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Timbre characterization as the basis of inquiry on multisensory experience

We may observe that in everyday life most people intuitively assume that each sensory reaction is assigned to a specific stimuli. The nature of sensual modalities is rarely questioned either by the subjects themselves or in the process of formal education. The perception of sound is to some extent the most intuitive sensual experience of all. Although hearing ability is crucial for the acquisition of the spoken language (Sacks, 1989) and the spatial orientation of the body, little do we usually explicitly know about its nature. We tend to take it for granted and, unless undergoing musical or acoustic education, use it without reflecting back on it. One may observe this clearly while analyzing the limited scope of adjectives that characterize sound.

Furthermore, the majority of the adjectives characterizing sound are deeply rooted in the experience of a different modality rather than hearing (e.g. *soft* as categorization of the perceived sound is secondary to *soft* as haptic experience). We may observe that the number of adjectives belonging natively to the domain of sound/hearing is very small in comparison to the adjectives associated with the remaining senses.

The presentation gives a brief summary of the study on timbre perception and human ability to communicate acoustic experience through the means of language. The author intends to investigate innate human dispositions to categorize certain stimuli and the ability to build explicit sensual consciousness. The research method was established on the basis of the *timbre solfege* introduced by Miśkiewicz (1992) but varies in application and the choice of tasks. The author believes that the same phenomena is experienced regardless of the used language. This, though, is the subject for further research as the presented experiments concern Polish language speakers only.

The study itself is two – dimensional. It brings up two main categories of questions:

- (1) **How do we differentiate sensory information? How do we decide that it belongs to one sense but not to the other? What does talking about sound teach us about the overall sensual human experience?**
- (2) Is there any common ground of subjective experience of the timbre of sound? Can it be communicated to others or put in general terms (objectivity)? Are there sounds that every and each of us can refer to as *soft*, *warm* or *bright*?

The author will address the aforementioned questions and present the results of the study up to now with the focus on the (1) dimension.

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