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# Cerebral activity in monkeys *Papio anubis* during the perception of conspecific and heterospecific agonistic vocalizations: A functional Near Infrared Spectroscopy study

Coralie Debracque, Thibaud Gruber, Romain Lacoste, Adrien Meguerditchian, Didier Grandjean

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29 **Abstract**

30 Are conspecific emotional vocalizations special? Although often investigated in non-human primates  
31 using functional magnetic resonance imaging or positron emission tomography, it remains unclear  
32 whether the listening of conspecific vocal emotions leads to similar or different cerebral activations  
33 when compared to heterospecific calls (i.e. expressed by another primate species). Using a  
34 neuroimaging technique rarely employed in monkeys so far, functional Near Infrared Spectroscopy  
35 (fNIRS), the present study investigated cortical temporal activities during exposure to both conspecific  
36 and heterospecific calls in three female adult baboons (*Papio anubis*). The three subjects were lightly  
37 anesthetized and passively exposed to agonistic baboon and chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*)  
38 vocalizations, as well as energy matched white noises in order to control for this low-level acoustic  
39 feature. Despite inter-individual variabilities, permutation test analyses on the extracted  
40 OxyHemoglobin signal revealed for two subjects out of three significant differences between the  
41 passive listening of baboon *versus* chimpanzee stimuli. Additionally, in one subject, a modulation of  
42 the left temporal cortex activity was found for the perception of baboon calls contrasted to chimpanzee  
43 vocalizations as well as for the passive listening of baboon white noises compared to chimpanzee ones.  
44 Although the lack of generalization of those findings in all three subjects prevents us to draw any  
45 conclusion and that more subjects would be needed, the hypothesis that baboons' cortical temporal  
46 regions may be more sensitive to the processing of conspecific sounds compared to heterospecific  
47 stimuli is not excluded. Our study highlights that fNIRS may be a promising alternative to further  
48 investigate the auditory mechanisms at play in the right and left baboons' temporal cortices for the  
49 processing of emotional vocalizations.

50 **Keywords**

51 fNIRS, cerebral activity, monkey, agonistic vocalisations, conspecific, heterospecific

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## 61 1. Introduction

62 Since the 1990s (George et al. 1995; Pihan, Altenmüller, and Ackermann 1997), many neuroimaging  
63 studies have investigated the human temporal cortex activity in emotional voice processing. Hence,  
64 functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) and more recently functional Near Infrared  
65 Spectroscopy (fNIRS) data pointed out the role of the bilateral superior temporal gyrus (STG), superior  
66 temporal sulcus (STS) and middle temporal gyrus (MTG) in the processing of emotional prosody  
67 (Grandjean 2020; Grandjean et al. 2005, 2005; Kotz et al. 2013; Plichta et al. 2011; Wildgruber et al.  
68 2009; Zatorre and Belin 2001) and more specifically in the recognition of positive and negative  
69 emotions (Bach et al. 2008; Frühholz and Grandjean 2013; Johnstone et al. 2006; Zhang, Zhou, and  
70 Yuan 2018).

71 Yet, despite calls for an evolutionary-based approach to emotions that consider the adaptive functions  
72 and the phylogenetic continuity of emotional expression and identification (Bryant 2021; Greenberg  
73 2002), few comparative research investigated the human temporal cortex activity during the recognition  
74 of emotional cues in human voices (conspecific) and other species vocalizations (heterospecific),  
75 expressed especially by non-human primates (NHP), our closest relative (Perelman et al. 2011). In the  
76 few studies published so far, fMRI analysis has revealed more activations in human auditory cortex for  
77 the recognition of agonistic vocalizations expressed by humans as well as macaques (*Macaca mulatta*)  
78 and domestic cats (*Felis catus*) comparing to affiliative ones. This result was largely driven by a  
79 decrease of activity in auditory cortex during the listening of macaque and cat vocalizations compared  
80 to human vocalizations (Belin et al. 2008). Additionally, Fritz and colleagues demonstrated a greater  
81 involvement of the human STS and the right planum temporale (PT) for the identification of human  
82 emotional voices contrasted to chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*) and then macaques calls (Fritz et al.  
83 2018). Interestingly, similar results were found in the STS and STG when human emotional voices were  
84 compared to various animal sounds, non-vocal stimuli or non-biological noises (Bodin et al. 2021;  
85 Pernet et al. 2015) suggesting a specific sensitivity of the superior regions of the human temporal cortex  
86 for conspecific voices.

