Prosodic cues to psychosis risk

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Introduction

Psychotic disorders
Psychotic disorders (e.g. schizophrenia) impact 1-2% of the population [1], and result in severe disruptions to cognition and emotional well-being.

Atypical prosody is a classic behavioral symptom in psychosis.

• Qualitatively: described as “flat affect”
• Quantitatively: F0 variability, intensity, and pause metrics (duration, frequency, and proportion of silence) shown to differ between clinical and control populations [2-4]
• Intonational flatness may reflect reduced emotional expression, while increased hesitations could be due to phonological or semantic/pragmatic impairments [5].

Signs prior to diagnosis
Young adults at ultra high risk (UHR) for psychosis show changes to behavior, perception, and motor control, reflecting early vulnerability [6]
• Up to 36% receive a psychosis diagnosis within 3 years [7]
• Early detection can greatly improve outcomes or even halt development of a psychotic disorder [8]

But: there is currently no biomarker to unambiguously identify individuals at highest risk of transition.

Project goals: Prosodic speech measures are untested in the pre-diagnosis population. This project is an exploratory investigation into whether prosodic features may represent a novel, easily-collected biomarker for vulnerability to psychosis.

Current study questions
1. Group classification: Are atypical prosodic features also present in the speech of UHR individuals?

Prediction: These features will reliably separate the speech of UHR and control speakers, replicating the acoustic correlates of flat affect found in the diagnosed population [2-4].

2. Symptom variance: Does prosody co-vary with symptoms?

Prediction: Variability in clinically-assessed psychological symptoms can be predicted in part by variability in prosodic features in the UHR group.

Participants

• 18 UHR* and 18 control individuals (age 15-21, 18 female)
• UHR group inclusion criteria: prodromal symptoms or first-degree relative with psychotic disorder

Clinical assessment: Structured Interview of Prodromal Syndromes [9]. Positive (P1-P5) and negative (N1-N6) subcomponents (scored from 0 - 6) sum to two scores:
• Negative symptom score: includes apathy, blunted emotion, impaired social functioning (UHR mean: 10.56, s.d. 5.68; control mean: 0.39, s.d. 1.42)
• Positive symptom score: includes hallucinations, delusions, thought and movement disorders (UHR mean: 12.56, s.d. 4.10; control mean: 1.42, s.d. 0.61)
• For 11 UHR speakers, a 12-month follow-up of symptom scores was available (average change in positive symptoms: -2.64, s.d. 4.01; negative symptom change: -0.91, s.d. 7.50)

Data processing
• 10-minute segments of clinical interviews (when possible, personal background questions), annotated to identify participants’ speech
• Automatic extraction of F0, speech/silence labels using Praat [10], summarized across conversational turns, within-participant

Methods and Materials

FO metrics (semitone-transformed):
• Mean F0
• Relative variation in vocal pitch (RVVP: r.d. F0) (mean F0)
Pause metrics:
• Pauses per second
• Proportion of silence in conversational turns
• Mean pause duration (sec) (≥200 ms)

Analysis 1: group classification

Linear discriminant analysis: classify participants as UHR or control as a function of combinations of prosodic features
• Best model: 61.1% of participants accurately classified (p = 0.052) as a function of relative variation in vocal pitch (RVVP), driven by higher variation in UHR female speakers. No improvement in classification with other F0 or pause measures.

Analysis 2: symptom variance in UHR speakers

Linear models with prosodic features as predictors were unable to significantly predict variance in symptom scores (positive or negative).

Symptom subcomponent classification:
• LDA: classifying binary split (low – 0.1; high – 2.6) of individual symptom subcomponents by prosody
• Higher NS score predicted by lower RVVP, higher proportion of silence (75% accuracy, p = 0.050)
• No other subcomponents reached significance
• NS (ideational richness): difficulty with discourse comprehension; reduced complexity in production

Negative symptoms, 12-mo. follow-up: (11 UHR participants)
• Linear model predicting symptom scores at time 2 from RVVP and proportion of silence at time 1 (see figure at right)
• RVVP (β = -4.51, t = 3.09, p = 0.047): less F0 variability at T1 → higher symptoms at T2
• Proportion of silence (β = 15.61, t = 3.68, p = 0.021): more silence at T1 → higher symptoms at T2 – driven by 1 speaker

Summary

Discussion
• Group classification is promising using variation in F0 – but pattern (greater RVVP for UHR females) goes against “flat affect” predictions.
• Modest compared to diagnosed population (61% vs. ~80% [3, 95.2%, [4]), but UHR is not a homogenous group – not all individuals receive a diagnosis.
• Symptoms show co-variance with prosodic measures:
  • Subcomponents of negative score sensitive to variation in F0, proportion of silence
  • Prosody at time 1 may signal negative symptom severity at time 2

Future directions
• Replication of current exploratory analyses in novel set of 36 participants
• Examination of outlier individuals for possible correlations with conversion to psychosis, or significant change in symptoms at 12-month follow-up session
• Extension to new dataset of neutral, read speech

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References


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UHR and control speakers, replicating the acoustic correlates of

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