

Methods for exploring interview data in a study of musical shaping

Helen M. Prior*¹

**Music Department, King's College, London, UK*

¹*helen.prior@kcl.ac.uk*

ABSTRACT

Background

The notion of shaping music in performance is pervasive in musical practice but detailed study of this concept has only begun recently (for example, see Küssner, forthcoming; Prior, 2011). The concept of musical shape is used in relation to several different ideas, from musical structure to musical expression, emotion, and tension; and in relation to specific musical features such as phrasing, the melodic line, and dynamics (Prior, 2011). Its highly versatile and multi-faceted nature prompted an interview study, which investigated the ways in which professional violinists and harpsichordists used the idea of musical shaping in a practical context.

Aims

This paper aims to illustrate the multiple ways in which the interview data were examined, and explores methodology-related issues relating to the data.

Method

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five professional violinists and five professional harpsichordists. These interviews incorporated musical tasks which involved participants playing a short excerpt of music provided by the researcher, as well as their own examples, to demonstrate their normal playing, playing while thinking specifically about musical shaping, and sometimes, playing without musical shaping. These musical demonstrations were discussed in some detail with participants to elicit descriptions of their musical shaping. The interviews were recorded with a Panasonic SD700 HD Camcorder and a Sony ICD-UX200 Digital Voice Recorder.

Various types of quantitative and qualitative data were used in this study to explore the ways in which violinists discussed and demonstrated their use of musical shape. First, an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of the musicians' interview data was conducted following guidelines provided by its pioneers (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2003). This method is strongly influenced by phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography, and allowed each participant's experiences of shaping music to be examined in detail.

Secondly, this approach was complemented by an examination of the musical extracts demonstrated by participants using Sonic Visualiser (Cannam, Landone, & Sandler, 2010), a program frequently used to examine performance features in musical recordings. By comparing participants' descriptions of their understanding of musical shaping with the sounds they produced, it was hoped that deeper insight could be gained into the process of shaping music.

Thirdly, the data are being explored in relation to the participants' use of metaphors, which were expressed verbally, gesturally and through musical demonstrations. Existing approaches to the examination of verbal and gestural metaphors (Cameron & Maslen, 2010; Cienki & Müller, 2008) and of gesture more generally (Godøy & Leman, 2010; Gritten & King, 2011; Heath, Hindmarsh, & Luff, 2010; Ratcliff, 2003) have been influential in this process, and Sonic Visualiser was used once more to analyse participants' musical demonstrations of metaphors.

Results

This is primarily a methodological paper, and therefore the preliminary findings of the overall study will be outlined briefly before a consideration of the value of the use of multiple approaches to the data analysis will be discussed. The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis revealed a wide range of themes. These related to the technicalities of shaping music, the relationship between the performer and composer of the music being performed, musical shaping and identity, and the use of, in particular, movement-related metaphors in relation to musical shaping that prompted further examination with metaphor analysis. It is important to note that some participants reported musical shaping as being difficult to describe, and the musical demonstrations they provided were valuable tools in their discussion of their experiences. Through these musical examples, the detailed examination of the relationships between the musicians' expressive (shaping) intent, their descriptions of their physical and technical actions, and the resulting sound, allowed some useful insights to be gained into the details of musical shaping. Finally, the data are currently being explored in more detail in relation to participants' use of metaphors, which were expressed verbally, gesturally, and through musical demonstrations, and it is hoped that this approach will provide a more complete picture of participants' apparent multi-modal understanding of musical shaping.

The wide-ranging methods described here were adopted in response to the breadth of data produced in the interviews. It has been valuable to be able to try to understand the ways in which participants make sense of their experience of shaping music in performance not only through an established text-based method such as IPA but also through an examination of their musical and gestural demonstrations. The use of Sonic Visualiser to examine small-scale musical demonstrations has been valuable, but certain considerations must be made concerning the nature of the examples provided. All the examples were provided within interviews and were not necessarily polished performances. The demonstrations varied in length and in the preparation time participants gave themselves immediately before they played. As such, they were not of the same nature as commercial recordings, which are the more usual focus of research examining performance nuances

