

## Abstract

The ability to infer affective states is often key to success in communication. The sound cues present in speech, used by listeners for this purpose, are generally summarized under the term of affective prosody and pitch range is considered one of its most often studied acoustic correlates. Children's sensitivity to prosody seems to become inhibited around the preschool years. Certain studies report that children begin to make use of prosody again when they are around 9 years old. The goal of the present paper was to test these findings on young speakers of Czech and verify the general assumption, as many studies did, that affective valence corresponds with the value of width of pitch range. (eg. „happy“ correlates with a wide range). The material for the experiment consisted of recordings of 8 sentences uttered by 2 speakers. The pitch range of these utterances was manipulated - expanded and narrowed. A perception experiment was carried out with 18 preschoolers and 20 school children. The respondents judged pairs of speaker utterances, one of which had an expanded range and the other a narrowed range. The children's task was to decide, which speaker „sounds happier“ or which „sounds sadder“ and reflect this choice by placing each speaker on an affective scale: negative - middle ground - positive. Apart from testing the development of children's sensitivity to affective prosody, the main hypothesis was, that utterances with wide range would be judged more often as „more positive“ and utterances with narrow range judged more often as „more negative“. The results show a significant change in development of children's perception of affective prosody. Apart from this, a significant tendency to judge the utterances of the female speaker with expanded range as more positive and the utterances of the male speaker with narrowed range as more negative was found, when they are considered in relation to each other. These results correspond with past similar research findings and suggestions that pitch range is only one of many acoustical correlates of affective prosody

**Key words:** affective prosody – affective states – affective valence – pitch range – perception – speech acquisition