

Perceptual learning of lexical tone

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A hallmark of speech is the presence of abundant variations in the acoustic realizations of sounds and words, both within and across speakers. Yet, listeners show a remarkable ability to adapt quickly and comprehend speech fluently. It is commonly recognized that perceptual learning of speech, or phonetic recalibration, plays a crucial role in facilitating this adaptive perception. What has remained open is how exactly our auditory perceptual system dynamically adjusts its mapping of incoming acoustic stimuli to sound categories and how generalizable and stable such recalibration remains. In this talk, I will address these inquiries by discussing results from collaborative projects on the perceptual learning of lexical tone in Standard Chinese, a suprasegmental feature of speech cued mainly via pitch variations to distinguish word meanings. Our findings complement existing research on perceptual learning of speech segments and help to constrain theories regarding the adaptive perceptual processing of speech.