

## 5 *Conclusions and discussion*

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### 5.1 *Conclusions*

The current study questioned a long-standing belief about the influence of the prosody and melody of language on music. Specifically, it has been a widely held assumption that the melody and rhythm of a spoken language influences musical melody. This study provided an empirical study of the effect of the prosody of spoken German and French on Romantic art songs from approximately 1820–1900.

The study makes explicit the importance of the hierarchical unit of the phrase in the relationship between language and music. This is supported with evidence from linguistics, music, and cognitive research indicating that neurological processing of hierarchical structures occurs similarly for both language and music.

Previous studies on the relationship between the rhythm of speech and the rhythm of instrumental music across languages with different rhythmic characteristics found a significant relationship between the two. However, the results of the current study of French and German art song indicate that while there are individual composers who clearly demonstrate the expected characteristic difference in rhythm, such as Debussy and Schumann, there is no clear overall trend in French and German song to mimic the rhythmic characteristics of the two languages in this particular genre.

One important finding is the independent verification of Patel and Daniele's observation that the nPVI of their German-based repertory increased as a function of time. When viewed in conjunction with the finding of a dramatic decrease in the nPVI of French-based repertory, Patel and Daniele's *post hoc* hypothesis regarding the rise of nationalism becomes an attractive explanation for the trends. More study on this would be necessary to determine if there were other factors influencing German and French compositional style over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as Patel and Daniele's proposed decreased influence of Italian music on German composers.

The study of the range of songs and phrases indicates that a trend for German composers to have a larger average range on both the song level and the phrase level than French composers. German composers also tended to use a wider range of ranges than French composers on both the song level and the phrase level, although this result was not statistically significant. An unanticipated result was the ability to discern aspects of individual compositional style from these results, as was discussed in Chapter 4.

The results from this study must not be applied too widely, however. The sample of songs included in the study was not a truly random sample; therefore, the results cannot be said to apply to all French and German art song composers, but rather must be limited to the repertory in the current study. A truly random study could be designed as verification both for this study and for the previous studies by Patel and Daniele and Huron and Ollen.

## 5.2 *Future research directions*

A tremendous amount of potential research areas remain in the study of the interaction of language and music. The research on the prosody of language is increasing exponentially, and as prosodic research increases, we can continue to investigate the effects of prosody on musical melody. The recent emphasis on contour-based systems of analysis for prosody has wide-reaching musical implications and a study involving the correlation between linguistic melodic contour and musical contour would be an important addition to the literature.

The tools used for this study may be applied to an individual composer in order to determine elements of compositional style, or may be used to determine the influence of language on a group of composers from a different genre. One potential study is to investigate the effect of bi- or multi-lingualism on compositional style when setting texts in the different languages of fluency. Another possibility is to develop a contour representation that is similar to that used in linguistics to facilitate the comparison of speech melody and musical melody.

As Marshall McLuhan said, “Song is the slowing down of speech in order to savor nuance.”<sup>1</sup> This study is one step in the long journey towards understanding the many nuances in the relationship between the rhythm and melody and speech and music.

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<sup>1</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1962), p. 200.