Prosodic Characteristics of Semi-Spontaneous Speech

Просодичні особливості квазіспонтанного мовлення

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ABSTRACT

The present article analyses the idea of semi-spontaneous speech, comparing it to spontaneous and prepared types of speech; studies and describes the prosodic characteristics of semi-spontaneous speech, implemented in the genre of interview; studies the role of speaker's level of preparedness to the communication act in respect of prosodic speech behaviour and differentiates proportion of the preparedness in spontaneous, prepared and semi-spontaneous speech; distinguishes a specific genre of mass media discourse – «star interview», its structure and differential features, designating the role and functions of the interviewer in «speaker – interviewer – target mass audience» link. The studied material involves audio recordings of interviews with three popular British musicians: Phil Collins, Sting and George Michael. Separate monological statements taken from interviews were analyzed with a particular focus on prosodic characteristic, taking into consideration the matters under discussion, the speaker's wish to elaborate upon a theme or shunt the conversation on another topic. Auditorial and acoustic analyses covered the research of such prosodic parameters as: the nature of the intonational scale, terminal tone and pausation peculiarities in the speakers' speech. The central focus of the present research is on differentiation elements that characterize semi-spontaneous speech. The article describes essential aspects that have influence over the main prosodic characteristics of oral speech:

experience in public speaking, individual characteristics of the speaker, physical and mental state, awareness of the topic discussed, desire to cover particular issues.

Introduction

Current research in sociolinguistics is aimed at studying language socialization, including a set of factors that regulate the realization of oral communication. Language socialization is based upon a methodological and theoretical framework that provides insights into dynamic shifting processes involving speakers and cultures, the process of their socialization into and through the language (Duff 2010; Morita, 2000; Ochs, 2012). Sociolinguistic analysis of the pronunciation characteristics of speech, considering social factors, gives linguists the opportunity to identify features of speech production in different communicative situations and appropriate repertoire of pronunciation styles; to consider and generalize the features of literary, colloquial, dialectal and other linguistic forms of speech of various social groups' representatives; to identify a set of differential marks that distinguish the speech of representatives of one social group from another (sociolect); to determine the speech variation of male and female within one or more social dialects; to establish dynamic features of the language variability at the pronunciation level within one idiolect during a long period of time (Galyashina, 2003).

The aim of the present article is to analyze semi-spontaneous speech by describing its prosodic characteristics in the genre of interview, and to compare semi-prepared speech with spontaneous, prepared and quasi-spontaneous speech. In particular, the present paper focuses upon intonation, terminal tones, and pauses in semi-prepared speech. The materials involve audio recordings of interviews with such famous British musicians as Phil Collins, Sting, and George Michael, respectively. The research methods involve acoustic analysis by computer program PRAAT 5.3.8 (Weenink and Boersma, 2012), and an auditorial perceptive analysis of separate speakers' statements.

Theoretical Background

Previous research indicates that a significant number of extralinguistic variables affect implementation of oral speech indifferent communicative situations (Galyashina, 2003). For instance, these variables are the relationship between the speaker and the listener, time factor, external conditions, speaker's and interviewer's intentions etc. One of the most important variables influencing the prosodic features of speech is the level of its preparedness. For example,

Galyashina (2003) suggests the following scale of spontaneity of speech: 1) spontaneous speech (spontaneous dialogue, spontaneous monologue); 2) semi-spontaneous speech (interview, story on a given topic, reproduction of someone else's speech, deliberate speech according to a pre-compiled plan, stereotyped speech on a template text); prepared speech (retelling and reading aloud) (Galyashina, 2003).

Semi-spontaneous and spontaneous types of speech are of particular interest, since the speakers most often resort to their favorite speech patterns, whereas the process of reading is influenced by graphs, reading techniques, the speaker's familiarity with the text, visual acuity, illumination, and other extra-linguistic factors. Physical variables in the semi-spontaneous speech are of less importance, however psycho-emotional variables are significant.

Spontaneous speech due to its unpreparedness and situational conditioning is characterized by a number of distinctive features, which to a certain extent can be regarded as deviations from the norms of prepared speech. One of the characteristics of spontaneous and quasi-spontaneous conversational speech is affectivity or emotional intensity. Previous research indicates that emotionality refers to «the expression of feelings, moods, subjective relationships» (Ahmanova, 2004: 211). However, Brandes (2004) suggests that emotionality in casual speech involves a complex synthesis of different types of emotions that arise as a result of specific and detailed content, emotional-evaluative coloring, subjective coloring of different nature and visual images (Brandes, 2004).

Previous research literature is suggestive of the following variables involved in semi-prepared speech, 1) uneven pausing; 2) uneven compression of the content of the utterance, elision at all levels; 3) compression and redundancy, commitment to stereotyping, the use of speech clichés on the one hand, and individual manner on the other; 4) the phenomenon of «non-grammaticality» (inconsistency, use of voids fillers, self-interrupting, correction of utterance under the influence of feedback) (Duff, 2010).

