

The Power of Voice: How Vocal Changes Influence Perceptions of Older Adults

Kennedy Owens, Professor Estella P.M. Ma

Laidlaw Scholars Leadership and Research Program, Duke University, Durham, NC, USA

In partnership with The Voice Research Lab at The University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam, Hong Kong

Voice is more than a means of communication – listeners sometimes use it to form opinions

Example: Assuming how strong, credible, and confident someone is based on the way they sound

We asked:

How do age-related voice changes influence listeners' perceptions of older adults?



Normal Vocal Cords

We hypothesized:

Voice samples recorded by deviant dysphonia voices would receive more negative attitude ratings than voice samples recorded by healthy voices.



Old Vocal Cords

Measuring perceptions of voice

Qualitative Approach (Study one)

Participants were interviewed about voice, aging, voice disorders, and their effect on social interactions.

Ten participants were recruited for the interviews and rating task, ages 18-25.

Quantitative Approach (Study two)

Participants listened to different sounding voice samples of older adults and rated each one on a Visual Analog Scale (VAS), across 13 bipolar adjective pairs representing different attitudes toward the speaker.

Using **samples from adults who were over 60 years old**, we had a **total of eight samples**. There were three normal samples, three mild samples, and two severe samples. The classifications were made by Professor Estella P.M. Ma and Kennedy Owens.

Voice influences social perception and communication

Four themes emerged from study one's interviews:

Voice as a social cue

"I can judge their age, their gender, even their character, based on their voice."

Voice as a facilitator or barrier to communication

"You cannot communicate as effectively as you wish [...] So there might be confusion and a lot of misunderstandings."

Perceived characteristics of voice disorders and aging voice

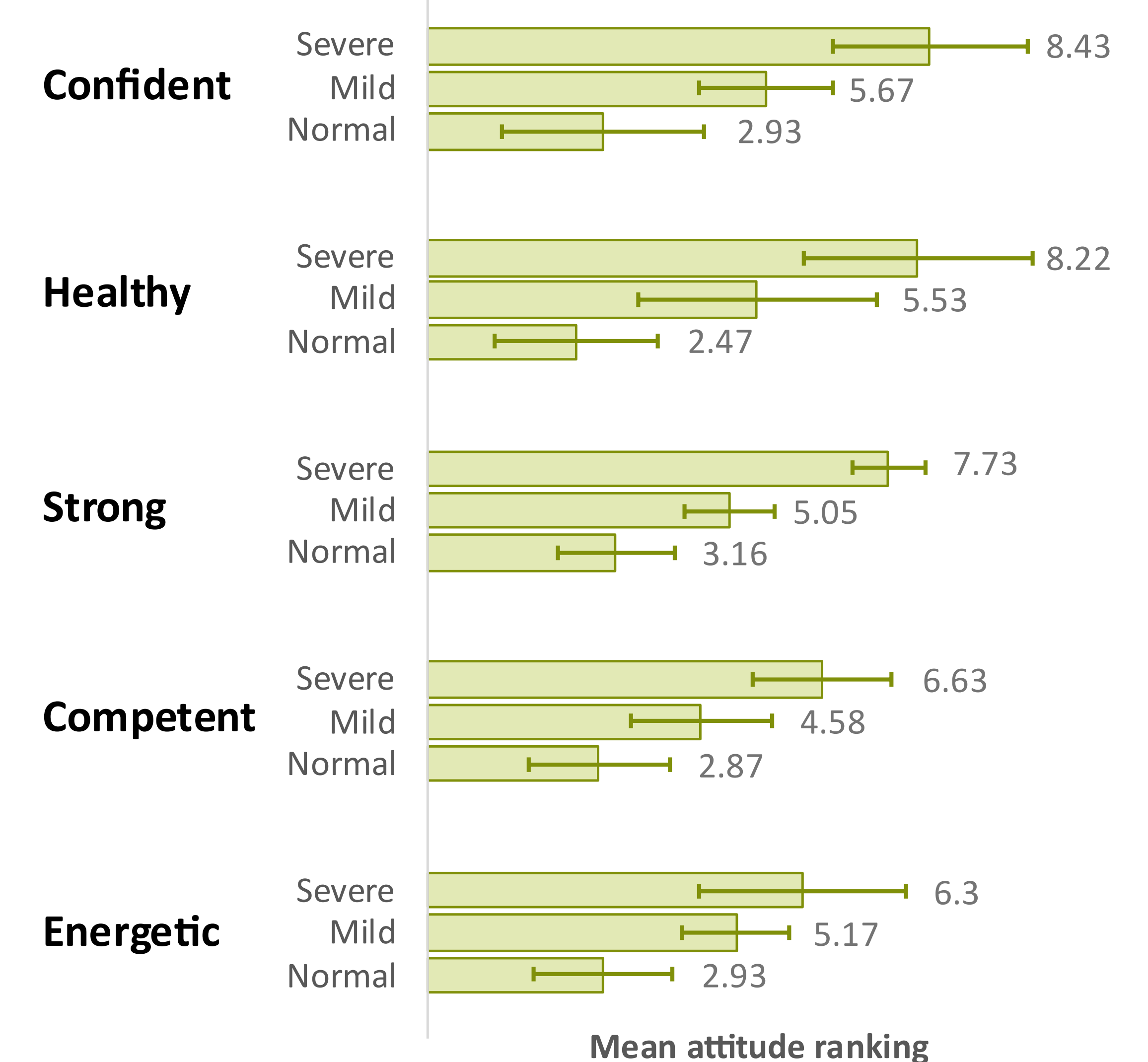
"Their voice sounds very hoarse, and ... very breathy, and will take much effort to speak."

Psychological impact of voice changes

"They'll have less confidence when they're talking to other people because they feel different."

Participants rated **severe voice samples** (most prevalent voice disorders) the **most negatively** across majority of these characteristics.

Mean and standard deviations of attitude ratings by dysphonia severity



Voice changes can affect more than communication

- Study one revealed that listeners viewed voice as a social cue that can influence their judgements about the older adult speaker's personality, health, competence, and more.
- Generally, study two showed that **the more severe a voice condition was, the more of a negative perception listeners had about that person**.

Limitations:

- Small sample size.
- Only descriptive statistics were used for measurement.

Future Directions:

- Recruit a larger and more diverse sample.
- Include a comparison group to better distinguish perceptions related to voice severity.

Conclusion : An older adults' voice can influence how others perceive them, not just how well they communicate, effecting their social interactions and quality of life.

References

