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Emotion contagion through prosody

Prosody has linguistic functions, such as signalling the structure and meaning of utterances, and these functions have been studied relatively widely. However, prosody also carries extra-linguistic information, which is transmitted in every speech signal alongside the linguistic information. One type of extra-linguistic information embedded in the prosodic signal is the speaker's emotion. This emotional information can affect the listener's interpretation of the speech signal. In today's talk I will discuss our recent and current work on emotion contagion via vocally expressed affect. In a series of experimental studies, we have demonstrated that listeners' emotions can be affected by exposure to emotional speech, possibly without much conscious awareness on the part of the listener. This research informs theory, but also has practical applications. Linguists who study the interpretation of speech may find it interesting to study this additional stream of information.