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Research Activity Report

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1. Overview

This research activity report is about my presentation on our research project on “Globally, songs and instrumental melodies are slower, higher, and use more stable pitches than speech” at the 47th International Council for Traditional Music World Conference (13–19 July 2023, Legon, Ghana).

In all human societies, we can observe that two types of acoustic communication exist, namely language and music. The comparative study of these two modes of human sound communication has attracted researchers in many fields. Many studies published the acoustic differences between song and speech, but usually, cultural or language variation is not very rich despite its cross-cultural universality. Therefore, we are aiming to conduct a series of comparative analyses with diverse cross-cultural samples to explore what distinguishes song from speech and what are the most similar features between them across cultures.

This conference trip was planned to receive feedback about the current preliminary analysis results from researchers mainly studying in the field of ethnomusicology. Besides, since it is conjectured to extend the current project into several sub-projects focusing on specific music-language relationships, we also planned to have a business meeting with collaborators attending the conference to discuss a rough idea about how the project will be extended.

2. Takeaways and highlights

Overall, the presentation received positive and useful feedback from the audience, and we could also discuss potential future steps for the project during the business meeting. One interesting discussion during the presentation was brought up by Dr. S. Ama Wray, where she sought how improvisational performance would affect music, language, and their relationship. Her study focuses on dance, improvisation, and choreography, which are the elements our project has not addressed so far, even though music and dance are tightly connected. We already have a collaborator who plans to examine the music-language relationship in a dance performance context as one of the extensions of the project. Therefore, the idea and discussion sparked by Dr. Wray have important implications for future activities.

3. Next steps

This conference trip helped us discuss several ideas about the extension of this project with our collaborators and the audience of our presentation. Music and language are observed in every culture and society, yet they are so diverse. Therefore, collaborating with scholars from various disciplines, including ethnomusicology, and different countries, is important to advance this line of research. We keep contacting our collaborators to formulate the plan for follow-up projects extending the current study.