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► To cite this version:

Nicolas Grimault, Marion David, Mathieu Lavandier, Torben Pastore, William A Yost. Sequential streaming of speech sounds based on position cues: Effect of head position and spatial attention.. 2019. hal-02331433

HAL Id: hal-02331433 https://hal.science/hal-02331433v1

Preprint submitted on 24 Oct 2019

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Sequential streaming of speech sounds based on position cues: Effect of head position and spatial attention.

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(Dated: July 11, 2019)

This scientific report has been written during the visiting period of Nicolas Grimault at ASU from January the 1st to March the 29th 2018. The purpose of this document is to report preliminary data about sequential streaming based on position cues and spatial attention.

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PACS numbers: 43.66.Mk, 43.55.Hy, 43.66.Ba, 43.66.Qp

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INTRODUCTION

I.

David et al [1-3] have already designed several experi-³⁴ 2 ments that reported an effect of position cues (ITD/ILD³⁵ 3 and perceived position) to segregate sequences of noise ³⁶ 4 bursts first and, more recently, sequences of conso-³⁷ 5 nant/vowel syllables. For example, to quickly summarize ³⁸ 6 the most recent data [3], David and colleagues have pre-³⁹ sented sequences of phonemes, Tha/Sa/Fi/Shu/... with ⁴⁰ 8 the bold syllables coming from azimuth $\phi 1$ and the other ⁴¹ 9 syllables coming from a different azimuth $\phi 2$. These se-⁴² 10 quences can be segregated based only on the azimuth ⁴³ 11 difference $\Delta = (\phi 2 - \phi 1)$. For voluntary segregation in ⁴⁴ 12 the azimuthal plan, performances start around d'=1.8 13 and grow up to d'=3 for Δ =30°. A Δ around 8° leads to 14 intermediate performances (cf figure 5, panel 1 and figure $_{45}$ 15 6 panel 1 in [3]). The experimental procedure was to de-16 tect a repetition within a stream of syllables interleaved 17 with an other stream of syllables and these experiments ⁴⁶ 18 were realized using headphones and virtual angular po- $^{\rm 47}$ 19 sitions ($\phi 2$ and $\phi 1$) using HRTF. The authors suggest ⁴⁸ 20 that this effect of position cues on stream segregation of 49 21 speech sounds probably contributes to the spatial release 5022 from masking. In these experiments, virtual environ-⁵¹ 23 ments were used and the position of the reference stream ⁵² 24 was fixed and always equal to 0° ($\alpha = \phi 1 = 0^{\circ}$ in figure ⁵³ 25 1). Recently, Grange and Culling [4] have suggested that ⁵⁴ 26 head orientation could benefit to speech intelligibility in 55 27 noise. Consequently, the first aim of this project is to $^{\rm 56}$ 28 test the hypothesis that head orientation (i.e. variable α 57 29 with fixed Δ in figure 1, panel A) could also benefit to ⁵⁸ 30 stream segregation of speech sounds. 31 60

In the previous experiment, the use of a virtual environment prevents also to visually locate the sound sources and probably reduces the potential effect of spatial attention. The second aim of this project is then to evaluate the effect of spatial attention for voluntary segregation of speech sequences. Such cues have been already reported to enhance speech intelligibility for simultaneous talkers [5]. The experiments are conducted in Bill Yost psychoacoustic laboratory, at ASU in Arizona in a sound booth with low reverberation and equipped with a stimulation system involving several loudspeakers (every 15°) and a revolving chair at the middle of the booth.

II. RATIONAL

As the rotations of the chair can be controlled, the proposed experiment would be either to rotate the listeners at random (changing α at random and keeping $\phi 1$ and ϕ^2 constant in figure 1, panel A) or to rotate the sounds at random around the listeners while always maintaining constant the angular difference between sources (changing $\phi 1$ at random and $\phi 2$ accordingly and keeping α constant in figure 1, panel B). Due to experimental constraints, the constant angular distance between loudspeakers (Δ) is equal to 15°. In the rotated-sound condition, $\phi 1$ would go at random from 0° to 90° by steps of 15° and α would be fixed to 0° . In this condition, the couple of speakers are then selected at random for each sequence presentation and the listener is fixed. As such, the listener does not know a priori where to listen at the beginning of the sequence and spatial attention is potentially reduced. In the rotated-listener condition, $\phi 1$ is fixed to 0° and the listener (i.e. the chair) goes from α

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A B B Contacted-listener B B Contacted-sound

FIG. 1. schematic relative position of the head (α) and of the two loudspeakers (ϕ 1, ϕ 2) providing alternating sequences of syllables. By convention, the sequence that starts first and that may contain a repetition always comes from ϕ 1. Panel A: condition Rotated-listener in experience 1. Panel B: condition Rotated-sound in experience 1.