87 Is this sensitivity of the temporal cortex to emotional cues expressed by conspecific found in NHP? In  
88 other words, are the cerebral mechanisms of vocal emotion perception shared across primate species,  
89 or has the auditory cortex of *Homo sapiens* evolved differently?

90 The previous literature on primates emphasizes the brain continuity between humans and NHP for the  
91 auditory processing of conspecific emotions. For instance, fMRI studies in macaques have revealed a  
92 greater involvement of the STG for the perception of conspecific emotional calls compared to  
93 heterospecific ones including calls from other primate and animal species, environmental sounds and  
94 scrambled vocalizations (Joly et al. 2012; Ortiz-Rios et al. 2015; Petkov et al. 2008). Following this,  
95 positron emission tomography (PET scan) studies have shown the predominant role of the right PT in  
96 chimpanzees (Tagliabata et al. 2009) and of the STS in macaques (Gil-da-Costa et al. 2004) for the

97 processing of conspecific emotional calls. Additionally, neurobiological findings in macaques and  
98 marmosets (*Callitrix jacchus*) have suggested a greater involvement of the STG and of the primary  
99 auditory cortex in the passive listening of emotional conspecific calls comparing to environmental  
100 sounds, scrambled or time-reversed vocalizations (Belin 2006; Ghazanfar and Hauser 2001; Poremba  
101 et al. 2004). Despite these results, the question on the specific status of conspecific emotions in NHP  
102 remains poorly explored with respect to heterospecific vocalizations. In particular, because of the  
103 species-dependent results in humans highlighted above and the phylogenetic proximity across primate  
104 species, it seems necessary to include heterospecific stimuli from other NHP to reconstruct the  
105 phylogenetic evolution of primate vocal emotion processing (Bryant 2021).

106 The present study investigated temporal cortex involvement in three female baboons: Talma, Rubis and  
107 Chet, during exposure to conspecific vs. heterospecific affective vocalizations, using fNIRS. Building  
108 on a growing interest over the past decade (Boas et al. 2014; Pan, Borragán, and Peigneux 2019), we  
109 used fNIRS because of its non-invasiveness, its poor sensitivity to motion artefacts (Balardin et al.  
110 2017) and its suitability for comparative research (Debracque et al. 2021; Fuster et al. 2005; Kim et al.  
111 2017; Lee et al. 2017; Wakita et al. 2010). According to the existing literature on NHP and humans  
112 suggesting a sensitivity of the primates' temporal cortex for conspecific calls, we expected *i*) more  
113 activation in the temporal cortex for the passive listening of baboon sounds compared to chimpanzee  
114 stimuli; and *ii*) a greater involvement of the temporal cortex for the perception of agonistic conspecific  
115 vocalizations in comparison to the other sounds.

