

Generative theories in language and music descriptions*

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Abstract

The style of a set of Swedish nursery tunes is described in terms of a generative rule system. A generative rule system producing melodically similar versions of an old Swedish folk song is also presented. Examples of melodies generated by these two rule systems are given.

Both these rule systems are similar in several respects. Thus, the marking of the hierarchical constituent structure seems to be one of the important principles in composing simple melodies.

The rule systems also show a number of similarities with the Chomsky & Halle (1968) generative phonology of English. For instance, the procedures used for deriving a stress contour from a tree diagram are almost identical. Moreover, in sentences as in melodies this stress, or prominence contour is of decisive importance to the generation of the surface structure, such as meter, harmony, and sequences of pitches. It is believed that such parallels between language and music reflect characteristics of man's perceptual and cognitive capacities.

Introduction

Traditionally, music theory works with impressionistic, non-formalizing methods. In describing musical styles, musicologists generally content themselves with mentioning the more remarkable and apparent stylistic features, while other features which are taken as self-evident are considered as not worth mentioning and disregarded. A similar attitude was

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