

Coarticulation is reduced in clear speech produced with protective face masks

1. Background

- Protective face masks degrade speech signal and impair speech intelligibility [1, 2].
- Listener-oriented hyperarticulated clear speech** [3] improves intelligibility and memory in noise even when produced with face masks [4]–[7].
 - The clear speech intelligibility benefit is larger for a native compared to a non-native speaker [6].
- Coarticulation**, or overlap between articulatory gestures, is reduced in hyperarticulated clear speech.
 - Evidence from CV coarticulation in clear speech produced without face masks [8, 9].

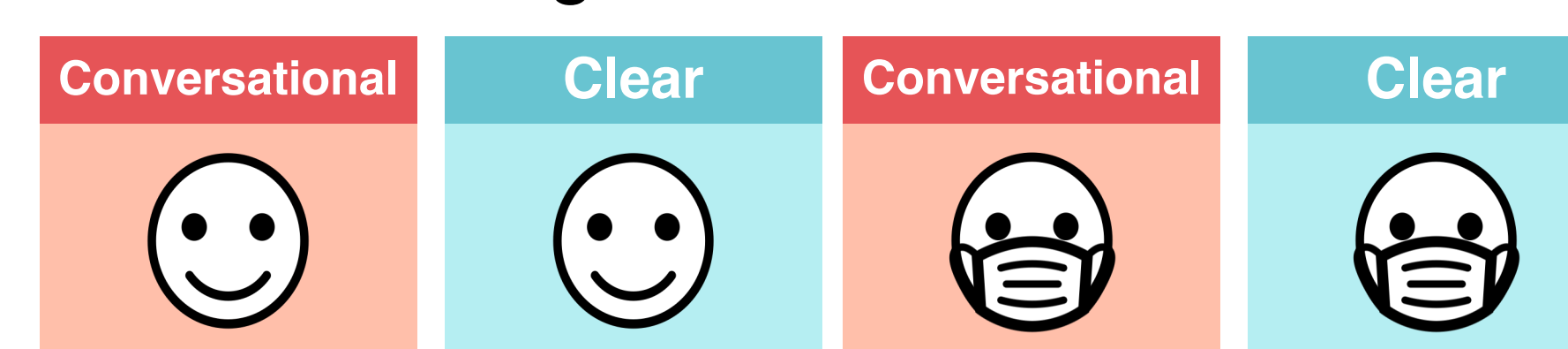
2. Research Questions

- Is coarticulatory resistance different for clear speech produced with a mask than without a mask?
- Does coarticulatory resistance in hyperarticulated clear speech differ for native and non-native speakers?

3. Methods

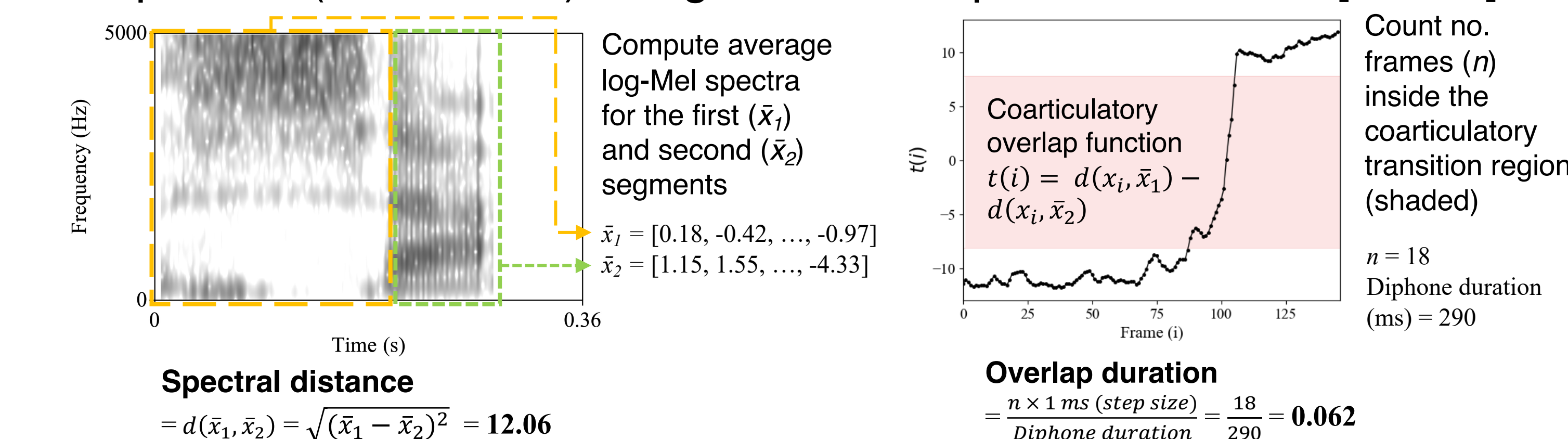
Speech corpus

- Audio recordings from Smiljanic et al (2021) Toucan Audio-Visual Corpus [6].
- Forty-five sentences from a textbook essay about toucans [10].
 - E.g., *There are approximately forty Toucan species indigenous to tropical America.*
- Read by one native and one non-native American English speaker in clear and conversational speaking styles with and without a surgical mask:



