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1	The role of spectro-temporal fine structure cues						
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1 Abstract

2 The importance of spectro-temporal modulation cues in conveying tonal information for lexical tones was assessed in native-Mandarin and native-French adult listeners using a 3 4 lexical-tone discrimination task. The fundamental frequency (F0) of Thai tones was either degraded using an 8-band vocoder that reduced fine spectral details and frequency-modulation 5 6 cues, or extracted and used to modulate the F0 of click trains. Mandarin listeners scored lower 7 than French listeners in the discrimination of vocoded lexical tones. For click trains, Mandarin listeners outperformed French listeners. These preliminary results suggest that the perceptual 8 9 weight of the fine spectro-temporal modulation cues conveying F0 information is enhanced 10 for adults speaking a tonal language. PACS numbers: 43.71 Rt, 43.71 Hw, 43.66 Mk

11

12 I. INTRODUCTION

Tonal variations at the syllable level distinguish word meaning in tonal languages (*e.g.*, Liang, 1963). Native listeners rely mainly on fundamental-frequency (F0)–and thus, voice-pitch cues–to discriminate lexical tones. However, other acoustic cues such as duration, amplitude or voice quality may also play a secondary role (*e.g.*, Kuo *et al.*, 2008; Whalen and Xu, 1992).

18 Over the last decades, psycholinguistic studies have investigated whether being native (*i.e.*, expertise) in tonal language influences the relative weight of these acoustic cues in 19 lexical-tone perception (Gandour and Harshman, 1978). Burnham and Francis (1997) showed 20 that non-native (English-speaking) listeners are less accurate in discriminating lexical tones 21 than native (Thai-speaking) listeners (see also Burnham and Mattock, 2007). Their results 22 also suggested that non-native listeners rely more on mean F0 to perceive tones compared to 23 native listeners who are able to categorize F0 patterns in spite of phonetic and tonal variability 24 (*i.e.*, small variations in pitch within the same category). Lee *et al.* (2008) explored further the 25

influence of the native language on the identification of lexical tones by using degraded 1 speech sounds (i.e., "fragmented" tones obtained by removing a variable number of F0 2 periods at the onset, center or final part of the syllables). Lexical tone identification 3 performance was affected by these degradations of F0 information for the non-native listeners 4 (English speakers learning Mandarin) only. These results confirm that non-native listeners 5 6 rely heavily on mean F0 whereas native listeners (Mandarin speakers) rely more on F0 7 direction (see also Huang and Johnson, 2010). Altogether, these studies are compatible with the notion that expertise in tonal language influences the relative importance of the acoustic 8 9 cues involved in lexical-tone perception. From a wider perspective, they are consistent with 10 the idea that linguistic experience shapes the weight of acoustic cues in speech perception 11 (e.g., Burnham and Mattock, 2007).

12 The search for the acoustic cues used in discriminating or identifying lexical tones has 13 been recently renewed by the use of "vocoders" that manipulate the spectral and temporal modulation components of speech signals (see Shamma and Lorenzi, 2013 for a review). The 14 15 slowest amplitude-modulation cues (AM, corresponding to the relatively slow variations in amplitude over time) play a major role in consonant recognition, whereas the fast AM cues, 16 frequency-modulation cues (FM, corresponding to the oscillations in instantaneous frequency 17 close to the center frequency of the frequency band), and fine spectral details are more 18 important in lexical-tone recognition. Chinese-speaking listeners have been shown to rely 19 more on the FM cues (e.g., Wang et al., 2011; Xu and Pfingst, 2003) cues compared to 20 English- or French-speaking listeners who hinge on AM cues to identify native speech sounds 21 (e.g., Shannon et al., 1995; Smith et al., 2002). Fu et al. (1998) showed that for native 22 Mandarin speakers, lexical-tone recognition was more affected by a reduction of temporal 23 resolution (that is by the selective attenuation of the fast [F0-related] AM cues above 50 Hz) 24 than by a reduction of spectral resolution (tones were vocoded using a decreasing number [4, 25

3, 2, and 1] of broad frequency bands). In contrast, consonant and vowel recognition was
 found to be mostly affected by a reduction of spectral resolution. In addition, Xu *et al.* (2002)
 and Kong and Zeng (2006) showed a clear dependence of lexical tone recognition on spectral
 resolution when the number of frequency bands varied from 1 to 32.

