

Rock the Rhythm and Croon the Melody: The Music of Speech

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Poetry, music, public oratory and everyday conversation share two powerful modes of communication: rhythms and melodies. As a rule speakers and hearers are only aware of details of rhythm and melody, the prosody of speech, when they hear something unexpected: a hesitation, misplaced accentuation, a foreign accent, stuttering. Informal 'folk linguistic' characterisations of speech prosody and voice quality capture some of the properties of rhythms, melodies and voice type, but not very precisely: 'monotonous', 'sing-song', 'shouting', 'whispering', 'high-pitched', 'low-pitched', 'squeaky', 'rumbling', 'bass', 'tenor', 'alto', 'soprano', 'falsetto', 'fast' or 'slow' in terms of the sounds of voices, and 'harsh', 'gentle', 'kindly', 'sexy', 'aggressive', 'angry' 'breathless', 'boring' or 'excited' in terms of their effects on the listener.

The main objective of the course is to increase awareness of speech prosody and to impart analytic skills regarding speech prosody in different situations and different languages, with practical sessions in which the functions, patterns and sound properties of samples of speech in Chinese, selected West African languages and English will be analysed, with occasional samples of the languages of participants. There will be excursions into the rhythms and melodies of poetry and song, and speculations about the evolution of speech prosody. Participants are recommended to bring their laptops, and to install and 'play around' with these two software applications before the course, as well as checking the background reading:

Praat: <http://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/>, Audacity: <https://www.audacityteam.org/>

Gibbon, Dafydd (2017). Prosody: The Rhythms and Melodies of Speech. (Introductory.)
<https://arxiv.org/abs/1704.02565>

Gibbon, Dafydd (2018). The Future of Prosody: It's about Time. Keynote address at *Speech Prosody 9*, Poznań. (Advanced.)
https://www.isca-speech.org/archive/SpeechProsody_2018/pdfs/_Inv-1.pdf

Materials for the course will be available later on the following website:

<http://wwwhomes.uni-bielefeld.de/gibbon/2019-Mannheim-Summer-School/>

Teaser

When we talk, we convey so much even without words, with 'the tone of voice', the rhythms and melodies of speech, yet we don't really know how this happens. Why not?