

# MELODIC CONTOURS AS A CONNECTING LINK BETWEEN PRIMATE COMMUNICATION AND HUMAN SINGING

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## Background

Any probing of the question whether music, which is exclusive to humans, is an entirely new phenomenon or whether there are unknown connections with vocal communication typical of previous stages in phylogenesis, requires searching for early musical signs in human development. Universally, parents use distinct, simple pitch contours in order to transmit emotional messages to the preverbal child. Their spontaneous appearance, triggered by the presence of an infant, indicates genetic predisposition.

## Aims

As the melodic element plays an important part in singing, the melodic contours used in motherese were to be investigated as possible starting points for the melodies of songs. Additionally, possible connections to animal acoustic communication were to be researched.

## Method

Different forms of melodic contour serve different purposes, and their composition depends on social context. To establish the possible similarity between melodic contours and the pitch contours of human melodies, four song-categories were chosen which are linked to comparable social situations: praise-songs, war-songs, songs to arouse attention and lullabies. Corresponding ethnic songs from different cultures were analysed with regard to whether they contain pitch contours which correspond with those used in motherese.

On the basis of ethological findings, the characteristic features and functions of primate calls and those of the different forms of melodic contours were compared.

## Results

The supposed correspondence of pitch contours in songs to the melodic contours of motherese proved to exist.

Primate ethological literature has shown parallels to exist between essential kinds of calls which are also at humans' disposal. This gave rise to the theory that in humans' prolonged period of progeny care the melodic contours must have evolved from the corresponding call classes of the modern human's ancestors. This requires further corroboration.

## Conclusions

Music, especially singing, can be assumed to have developed from earlier forms of vocal communication which melodic contours as a connecting link.