EE E6820: Speech & Audio Processing & Recognition

Lecture 9: Speech Recognition: Front Ends

1. **Recognizing Speech**
2. **Feature Calculation**

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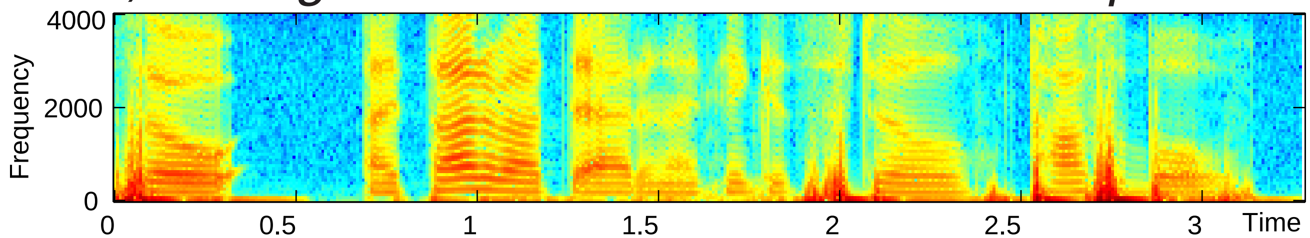
1 Recognizing Speech

"So, I thought about that and I think it's still possible"



- **What kind of information might we want from the speech signal?**
  - words
  - phrasing, 'speech acts' (prosody)
  - mood / emotion
  - speaker identity
- **What kind of processing do we need to get at that information?**
  - time scale of feature extraction
  - signal aspects to capture in features
  - signal aspects to *exclude* from features

Speech recognition as Transcription

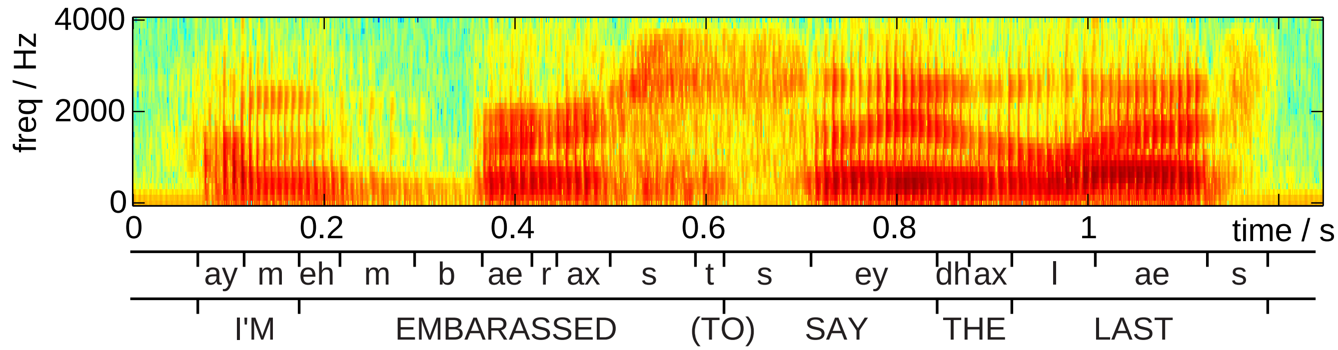
- **Transcription = “speech to text”**
  - find a word string to match the utterance
- **Best suited to small vocabulary tasks**
  - voice dialing, command & control etc.
- **Gives neat objective measure:
word error rate (WER) %**
  - can be a sensitive measure of performance
- **Three kinds of errors:**

Reference:	THE	CAT	SAT	ON	THE		MAT
Recognized:	–	CAT	SAT	AN	THE	A	MAT
	Deletion			*Substitution*		*Insertion*	

  - WER = (S + D + I) / N

Limitations of the Transcription paradigm

- **Starts to fall down with 'natural' speech**
  - some "words" may not even exist



- **Word transcripts do not capture everything**
  - speaker changes, intonation, phrasing
- **Word error rate treats all errors as equal**
  - small words ("of") counted as big words
  - small differences ("company's" → "companies") vs. larger ("held police" → "health plans")
- **Move towards other measures**
  - e.g. task-defined: was the *meaning* recognized?

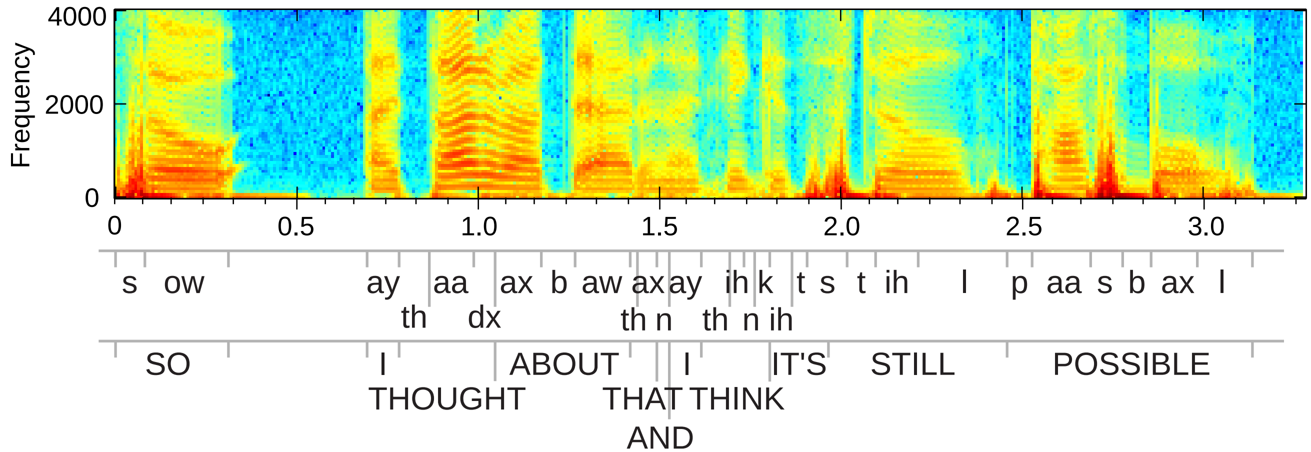
Why is Speech Recognition hard?

