Tonotopic columns and cortical depth dependent modulations in human A1: preliminary results.

Federico De Martino^{1,2}, Michelle Moerel¹, Rainer Goebel¹, Kamil Ugurbil², Elia Formisano¹, and Essa Yacoub² ¹University of Maastricht, Maastricht, Netherlands, ²Center for Magnetic Resonance Research, Minneapolis, Minnesota, United States

TARGET AUDIENCE. High-resolution fMRI community. Auditory neuroscience.

PURPOSE. Columnar and layer specific modulations (by task manipulation) of fMRI activity in primary auditory cortex.

INTRODUCTION. Using high field high-resolution functional measurements in vivo, the columnar organization of striate and extra striate visual areas in

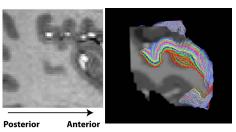
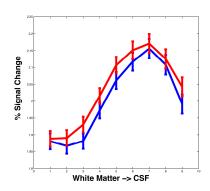
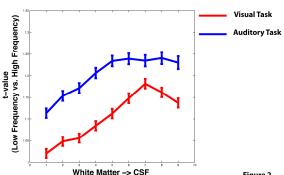


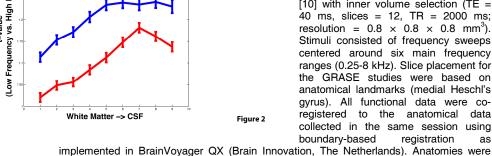
Figure 1

humans has been imaged [1-3]. Similarly, cortical depth dependent functional responses have been recorded from visual and motor areas of the human brain [4-7]. While a model of tonotopic columns in A1 has been proposed based on animal literature [8], direct evidence of such organization in humans is not available. Similarly, the role of different cortical layers to the formation of our auditory percept [8, 9] is still based on inferences from animal data. Here we report our preliminary results on the investigation of the vertical (i.e. columnar) and horizontal (cortical depth dependent) functional responses in human primary auditory cortex. We measured T_2 weighted (3D GRASE) [10] functional responses to frequency sweeps (arranged in six different frequency ranges) while the subject was performing either an auditory discrimination task or a visual discrimination task. Our preliminary results show that the medial portion of Heschl's gyrus is organized in tonotopic columns and that superficial layers are modulated by the increased feedback during the auditory discrimination task compared to the visual one.

MATERIAL AND METHODS. Measurements were performed at 7T (Siemens, Erlangen, Germany) using a using a custom 9 channel receive array and a separate open half-volume guadrature transmit coil. Our preliminary results are recorded from one healthy volunteer, the recording of additional sessions from other subjects is ongoing. T₁ and proton density weighted (3D-MPRAGE)







anatomical data were acquired and were used for segmentation [11] and cortical layer sampling [3]. Functional responses were measured with T2 weighted high-resolution 3D GRASE [10] with inner volume selection (TE = 40 ms, slices = 12, TR = 2000 ms; resolution = $0.8 \times 0.8 \times 0.8 \text{ mm}^3$). Stimuli consisted of frequency sweeps centered around six main frequency ranges (0.25-8 kHz). Slice placement for the GRASE studies were based on anatomical landmarks (medial Heschl's gyrus). All functional data were coregistered to the anatomical data collected in the same session using boundary-based registration

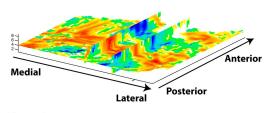


Figure 3

segmented to extract cortical depth dependent profiles (n = 9). Layer definition comprised of the computation of the distance of each voxel from the white/gray matter boundary and subsequent grid sampling as implemented in BrainVoyager QX. Figure 1 shows the resulting cortical grids. Functional data were analyzed with a standard General Linear Model and best frequency maps [12] were generated to measure the relative frequency preference voxel-by-voxel. The resulting functional maps were sampled at each cortical depth and used for the investigation of vertical and horizontal functional properties of the selected cortical region.

RESULTS. During both the auditory and visual task we observed significant (FDR; q < 0.05) responses to auditory stimuli in the imaged region. Across cortical depths the activation increased from the white/gray matter border, peaked at a relative depth of 30% (from the CSF) and decreased towards the CSF (Figure 2). When comparing the response

to low and high frequencies (t-scores), we observed a smaller difference between the two tasks at 30% cortical depth and an increased difference (with the auditory task showing higher t-scores) in deep and superficial layers (Figure 2). Visualizing the tonotopic map on the flattened anatomical 3D grids of the Heschl's gyrus revealed a clear vertical (columnar) arrangement of preferred frequency (figure 3).

DISCUSSION. The modulation of the difference between the functional response to low and high frequency tones in superficial gray matter (figure 2), highlights the possibility of measuring the effect that feed-forward (visual task) and feedback (auditory) information has on the functional properties of primary auditory cortex. Our preliminary results show that superficial layers are characterized by a better frequency specificity when subjects are attending to the acoustic properties of the stimuli. Furthermore, we have shown here that tonotopic maps in the human primary auditory cortex have a clear columnar arrangement.

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