

Change in language and music: a constructional outline

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Two of the five questions posed by Jackendoff and Lerdahl (2006: 34) on the subject of music and cognition are as follows:

Q1 (Musical structure): When a listener hears a piece of music in an idiom (or style) with which he/she is familiar, what cognitive structures (or mental representations) does he/she construct in response to the music?

Q2 (Musical grammar): For any particular musical idiom MI, what are the unconscious principles by which experienced listeners construct their understanding of pieces of music in MI (i.e., what is the musical grammar of MI)?

Jackendoff and Lerdahl (2006) attempt to provide answers to these questions in part by drawing parallels between musical and linguistic capacity, especially by exploring principles associated with the architecture of a synchronic grammar.

In this talk, I will approach the relationship between musical and linguistic structure from the perspective not of synchrony, but of diachrony, and consider how an understanding of the principles of linguistic change – particularly, principles of constructional change – might be relevant for an account of the grammar of music, and the nature of representations in both music and language. In particular, I will address the following issues, and show how these link to the two questions posed by Jackendoff and Lerdahl (2006):

1. The importance of formulae in both music and language, and how those formulae change over time (see e.g. Wray 2002 on formulae in language, and Hepokoski and Darcy 2006 on variation in sonata form).
2. The relationship between musical formulae and linguistic constructions, the issue of form-only constructions (cf. Jackendoff 2013), and how these change.
3. The importance of inheritance and networks in the representation of both language (Van de Velde, De Smet and Ghesquière 2013) and music (Schubert, Hargreaves and North 2014), and the nature of change in language networks (Traugott and Trousdale 2013).

References

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