

Prosodic features of people with depression and their therapists

Laurence White and Hannah Grimes

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences, Newcastle University

People with clinical depression often have distinctive prosodic patterns, such as lower fundamental frequency (F0), reduced F0 range and lower articulation rate, but the conversational dynamics between depressed speakers and their interlocutors are poorly understood. We examined the prosodic features of patients and therapists at the beginning and the end of a 29-week course of dialectical behaviour therapy for refractory depression. As expected, articulation rate was higher for therapists than for patients, and therapists' median F0 was also higher (with speaker sex controlled). A three-way interaction between speaker, session and time-within-session was attributable to patients' articulation rate increasing over the first therapy session. There were few direct relationships found between levels of depression and specific prosodic measures, but we found suggestive evidence that articulation rate convergence in the first session may predict more positive therapeutic outcomes.