However, the vocoder-based studies cited above did not compare *directly* lexical-tone 5 recognition across listeners from different linguistic backgrounds using the same material and 6 7 procedure. Thus, it is still unclear whether the native language of adult speakers influences the weight of the spectro-temporal modulation cues conveying F0 information in speech 8 perception. The goal of the present pilot study was to assess the effect of two different native 9 10 languages on the ability to use fine spectral details and FM cues in lexical-tone discrimination. This comparison should reveal to what extent native language shapes the 11 perception of speech modulation cues. Three conditions were designed to: 1) preserve the 12 original speech modulation cues of lexical tones, 2) degrade the fine spectral details and FM 13 speech cues of lexical tones and thus the F0-related information and 3) generate sounds (click 14 15 trains) preserving only the F0-related FM cues of the original lexical tones. First, it was hypothesized that native French-speaking listeners should be less accurate in lexical-tone 16 discrimination than native Mandarin-speaking listeners. Second, if Mandarin listeners rely 17 18 more on F0 direction than French listeners, they should be more affected by the degradation of fine spectral and FM cues than the French ones. Third, if exposure to a tonal language 19 results in a higher perceptual weight of the fine spectral than temporal cues in perceiving F0 20 information for both speech and click-train sounds, Mandarin-speaking listeners should be 21 more accurate in the discrimination of F0 contours in the click-train condition than French-22 23 speaking listeners (see Xu *et al.*, 2002). The present study used a same/different task to assess the discrimination of lexical tones. Three Thai lexical tones were used in order to present non-24 native stimuli for both French and Mandarin-speaking listeners and use similar stimuli than 25

those used in Burnham and Francis (1997): low, rising, and falling F0 patterns. We assumed 1 2 that the discrimination abilities of native Mandarin-speaking listeners should be facilitated by their experience in lexical tone processing. Participants had to discriminate the following 3 three contrasts: rising/low, rising/falling, and low/falling using a same/different task. The 4 rising/low contrast would be the most difficult to discriminate for non-lexical users because of 5 the highly similar F0 trajectories until the mid-point of the tone. It is not the case for the rising 6 7 and falling tones that have totally different F0 trajectories and differ on other cues such as duration, making them easier to distinguish (see Abramson, 1978). In addition, two different 8 inter-stimulus intervals (ISI) were used (500 and 1500 ms) in the present same/different task. 9 As suggested in previous studies (see Burnham and Francis, 1997; Clément et al., 1999; 10 Werker and Tees, 1984) long ISI may affect information loss in the short-term memory 11 representation of the cues used to discriminate two sounds. We assumed that a long ISI (1500 12 13 ms) may affect the rate of information loss in the short-term memory representation of the voice-pitch cues used to discriminate lexical tones compared to a short ISI (500 ms). This 14 effect may be greater for the French-speaking listeners than Mandarin-speaking listeners. 15

16 II. METHOD

17 **A. Participants**

One hundred and twenty young adult subjects, were split into 12 groups of 10 subjects. No participant reported any history of speaking or hearing disorders. Sixty native French speakers, born and raised in France, were tested in Paris, France (age range = [21-34 years]; mean = 24; standard deviation (SD) = 2.5 years; 24 females). They did not learn any tonal language. The other 60 participants were native Mandarin speakers, born and raised in Taiwan, and tested in Taipei, Taiwan (age range = [19-29]; mean = 23 years; SD = 2.5 years; 33 females). For each participant the musical experience was assessed and 52 native Frenchspeaking and 44 native Mandarin-speaking listeners reported to practice music. Table 1
 summarizes the participants' characteristics.