116

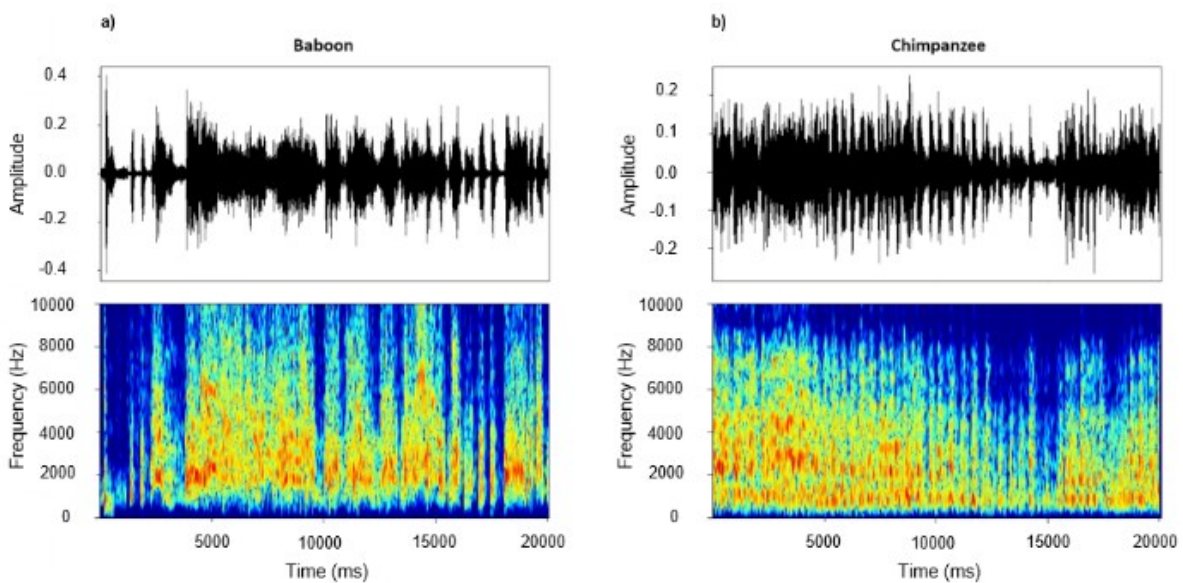
## 117 **2. Material & Methods**

### 118 **2.1. Subjects**

119 Three healthy female baboons (Talma, Rubis and Chet, mean age = 14.6 years, SD  $\pm$  3.5 years) were  
120 included in the present study. Based on the annual health assessment and the daily behavioural surveys  
121 made by the veterinary and animal welfare staff, the subjects had normal hearing abilities and did not  
122 present a structural neurological impairment (confirmed with respective T1w anatomical brain images  
123 – 0.7 x 0.7 x 0.7 resolution – collected in vivo under anesthesia in the 3Tesla MRI Brunker machine).  
124 All procedures were approved by the “C2EA -71 Ethical Committee of neurosciences” (INT Marseille)  
125 and performed in accordance with the relevant French law, CNRS guidelines and the European Union  
126 regulations. The subjects were born in captivity and housed in social groups at the Station de  
127 Primatologie in which they have free access to both outdoor and indoor areas. All enclosures are  
128 enriched by wooden and metallic climbing structures as well as substrate on the group to favour foraging  
129 behaviours. Water is available *ad libitum* and monkey pellets, seeds, fresh fruits and vegetables were  
130 given every day. The three subjects were lightly anesthetized with propofol and passively exposed to  
131 auditory stimuli as described below (see also Debracque et al. 2021 for the complete protocol).

## 132 2.2. Stimuli

133 Auditory stimulations consisted of agonistic vocalizations expressed by baboon (conspecific – see  
134 Figure 1a) and chimpanzee (heterospecific – see Figure 1b) species as well as energy matched white  
135 noises to control for this low-level acoustic feature and for its unfolding (i.e. the temporal structure of  
136 energy of the vocalizations). Each stimulus had a duration of 20 seconds, and was repeated six times  
137 (see Debracque et al. 2021 for more details). The auditory stimuli were pseudo-randomized, alternating  
138 vocalizations and white noises; and were separated by 15 seconds of silence. Additionally, auditory  
139 stimulations were broadcasted either binaurally or monaurally in the right or left ear.  
140



141  
142 **Figure 1:** Representative waveforms and spectrograms of 20s-long agonistic **a)** baboon and **b)**  
143 chimpanzee vocalizations used as stimuli in the present study. These graphical representations were  
144 extracted using the PhonTools package (Barreda 2015) on R. studio (Team 2020).