- **Why not match against a set of waveforms?**
  - waveforms are never (nearly!) the same twice
  - speakers minimize information/effort in speech
- **Speech variability comes from many sources:**
  - speaker-dependent (SD) recognizers must handle within-speaker variability
  - speaker-independent (SI) recognizers must also deal with variation between speakers
  - all recognizers are afflicted by background noise, variable channels

→ **Need recognition models that:**
  - generalize i.e. accept variations in a range, and
  - adapt i.e. 'tune in' to a particular variant

Within-speaker variability

- **Timing variation:**
  - word duration varies enormously



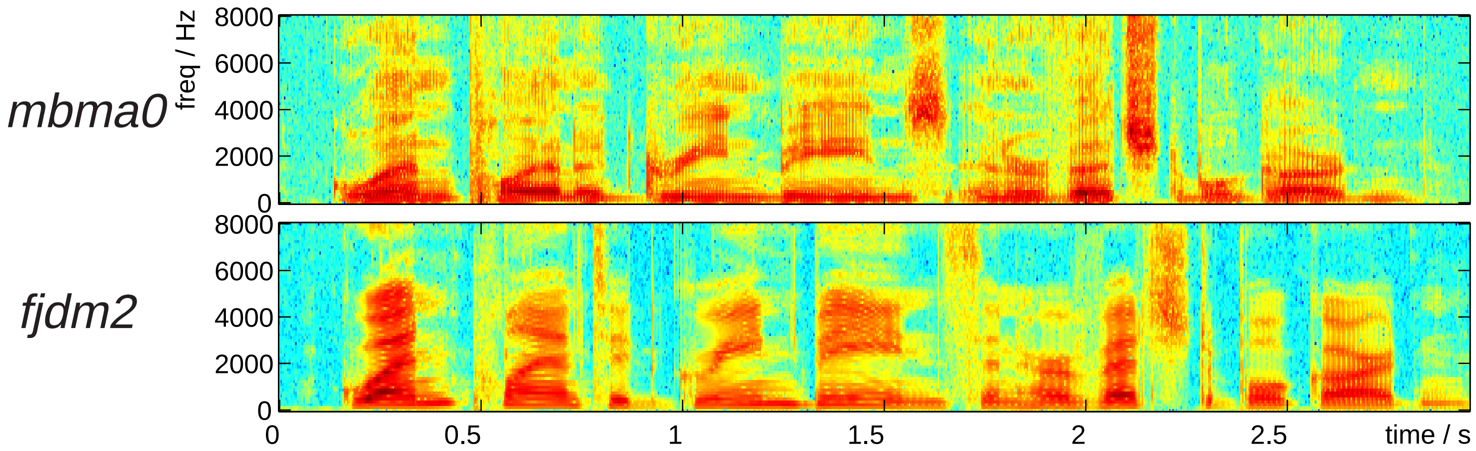
  - fast speech 'reduces' vowels

- **Speaking style variation:**
  - careful/casual articulation
  - soft/loud speech

- **Contextual effects:**
  - speech sounds vary with context, role:
    "How **do** you **do**?"

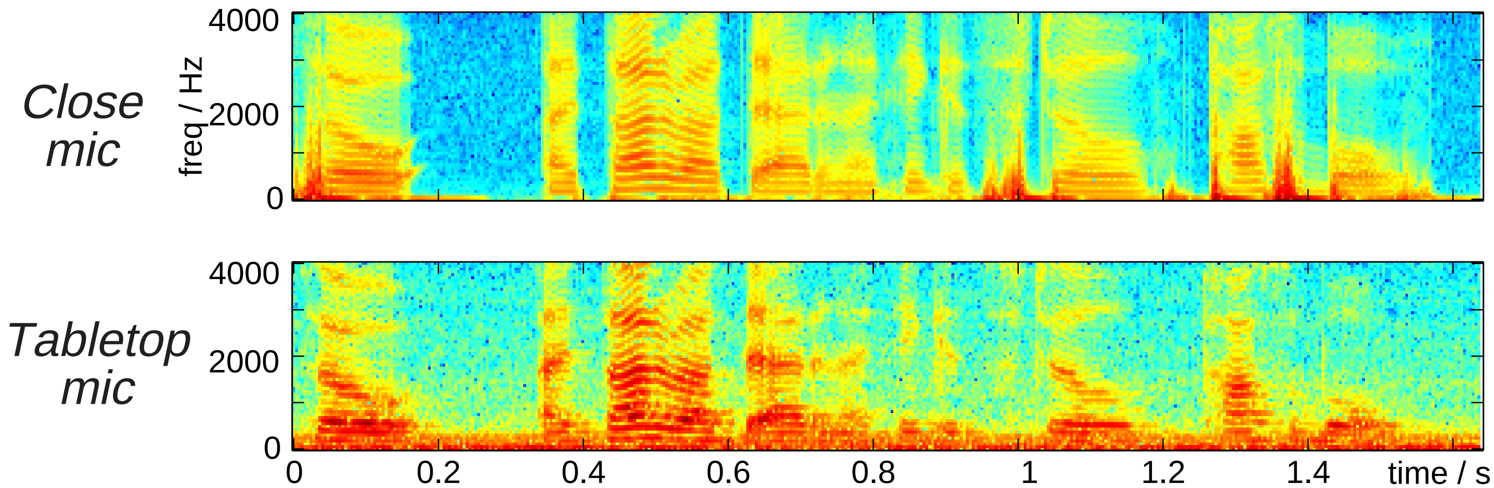
Between-speaker variability

- **Accent variation**
  - regional / mother tongue
- **Voice quality variation**
  - gender, age, huskiness, nasality
- **Individual characteristics**
  - mannerisms, speed, prosody