with programs such as Sonic Visualiser. Several points must be noted. First, all the participants were professional musicians and were highly proficient on their instrument. They possessed a high degree of technical control and usually demonstrated a particular musical effect to their own satisfaction on their first attempt. When they did not, they usually demonstrated for a second time, and had the confidence to do so. Second, the demonstrations given by participants were not considered in isolation: rather, they were compared with other demonstrations given by that participant in relation to a different shaping intention. Occasionally, general trends concerning variation in tempo or dynamic were observed over multiple participants, but often, excerpts were only compared with other similar excerpts provided by the same musician. Finally, the recording quality, although adequate, was not comparable to studio conditions. Overall, although the techniques used within Sonic Visualiser were similar to some of those used for commercial recordings, the nature of the musical demonstrations was taken into consideration throughout the analytical process and in the conclusions drawn from the data.

The analysis of metaphor and gesture in the data is currently being undertaken. Social scientific approaches to the analysis of gesture often use data from a real-world setting, and frequently focus on short chunks of data, analysing those gestures in great detail (Heath, et al., 2010; Knoblauch, Schnettler, Raab, & Soeffner, 2006). Although gesture is often examined in relation to music, empirical data employed for this are often taken from rehearsals or performances rather than an interview context (Elsdon, 2006; King & Ginsborg, 2011), or employs motion-capture equipment to gain detailed insights into highly specific research questions (Godøy & Leman, 2010). The data examined here were video data from a static camera position and are being examined for a specific purpose: namely, the correspondence (or otherwise) between verbal, gestural, and musical representations of metaphor. It is hoped that the use of techniques from a cognitive linguistic approach to the analysis of metaphor (Cameron & Maslen, 2010) will provide valuable insight into the data.

Conclusions

Research exploring the specific concept of musical shape has only recently begun, and therefore requires considerable exploratory work. This study represents a part of this exploratory work and has required the adoption of multiple approaches as the relationships between musical shaping and other areas of research have become apparent. It is hoped that exposing the variety of approaches taken in this study may prompt researchers in other areas of music psychology to consider increasing the range of their analytical techniques.

Keywords

Musical shape, expression, performance, methodology

REFERENCES

- Cameron, L., & Maslen, R. (Eds.). (2010). *Metaphor Analysis: Research Practice in Applied Linguistics, Social Sciences and the Humanities*. London: Equinox Publishing.
- Cannam, C., Landone, C., & Sandler, M. (2010). *Sonic Visualiser: An Open Source Application for Viewing, Analysing, and Annotating Music Audio Files*. Paper presented at the ACM Multimedia 2010 International Conference, Firenze, Italy.
- Cienki, A., & Müller, C. (2008). *Metaphor and Gesture*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Elsdon, P. (2006). Listening in the gaze: the body in Keith Jarrett's solo improvisations. In A. Gritten & E. King (Eds.), *Music and Gesture*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Godøy, R. I., & Leman, M. (Eds.). (2010). *Musical Gestures: Sound, Movement, and Meaning*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Gritten, A., & King, E. (Eds.). (2011). *New Perspectives on Music and Gesture*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Heath, C., Hindmarsh, J., & Luff, P. (2010). *Video in Qualitative Research: Analysing Social Interaction in Everyday Life*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- King, E., & Ginsborg, J. (2011). Gestures and Glances: Interactions in Ensemble Rehearsal. In A. Gritten & E. King (Eds.), *New Perspectives on Music and Gesture* (pp. 177–201). Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Knoblauch, H., Schnettler, B., Raab, J., & Soeffner, H.-G. (Eds.). (2006). *Video Analysis: Methodology and Methods. Qualitative Audiovisual Data Analysis in Sociology*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH.
- Küssner, M. B. (forthcoming). Music and Shape. *Literary and Linguistic Computing, Special Edition*.
- Prior, H. M. (2011). Report for Questionnaire Participants, from http://www.cmpcp.ac.uk/Prior_Report.pdf
- Ratcliff, D. (2003). Video Methods in Qualitative Research. In P. M. Camic, J. E. Rhodes & L. Yardley (Eds.), *Qualitative research in psychology: expanding perspectives in methodology and design*. Washington: American Psychological Association.
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2003). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods* (pp. 51–80). London: Sage Publications Ltd.