

***“That’s Fantastic!”***

## **The Prosodic Characteristics of Sarcasm in Childish Gambino’s Speech, Rap, and Singing**

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Conversation allows people to establish a sense of connection, and, though seemingly negative, sarcasm plays an important role in this regard (Gibbs, 2000; Recchia et al., 2010). Due to its emotive nature, music is another means of establishing connection (Nummenmaa et al., 2021), and like speech, also features sarcasm (e.g., Bamgbose, 2019). Given that music has been shown to be intricately connected to speech (e.g., Gilbers et al., 2020; Patel et al., 2006), the question arises whether the sarcastic tone of voice functions similarly in music.

The present study explores the prosodic characteristics of sarcasm in speech and music. To this end, a case study was conducted on the speech, rap, and singing of Childish Gambino, comparing sarcastic and non-sarcastic utterances in each domain regarding pitch and rhythm. Based on prior research, it was expected that, in speech, sarcasm would be conveyed through a lower average pitch, less pitch variation, and a slower tempo (e.g., Cheang & Pell, 2008), and that a similar pattern would be observed in music.

The results proved to be mixed: while some similarities remain, musical sarcasm did not mimic the prosody of spoken sarcasm across the board. While sarcastic speech prosody did not differ from sincere speech, sarcastic rap displayed one prosodic cue in line with previous research: a slower tempo. Sarcastic singing is expressed in a different manner altogether. A possible explanation could be the underlying musical structure (e.g., melodic and rhythmic motifs) of the song as a whole. Pitch and rhythm are not the only ways of expressing sarcasm, so artists may opt for other means (e.g., mood juxtaposition of lyrics and instrumentation).

*Keywords: Sarcasm, prosody, language-music connection, singing, rapping.*

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