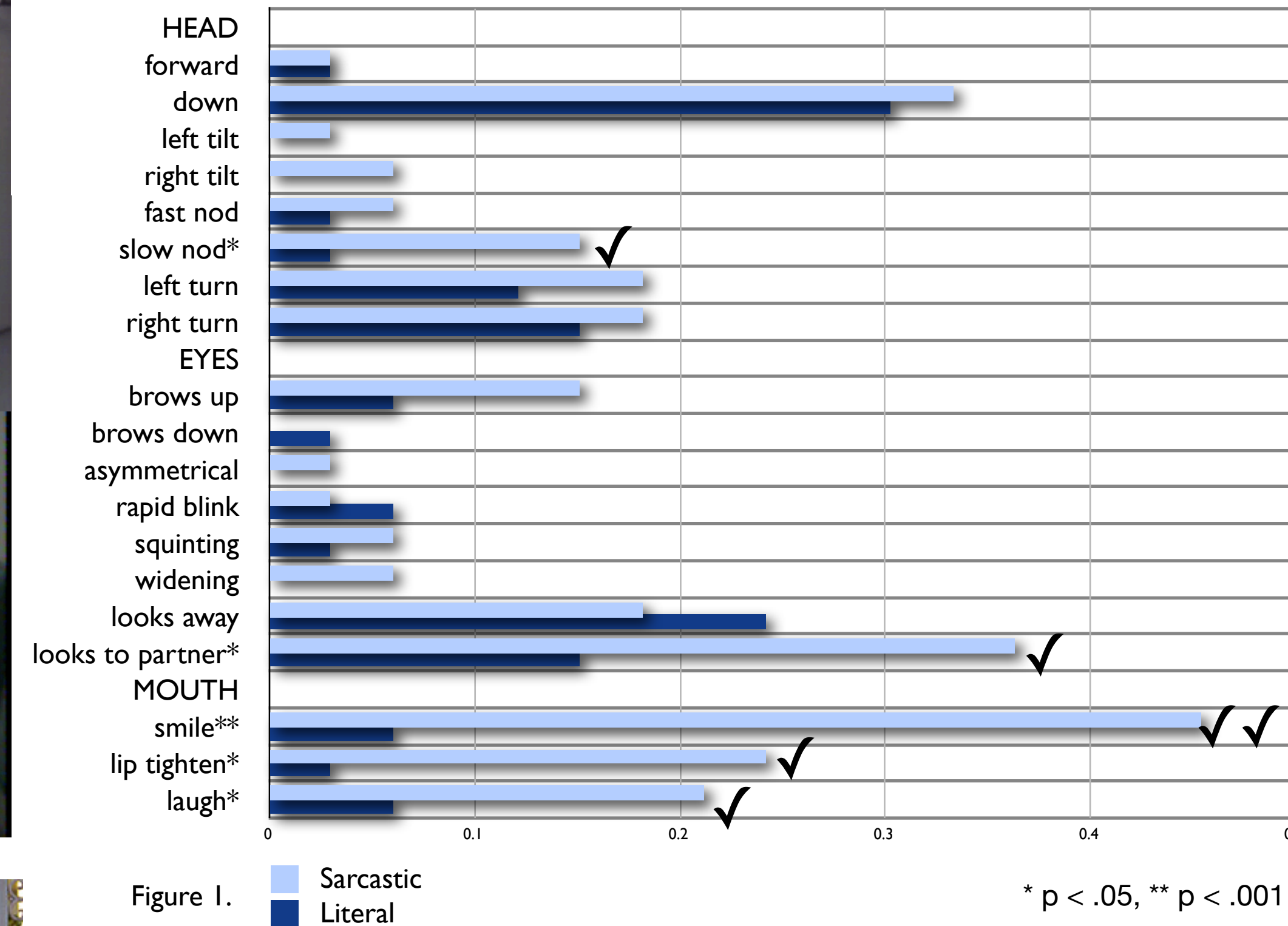


Figure 1. \* p < .05, \*\* p < .001

## Results (2): Lexical Sarcasm

- Sarcastic and literal utterances were coded for the presence of adjectives, adverbs, adjective-adverb collocations, and pauses.
- Results showed that there were significant differences between the sarcastic and literal utterances for presence of adjectives, adjective-adverb collocations, and pauses (see Table 1).

## Results (3): Common Ground

- In previous work, we showed the importance of common ground in determining how, as well as how often, people speak sarcastically (e.g., Caucci, Kreuz, & Buder 2007).
- There were 12 sessions of friend pairs, 7 of which contained at least one sarcastic utterance. Three of the 12 stranger-pair sessions included at least one sarcastic utterance.
- Common ground affected the frequency of facial cues used to signal sarcastic intent (see Figure 2).