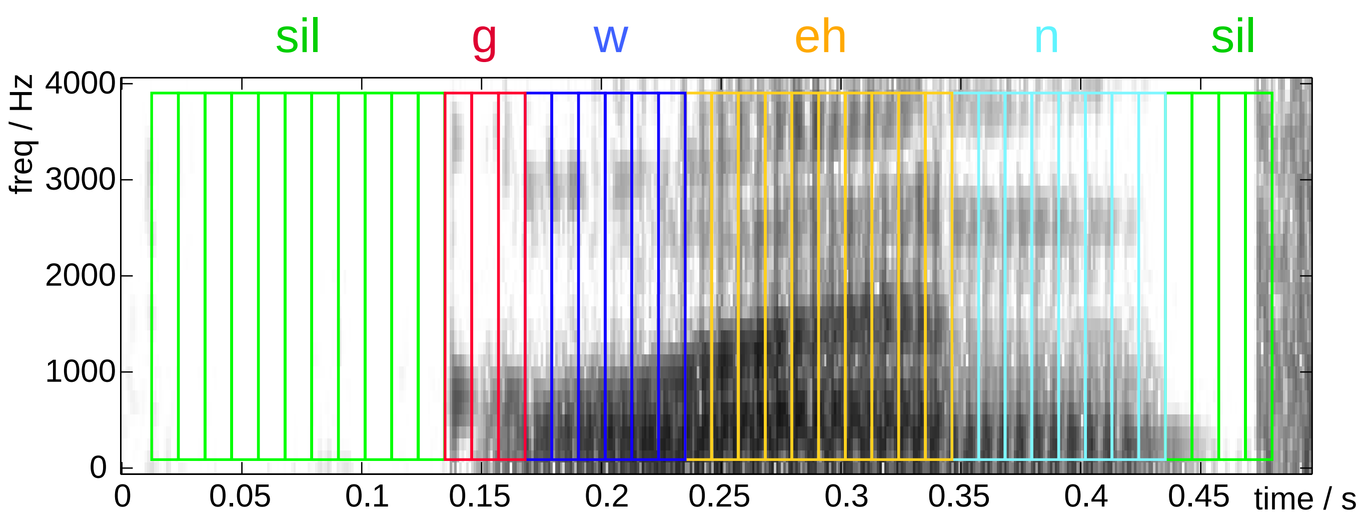
Environment variability

- **Background noise**
  - fans, cars, doors, papers
- **Reverberation**
  - 'boxiness' in recordings
- **Microphone channel**
  - huge effect on relative spectral gain



How to recognize speech?

- **Cross correlate templates?**
  - waveform?
  - spectrogram?
  - time-warp problems
- **Match short-segments & handle time-warp later**
  - model with slices of ~ 10 ms
  - pseudo-stationary model of words:



  - other sources of variation...

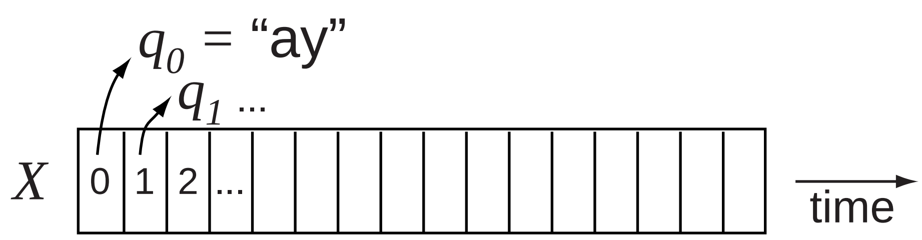
Which segments to use?

- **Assume words can be broken down into pseudo-stationary segments**
  - not a perfect fit, but worth a try
- **Linguists offer phonemes or phones**
  - phonemes are the minimal set needed to disambiguate words
  - phones are realizations of phonemes
- **Other possibilities:**
  - data-clustering techniques to define segments 'intrinsically'
  - lesson from synthesis: transitions as important or more important than steady portions?

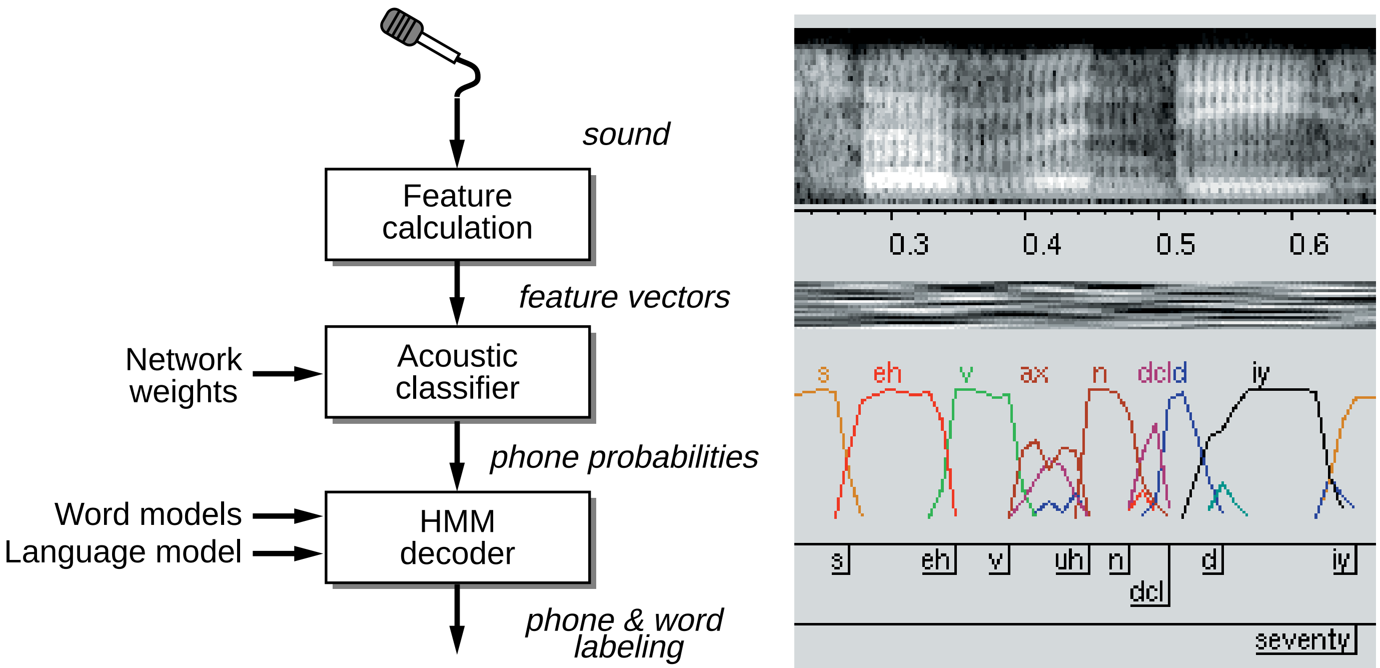
    ...but how to model?

