Individual Differences in Linguistic Encoding

Even though individual variation is ubiquitous and has been documented across a growing number of studies, research into the nature of linguistic contrasts and their encoding tends to treat participants as a homogenous group. In this talk, I will focus on speech prosody research and argue that many conflicting findings that have been considered controversial in the past may be resolved once individual variation in participants’ performance has been adequately captured. I will discuss my recent work on rhythm production and perception in typical and atypical populations and present recent evidence that is starting to shed light on the individual origins of the controversies surrounding speech rhythm. While I recognise that a hypothesis-driven sampling of individual characteristics and traits remains a challenge across many subfields of speech research, I will highlight a number of instruments available for capturing individual abilities relevant to the study of prosody and outline some best practices for capitalising on individual variability in production and perception research.