Table 1. Number of Lexical Items Found in Utterances

| Lexical Characteristic         | Sarcastic | Baseline |
|--------------------------------|-----------|----------|
| Interjections                  | 18        | 18       |
| Adjectives (only)*             | 28        | 8        |
| Adverbs (only)                 | 8         | 4        |
| Adjective/Adverb collocations* | 7         | 0        |
| Pauses*                        | 7         | 0        |

\* p < .05

### COMMON GROUND DIFFERENCES FOR FACIAL CUES

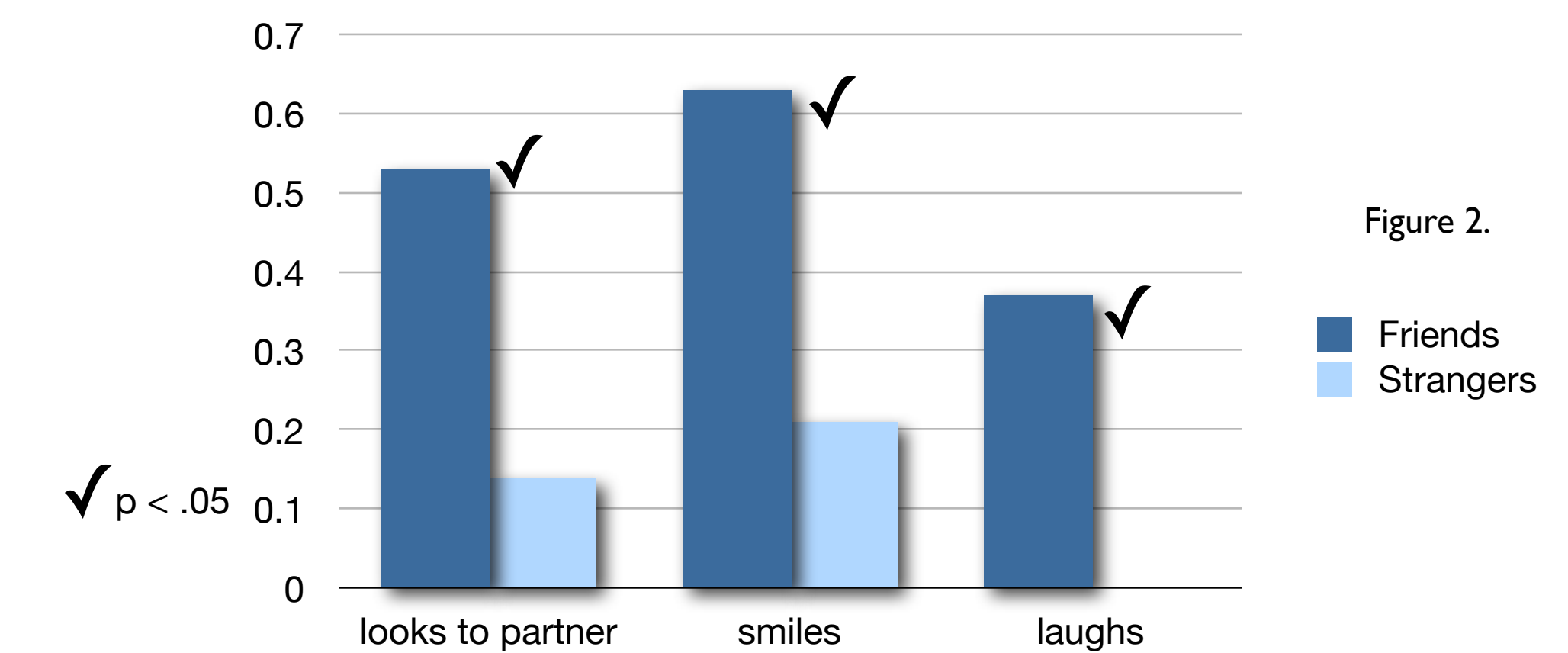


Figure 2.

## Discussion

- Importantly, all sarcastic utterances in our data set were elicited naturally.
- The results from the current project suggest that speakers indicate their sarcastic intent with facial as well as lexical cues in spontaneous sarcasm.
- Furthermore, we were able to show that common ground affects the facial cues participants produce to indicate sarcastic intent.
- Interestingly, we found a complicated relationship among facial, lexical and social cues to sarcasm.
- Future research should attempt to tease apart the individual contributions of these factors to the comprehension of a sarcastic statement.

### References

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