Probabilistic formulation

- **Probability that segment label is correct**
  - gives standard form of speech recognizers:
- **Feature calculation**
  transforms signal into easily-classified domain
  $$s[n] \rightarrow X_m \qquad \left(m = \frac{n}{H}\right)$$
- **Acoustic classifier**
  calculates probabilities of each mutually-exclusive state q^i
  $$p(q^i \mid X)$$
- **'Finite state acceptor' (i.e. HMM)**
  $$\hat{Q} = \underset{\{q_0, q_1, \ldots q_L\}}{\operatorname{argmax}} p(q_0, q_1, \ldots q_L \mid X_0, X_1 \ldots X_L)$$
  MAP match of allowable sequence to probabilities:



Standard speech recognizer structure



- **Questions:**
  - what are the best features?
  - how do we do the acoustic classification?
  - how do we find/match the state sequence?

Outline

1. **Recognizing Speech**

2. **Feature Calculation**
   - Spectrogram, MFCCs & PLP
   - Improving robustness

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Feature Calculation

- **Goal: Find a representational space most suitable for classification**
  - waveform: voluminous, redundant, variable
  - spectrogram: better, still quite variable
  - ...?
- **Pattern Recognition: Representation is upper bound on performance**
  - maybe we *should* use the waveform...
  - or, maybe the representation can do *all* the work
- **Feature calculation is intimately bound to classifier**
  - pragmatic strengths and weaknesses
- **Features develop by slow evolution**
  - current choices more historical than principled

Desired characteristics for features

- **Provide the 'right' information**
  - extract signal information for classification task
  - suppress irrelevant information
- **Be compatible with acoustic classifier**
  - relatively low dimensionality
  - uncorrelated dimensions?
- **Be practical**
  - applicable in 'all' circumstances
  - relatively inexpensive to compute
- **Be robust**
  - so far as possible, exclude nonspeech information

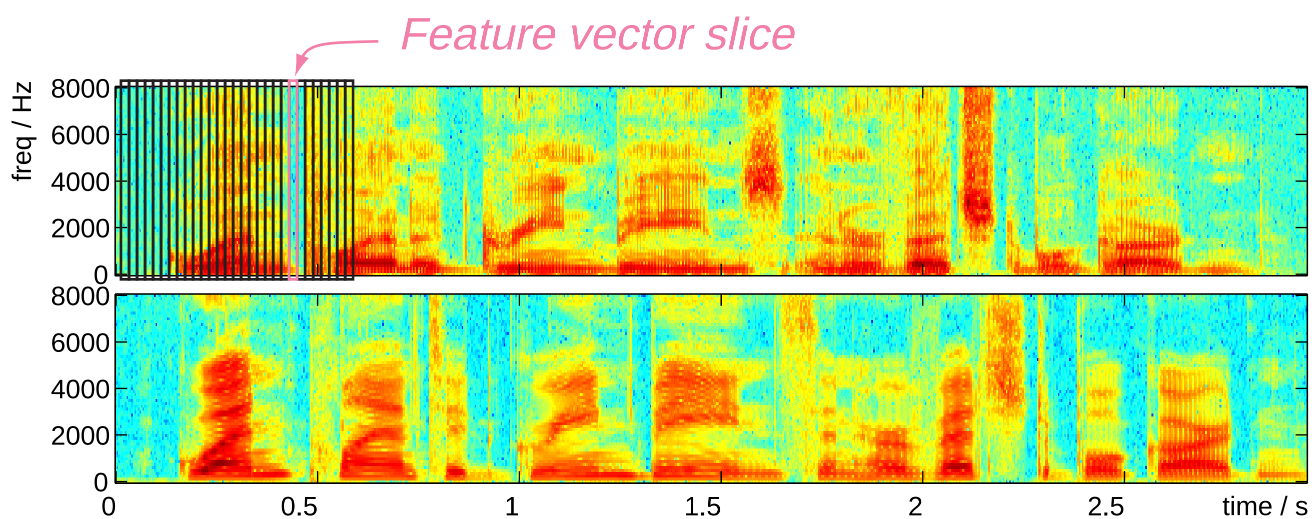
→ **How to evaluate features?**
  - normally: just put them in a recognizer

