The Acquisition of Prolongation as a Structural Constituent in Musical Attending

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Venue: Room G17, Webster Ground

1. Background

Prolongation, as described by Music Theory, alludes to certain musical events that remain active in the musical ‘flow’ although they are not physically present. However, how is prolongation experienced and which its nature is, are unanswered questions. Based on previous research it is possible to assume that prolongation, as a phenomenon of music structure, is a factor that might organize the way in which the listener experiences tonal music. In a prior study, we used the click-detection paradigm and measured the Subject Reaction Time (SRT) in order to find evidence of prolongation as a constituent structural unit. If prolongation have incidence in the way the listener represents music, as long as the process of attending progresses, the study of the process of acquisition of this ability is a matter of relevance.

2. Aim

Explore evidence about the acquisition of the experience of prolongation as a constituent structural unit while attending to music.

3. Method

Thirty children (6-14 years), sorted in three age-groups, had to listen to 20 trials: 1) 10 trials: 5 melodies with a click superimposed in two different positions: i) at the boundary - between the last note of the prolongational unit and the next structural note in the musical sequence, ii) before the boundary (1 sec. before). 2) 10 trials: the same 5 melodies in which the metrical position of the prolonged final tone was modified, in order to monitor the influence of metrical factors, with the clicks superimposed according to similar criteria. We assumed that the more stable the event in which the clicks is located, the faster the SRT.

4. Results

Results show faster SRT for clicks at Boundary Positions, as it was hypothesised. Furthermore, younger children seem to have slower SRT than older children. As in the study with adults, metrical position at the prolongation boundary was a non-significant factor, although it could be observed a tendency of the youngest children to be sensitive to metrical position.

5. Conclusions

Results bring evidence about the prolongation organizing the listener’s experience while attending to tonal music since childhood. However, we have reasons to think that in younger children responses could be influenced by metrical positions.