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⁶⁴ =0° to α =90° at random. In this condition, the sounds ⁹² are always played by the same couple of loudspeakers and the listener turns around at random. As such, the ⁹³ listener knows *a priori* where to listen and spatial at-⁶⁴ tention is potentially enhanced. A visual mark is added ⁹⁵ to help to clearly identified the loudspeaker located at ⁹⁶ ϕ 1=0° (Figure 1, panel A).

By observing the effect of α in the rotated-listener con-102 71 ditions, we should observed the potential effect of head103 72 orientation for sequential segregation of speech items [4].¹⁰⁴ 73 According to [4], depending of the spectrum of the speech¹⁰⁵ 74 signal, the best angular difference α of the head from¹⁰⁶ 75 zero azimuth could be different than $\phi = \phi 1 + \frac{\phi 2 - \phi 1}{2}$ to¹⁰⁷ better segregate speech coming from one fixed angle $\phi 1_{108}$ 76 77 from speech coming from an other fixed angle $\phi 2$ (see¹⁰⁹ 78 Fig 1, panel A). Simulations are provided in the next¹¹⁰ 79 section as an attempt to predict the best position. As111 80 the acoustical cues reaching the ears would be the same¹¹² 81 (in an anechoic room), by comparing the two conditions¹¹³ 82 (rotated-sound versus rotated-listener) we should be able¹¹⁴ 83 to evidence any effect of spatial attention for sequential115 84 segregation of speech items [5]. In fact, a larger effect of¹¹⁶ 85 segregation in the rotated-listener condition than in the117 86 rotated-sound condition would be in favor of an effect of¹¹⁸ 87 spatial attention on stream segregation (i.e. the ability¹¹⁹ 88 to focus on a particular fixed spatial position to segre-120 89 gate sounds, independently of acoustical cues related to₁₂₁ 90 position). 122 91

III. SIMULATIONS

α=0

Previous studies [4, 6] used binaural simulations to predict the effect of head movements on Speech Reception Threshold (SRT) with a concurrent speech masker. To do so, the authors estimated the Speech to Noise Ratio (SNR) for different angular positions of the speech and masker. The most favorable SNR would then predict the better SRT. In the current experiment, the question is slightly different as the two concurrent speeches are not simultaneous. Computing a SNR is then inoperative. However, doing simulations, could still enable to do, aposteriori, some correlation of the results with the best angle α that would provide the largest spectral or temporal differences between ears. Some simulations have been performed using the average speech signal used in this experiment convolved with HRTFs (i.e. virtual environment) to mimic the experimental configuration and the relative positions of sounds sources and rotated listener. Figure 2 shows the estimated differences in one ear for source A and B coming from 0° and 15° when the listener is rotated from 0° to 90° (condition rotatedlistener, Figure 1, panel A). Figure 2 evidences that the largest spectral difference in one ear between source A and B occurs when the listener is facing 7.5° . In other words, when the listener is at equal angular distance of both sources. Based on the assumption that monaural spectral cues are critical for streaming [1–3], this angular position should then provide the largest streaming effect.

Figure 3 show the difference between ILDs (panel B) and difference between ITDs (panel D) for two sound sources $(0^{\circ} \text{ and } 15^{\circ})$ and a rotated listener moving from

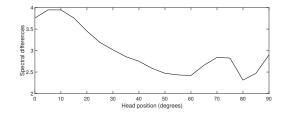


FIG. 2. Sum of the two monaural spectral differences (in right and left ears) between sources at 0° and 15° when the listener is rotated from 0° to 90° .