3

-Table 1 about here-

4 **B. Stimuli**

Three Thai tones (rising, falling and low) were pronounced by a native female speaker 5 asked to speak clearly (F0 range=100-350 Hz, as estimated by YIN algorithm; de Cheveigné 6 7 and Kawahara, 2002) with the syllable /ba/ (see the Figure 1 for a representation of the F0 trajectories, the sound files also available online). All stimuli were recorded digitally via a 16-8 bit A/D converter at a 44.1-kHz sampling frequency. In each lexical tone, eight different 9 10 tokens were chosen because of their higher clarity. The mean duration of the stimuli was 661.6 ms (SD=32.3 ms) for the rising tones, 509.9 ms (SD=36.8) for the falling tones, and 11 636 ms (SD=31.2) for the low tones. 12

13

-Figure 1 about here-

In the first condition ("Intact"), each digitized signal was passed through a bank of 32, 14 15 fourth-order gammatone filters (Gnansia et al., 2009; Patterson, 1987) -also called "analysis filters" hereafter, each 1-ERB_N-wide (average equivalent-rectangular-bandwidth of the 16 auditory filter as determined using young normally hearing listeners tested at moderate sound 17 levels; Moore, 2007) with CFs uniformly spaced along an ERB_N-number scale (one filter per 18 ERB_N) ranging from 80 to 8020 Hz. The Hilbert transform was then applied to each bandpass 19 filtered speech signal to extract the AM and FM components. The temporal envelope (AM 20 component) was lowpass filtered using a zero-phase Butterworth filter (36 dB/octave rolloff). 21 Cochlear filtering (modelled here by gammatone filtering) imposes limitations on the 22 maximum AM rate. As in Gnansia et al. (2009), we adjusted the cutoff frequency of the 23 lowpass filter (following gammatone filtering) to $\text{ERB}_{N}/2$; the ERB_{N} corresponded to that of 24 the (normal) cochlear filter tuned to the geometric center of the 1-ERB_N wide gammatone 25

filter. In each band, the FM carrier was then multiplied by the filtered AM function. Finally,
the narrowband speech signals were added up and the level of the resulting speech signal was
adjusted to have the same root-mean square (RMS) value as the input signal. In this condition,
speech processing resulted in near-perfect stimulus reconstruction.

In the second condition ("Vocoded"), the same signal processing scheme was used, 5 except that each digitized signal was passed through a bank of 8, fourth-order gammatone 6 7 filters, each 4-ERB_N-wide with CFs uniformly spaced along an ERB_N-number scale (one filter per ERB_N) ranging from 80 to 8020 Hz. In this condition, the cut-off frequency of the low-8 pass filter used to extract temporal envelopes was set to $ERB_N/2$; the ERB_N corresponded to 9 10 that of the (normal) cochlear filter tuned to the geometric center of the 4-ERB_N wide gammatone filter. The original FM carriers were replaced by sine wave carriers with 11 frequencies at the center frequency of the gammatone filters, and with random starting phase 12 in each analysis band. 13

In a third condition ("F0-modulation"), the stimuli were generated by first extracting 14 the F0 trajectory of each original lexical tone using the YIN algorithm (de Cheveigné and 15 Kawahara, 2002; implemented in MATLAB, MathWorks, Natick, MA). Then, this F0 16 trajectory was used to modulate the F0 of a periodic click train (more precisely, the signal was 17 18 a periodic click train of 88- us square (*i.e.*, monophasic) pulses, which were repeated at a rate equal to 1/F0). A first order (butterworth) lowpass filter was used to limit the frequency range 19 below 22050 Hz. The "F0-modulation" signals have the same duration as the original lexical 20 21 tones (sound samples are provided on-line in the JASA supplementary material).

This study intended to measure lexical-tone discrimination on the sole basis on temporal-envelope (AM) cues for lexical-tone users and non-users. Note that the stimuli were not normalized in duration, because duration cues are considered to be an element of

7

temporal-envelope cues (Rosen, 1992). Thus, normalization in duration would degrade
 envelope cues.

