

Invited Talk

UNDERSTANDING ACOUSTICS AND FUNCTION IN SPONTANEOUS HUMAN LAUGHTER

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ABSTRACT

Laughter is often considered a stereotyped and distinctively human signal of positive emotion. Yet, acoustic analyses reveal a great deal of variability in laugh acoustics, and that changes in laughter sounds need not signal comparable changes in emotional state. There is simply not enough evidence to know whether laugh acoustics have specific, well-defined signaling value. However, there is evidence that laughter is deeply rooted in human biology. Great apes, for example, produce recognizably laugh-like vocalizations, and characteristic laughter sounds are produced by humans who are profoundly deaf. Based on acoustic form and likely phylogenetic history, laughter is argued to have evolved primarily as a vehicle of emotional conditioning. In this view, human laughter emerged because it helps foster and maintain positive, mutually beneficial relationships among individuals with genuine liking for one another. It is predicted to as easily have the opposite role among those who do not.