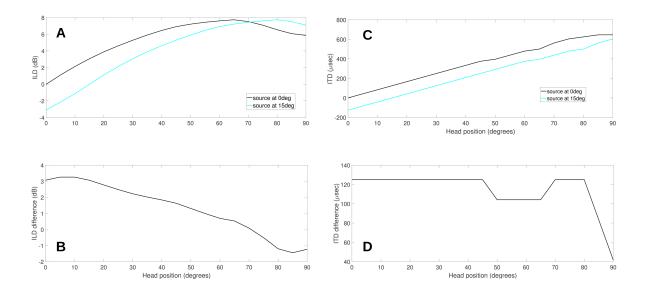


FIG. 3. Panels A and B show the simulated ILD and the difference between these ILDs for two sound sources (0° and 15°) and a rotated listener moving from 0° to 90° . Panels C and D show the simulated ITD and difference between these ITDs in the same configuration.

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¹²³ 0° to 90°. As for monaural spectral differences, the differ-140
¹²⁴ ences between ILD values is maximum when the listener
¹²⁵ is facing 7.5°. The differences between ITD is very low
¹²⁶ and about constant for sources only distant of 15°. 141
¹²⁷ Overall, for non simultaneous sounds located at 0°

and 15°, based on the simulations, both the spectral₁₄₂ monaural cues and the difference between ILD predict₁₄₃ the largest segregation at 7.5°. It is unclear how ITD_{144} could also influence segregation

IV. PRE-EXPERIMENT

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This pre-experiment is dedicated to estimate the per-¹⁴⁸ formance levels at 0°, 15° and 30° separations (subject always facing 0°) and to check for any effect of segrega-¹⁴⁹ tion when using real sound sources in a real room and any¹⁵⁰ saturation effect at 15°. In fact, if the performances are¹⁵¹ too low or too high with a 15° difference between sources,¹⁵² no room of improvement would remains to evidence any¹⁵³

effect of spatial attention and/or head orientation.

A. Subjects

Five young normal hearing and native female English speakers from 18 to 31 (mean age 22,8) participated to this preliminary experiment. One was research assistant in the lab and the others were students from the department and received credits for their participation to this rather short experiment.

B. Experimental setup and listening Room

The listening room was the same used for previous studies [7, 8]. It consists of 24 loudspeakers (Boston Acoustics 100X, Peabody, MA) connected to a computer through three sound-cards (Audiofire 12), three amplifiers (AudioSource AMP 1200) and 24 passive attenua-

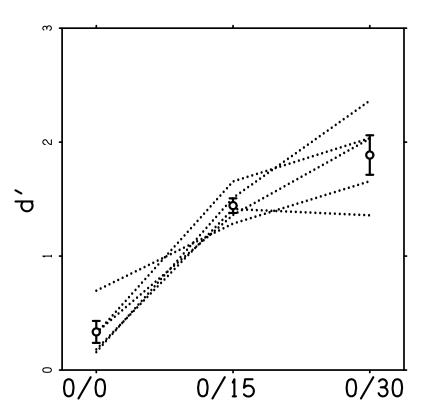


FIG. 4. Individual and averaged performances with couple of sources located at different angular positions (abscissa, $\phi 1/\phi 2$). The bars indicate the standard error within subjects.

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tors (ATLAS SOUND LP, AT 100-RM) in parallel. The179 154 24 loudspeakers are on an azimuth circle 3 meters in di-180 155 ameter at pinna height. The loudspeakers are located in181 156 a $4.6 \times 3.6 \times 3$ meters room lined on all six surfaces with₁₈₂ 157 0.1 meter thick acoustic foam resulting in a room with₁₈₃ 158 a wideband reverberation time (RT 60) of 102 ms. Lis-184 159 teners were seated in the middle of the azimuth array₁₈₅ 160 and were monitored by an experimenter through a video₁₈₆ 161 system. Listeners were asked to face straight and to keep 162 their heads stationary. They were free to look at any 163 direction without moving the head. 187 164