3 C. Procedure

4 A same/different task like Burnham and Francis (1997) was used to assess discrimination using E-Prime 2.0 software (Psychology Software Tools). Two different ISIs 5 (500 and 1500 ms) were used. In each vocoder condition (Intact, Vocoded or F0-6 7 modulations), eight practice trials, with feedback, were first presented with unrelated sounds (unprocessed syllables /ko/ and /mi/) to train subjects with the task. This was followed by a 8 test phase composed of 48 test trials, without feedback. Half of the trials consisted of the 9 10 presentation of two stimuli of the same category, and the other half in the presentation of two stimuli belonging to two different categories (8 trials per contrast: rising/low, rising/falling, 11 and low/falling). "Same" and "different" trials were presented in random order within two 12 13 blocks (of 24 trials). Each subject was randomly assigned to a given experimental condition (Intact, Vocoded or F0-modulations) and a given ISI duration (500 or 1500 ms) in order to 14 15 reduce training effect between conditions and prevent recognition of the sounds in the degraded conditions Thus, six independent groups of ten adults from each language 16 background were tested in a soundproof booth in Paris or in Taipei using the same material 17 18 and by the same experimenter. All stimuli were presented in free field using a Fostex (model PM0.5) speaker at a 70 dB SPL. Subjects sat in front of a computer controlling the experiment 19 and 50 cm from the speaker located on their right side (i.e., at 40 deg azimuth and 0 deg 20 elevation). Subjects were instructed to listen carefully to the pairs of sounds and to respond as 21 fast and as accurately as possible by pressing two different keys (indicating same or different). 22 The subject's accuracy was estimated by a d' score where d' = Z[p(hit) - Z[p(false alarms)])23 (see Macmillan and Creelman, 1991). If the hit rate was 1.0 or the false alarm rate was 0, d' 24

1 was calculated after adjusting the hit rate or false alarm rate by the reciprocal of the number of2 trials.

3 III. RESULTS

4 The d' scores of the native-Mandarin and native-French participants for each tone contrast are represented in Figure 2 for the "Intact", "Vocoded" and "F0-modulations" 5 conditions. A d' of 0 corresponds to chance, and a d' of 2.68 corresponds to perfect 6 7 discrimination. French and Mandarin speakers showed similar discrimination performance in the "Intact" speech condition. In the "Vocoded" speech condition, the performance of both 8 groups decreased significantly but remained above chance level. Moreover, Mandarin 9 10 speakers scored lower than French speakers in this condition (when the fine spectro-temporal modulation cues conveying voice-pitch information were severely degraded). In the "F0-11 modulations" condition, Mandarin speakers showed slightly better discrimination of (F0) 12 pitch contours compared to French speakers. 13

14

-Figure 2 about here-

Even if native French-speaking listeners had more practice in music than native 15 Mandarin-speaking listeners [mean=6.30, sd=6.14, vs. mean=3.61, sd=3.8 for years of 16 musical practice], a preliminary analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the total d' score showed 17 18 no main effect of the factor Musician or interaction with Language. Thus, data were collapsed across this variable in the main analyses. A repeated-measures ANOVA was performed with 19 Condition (Intact vs. Vocoded vs. F0-modulations), ISI (500 ms vs. 1500 ms) and Language 20 (French vs. Mandarin) as between-subject factors and Contrast (rising/low vs. rising/falling 21 vs. low/falling) as within-subject factor, to assess the role of Language and ISI in the three 22 experimental conditions on the d' scores. This analysis revealed a main effect of Condition 23 [F(2,108)=125.54, p < .001] and a *post-hoc* Tukey's HSD test showed that the "Vocoded" 24 speech condition led to lower discrimination scores compared to "Intact" and "FO-25

modulations" conditions (see Figure 2). No main effect of ISI or Language was found. 1 2 However, a main effect of Contrast was found [F(2,216)=5.4, p=.005]. Post-hoc comparisons (Tukey' HSD test) showed that as expected, the "rising-falling" contrast was easier to 3 discriminate than "rising-low"; no difference was observed between the other two contrasts. 4 Moreover, a significant Condition x Contrast interaction was observed [F(4,216)=4.1, p=.003] 5 indicating that the "rising-falling" contrast was easier to discriminate than the "rising-low" 6 contrast in the "Vocoded" speech condition. Furthermore, the significant interaction of 7 Condition x Contrast x Language [F(4,216)=3.51, p=.008] revealed that the higher scores 8 obtained for the "rising-falling" contrast were mainly obtained by Mandarin-speaking 9 listeners. 10

