

The origins of language in the context of a common beginning with music

Barbara Pastuszek-Lipińska
(Akademia Humanistyczno-Ekonomiczna w Łodzi)

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Most researchers agree that both language and music started their development from sounds, but the question of whether their origins are common or separate has caused many severe disagreements since the 17th century. One of the first investigators interested in finding correlations between music and language was René Descartes (1618/1987), who considered language and music to be the main achievements that set man apart from animals.

Then Jean Jacques Rousseau (1754) claimed that music and language share some common pathways and went on to suggest that the first languages were sung, not spoken and that the main role of the languages was to express emotions: love, hatred, and anger. In short, he claimed that at its origin, language was passionate before becoming rational.

Another important investigator was Darwin (1871), who also argued for a common origin of music and language, but who suggested that language was developed first and that music evolved out of primates' reproductive calls. The idea that the two domains have the same origin and are interrelated was also suggested in the 19th century by a famous linguist, von Humboldt, and then by Jespersen (1922) early in the 20th century.

Although the notions of speech prosody and particularly of musical prosody are not very old, data on the similarities between speech prosody and music can be found frequently in literature.

The authors also highlight the role of voice modulation during vocal expression in both music and language and note the role of speech melody in conveying meaning and emotions. The ability to exercise "voluntary control over the precise acoustic patterns of vocal expression" has been noticed e.g. by Juslin and Laukka (2003, 279-82), who also pointed out the fact that this ability plays a crucial role in both language and music, and particularly in speech production and singing.

When we then talk about the origins of language we cannot omit the sounds based on common ancestors of music and language. In the presentation, the common sources of origin will be discussed.

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