



**HAL**  
open science

## The Oscillatory Nature of Movement Initiation

Cécilia Neige, Goldy Yadav, Gerard Derosiere

► **To cite this version:**

Cécilia Neige, Goldy Yadav, Gerard Derosiere. The Oscillatory Nature of Movement Initiation. Journal of Neuroscience, 2023, 43 (6), pp.882 - 884. 10.1523/jneurosci.1687-22.2022 . hal-04148761

**HAL Id: hal-04148761**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04148761>**

Submitted on 3 Jul 2023

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

## Journal Club

**Editor's Note:** These short reviews of recent *JNeurosci* articles, written exclusively by students or postdoctoral fellows, summarize the important findings of the paper and provide additional insight and commentary. If the authors of the highlighted article have written a response to the Journal Club, the response can be found by viewing the Journal Club at [www.jneurosci.org](http://www.jneurosci.org). For more information on the format, review process, and purpose of Journal Club articles, please see <http://www.jneurosci.org/content/jneurosci-journal-club>.

# The Oscillatory Nature of Movement Initiation

Cécilia Neige,<sup>1,2\*</sup> Goldy Yadav,<sup>3\*</sup> and  Gerard Derosiere<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Pôle Est, Centre Hospitalier Le Vinatier, F-69500 Bron, France, <sup>2</sup>Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche Médicale, Centre de Recherche en Neurosciences de Lyon U1028 UMR5292, PsyR2 Team, F-69500, Bron, France, and <sup>3</sup>Cognition and Actions Laboratory, Institute of Neuroscience, Université Catholique de Louvain, Brussels, 1200, Belgium  
Review of Hussain et al.

Initiating voluntary movements at appropriate times allows animals to interact optimally with the world. Given this, it is no surprise that neuroscientists have long aimed to understand the neural bases of movement initiation (Libet et al., 1983). An extra benefit of such research is that it may provide a foundation for developing interventions to improve symptoms of patients exhibiting impairments in movement initiation, such as those with Parkinson's disease or Tourette syndrome.

The execution of most voluntary movements relies on cortical cells in the primary motor cortex (M1), which project to the spine and connect with peripheral motor neurons. This corticospinal pathway provides a unique route through which the brain can initiate movements (Derosiere and Duque, 2020). Classical models in motor neuroscience posit that the initiation of a body movement occurs when corticospinal cells projecting to motor neurons innervating the related body part receive neural inputs sufficient to increase their activity to a triggering threshold (Schurger et al., 2012). Importantly, the basal level of corticospinal excitability will determine the likelihood that a given neural input will be

sufficient to reach this threshold, and thus, to drive movement.

EEG recordings in humans have shown that activity in the primary motor cortex (M1), as in other cortical areas, fluctuates in an oscillatory pattern over time (Buzsaki, 2006). Two prominent EEG waveform oscillations that are considered to play a crucial role in goal-directed motor behaviors are the  $\mu$  (8–12 Hz) and  $\beta$  rhythms (13–35 Hz) recorded over M1. Specifically, corticospinal excitability increases during the trough and rising phases of  $\mu$  oscillations (Zrenner et al., 2018; Hussain et al., 2019) and at the peak and falling phases of  $\beta$  oscillations (Wischnewski et al., 2022; but for a lack of effect of the beta phase, see Hussain et al., 2019). Although the exact cause of these opposite effects of the  $\mu$  and  $\beta$  phases on corticospinal excitability remains unknown, one possible explanation is that they are generated by distinct neural mechanisms. As such, the trough and rising phases of  $\mu$  oscillations are associated with an increase in spiking frequency in motor cortices (Haegens et al., 2011) but do not involve any modulation in the activity of GABA interneurons (Bergmann et al., 2019). Conversely, the peak and falling phases of the beta rhythm are thought to be associated with a cyclic hyperpolarization of corticospinal cells mediated by a release of GABAergic activity (Rossiter et al., 2014; Hussain et al., 2022; Wischnewski et al., 2022). Still, despite the presence of different generators for these oscillations, the fascinating effects of the oscillatory phase on corticospinal output

recently uncovered (Zrenner et al., 2018; Bergmann et al., 2019; Hussain et al., 2019; Wischnewski et al., 2022) raise the question as to whether specific phases represent critical temporal windows for releasing voluntary motor commands and initiating movements.

In work published recently in *The Journal of Neuroscience*, Hussain et al. (2022) addressed this key question. Healthy participants performed a self-paced movement task, in which they viewed a series of pictures and pressed a button with the left index finger to go to the next picture whenever they wanted. EEG and EMG of the left index finger muscle were recorded throughout the task, allowing the authors to record both oscillatory activity in M1 and the onset of muscle contraction, respectively.

