The Perception of Speech Rhythm in Different Languages and Dialects: A Comparative Study.
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It has often been felt that languages may belong to different rhythmic classes. “stress-timed” languages are exemplified by English, “syllable-timed” languages by French (Pike 1945) and “mora-timed” languages by Japanese (Ladefoged, 1975). However, acoustic studies have not been unanimous in strictly establishing which rhythm category a given language belongs to and failed to provide empirical support of the “isochrony theory” (Bolinger, 1965; Dauer, 1983).

In this research it was hypothesized that a perceptual study could generate more convincing results relevant to rhythm typology. This approach has been adopted by using discrimination experiments such as spectral inversion and stimuli consisting of just F0 and amplitude, in order to decide the rhythmic status of many languages as well as many Arabic and English dialects.

Based upon the results of this study, it made enough sense for listeners to use rhythm as an essential cue to classify languages and dialects according to their rhythmic properties. Listeners were also able to perceive rhythmic differences between languages and dialects belonging to the same rhythm class. This implies the possibility of subclasses of broad rhythmic categories (Ghazali et al., 2002; Hamdi et al., 2005). Lebanese Arabic and Welsh English were perceived as quite different from the other English and Arabic dialects at segmental and suprasegmental levels.

Surprisingly, listeners were also able to use pitch (F0) as a discriminating factor, though test results in inverted speech generated more conclusive empirical data compared to pitch.

REFERENCES


