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Affect bursts as evolutionary precursors of speech and music

Abstract

I suggest that brief non-verbal displays of emotion (affect bursts) may have been an important element in the evolution of *speech and gesture*, and, probably in parallel, of *singing and music*. After giving brief account of the evolutionary development of emotion and the nature and architecture of the human emotion system, with particular emphasis on motor expression, I will present a dynamic model of *emotion communication* distinguishing the function of expression 1) as symptom (of speaker state), 2) as symbol (of a message), and 3) appeal (to the listener), highlighting differential types of coding (biological push vs. sociocultural pull) of the expressive signs. A brief overview of research on emotion communication will provide evidence for the similarity of the expressive cues used to convey specific emotions in nonverbal vocal aspects speech and in vocal and instrumental music. In particular, some of the evidence supporting the proposal that affect bursts might have been the starting point for the joint evolution of language and music are reviewed. The proposal, and particularly the role of aesthetic emotions in poetry and music, is examined on the background of Gould's critique of "adaptationism"