Features (1): Spectrogram

- **Plain STFT as features e.g.**

$$X_m[k] = S[mH, k] = \sum_n s[n + mH] \cdot w[n] \cdot e^{-(j2\pi kn)/N}$$

- **Consider examples:**



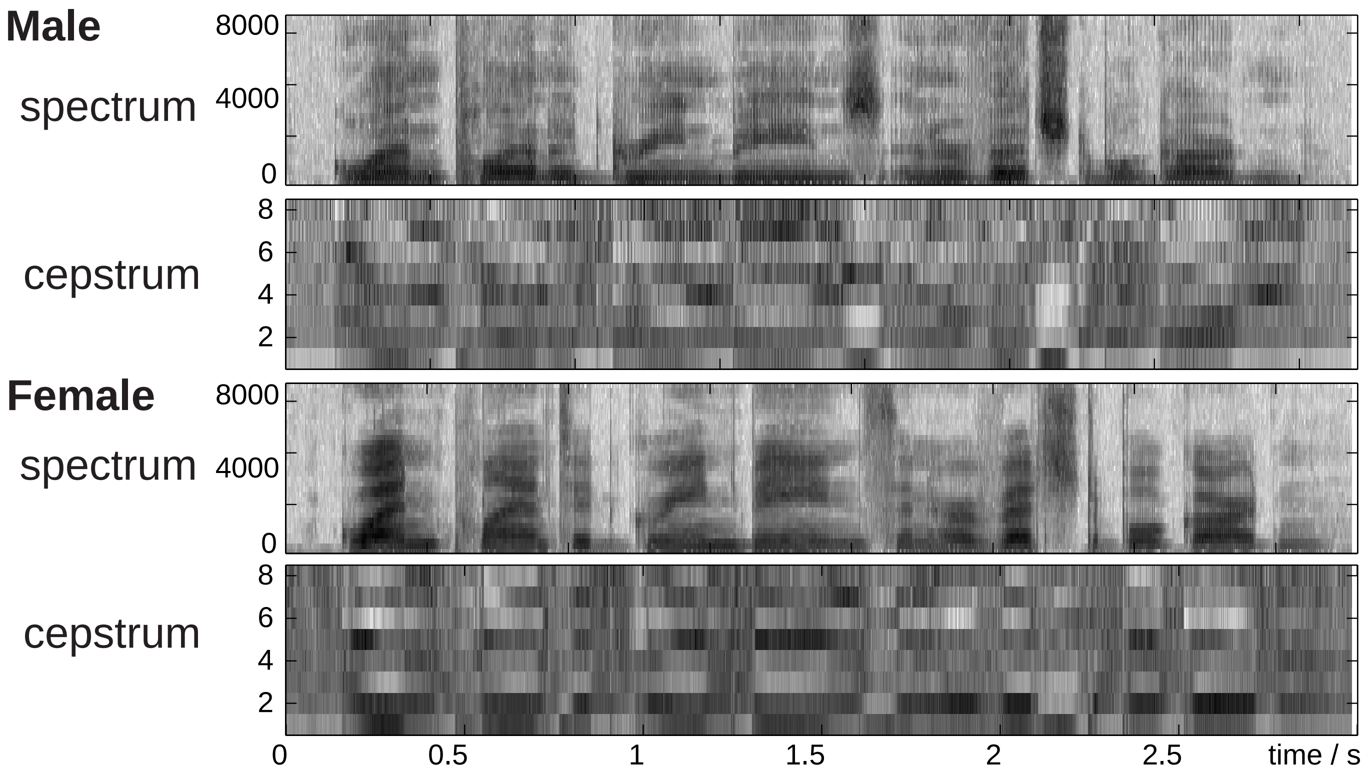
- **Similarities between corresponding segments**
  - but still large differences

Features (2): Cepstrum

- **Idea: Decorrelate, summarize spectral slices:**

$$X_m[l] = IDFT\{\log|S[mH, k]|\}$$

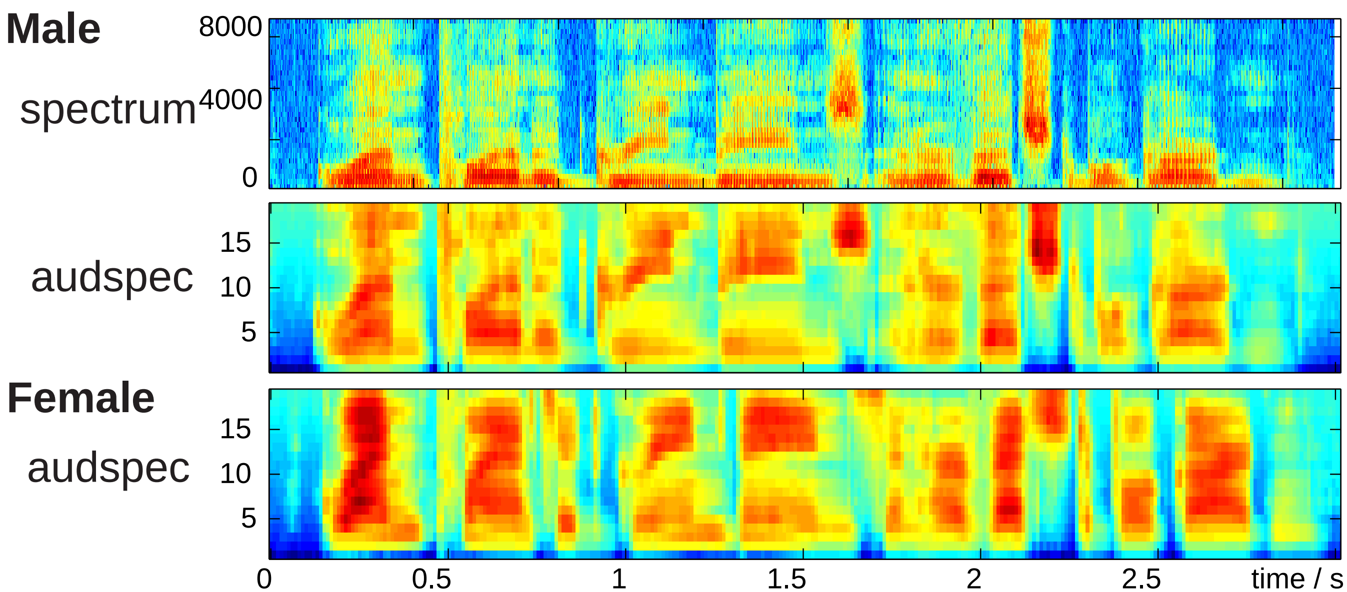
  - good for Gaussian models
  - greatly reduce feature dimension