The significant interaction Contrast x ISI x Language [F(2,216)=3.28, p = .04]indicated that the better *d*' scores for the "rising-falling" contrast were exhibited by the French-speaking listeners with an ISI of 500 ms and by the Mandarin ones with an ISI of 14 1500 ms. Finally, a significant interaction between Condition x ISI x Language 15 [F(2,108)=4.12, p = .02] showed that French-speaking participants were better than Mandarin 16 ones with a short ISI in the "Vocoded" condition.

A significant interaction Condition x Language was also found [F(2,108)=5.79, p 17 =.004]. To explore further this interaction and to compare the discrimination performance of 18 Mandarin and French-speaking listeners in each condition, separated repeated-measures 19 ANOVAs were run with Language (French vs. Mandarin) and ISI (500 ms vs. 1500 ms) as 20 between-subject factors and Contrast (rising/low vs. rising/falling vs. low/falling) as within-21 subject. In the "Intact" condition, no main effect or interaction with Language was observed. 22 A main effect of Contrast was observed [F(2;72) = 3.75, p = .03] indicating that the "falling-23 low" contrast was more difficult to discriminate than the two other contrasts. In the 24 "Vocoded" speech condition, a main effect of Contrast was observed [F(2;72) = 4.69, p = .01]25

but indicated that the "rising-falling" contrast was easier to discriminate than the "rising-low". 1 2 A marginal effect of Language was observed [F(1;36) = 3.83; p = .058], showing that French participants tended to be slightly better at discriminating the vocoded lexical tones than 3 4 Mandarin participants. Although the d' scores of both groups remained above chance level (Student t test; all p<.001), a significant interaction between Contrast and Language 5 6 [F(2,72)=3.4, p=.04] was observed. *Post-hoc* comparisons (Tukey's HSD test) indicated that 7 the d' scores varied between contrasts only for Mandarin-speaking listeners and that they better discriminated the "rising-falling" than the "falling-low" contrast. A significant 8 interaction between ISI and Language was also found [F(2,72)=4.39, p = .04] indicating that 9 10 French speaking-listeners were better than the Mandarin ones with a ISI of 500 ms. In the "F0-modulations" condition, a main effect of Language was observed [F(1,36)=7.31, p=.01]11 and *post-hoc* comparisons revealed that Mandarin-speaking listeners obtained (slightly) 12 13 higher d' scores compared to French-speaking listeners.

14 IV. DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to investigate the role of native language on the processing of 15 spectro-temporal cues in lexical-tone discrimination. In apparent contrast with previously 16 published investigations on lexical-tone discrimination (e.g., Burnham and Francis, 1997; 17 Hallé et al., 2004; Sun and Huang, 2012), both French- and Mandarin-speaking listeners were 18 able to correctly perceive differences in pitch contours with the present lexical tones. The 19 absence of difference between language groups results from a ceiling effect (that is from the 20 high performance of both groups for the current discrimination task and for the present speech 21 stimuli that were carefully selected from a large set of clearly articulated utterances). As 22 expected in the "Vocoded" speech condition, results indicate an effect of native language on 23 the perception of F0 variations and suggest that lexical-tone users are more dependent on fine 24 spectral and FM cues than non-users when perceiving lexical tones. Moreover, French-25

speaking listeners are better able to make use of the remaining (AM) information (conveying 1 2 duration and loudness information; cf. Rosen, 1992 (p. 74, lines 13-14)) than Mandarinspeaking listeners in this condition. One possibility is that the experience with French prosody 3 4 and phonological categories makes French-speaking listeners more likely to focus on the AM cues available (related to rhythm information) in the Vocoded stimuli and potentially relevant 5 for French language. Moreover, these results are consistent with previous studies showing that 6 7 native lexical-tone users rely more on the F0 direction than non-users (e.g., Lee et al., 2008, 2010). Furthermore, the duration of ISI influenced French and Mandarin participants' 8 9 performance differently in that Vocoded condition. As expected, better performance for the "rising-falling" contrast was observed with a short ISI for French speakers and with a long ISI 10 for Mandarin speakers. This may reveal that native language affects the rate of information 11 decay in the short-term memory representation (and/or its use for further perceptual 12 processes) of the voice-pitch cues used to discriminate lexical tones (Mandarin speakers 13 showing less information decay than French speakers). 14