As far as the present research is concerned, it is important to determine the main difference between semi-spontaneous and spontaneous speech. One of the main differences is a certain proportion of the preparedness of semi-spontaneous speech act, since the act of communication in this case is often planned in advance and is aimed not only at the direct participants of communication, but also at a certain audience. The semi-spontaneous speech may involve unprepared speech, but pronounced on a predictable and well-known for the speaker topic.

The present research is focused on semi-spontaneous speech, realized in the genre of the interview. Modern interview studies are characterized by a complex nature and involvement of several disciplines, such as

psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, stylistics, communicative linguistics, etc. Such a broad spectrum of research is quite reasonable, since the genre of the interview is of a specific communicative and cognitive nature, playing an important role in human speech activity, and is undoubtedly effectively used in foreign languages teaching.

There exist different definitions and interpretations of the word «interview». One of them is «a conversation, in most cases with a well-known person, on a certain topic or about the interviewee, which is broadcast on the radio or television or printed in the press» (Duden, 2010: 604).

Currently, there are two approaches towards the genre of interview. In particular, according to one approach, interviews are regarded as a dialogue. In another approach, however, they are seen as a set of monologue utterances by the speaker. Soboleva (2010) notes that the features of interview as a form of communication act give grounds to define it as a «monologised dialogue». The interview is characterized by comprehensive utterances, by the completeness of the topics discussed, and the formulation of the conclusions of the informant (Soboleva, 2010). This concept is of current concern for our work, since the implementation of the interview, despite the presence of an interviewer, is aimed primarily at a mass audience of listeners.

The above-mentioned notion is supported by other linguists who indicate that the interview can not belong directly to the dialogic genre of speech, since the possibility of sharing role functions is too limited and the micro-texts of the interview tend to be auto-semantic (Syresina, 2013). Consequently, the peculiarities of the structural and semantic organization of the interviews allow to define it as a special type of speech text with peculiar role relations codification, which are reflected in its compositional structure.

Syresina (2013) shares a similar opinion, pointing out that regardless of the type of genre, each text involves dialogical and monological components that can dominate alternately on certain fragments. The respondent's complex of responses is organized by a multitude of monologues in which the speaker's position manifests itself. The set of interviewer's questions is considered as a hidden monologue that implements a certain strategy. Depending on the strategy, the interviewer asks questions and sets a goal to build a model for the development of dialogue. Thus, despite the dominance of the monologue in the interview, there is a hidden dialogue and a direct clash of opinions of the interlocutors (Syresina, 2013: 51).

The interview, as a special communicative act, provides complex connection between the interviewer, speaker and potential listener. An important sign of the actualization of television and radio interviews is the existence of a form of dialogue, which illustrates the development of thought, while the content of this thought reaches the potential audience in its physical reality.

Accordingly, the factor of presence of the listener/viewer has a strong influence on the speech of interview participants. The message of the conversation is not the only important thing for radio and television interviews, it is also important what prosodic models the informant uses, how quickly he reacts to changing situations (Lukina, 2003).

As for communicative aspect, the interview has specific properties, such as the spontaneity of the reactions, the connection of the standard and the expression, the absence of direct feedback from the audience, the quasi-spontaneous nature of the speech, the presence of direct contact with the listener-interviewer, and the lack of professional oratorical skills of the participants in communication.

The present research is focused on a special type of interview, which can be defined as «star interview». It is a genre of mass media discourse, where information operations are carried out in the «interviewer-interviewee-audience» chain. The task of the interviewer is to get as much information about the «star» as possible. The goal is achieved by asking a large number of personal questions. This explains the fact that «star» interviews in most cases are less informative in the socio-political aspect. It should be mentioned that «star» interview is a type of improvised conversation. The interviewer then follows the respondent's answers, his questions arise spontaneously in the course of the conversation. However, while preparing for the interview, the interviewer outlines a certain range of topics that are discussed in the form of an improvised conversation. The interviewer acts as intermediary between the speaker and the target mass audience.

The present article involves prosodic peculiarities of semi-spontaneous speech within the genre of interview. The most important function of prosody is the division of the speech stream into its components and their integration into a single whole. Such prosodic organization of oral speech ensures the success of communicative act, allowing the speaker to transmit a message and the recipient – to adequately perceive it. The subject of discussion is an important factor in the choice of prosodic means as it can influence an individual prosodic behaviour of the speaker. Individual prosodic behavior can be demonstrated by pausing, tonal modifications, loudness, speech tempo, as well as by individual ways of accentuation of key words, semantic centers.