Features (3): Frequency axis warp

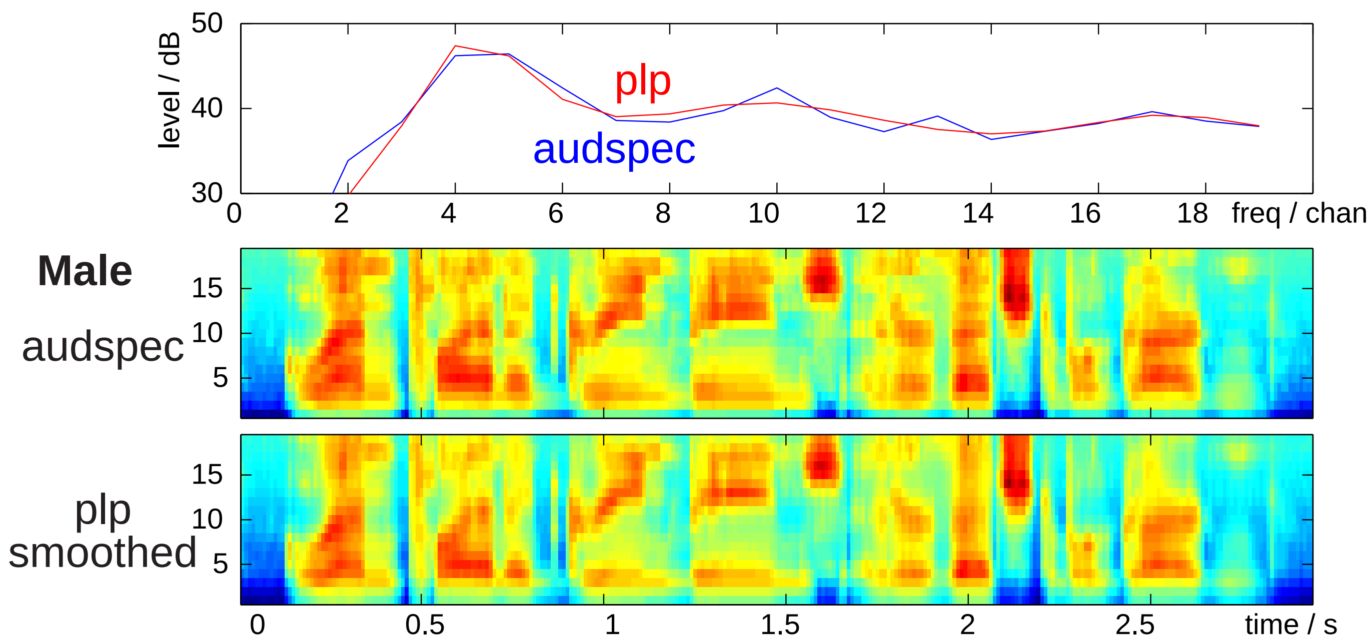
- **Linear frequency axis gives equal 'space' to 0-1 kHz and 3-4 kHz**
  - but perceptual importance very different
- **Warp frequency axis closer to perceptual axis:**
  - mel, Bark, constant-Q ...

$$X[c] = \sum_{k = l_c}^{u_c} |S[k]|^2$$



Features (4): Spectral smoothing

- **Generalizing across different speakers is helped by smoothing (i.e. *blurring*) spectrum**
- **Truncated cepstrum is one way:**
  - MSE approx to $\log|S[k]|$
- **LPC modeling is a little different:**
  - MSE approx to $|S[k]|$ $\rightarrow$ prefers detail at peaks



Features (5): Normalization along time

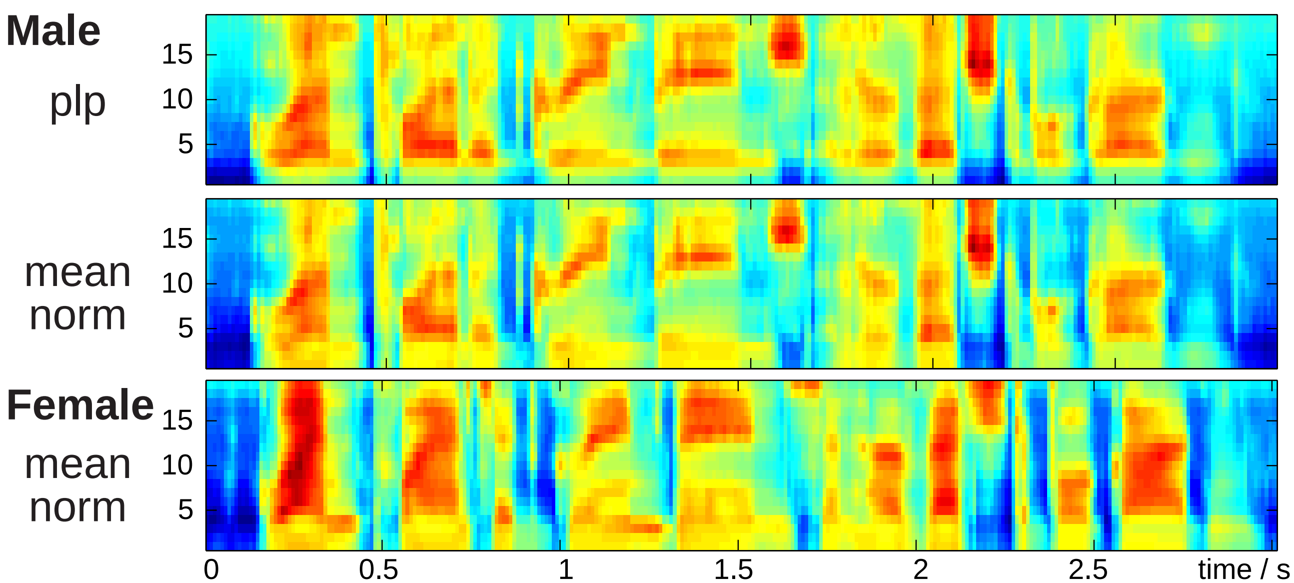
- **Idea: feature variations, not absolute level**
- **Hence: calculate average level & subtract it:**