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C. Methods

The same experimental material and protocol than [3]¹⁹¹ 166 have been used. Only voluntary segregation is estimated¹⁹² 167 and the listener is instructed to detect a repetition in¹⁹³ 168 the sequence of syllables that starts first and that always¹⁹⁴ 169 comes from the 0° loudspeaker. As such, spatial atten-170 tion is maximized. An interleaved sequence of syllables 171 is played from 0° , 15° , or 30° . All syllables have been¹⁹⁵ 172 equalized in RMS level and are played at about 65 dB 173 SPL. All three loudspeakers have been calibrated in the196 174 room to deliver the same SPL level at head position us-197 175 ing a class A sound level meter (Larson Davis 800B). The198 176 177 listener is always facing 0° and three conditions of angu-199 lar distance between sources have then been tested $(0^{\circ},_{200})$ 178

 15° , and 30°). Each sound sequence duration is 5 seconds in average. The three angle conditions are repeated three times in a block in random order. Each listener is presented with 14 blocks to reach the same number of repetitions than in David *et al* [3] and thus comparable performance levels in terms of d'. Overall, for each listener, the duration of the experiment is less than 15 minutes.

D. Results

The results are plotted on figure 4. In average, for these listeners, d' is increasing when increasing the angular distance between sources from 0° to 30°. The performances start around d'=0.33 and grow up to d'=1.89 for Δ =30°. A reapeted measure ANOVA applied to the data reveals a significant effect of the angular distance [F(2,8)=41.51, p<0.001].

E. Discussion

The results of this preliminary experiment evidence that, when using real sound sources (loudspeakers) in a real room, segregation still occurs for sound sources separation equal or over 15° . In the previous study of David *et al* [3], when using virtual reality, the performances

TABLE I. Values of α , $\phi 1$ and $\phi 2$ in the rotated-listener²²⁵ and the rotated-sound experimental conditions. The last colums provide the apparent positions of LP 1 and LP²²⁶ 2 in right and left ears. By convention, a positive angle²²⁷ value indicates that the sound is on the same side than the ear.²²⁸

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| | Chair | LP 1 | LP 2 | Right ear | | Left ear | |
|---------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| | α | $\phi 1$ | $\phi 2$ | | $\phi 2$ - α | α - ϕ 1 | α - $\phi 2$ |
| Rotated listener | 0 | 0 | 15 | 0 | 15 | 0 | -15 |
| | 5 | 0 | 15 | -5 | 10 | 5 | -10 |
| | 7 | 0 | 15 | -7 | 8 | 7 | -8 |
| | 8 | 0 | 15 | -8 | 7 | 8 | -7 |
| | 10 | 0 | 15 | -10 | 5 | 10 | -5 |
| | 15 | 0 | 15 | -15 | 0 | 15 | 0 |
| | 20 | 0 | 15 | -20 | -5 | 20 | 5 |
| | 30 | 0 | 15 | -30 | -15 | 30 | 15 |
| | 45 | 0 | 15 | -45 | -30 | 45 | 30 |
| | 60 | 0 | 15 | -60 | -45 | 60 | 45 |
| | 75 | 0 | 15 | -75 | -60 | 75 | 60 |
| | 90 | 0 | 15 | -90 | -75 | 90 | 75 |
| | 0 | 0 | -15 | 0 | -15 | 90 7 | 15 |
| Rotated Sound | 0 | 15 | 0 | 15 | 0 | -15 | 0 |
| | 0 | 30 | 15 | 30 | 15 | -30 | -15 |
| | 0 | 45 | 30 | 45 | 30 | -45 | -30 |
| | 0 | 60 | 45 | 60 | 45 | -60 | -45 |
| | 0 | 75 | 60 | 75 | 60 | -75 | -60 |
| | 0 | 90 | 75 | 90 | 75 | -90 | -75 |

249 start around d'=1,8 and grow up to d'=3 for Δ =30°. In₂₅₀ 201 the current experiment, the performances are lower in_{251} 202 average but the size of the effect is roughly similar when₂₅₂ 203 increasing Δ from 0° to 30°. This discrepancy can be₂₅₃ 204 probably explained by a stimulation with loudspeakers $_{254}$ 205 in a real room instead of headphones and a simulated₂₅₅ 206 room. Finally, the average performances at 15° equal₂₅₅ 207 d'=1.44 are higher than those at 0° and lower than those₂₅₇ 208 at 30°. This indicate that the performances at 15° are₂₅₈ 209 probably not saturated. In the next experiment, at 15°,259 210 we expect lower performances when reduced spatial at- $_{260}$ 211 tention is available and slightly better performances when₂₆₁ 212 moving the listener up to the optimal angular position. $_{262}$ 213