## 145 2.3. fNIRS

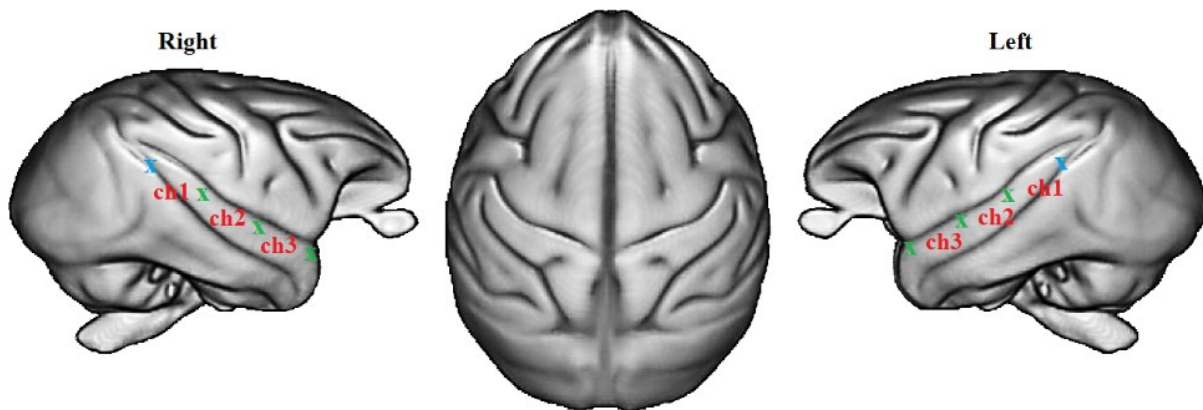
### 146 2.3.1. Recordings

147 Brain activations were measured using two light and wireless fNIRS devices (Portalite, Artinis Medical  
148 Systems B.V., Elst, The Netherlands) enabling the measurement of Oxyhemoglobin (O<sub>2</sub>Hb). Optical  
149 probes were placed on the right and left temporal cortices of the subjects using T1 MRI scanner images  
150 previously acquired at the Station de Primatologie on baboons (see Figure 2). Data were obtained at 50  
151 Hz with two wavelengths (760 and 850 nm) using three channels per hemisphere (ch1, ch2, ch3) with  
152 three inter-distance probes (3 – 3.5 – 4 cm) investigating three different cortical depths (1.5 – 1.7 – 2  
153 cm respectively).

154 Reducing the potential disturbing impact of the fNIRS protocol on the subjects, each experimental  
155 session was planned during the baboons' routine health inspection at the Station de Primatologie. As



156 part of the health check, subjects were isolated from their social group and anesthetized with an  
157 intramuscular injection of ketamine (5 mg/kg - Ketamine 1000®) and medetomidine (50µg/kg -  
158 Domitor®). Then Sevoflurane (Sevotek®) at 3 to 5% and atipamezole (250 µg/kg - Antisedan®) were  
159 administered before recordings. Each baboon was placed in ventral decubitus position on the table and  
160 the head of the individual was maintained using foam positioners, cushions and Velcro strips to remain  
161 straight and to reduce potential motion occurrences. Vital functions were monitored (SpO<sub>2</sub>, Respiratory  
162 rate, ECG, EtCO<sub>2</sub>, T°) and a drip of NaCl was put in place during the entire anaesthesia. Before fNIRS  
163 recordings, temporal areas on the baboons' scalp were shaved and sevoflurane inhalation was stopped.  
164 Subjects were further sedated with a minimal amount of intravenous injection of Propofol (Propovet®)  
165 with a bolus of around 2mg/kg every 10 to 15 minutes or by infusion rate of 0.1 – 0.4 mg/kg/min. After  
166 the recovery period, subjects were put back in their social group and monitored by the veterinary staff.  
167



168  
169 **Figure 2:** fNIRS optode and channel locations according to 89 baboons T1 MRI template (Love et al.  
170 2016). Blue and green crosses represent optical receivers and transmitters respectively. Ch1, Ch2 and  
171 Ch3 indicate the three channels on the right and left temporal cortex.