$$X[k] = S[k] - \mathrm{mean}\{S[k]\}$$

- **Factors out fixed channel frequency response:**

$$s[n] = h[n] * e[n]$$

$$\log|S[k]| = \log|H[k]| + \log|E[k]|$$

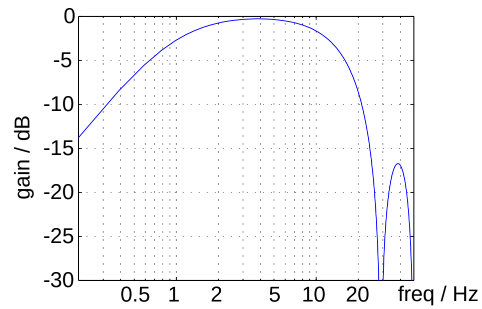


Features (6): RASTA filtering

- **Mean subtraction ≈ high-pass filtering along time in log-spectral domain**

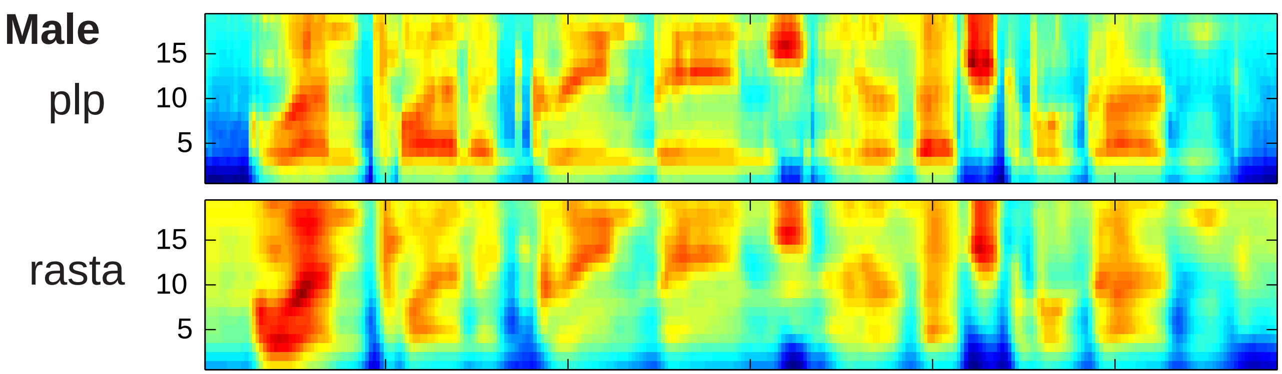
$$X[k] = S[k] - \mathbf{lpf}\{S[k]\}$$

- **+ smooth along time for more blurring**



→ **Bandpass filter in time**

- relates to 'modulation sensitivity' in hearing?

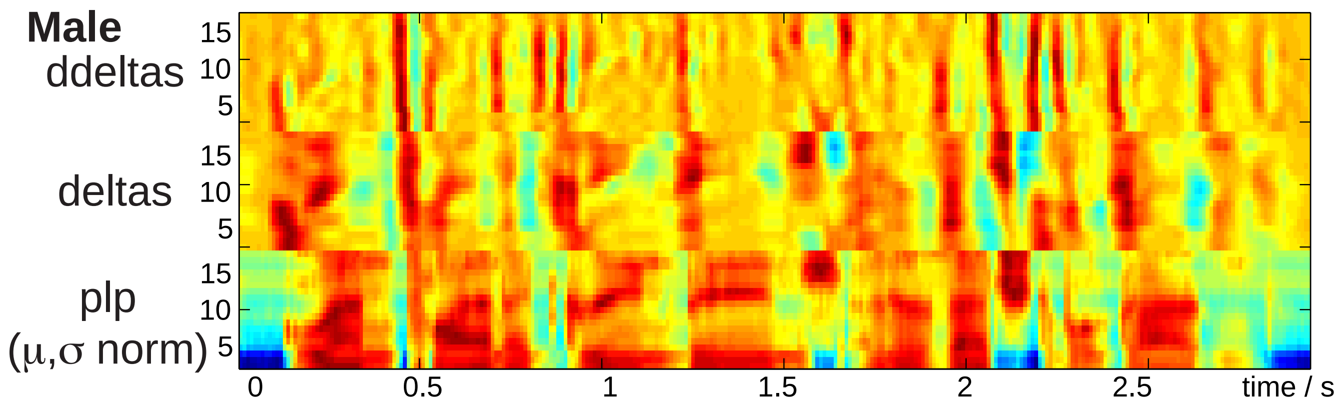


Delta features

- **Want each segment to have 'static' feature vals**
  - but some segments intrinsically dynamic!

  →calculate their derivatives - maybe steadier?

