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# **The Speech rhythm of bilinguals – a case study on Italian and Croatian**

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Rhythm metrics are algorithms that serve to analyze speech based on vocalic and consonantal intervals. They were primarily developed to confirm the existence of three distinct rhythmic language classes i.e. syllable-timed, stress-timed and mora (see Ramus et al. 1999, Grabe & Low 2002, Dellwo 2006, White & Mattys 2007). Although this new approach has been successfully put to use furthering our understanding of many facets of natural languages, rhythm in bilingual speech is still poorly understood. A notable exception can be found in the works of Schmid and Dellwo (2012, 2013) who suggest that bilingual speech can exhibit either "native" or "intermediate" characteristics. In order to test this hypothesis, I conducted an experiment featuring 8 Italian-Croatian bilinguals from Istria, applying a series of rhythm metrics and prosodic indexes (e.g. articulation rate [AR] and speech rate [SR]) to a corpus of read speech. The results only partially confirm both the hypotheses: The bilinguals exhibit native (i.e. monolingual-like) values when reading in Italian, but intermediate values when reading in Croatian. Moreover, AR and SR indices indicate that bilingual speech has its own characteristics - both AR and SR are lower in bilingual speech than in monolingual speech. This research sheds new light on the rhythmic properties of bilingual speech, showing that bilingual speech is more complex than initially assumed.