To estimate the timing at which the motor command was released within M1, Hussain et al. (2022) first estimated each individual's cortico-muscular conduction time (i.e., from the right M1 to the left index finger muscle involved in the task), by applying single-pulse transcranial magnetic stimulation over the right M1 during rest. Such stimulation depolarizes corticospinal cells and ultimately evokes motor-evoked potentials (MEPs, recorded with EMG) in contralateral muscles, with a delay that usually varies between 18 and 25 ms, reflecting the cortico-muscular conduction time. The authors subtracted this estimated conduction time from the time of onset of muscle contractions measured with EMG during the task to estimate when the motor

Received Sep. 6, 2022; revised Nov. 9, 2022; accepted Nov. 15, 2022.

\*C.N. and G.Y. contributed equally to this work.

The authors declare no competing financial interests.

Correspondence should be addressed to Cécilia Neige at [cecilia.neige@ch-le-vinatier.fr](mailto:cecilia.neige@ch-le-vinatier.fr).

<https://doi.org/10.1523/JNEUROSCI.1687-22.2022>

Copyright © 2023 the authors

command was released within M1 for each subject and each movement. After this, they extracted the phase angles of the  $\mu$  and  $\beta$  frequencies in the EEG recording at the time of each motor command release. Finally, they assessed whether specific phase angles were associated with the release of the motor commands.

The study highlighted two major findings. First, motor commands were more often released during the falling phase of the contralateral beta activity (i.e., when activity went from peak to trough). Second, motor command release was not affected by the phase of the  $\mu$  rhythm. In accordance with classical models of movement initiation, the authors concluded that the falling phase of the  $\beta$  frequency may coincide with the periodic synchronization of spiking activity in contralateral M1, which would bring corticospinal excitability closer to the triggering threshold and increase the propensity to initiate movements.

What might be the neural source of such a periodic synchronization of spiking activity in M1? As described above,  $\beta$  peaks are associated with a cyclic release of GABAergic activity (Rossiter et al., 2014; Hussain et al., 2022; Wischnewski et al., 2022). One possibility is that this cyclic release is generated by modulatory thalamo-M1 inputs (Takahashi et al., 2021): under the influence of fronto-basal ganglia circuits. Indeed, the inferior frontal gyrus and the presupplementary motor area both inhibit corticospinal output through basal ganglia circuits in various contexts, including during movement initiation (Obeso et al., 2013; van Campen et al., 2013). Interestingly, in some motor tasks, the inhibitory influence of these areas is cyclically released every 50 ms (Picazio et al., 2014), suggesting that (dis)inhibitory signals can be transmitted at a  $\beta$  frequency from frontal structures to corticospinal cells. Hence, one possibility is that the inferior frontal gyrus and/or the presupplementary motor area produce a “pulsed disinhibition” of corticospinal cells at the  $\beta$  frequency through fronto-basal ganglia-thalamo-M1 circuits, ultimately involving M1 GABAergic interneurons. Together, this circuitry would contribute to synchronizing spiking activity periodically in the motor output pathway, increasing the propensity to initiate movements at  $\beta$  peaks.

Of note, such a cyclic depolarization of corticospinal cells might not only increase corticospinal excitability but also decrease the cortico-muscular conduction time. In line with this idea, MEP latency

is shorter during the peak of the  $\beta$  frequency (Torrecillos et al., 2020). This is of key importance to the study by Hussain et al. (2022), given that, as explained above, the average individual MEP latency was exploited to estimate the timing at which the motor command was released within M1 for each movement. Given the effect of the beta phase on MEP latencies, one could argue that the authors’ estimation involved some time lag with respect to the actual timing of the motor command release, especially for commands released during the peak of the  $\beta$  frequency. However, the effect of the beta phase on MEP latencies is quite subtle, of the order of 0.4–0.8 ms (Torrecillos et al., 2020), while the duration of a full  $\beta$  cycle is of the order of 50 ms. Even for higher-frequency oscillations, such as  $\gamma$  (i.e., from 40 to 100 Hz), the duration of a full cycle is of the order of 10–25 ms. Hence, it is sensible to assume that the putative misestimation mentioned above was too subtle to affect the findings of the present study. Overall, the approach developed by Hussain et al. (2022) to identify the timing of motor command release is novel and may prove useful for future studies aiming to examine the functional role of these oscillations in movement initiation.