### 172 2.3.2. Analysis

173 SPM\_fNIRS toolbox (Tak et al. 2016) and custom made codes on Matlab 7.4 R2009b (The MathWorks  
174 Inc. 2009) were used to perform first level analysis on raw fNIRS data following this procedure:  
175 *i)* O<sub>2</sub>Hb concentration changes were calculated using the Beer-Lambert law (Delpy et al. 1988); *ii)*  
176 motion artifacts were removed manually in each individual and each channel. In total, 10 seconds  
177 (1.3%) were removed from the O<sub>2</sub>Hb signal of Rubis and 35 seconds (4.8%) for Talma and Chet; *iii)* a  
178 low-pass filter based on the HRF (Friston et al. 2000) was applied to reduce physiological confounds;  
179 *iv)* a baseline correction was applied in subtracting the pre-stimulus baseline from the post-stimulus  
180 O<sub>2</sub>Hb concentration changes of each trial and *v)* O<sub>2</sub>Hb signal was averaged for Talma in a window of  
181 4 to 12 s post stimulus onset for each trial; and for Rubis and Chet in a window of 2 to 8 s post stimulus  
182 onset in order to select the range of maximum O<sub>2</sub>Hb concentration changes following Debracque et al  
183 2021. Shortly, the differences of concentration range are explained by the presence of tachycardia

184 episodes for both Rubis and Chet during the experiment, involving an HRF almost twice as fast as the  
185 one found for Talma.

186 The second level analysis was made on R. studio (Team 2020) using the permuco package (Frossard  
187 and Renaud 2019). In each Hemisphere (right, left), we used non-parametric permutation tests with  
188 5000 iterations to assess O<sub>2</sub>Hb concentration changes for each subject (Talma, Rubis, Chet) as they  
189 enable repeated measures ANOVA in small sample sizes by multiplying the design and response  
190 variables (Kherad-Pajouh and Renaud 2015). *Stimuli* (call, white noise); *Species* (baboon, chimpanzee);  
191 *Channels* (ch1, ch2, ch3) and *Sides* (right, left, both ears) were selected as fixed factors. As  
192 recommended, contrast effects of *Species* and *Stimuli* within channels were assessed with 2000  
193 permutations (Kherad-Pajouh and Renaud 2015). Both p. values for permutation  $F$  ( $p_{\text{perm}}$ ) and  
194 parametric  $F$  are reported.