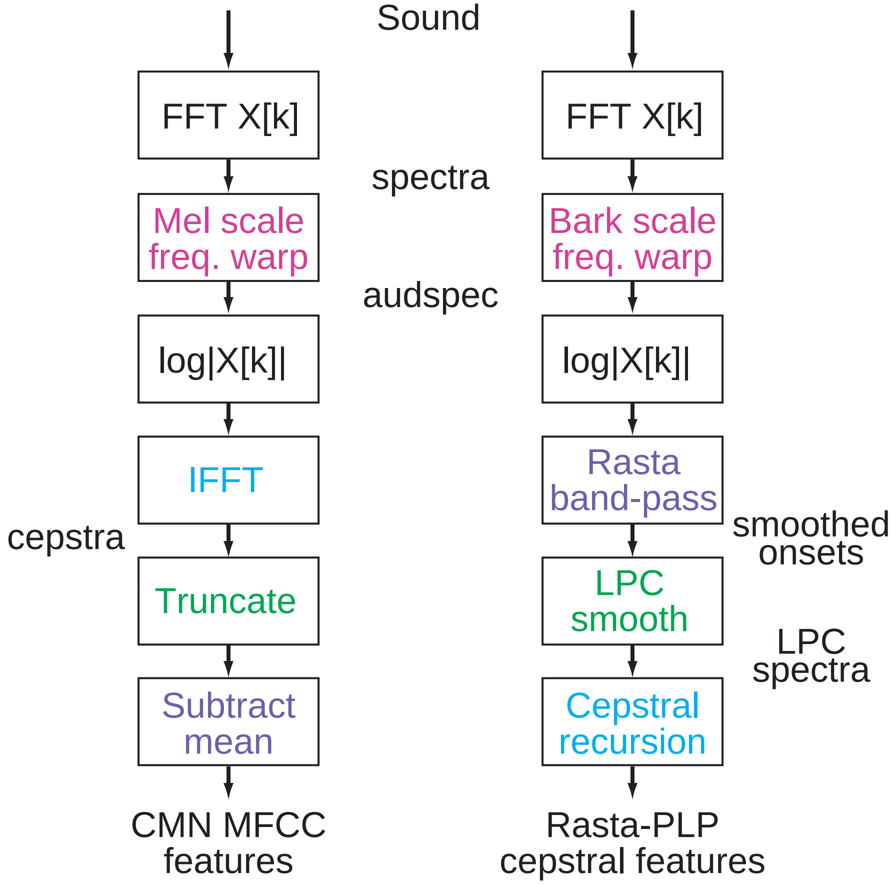
- **Append** dX/dt **(+** d^2X/dt^2**) to feature vectors**



- **Relates to onset sensitivity in humans?**

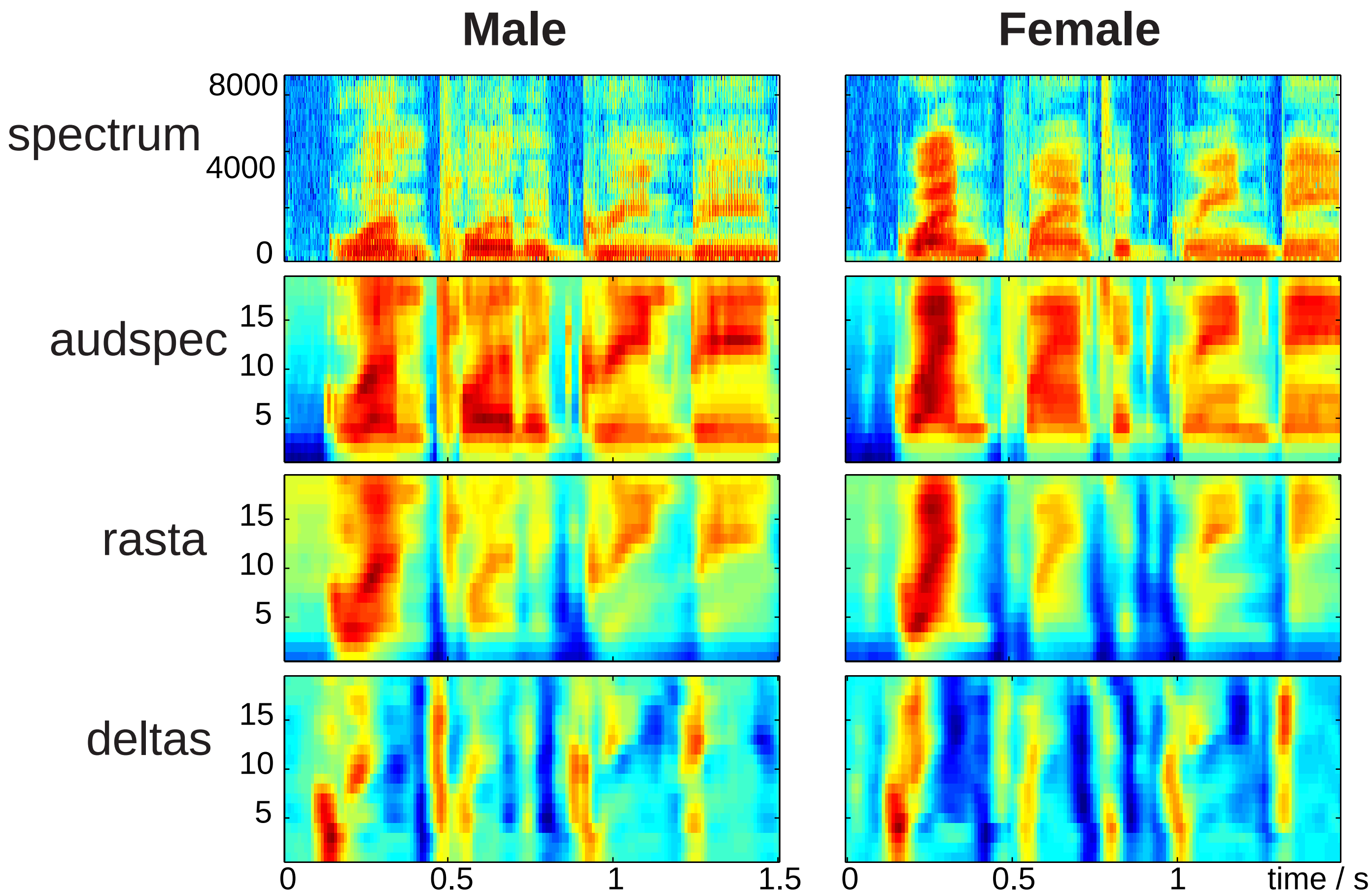
Overall feature calculation

- **MFCCs and/or RASTA-PLP**



- **Key attributes:**
  - spectral, auditory scale
  - decorrelation
  - smoothed (spectral) detail
  - normalization of levels

Features summary



- **Normalize same phones**
- **Contrast different phones**

Summary

- **Speech recognition as word transcription**
  - neat definition, but limited
  - hard because of variability
- **Feature calculation extracts information**
  - smoothed, decorrelated spectral parameters
  - long evolution to match classifiers

How to actually recognize feature sequences?