
Enhancing The Meaning of Lyrics: The Interplay of Language and Music in Song

Alice Karbanova
Masaryk University, Brno, CZ
alice.karbanova@gmail.com

Over the past decades, the intricate relationship between language and music has garnered the attention of scholars from diverse linguistic disciplines, revealing compelling evidence of their mutual influences on various levels, from the sensory to the cognitive realm. They have provided evidence for overlapping brain areas involved in processing both musical and linguistic meaning, as well as shared conceptual networks for language and music. Empirical validation supports music's capacity to effectively convey abstract concepts. Music is meaningful mainly on the pragmatic level because it bears resemblance with the affective prosodic cues in speech. Given that speech prosody provides important clues about a speaker's communicative intentions during conversation, listeners decode the acoustic clues present in music as indicative of such intentions. To convey information, speech and music rely on similar acoustic cues (pitch, timing, timbre cues etc.) which differ with respect to the emotion that is expressed by the producer. A portion of meaning is encoded in speech prosody and such acoustics patterns are imitated in musical structure. This doctoral investigation in song perception delves into the potential competition between language and music for cognitive resources during song perception and interpretation. Since musical acoustic cues function as pragmatic context influencing the meaning of words, the ongoing experimental phase of this research seeks to unveil how concepts adjust based on inferences drawn from communicative intentions embedded within musical cues. This study promises to illuminate the intricate dynamics through which language and music converge and coalesce in the human cognitive landscape, enriching our understanding of their mutual interactions and shared processing mechanisms.

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