### 195 3. Results

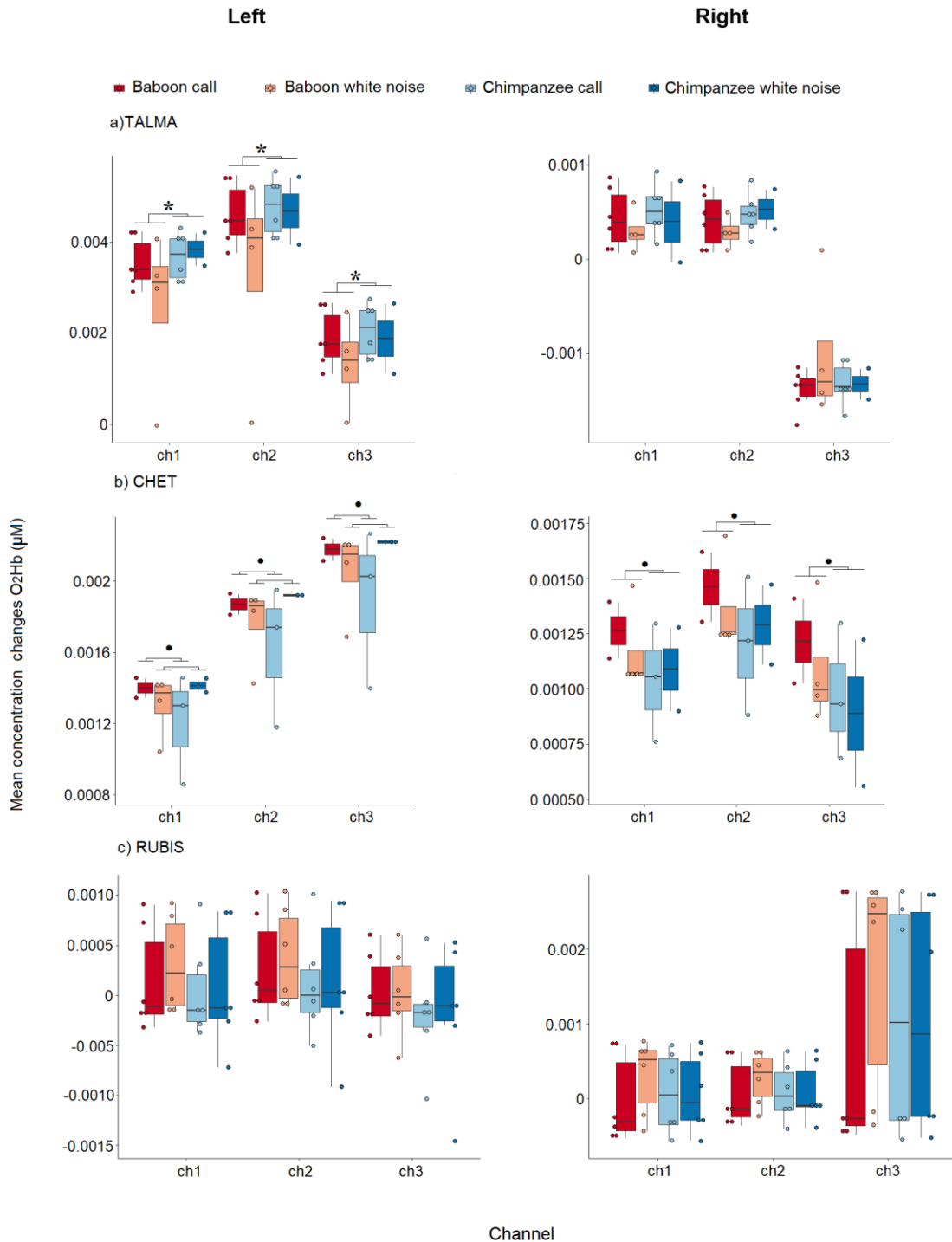
196 The main effect *Channels* was significant in nearly all subjects and hemispheres: Talma (right:  $F(2,3)$   
197 = 161,5,  $p | p_{\text{perm}} < .001$ ; left:  $F(2,3) = 33.91$ ,  $p | p_{\text{perm}} < .001$ ); Rubis (right:  $F(2,3) = 8,99$ ,  $p | p_{\text{perm}}$   
198  $< .001$ ); and Chet (right:  $F(2,3) = 3,99$ ,  $p | p_{\text{perm}} < .05$ ; left:  $F(2,3) = 25.68$ ,  $p | p_{\text{perm}} < .001$ ). It was not  
199 significant for Rubis' left hemisphere ( $F(2,3) = 2.15$ ,  $p | p_{\text{perm}} = .12$ ). Hence, we reported the effects of  
200 *Species* and *Stimuli* according to channels in Figure 3. Note that for all subjects, the factor *Sides* did not  
201 reach significance and thus, do not statistically explain differences for *Stimuli* and *Species* (see  
202 Debracque et al. 2021 for more details related to auditory asymmetries). All results are reported in  
203 Supplementary Materials.

204 Regarding the right hemisphere, permutation tests revealed for Chet a significant main effect of the  
205 factor *Species* ( $F(1,2) = 5.03$ ,  $p | p_{\text{perm}} < .05$ ).