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EXPERIMENT 1

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A. Subjects

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10 young normal hearing and native (4 males and 6270 216 females) English speakers from 18 to 32 (mean age 23.3)₂₇₁ 217 participated to this experiment. One was research as-272 218 sistant in the lab and the others have signed an inform₂₇₃ 219 consent and were paid an hourly wage for their partici-274 220 pation. One listener, who did abrupt movements during₂₇₅ 221 the test that lead to uncontrolled rotations of the chair,276 222 has been excluded. The data in the following are then₂₇₇ 223 based on 9 listeners. 278 224

B. Experimental setup and listening Room

The listening room was the same used for previous studies [7, 8] and for the preliminary experiment (see above for details). Listeners were seated in the middle of the azimuth array and were monitored by a experimentator who always stays in the room. Listeners were asked to face straight and to keep their heads stationary. They were free to look at any direction without moving the head. Listeners were closely monitored to be sure they did not move their heads and they rarely did so. In the rotated-listener condition, the chair was rotated before each sequence presentation using a custom-designed rotating chair moved by a stepper motor with 0.225° microstep resolution and controlled by Arduino hardware and C++ software.

C. Methods

The same experimental protocol than use in David *et al* (2017) is used. Only voluntary segregation is estimated and the listener is instructed to detect a repetition in the sequence of syllables that starts first (target sequence). The two interleaved sequences are always played from two distinct loudspeakers. The target sequence that starts first and that might contain a repetition is always coming from angle $\phi 1$ and the other interleaved sequence is coming from $\phi 2$ (Figure 1). The angular distance between these two loudspeakers $(\phi 1 - \phi 2)$ was hold constant through the whole experiment and equal to 15° in absolute value. All syllables have been equalized in RMS level and are played at about 65 dB SPL. All eight loudspeakers have been calibrated in the room to deliver the same SPL level at head position using a class A sound level meter (Larson Davis 800B). Two conditions of rotation will be introduced and blocked. Each listener is presented with 7 blocks of each condition (14 blocks overall) to reach the same number of repetitions than in David et al [3] and in the pre-experiment. In the rotating listener condition (Figure 1, panel A), the sources are fixed and always positioned at 0° and 15° . The listener is rotated with rotation values equal to 0° , 5° , 7° , 8° , 10° , 15° , 20° , $30^{\circ}, 45^{\circ}, 60^{\circ}, 75^{\circ}$ or 90° presented in random order 6 times each, in each block. Based on the previous simulations, several angles around 7.5° have been added. In the rotating sound condition (Figure 1, panel B), the listener is fixed and always facing 0° . The loudspeakers are always separated by 15° and the position of loudspeaker 1 (ϕ 1) equals 0°, 15°, 30°, 45°, 60°, 75° or 90° presented in random order 6 times each, in each block. As such, each condition of the rotating-sound block is matched with a condition in the rotating-listener bloc. The only difference between theses conditions is that the ear of presentation is reversed and the listener knows a priori in which direction to listen to in the rotated-listener condition. All parameters $(\alpha, \phi 1 \text{ and } \phi 2)$ in all conditions are summarized in Table I. Each sound sequence duration is

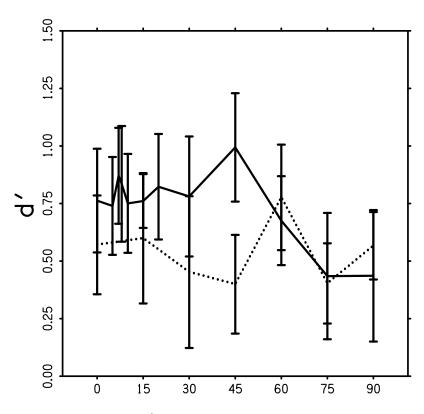


FIG. 5. Averaged performances with a couple of 15° distant sources located at different angular positions (abscissa) related to the head. The bars indicate the standard error within subjects. The results from condition rotated-listener are plotted with a continuous line. The results from condition rotated-sound are plotted with a dotted line.