Strikingly, the phase of the  $\mu$  frequency did not affect the propensity to initiate movements in this study. Yet, as mentioned earlier, corticospinal excitability rises cyclically during the trough and rising phases of the  $\mu$  frequency. Why isn’t the propensity to initiate movements higher while corticospinal output increases during these  $\mu$  phases? This could perhaps be related to the fact that movement initiation implies (if not requires) a release of GABAergic activity in the motor cortex (Reynolds and Ashby, 1999), while GABAergic activity remains unchanged during the trough and rising phases of the  $\mu$  rhythm (Bergmann et al., 2019). Another, complementary explanation, though speculative, could be that other motor circuits exhibit a concomitant decreased excitability during  $\mu$  trough and rising phases. A proportion of corticospinal cells projecting to motoneurons originates outside M1, mostly in secondary motor areas (Dum and Strick, 1991). Therefore, while the excitability of M1-originating corticospinal cells indeed rises during  $\mu$  trough and rising phase (Bergmann et al., 2019), it is plausible that the excitability of cells

originating in secondary motor areas decreases, leading to a null net input on motoneurons and, ultimately, to a lack of effect of the  $\mu$  phase on movement initiation.

In conclusion, the work by Hussain et al. (2022) investigates the functional role of cortical oscillatory phases in movement initiation. The authors show that motor command release coincides preferentially with restricted phases of the  $\beta$ , but not of the  $\mu$ , frequency in contralateral M1. The study should prompt future work to further elucidate the functional role of neural oscillations in movement initiation and complex human motor behavior.

## References

- Bergmann TO, Lieb A, Zrenner C, Ziemann U (2019) Pulsed facilitation of corticospinal excitability by the sensorimotor  $\mu$ -alpha rhythm. *J Neurosci* 39:10034–10043.
- Buzsáki G (2006) *Rhythms of the brain*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Derosiere G, Duque J (2020) Tuning the corticospinal system: how distributed brain circuits shape human actions. *Neuroscientist* 26:359–379.
- Dum RP, Strick PL (1991) The origin of corticospinal projections from the premotor areas in the frontal lobe. *J Neurosci* 11:667–689.
- Haegens S, Nächer V, Luna R, Romo R, Jensen O (2011)  $\alpha$ -Oscillations in the monkey sensorimotor network influence discrimination performance by rhythmical inhibition of neuronal spiking. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 108:19377–19382.
- Hussain SJ, Cohen LG, Bönstrup M (2019) Beta rhythm events predict corticospinal motor output. *Sci Rep* 9:10.
- Hussain SJ, Vollmer MK, Iturrate I, Quentin R (2022) Voluntary motor command release coincides with restricted sensorimotor beta rhythm phases. *J Neurosci* 42:5771–5781.
- Libet B, Gleason CA, Wright EW, Pearl DK (1983) Time of conscious intention to act in relation to onset of cerebral activity (readiness-potential): the unconscious initiation of a freely voluntary act. *Brain* 106:623–642.
- Obeso I, Robles N, Muñoz-Marrón E, Redolar-Ripoll D (2013) Dissociating the role of the pre-SMA in response inhibition and switching: a combined online and offline TMS approach. *Front Hum Neurosci* 7:150.
- Picazio S, Veniero D, Ponzio V, Caltagirone C, Gross J, Thut G, Koch G (2014) Prefrontal control over motor cortex cycles at beta frequency during movement inhibition. *Curr Biol* 24:2940–2945.
- Reynolds C, Ashby P (1999) Inhibition in the human motor cortex is reduced just before a voluntary contraction. *Neurology* 53:730–735.
- Rossiter HE, Davis EM, Clark EV, Boudrias MH, Ward NS (2014) Beta oscillations reflect changes in motor cortex inhibition in healthy ageing. *Neuroimage* 91:360–365.
- Schurger A, Sitt JD, Dehaene S (2012) An accumulator model for spontaneous neural

- activity prior to self-initiated movement. *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA* 109:E2904–E2913.
- Takahashi N, Moberg S, Zolnik TA, Catanese J, Sachdev RN, Larkum ME, Jaeger D (2021) Thalamic input to motor cortex facilitates goal-directed action initiation. *Curr Biol* 31:4148–4155.e4.
- Torrecillos F, Falato E, Pogosyan A, West T, Di Lazzaro V, Brown P (2020) Motor cortex inputs at the optimum phase of beta cortical oscillations undergo more rapid and less variable corticospinal propagation. *J Neurosci* 40:369–381.
- van Campen A, Neubert FX, Van Den Wildenberg W, Ridderinkhof KR, Mars R (2013) Paired-pulse transcranial magnetic stimulation reveals probability-dependent changes in functional connectivity between right inferior frontal cortex and primary motor cortex during go/no-go performance. *Front Hum Neurosci* 7:736.
- Wischnewski M, Haigh ZJ, Shirinpour S, Alekseichuk I, Opitz A (2022) The phase of sensorimotor mu and beta oscillations has the opposite effect on corticospinal excitability. *Brain Stimul* 15:1093–1100.
- Zrenner C, Desideri D, Belardinelli P, Ziemann U (2018) Real-time EEG-defined excitability states determine efficacy of TMS-induced plasticity in human motor cortex. *Brain Stimul* 11:374–389.