206 Regarding the left hemisphere, the main factors *Species* was found significant for the baboon Talma  
207 ( $F(1,2) = 4.24$ ,  $p | p_{\text{perm}} < .05$ ). In addition, a significant two-way interaction was found significant for  
208 the subject Chet between *Stimuli* and *Species* ( $F(1,4) = 4,13$ ,  $p | p_{\text{perm}} = .05$ ).

209 In sum, across the three channels, more O<sub>2</sub>Hb concentration changes were found in Talma's left  
210 hemisphere for the perception of chimpanzee sounds compared to baboon stimuli. Conversely, for Chet,  
211 permutation analyses revealed more O<sub>2</sub>Hb concentration changes in the right hemisphere for the passive  
212 listening of baboon sounds comparing to chimpanzee ones. Additionally, her left hemisphere was more  
213 activated by baboon calls vs. chimpanzee calls and by chimpanzee white noises vs. baboon white noises.





214

215 **Figure 3:** Right and left temporal cortex activations for the baboons **a)** Talma, **b)** Chet and **c)** Rubis  
216 during the perception of agonistic baboon (conspecific) and chimpanzee (heterospecific) vocalizations  
217 as well as their energy matched white noises. The mean concentration changes of O<sub>2</sub>Hb (y axis) is  
218 represented in micro molar (µM) for each fNIRS channel (x axis). Colourful dots and dark lines  
219 represent stimuli and confidence intervals respectively. Results of the permutation tests within channels  
220 are shown with \* p<.05; p=.07. The ggplot2 package (Wickham et al. 2021) on R.studio (Team 2020)  
221 was used for visualizing the data.

## 222 4. Discussion

223 The present fNIRS study suggests, in two out of our three tested baboons, a sensitivity of the baboons'  
224 temporal cortex for conspecific sounds with documented differential activations in contrast to  
225 heterospecific sounds.

226 This finding is quite consistent with the few existing fMRI data in macaques showing the distinctive  
227 role of STG in the perception of emotions in conspecific and heterospecific calls (Joly et al. 2012;  
228 Petkov et al. 2008). Similar to humans (Belin et al. 2008; Fritz et al. 2018), this first result suggests a  
229 different involvement of temporal regions in NHP for the processing of emotions in conspecifics and  
230 heterospecific primate vocalizations. From an evolutionary perspective, this would be a mechanism  
231 inherited from the common ancestor of *Homo sapiens* and other *Catharrhini* around 40 million years ago  
232 (Harrison 2013), although it may be earlier if *Platyrrhini* share this feature too.

233 Despite the significant main effect *Species* for two subjects, fNIRS data revealed also inter-individual  
234 differences between Talma and Chet. First, we failed to record significant results for Rubis, although  
235 this may have been a consequence of her constant tachycardia during the health check and experiment  
236 (see Debracque et al. 2021). Second, the left temporal cortex of Talma was overall more activated for  
237 chimpanzee sounds (calls and white noise) than for baboon ones; in contrast, results were reversed in  
238 the left temporal cortex of Chet, where statistical analyses highlighted an increase of O<sub>2</sub>Hb  
239 concentration changes in the left temporal cortex for the passive listening of agonistic baboon sounds  
240 compared to chimpanzee sounds. In addition, in her right temporal cortex, we documented an increase  
241 in O<sub>2</sub>Hb concentration led by the perception of agonistic baboon call.

242 Differences between individuals in temporal cortex sensitivity could explain this absence of congruence  
243 in our fNIRS data. Xu and colleagues (2019), have in fact, demonstrated in five anaesthetized and awake  
244 macaques great individual variabilities in functional connectivity across cortical regions (Xu et al.  
245 2019). Interestingly, the authors compared macaques' fMRI data to human ones and concluded to a  
246 similar heterogeneity in functional connectivity across primate species. In the same line, Pernet and  
247 colleagues also demonstrated, using fMRI, high inter-individuality differences between human STG  
248 and STS for the listening of conspecific emotional voices compared to non-vocal sounds (Pernet et al.  
249 2015). Hence, as for highly cited human neuroimaging studies (Szucs and Ioannidis 2020), future non-  
250 invasive comparative research should include more subjects to take in consideration this inter-individual  
251 variability in brain mechanisms. Yet, the necessity to increase NHP subjects to address limits in  
252 statistical power faces ethical aspects related to animal welfare in the case of invasive neuroimaging  
253 studies. The development of fNIRS (Debracque et al. 2021) and longitudinal studies in comparative  
254 neuroscience (Song et al. 2021) would thus allow answering parts of these challenges.