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5 seconds in average. Overall, for each listener, the du-303
ration of the experiment is around three hours separated 304
in two sessions (8 and 6 blocks respectively to reach 14305
blocks). The loudspeaker at 0° is visually marked with a306
red dot to be easy to spot in the rotated-listener condi-307
tion in order to facilitate the spatial attention. 308

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D. Results

The performances are plotted in Figure 5 function 313 286 of the position of the loudspeaker related to the head. $^{\scriptscriptstyle 314}$ 287 In condition rotated-listener, $(\alpha - \phi 1)$ in the left ear is³¹⁵ 288 used for the abscissa (Table I). In condition rotated-289 sound, $(\phi 1 - \alpha)$ in the right ear is used for the abscissa 290 (Table I). As such, the only remaining acoustic differ-³¹⁶ 291 ence across conditions rotated-listener and rotated-sound 292 is the ear of presentation which should made the two317 293 conditions comparable for young normal hearing listen-318 294 ers. For each listener, as in the preliminary experiment,³¹⁹ 295 d' computation is based on 42 repetitions in each con-320 296 The syllable was repeated in about half the₃₂₁ dition. 297 repetitions so, the hit rate is computed as the num-322 298 ber of response *repeated* when there was a repeat in_{323} 299 the sequence and the false alarm rate is computed as₃₂₄ 300 the number of responses *repeated* when there was no₃₂₅ 301 repeat in the sequence. A repeated measure ANOVA₃₂₆ 302

and a Bayesian repeated measure ANOVA has been applied to the data using the JASP software [9–11]. Neither the effect of the angular position $[F(6,48)=0,87, p=0,52, BF_{01}=10,70]$ nor the effect of the rotated condition $[F(1,8)=3,14, p=0,11, BF_{01}=1.29]$ are significant. The interaction betwen there two factors is not significant either $[F(6,48)=1,44, p=0,22, BF_{01}=13.54]$. Moreover, based on the simulation, to check for a potential effect of head position, a dedicated Bayesian repeated maesure ANOVA has been applied to the data in the rotated-listener condition restricted to angles from 0° to 15°. This analysis reveals not significant effect of head position $[F(5,40)=0,17, p=0,97, BF_{01}=12.38]$.

E. Discussion

Based on the preliminary experiment, the expected size of the effects is small (around 0.5 variation in d'). This observation led us to do a large number of repetitions (42 in each condition) and a reasonable number of listeners (10). However, the data plotted in Figure 5 are still very noisy, the results are not significant and the Bayesian factor, lower than two, does not enable to rule out a potential effect of the rotated condition. As an attempt to reduce the noise in the data, we have introduced a training period. To determine the adequate training pe-

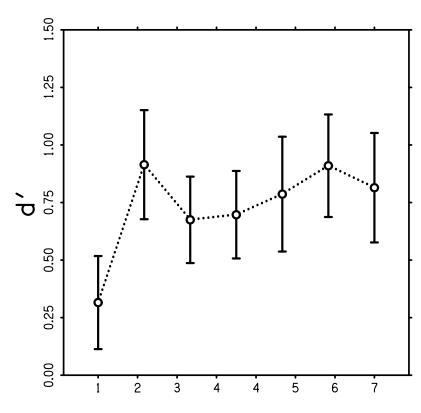


FIG. 6. Averaged performances across all participants and conditions for each block of presentation. The bars indicate the standard error within subjects.

³²⁷ riod based on an objective criterion, the training curves³³⁵ ³²⁸ across blocks have been estimated and plotted in Fig-³⁵⁶ ³²⁹ ure 6. The training effect is significant $[F(6,48)=3.50,_{357}]$ ³³⁰ p<0.01] and a post hoc analysis reveals that the perfor-³⁵⁸ ³³¹ mances in block one are lower than in all other blocks.³⁵⁹ ³³² So, based on this training curve, it appears clearly that³⁶⁰ ³³³ some training occurs during the first block which has then

³³⁴ be ignored in a second analysis plotted on Figure 7. A ³³⁵ Bayesian repeated measure ANOVA has been applied to ³³⁶ the data after the training occurs (36 last repeats). Still, ³³⁷ neither the effect of the angular position [F(6,48)=1,22,³³⁸ p=0,31, $BF_{01}=8,39]$ nor the effect of the rotated con-³³⁹ dition $[F(1,8)=1,58, p=0,24, BF_{01}=1,97]$ are significant. ³⁴⁰ The interaction betwen there two factors is not significant

³⁴¹ either $[F(6,48)=,85, p=0,11, BF_{01}=15,63]$.

