

THE ELOQUENCE OF THE BODY

-A synchronized composite of discourse structure, word meaning, and nonverbal behaviour-

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Since 1988, and in parallel to her teaching and research positions (Geneva University - FPSE, HUG, CERN, IMD, HEG-Fr), she has been directing Vox Institute – a training and research institute - specialized in vocal and non-verbal aspects of speech communication, including acoustic voice analyses and their applications to public speaking and rhetoric in general.



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The four basic canons of classical rhetoric comprise: *inventio* (finding arguments appropriate to the target audience), *dispositio* (sequential arrangement of the arguments), *elocutio* (style, figures of speech) and *actio* or oral delivery. The latter includes enunciation, vocal patterns (pitch, loudness, pace, intonations), as well as the movements of the body, posture, gestures and facial expressions.

Today it is commonly accepted that a persuasive effect will ultimately depend on how the speech is “acted out”.

Eloquence is indissociable from oral delivery. It is by appropriate *actio* that the art of oratory can fulfil its purpose: to persuade and/or convince (including the appeal to ethos, logos and pathos). For Cicero ([Brutus](#)) the orator’s eloquence should produce three effects: 1) to *inform* his hearers, 2) to *please* them, and 3) to *move their passions* – a sheer necessity.

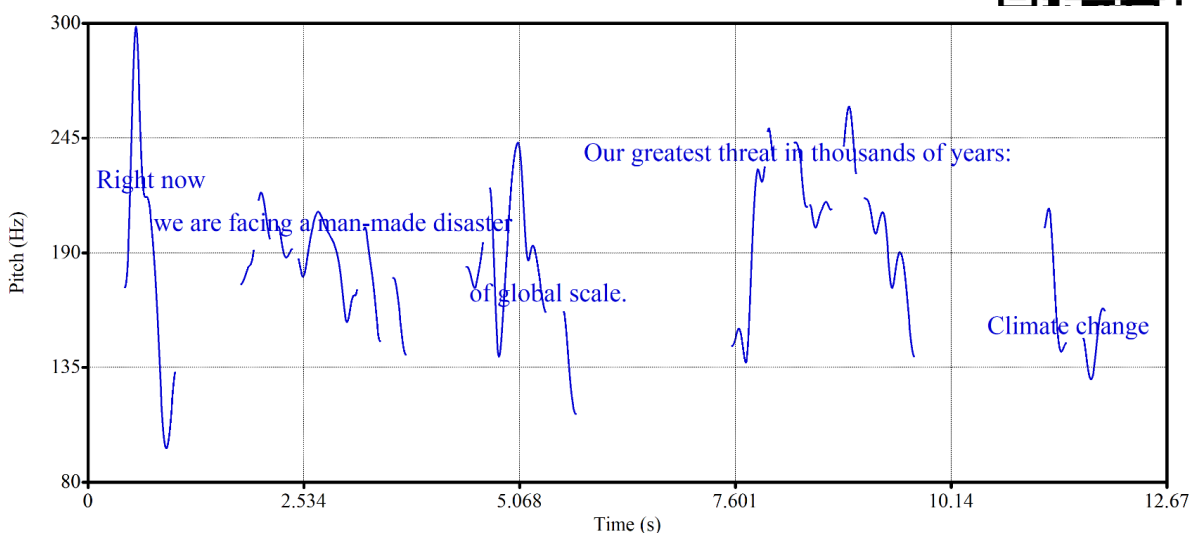
For both Aristotle and Ciceron an accomplished orator arouses two kinds of emotions in the audience: aesthetic and utilitarian. The aesthetic emotions result from a pleasant sensorial experience (visual and auditory) while utilitarian emotions (such as pity, fear or anger) can be related to the personal relevance of the argument, and emotional contagion (including the identification with the speaker). Utilitarian emotions are induced for a purpose. They can trigger, steer or stop the hearer’s behaviour.

In order to create an emotional impact, enrich and refine his message, the speaker must control the movements of his body, his gestures, his facial expressions, his vocal timbre and produce a variety of intonations. Recent research has shown that emotionally relevant information (such as valence and arousal) can be obtained by visual tracking of the speaker's head and hands trajectories, posture and gestures.



The speaker's gestures are synchronized with the rhythm of his speech patterns. They enhance the clarity of the message by chunking the utterance into units of thought. They mark the topic and comment in a sentence, and reveal what the speaker considers as new vs. taken for granted. This is the function of the up and down movement of beats in general.

[Sir David Attenborough's speech at COP24](#), (Katowice, Poland 3rd December 2018) is an example of synchronization of up and down body movements with the rhythm and structure of his spoken word.



The speaker's voice pitch (fundamental frequency in Hz) also follows the up and down pattern. The above curves illustrate the pitch modulation in [Sir David Attenborough's speech](#) at COP24, Katowice, Poland, 2018.