Coarticulation analysis

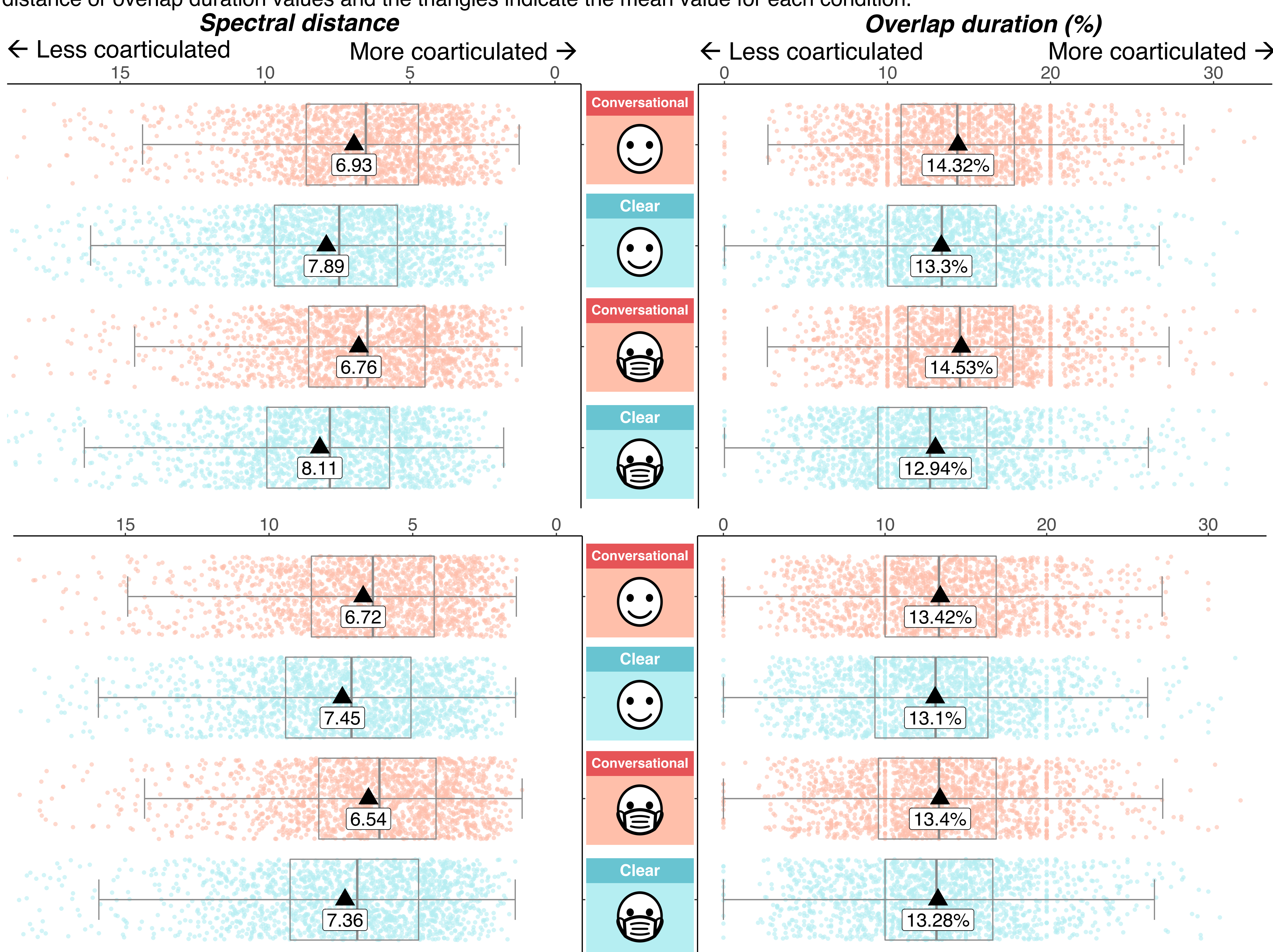
- Spectral and temporal measures of coarticulation for word-internal diphones ($N = 13,594$) using the whole-spectrum method [11, 12].



- Larger spectral distance or smaller overlap duration = less coarticulated
- Analyzed separately for each speaker with Bayesian hierarchical modeling [13]: $\text{measure} \sim \text{Style} * \text{Mask} + (\text{Style} * \text{Mask} | \text{diphone})$

4. Results

Fig 1. Results for the two whole-spectrum measures of coarticulation: 1) Spectral distances (left) and 2) overlap durations (right) for the native (top row) and non-native (bottom row) speakers. Each row shows results for the two mask conditions (mask-on, mask-off) and two speaking styles (clear, conversational). The dots represent individual spectral distance or overlap duration values and the triangles indicate the mean value for each condition.



Native speaker

- Clear speech was less coarticulated than conversational speech.
- Coarticulatory resistance was greater for clear speech produced with a mask than for speech produced without a mask.
 - No sig. main effect of Mask
- Same patterns for both spectral measures

Non-native speaker

- Clear speech was less coarticulated than conversational speech.
- No sig. main effect of Mask
- No sig. Style x Mask interaction
- Same patterns for both spectral measures

5. Discussion

- Compared to conversational speech, hyperarticulated clear speech showed coarticulatory resistance [8, 9].
- Speaking with a mask did not automatically induce coarticulatory resistance: conversational speech with a mask did not differ from conversational speech without a mask.
 - Even though masks attenuate high-frequencies [1, 2].
 - But they do not affect measures such as segment duration, vowel formants, etc. [5].
- Coarticulatory resistance was adaptively reinforced in clear speech produced with a face mask.
 - Only by the speaker with more extensive experience with the target language.
- Consistent with the larger perception-in-noise benefit for masked clear speech for the native compared to the non-native speaker [6].
- The results are consistent with H&H theory [3]: speech produced in response to a communicative barrier shows coarticulatory resistance relative to speech in the absence of such barriers.
 - Speakers vary coarticulatory patterns in clear speech in a graded fashion depending on the specific communicative challenges (e.g., when speaking with a face mask or imagining perceptual difficulty on the part of the listener).

References

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