

Exoticness and Complexity in Phonetics: Definitions and Distributions

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Lateral ejective affricates, clicks, bilabial trills and other segmental types considered exotic in phonetics are often viewed as more difficult to produce or process, and this difficulty is held to account for their rarity. There is an obvious problem of circularity in using rarity to define difficulty, and then 'explaining' rarity on the basis of difficulty. Lindblom and Maddieson (1988) used an intuitive concept of elaboration which did not really face up to this issue. This talk will draw a distinction between the exotic(rare) and the complex, particularly in systemic and syntagmatic patterns, and present results from analysis of an expanded database on phonological typology, and from collaborative work with Marsico et al (2004) seeking more objective characterizations of complexity.