The fundamental frequency of the voice often correlates with eyebrow position: higher vocal pitch is associated with higher eyebrow placement. Smiling has an effect on the voice. It produces an upward shift in vocal resonance heard as "smiling voice." By contrast, when the zygomatic



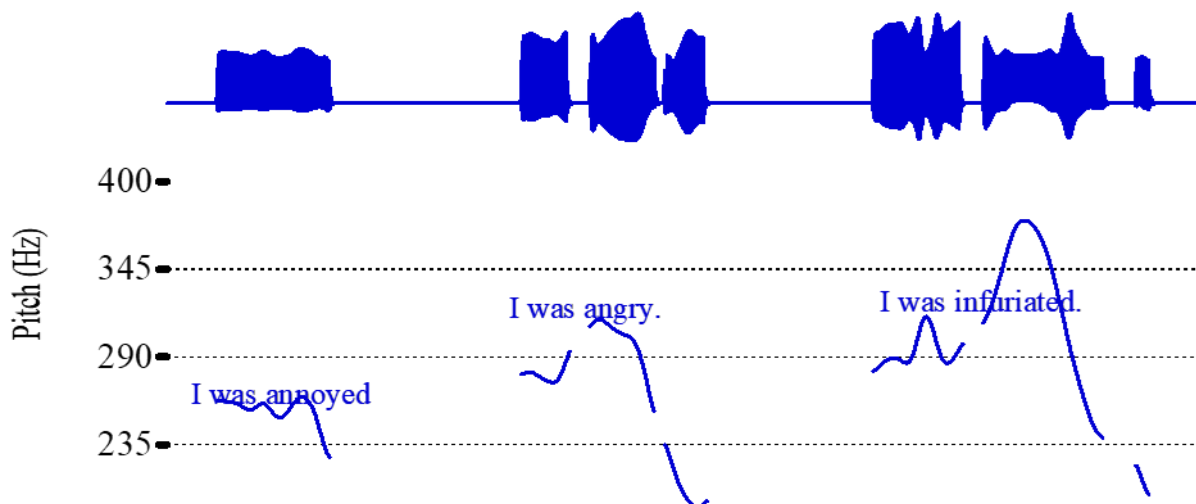
muscles are relaxed, and the vocal tract is lengthened producing a “darker” timbre associated with sadness or seriousness.

Such rhythmically orchestrated coordination of nonverbal behaviour and acoustic features (rhythm, emphasis) can enhance the emotional impact on the audience. In part, it may be due to *entrainment* – a mechanism whereby rhythmic processes interact with each other and eventually ‘lock in’ to a common phase and periodicity. Hearing the beat automatically involves the listener's motor system. Indeed, both music and speech activate motor zones which organise auditory perception and give a motoric meaning to the stimulus. Rhythmic entrainment is often seen as a key source of emotions experienced during music listening.

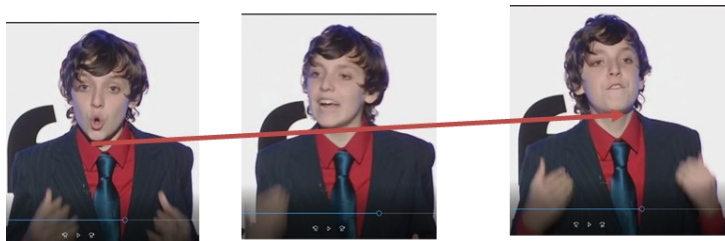
Here is how the relation between music, speech and body motion was described by [Quintilian](#): “Music has two modes of expression in the voice and in the body; for both voice and body require to be controlled by appropriate rules. (....) Now I ask you whether it is not absolutely necessary for the orator to be acquainted with all these methods of expression which are concerned firstly with gesture, secondly with the arrangement of words and thirdly with the inflexions of the voice. (....) It is by the raising, lowering or inflexion of the voice that the orator stirs the emotions of his hearers. (....). Further the motion of the body must be suitable and becoming. This is a most important part of eloquence..., ([Institutio Oratoria Book 1, chapter X](#))

Climax or *gradation* (a figure of speech where successive words/phrases are arranged in ascending order of strength) is another example of joint action of lexical, musical and bodily components of eloquence.

The *gradation* in speech and the *crescendo* in music have the effect of building excitement, anticipation and increased perceptual attention of the events occurring at the same time.



The above represents a passage in [Duncan Harisson’s Winning Speech](#) 29 April 2009 illustrating gradation - the going up a scale of excitement.



His successive phrases show [gradual increase in pitch](#) accompanied by a slight raising of his chin and his hands.

At present -as in the past- be it in young or old speakers, *Eloquence* can be described as emotion congruent and well-synchronized composite of discourse structure, word meaning, and speakers’ nonverbal behaviour.

If you are eager to learn more about eloquence, join one of the forthcoming workshops

1) *The Power of Voice and Nonverbal Behaviour in Speech Communication*



Venue : a small Chateau in France close to Geneva

Book a seat

2) *L'impact de la voix dans la communication professionnelle - Parler pour convaincre*



Venue : Geneva, 17 rue des Maraichers

Book a seat