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KEYNOTE LECTURE

Capturing Intonational Behaviour: From Autism to Human–Robot Interaction

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Prosodic behaviour is characterized by substantial variation across speakers or communicative contexts, making its systematic characterization challenging. This talk focuses primarily on an approach to global intonation that captures the dynamics, extent, and diversity of pitch movements. Applied to autistic and non-autistic Slovak-speaking children, these measures reveal a prominent role of development while providing little support for a uniform "autistic prosody." Their broader applicability is demonstrated in older adults performing cognitive assessment tasks, where the same measures capture systematic differences in intonational behaviour depending on whether participants interact with a human interlocutor or the humanoid robotic head. A complementary approach, based on a broader set of acoustic measures applied to a multilingual corpus of autistic and non-autistic speakers, provides an additional perspective on intonational variability. Together, the findings illustrate the challenges of identifying stable patterns of intonational behaviour and point to the importance of development, individual variability, interactional context, and methodological choices in shaping the patterns we observe.