For now, the noise prevent then to conclude anything 342 about the data but the Bayesian factor, lower than two, 343 does not enable to rule out a potential effect of the ro-344 tated condition and it seems that the performances in the 345 rotated-listener condition are over those in the rotated-346 sound condition from 0° to 60° . We should be very cau-347 tious but this could reveal an effect of spatial attention 348 in this angular range. Both auditory and visual spatial 349 attention could be involved in the rotated-listener con-350 dition. The visual area in human is about 60° . So, this 351 limitation could reduce the effect of visual spatial atten-352 tion in the rotated-listener condition from 60° to 90° . 353

Additionnally, the Bayesian factor higher than 10 indi-

cate no effect of head position for segregating two sound sources located 15° apart.

To conclude, further data collection are required to better understand the underlying mechanisms involved in this experiment. In order to think further, the individual performances after training are plotted in Figure 8.

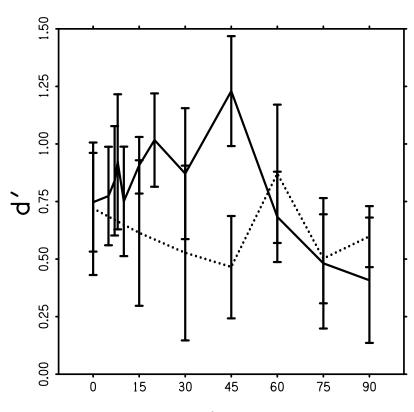


FIG. 7. Averaged performances after training with a couple of 15° distant sources located at different angular positions (abscissa) related to the head. The bars indicate the standard error within subjects. The results from condition rotated-listener are plotted with a continuous line. The results from condition rotated-sound are plotted with a dotted line.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This research has been conducted in the framework of 362 the research network CeLyA (Lyon Acoustics) supported 363 by ANR (ANR-10-LABX-60). This research also benefits 364 from a grant allocated to Bill Yost. The autors also thank 365 Kathryn Pulling and Vivie Truong who have been very 366 helpful during the experimental phase and Andrew Ox-367 enham for helpful comments and discussions about this 368 project. 369

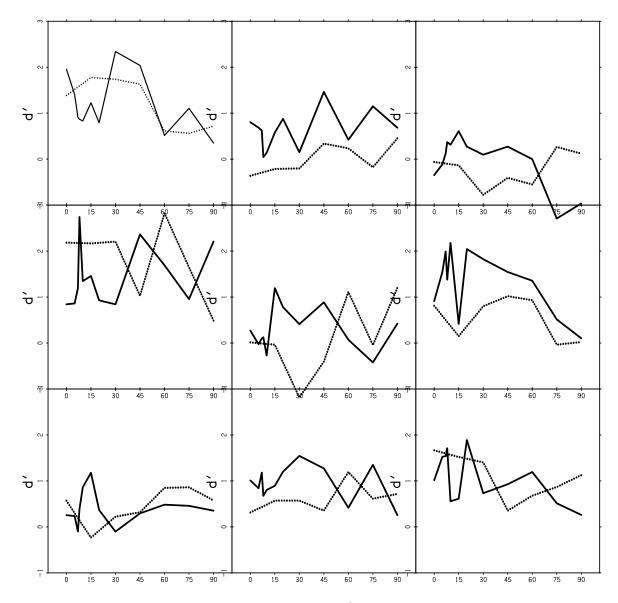


FIG. 8. Individual performances after training with a couple of 15° distant sources located at different angular positions (abscissa) related to the head. The bars indicate the standard error within subjects. The results from condition rotated-listener are plotted with a continuous line. The results from condition rotated-sound are plotted with a dotted line.

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