Finally, when the fine spectro-temporal modulations conveying the voice-pitch information were presented for discrimination using "F0-modulations" sounds, Mandarinspeaking listeners showed better discrimination of (F0) pitch contours compared to Frenchspeaking listeners. These results are in line with several studies showing an effect of native language on the identification of pitch contours in non-linguistic signals such as sine waves, harmonic complex tones, or iterated rippled noises (*e.g.*, Bent *et al.*, 2006; Swaminathan *et al.*, 2008; Xu *et al.*, 2006).

Overall, the present results suggest that Mandarin-speaking listeners are more dependent on F0 variations-and thus on FM and fine spectral cues-than French-speaking listeners when discriminating lexical tones. The results of this pilot study are consistent with the notion that native language shapes the weight of spectro-temporal fine structure cues in

processing speech sounds. Results obtained with click trains suggest that this influence of 1 2 native language could extend to non-linguistic sounds. Thus, temporal modulation processing in the auditory system may be influenced by higher-level mechanisms fine-tuned by language 3 4 expertise. This influence is not incorporated in current models of modulation processing (Jørgensen and Dau, 2013). However, our conclusions should be taken with caution because 5 6 several factors such as genetic and socio-cultural backgrounds and environmental factors were 7 not controlled in the present study. Further work investigating the development of lexical-tone processing for infants learning tonal and non-tonal languages is required to address these 8 issues. Moreover, the perceptual strategies (i.e., Bent et al., 2006) used by native and non-9 10 native lexical-tone listeners when listening to degraded lexical tones may be further explored 11 using a more cognitively demanding task such as an identification task.

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15	
16	Figure captions
17	Table 1. Participants' information
18	Figure 1. Spectrograms of the Intact (left panels), Vocoded (middle panels) and F0-
19	modulation (right panels) versions of a /ba/ rising (first row), /ba/ falling (second row) and
20	/ba/ low (third row) stimulus.
21	Figure 2. d' scores of the Mandarin-speaking and French-speaking listeners in the three
22	experimental conditions (Intact, Vocoded and F0-modulations) for each lexical-tone pair (RL:
23	Rising-Low; RF: Rising-Falling; FL: Falling- Low) presented in the two ISI (500 ms; 1500

24 ms). The bars represent the standard errors.

Condition	lsi	Language	mean age	sd age	age range	number	number	mean musical	sd of musical	range of musical
Condition			(years)	(years)	(years)	of females	of musicians	practice (years)	pratice	pratice (years)
Intact	1500	French	25	3.4	22-31	7	6	6.9	7.7	0-23
Intact	500	French	24	1.9	21-27	6	6	5.9	6	0-15
Intact	1500	Mandarin	24	2.4	22-29	7	5	3.4	4.1	0-14
Intact	500	Mandarin	23.6	2.5	20-27	6	6	4.9	2.9	0-10
Vocoded	1500	French	23.8	1.4	22-26	1	6	5	5.3	0-15
Vocoded	500	French	25.3	3.7	22-34	0	7	7.3	6.3	0-20
Vocoded	1500	Mandarin	22.1	1.7	19-24	4	4	4.5	4	0-12
Vocoded	500	Mandarin	23.2	2.9	20-29	6	6	3.8	4.1	0-13
F0-modulations	1500	French	24.9	1.97	22-29	7	6	5.4	6	0-16
F0-modulations	500	French	24.6	1.9	22-28	3	7	7.3	6.5	0-18
F0-modulations	1500	Mandarin	23.9	3.1	20-28	5	4	2	2.2	0-7
F0-modulations	500	Mandarin	21.7	1.9	20-26	6	5	3.4	4.7	0-15





