

The time course of person perception from voices

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Listeners readily form impressions about a person based on the voice: Is the person old or young? Trustworthy or not? While some studies suggest that these impressions can be formed rapidly (e.g., by 400ms of exposure for traits), it is unclear just how quickly these impressions are formed across a number of person-related impressions.

In a gating experiment, we collected ratings of 3 physical characteristics (age, sex, health), 3 trait characteristics (trustworthiness, dominance, attractiveness) and 3 social characteristics (level of education, poshness, professionalism) from recordings of the sustained vowel /a/ of 100 unfamiliar voices. Voice recordings were presented to listeners for 25ms, 50ms, 100ms, 200ms, 400ms, and 800ms.

We observe that even from 25ms of exposure, interrater agreement for impressions of physical characteristics is high, with these impressions already being similar to the impressions formed after 800ms. This suggests that impressions of physical characteristics can be established rapidly. In contrast, agreement for trait and social characteristics is low to moderate for short exposure durations and gradually increases over time. These findings thus show that different person-related impressions arise at different points in time, suggesting that, in principle, person impressions that arise earlier may influence impressions that arise later on in time.