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### PARLAMETRICS Download the .pdf

**Parlometrics is a comparative study of conversational style** undertaken during 1971 and 1972 by Alan Lomax with Norman Markel, Norman Berkowitz, Dorothy Deng, and Carol Kullig. It is concerned with how people talk — with the style rather than the substance of spoken communication. Like Cantometrics and Choreometrics this study focused on meta-communications in relation to culturally shared domains of behavior and interaction, which operate largely at the unthinking or unconscious level.

Culture should be understood not merely as an unknowable "web of significance" in the Geertzian sense but also as a stream of particular behaviors, which themselves engender meaning and values. In communication terms, it is anchored in common ways of handling space, force, timing, dominance, sequence, and gender. In speech, Lomax noted, "such shared patterns of identification enable culture members to calibrate and synchronize their behavior, thus ensuring the success of verbal interchange and cooperative action. They form the warp of communication through which the web of particular relationships, acts, and interchanges is woven." Parlometrics considered language from the perspective of living speech, as a social act regulated by trans-generationally inherited and socially transmitted conventions. Its premise was that identifying such codes, tracing their variability across many cultures, and observing their co-variation with cultural indicators would provide the key to their interpretation.

Parlometrics was directly inspired by the pioneering research on communications theory and paralanguage by Edward Hall (1959, 1963), George L. Trager (1958), and Raymond Birdwhistell (1952, 1970), building directly upon Trager and Henry Lee Smith's work on vocal qualities and extra-linguistic vocalizations (1951), and Charles F. Hockett et al (1960) on speech rate, register, volume, and tone quality, as well as pauses, hems, haws, sighs, gasps, coughs and throat-clearings. The overall approach was indebted to the interaction studies of Conrad Arensberg and Eliot Chapple (1940, 1972), which attempted to decipher human behavior through the discrimination, measurement, and sequencing of interpersonal interactions. Prior linguistic research by Lomax, Edith Trager Johnson, and Fred C. Peng on the phonotactics of folk song (1964, 1973) was a source of ideas, as was Cantometrics, upon which the research design of Parlometrics was based.

The Human Relations Area Files classification of languages, which was based on George P. Murdock's *Outline of World Cultures*, 5th rev. ed. (1975), and *Outline of Cultural Materials* (1960), 4th ed., and on the work of Joseph Greenberg and Carl Voegelin, guided the selection of a sample representative of the world's language families. The United Nations lent its cooperation to the project in gathering recordings of speech, as did individual linguists, anthropologists, and other scholars. Consisting of 156 languages, a number of which are endangered, the sample was examined for paralinguistic features that varied across cultures. A standardized rating scheme was tested and applied to upwards of three 2–5-minute stretches of natural dialogues and monologues from each language. The data were factor-analyzed into geographic and stylistic clusters, and were then evaluated against the same societal variables that had been used in Cantometrics. As in the cases of Cantometrics and Choreometrics, the analysis produced a number of interesting hypotheses, as well as quite similar results.

At the time the Parlometrics sample was gathered, there were no existing libraries of recorded speech representative of the world or even of world regions. The Parlometrics Collection contains 150 hours of recordings, a number of which are of endangered languages or languages now extinct. In 2005 the collection was digitized and preserved by the [Rosetta Project](#), a global collaboration of language specialists and native speakers.

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