255 Often explored using fMRI or Pet scan (e.g. Bodin et al. 2021; Gil-da-Costa et al. 2004; Ortiz-Rios et  
256 al. 2015), our fNIRS data remain inconclusive regarding any differences in temporal cortex activity

257 between the passive listening of agonistic baboon vocalizations and white noises. Indeed, comparative  
258 research on macaques and marmoset (*Callithrix jacchus*) showed a greater sensitivity of the temporal  
259 cortex in its anterior part than in its posterior area for the contrast conspecific calls vs. control sounds  
260 (Bodin et al. 2021). Future fNIRS studies should improve the probe location on the scalp of baboons or  
261 any other NHP species.

262 Finally, out of the scope of this paper, permutation tests and descriptive analyses highlighted consistent  
263 fNIRS data for the channels 1 and 2 compared to channel 3 on both, right and left hemispheres. This  
264 result suggests that, for fNIRS in baboons, the best inter-probe distant to assess cortical activations  
265 would be between 3cm and 3.5cm. Interestingly, these distances are commonly used for fNIRS  
266 experiments in human adults (Ferrari and Quaresima 2012).

267 Overall, highlighting the evolutionary continuity between humans and NHP, our results suggest the  
268 existence in baboons of differences in temporal cortex activity between the processing of conspecific  
269 and heterospecific sounds. Yet, fNIRS data also pointed out high inter-individual variability in these  
270 results and remain inconclusive in regards to the contrast conspecific agonistic vocalizations vs. white  
271 noises (control sounds), which are often explored meaningfully using fMRI or Pet scan (e.g. Bodin et  
272 al. 2021; Gil-da-Costa et al. 2004; Ortiz-Rios et al. 2015). Moreover, the present study has some  
273 limitations. Firstly, our experiment focused on baboons and it is unclear whether it will replicate in  
274 other monkey species. In fact, Fitch and Braccini (2013) have already suggested differences between  
275 monkey in terms of mechanisms for the processing of conspecific and heterospecific vocalizations  
276 (Fitch and Braccini 2013). Finally, only agonistic vocalizations were included in the present fNIRS  
277 protocol. Yet, similar to humans, NHP might have some distinctive brain mechanisms for negative and  
278 positive emotions (e.g. Davidson 1992; Frühholz and Grandjean 2013; Zhang et al. 2018).

279 Consequently, future studies should consider the inclusion of positive emotions, more individuals or  
280 the use of fNIRS and longitudinal studies, as well as various monkey species in order to maximize the  
281 generalization of their neuroimaging data on auditory processing of emotions in NHP.

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#### 294 ***Conflict of interest***

295 The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

#### 296 ***Availability of data and material***

297 Raw data are freely available to any researcher.

#### 298 ***Code availability***

299 Custom Matlab and R. studio codes are available on request.

#### 300 ***Ethics approval***

301 All animal procedures were approved by the “C2EA -71 Ethical Committee of neurosciences” (INT  
302 Marseille) under the application number APAFIS#13553-201802151547729, and were conducted at  
303 the Station de Primatologie CNRS (UPS 846, Rousset-Sur-Arc, France) within the agreement number  
304 C130877 for conducting experiments on vertebrate animals. All methods were performed in accordance  
305 with the relevant French law, CNRS guidelines and the European Union regulations (Directive  
306 2010/63/EU).

#### 307 ***Consent to participate***

308 Not applicable.

#### 309 ***Consent for publication***

310 Not applicable.

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