The present study

The auditory analysis in the present study was carried out by three experienced lecturers of English department nr2 of the National University «Odesa Maritime Academy». The analysis involved such prosodic parameters as the character of the intonation scale, terminal tone and pausing peculiarities of the informants' speech. The acoustic analysis was conducted by computer

program PRAAT 5.3.8 (Boersma & Weenink, 2012) that facilitated acoustic analysis by means of intonograms, automatically registered by the computer program PRAAT. The informants were represented by famous British singers Phil Collins, Sting, and George Michael. Separate monological statements taken from interviews were analyzed.

Pausing peculiarities play a special role in the rhythmic organization of public speech. A pause in public speech can be used as a rhetorical device, imitating unprepared speech and also as a means of attracting listener's attention to the key message of the statement or to a particular idea (Gussenhoven, 2004). Special attention should be paid to hesitation pauses that are represented as an integral part of speech production. Constant control over own speech provides its clear rhythmic organization. Particularly, it is demonstrated in the character of syntagmatic division (tendency to a measured, precise in terms of periodicity and duration division of the speech stream into syntagmas), as well as in the pausing peculiarities. Semi-spontaneous speech cannot be constantly controlled that way due to lack of preparedness and potential unexpected questions form the interviewer.

As far as pauses are concerned, pause durations are thought of as an essential criterion for their classification. It is worth noting that pause duration is of particular importance in spontaneous and semi-spontaneous speech. It depends on many variables, such as complexity and style of the statement, individual manner of the speaker, relations between the speaker and interviewer etc. In the present research, we suggest the following pause gradation:

Extra-long – more than 2000 milliseconds (|||||)
Long – 500 – 2000 ms (||||)
Medium – 300 – 500 ms (|||)
Short – 100 – 300 ms (||)
Extra-short – up to 100 ms (|)

Results and Discussion

The results of the analysis of the present corpus have been summarized in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Duration of pauses in speakers' speech (%)

Speaker	Extra-long Pauses	Long Pauses (mec)	Medium Pauses	Short Pauses	Extra-short Pauses	Total, %
George Michael	11	26	23	23	17	100
Phil Collins	12	24	26	26	14	100
Sting	15	19	30	27	9	100

Pausing peculiarities of informants depend on the topics they speak on. As for well-familiar subject matters, the informant may avoid using filled pauses of hesitation, the speech flow in this case is even with predominance of medium and short pauses. For example:

(1) I think the music is is more to my soul, |||| (1102 ms) I make music because || (202 ms) this is own reward, || (172 ms) I'm not actually thinking about commercial success, || (225 ms) it's nice to have a record, it's nice to get royalty and all of that stuff ||| (494 ms) but music feeds my soul ||| (335 ms) and it does so increasingly. [Sting]

The temporal characteristic of the same speaker totally change after the unexpected question:

(2) Would I give up my current job to be a teacher? ||||| (2575 ms) No, || (118 ms) Music is my vocation, em... ||||| (2460 ms) at the same time I still think teachers should be paid more, ||| (423 ms) I think the best people in society that need to do one of the most important jobs in society | (85 ms) and we need to attract those best people by paying them. [Sting]

In the beginning the singer is surprised by the question and needs time to think over the idea, as a result filled and unfilled extra-long pauses of hesitation occur. After a short time, the singer summons up thoughts and continues the pattern speaking calmly and confidently with almost no pauses at all. The speech is controlled, that is demonstrated in the even division of the voice stream into syntagmas.

Another speaker Phil Collins demonstrates similar criteria:

(3) Um... I don't know what the next step is, ||||| (3310 ms) the next step is going home to bed, um... |||| (1800 ms) no I'm not sure what the next step is, || (205 ms) I'm not really sure there is a next step, you know, ||| (495 ms) I'm gonna do everything I can to make this record erm... ||| (384 ms) people aware of this record, because I'm very proud of it... [Phil Collins]

The utterance by Phil Collins shows the same temporal chain as the previous speaker: the unexpected question – extra-long and long pauses of hesitation – finding necessary words – even speech flow.

It stands to mention that pausation is significant for oral speech comprehension, as the listener reconstructs rhythmic and intonational-pausal variations of the speaker, the pauses allow to interpret the perceived information and make predictions as for the potential development of an idea.

As for melodic characteristics, the prevailing intonational scale is the stepping one, which is mostly combined with a falling terminal tone. Statements sound confident.

That was ꞌtaken when ꞌI was about thir‚teen probably,/ by ꞌthat point I ꞌhad been ꞌplaying ꞌdrums for ‚eight years,/ so I was ꞌalready a proꞌfessional ‚drummer in my my head... [Phil Collins]
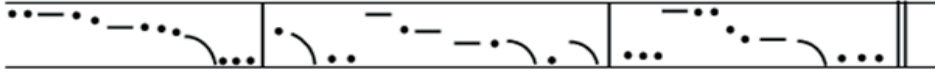
The combination of stepping intonation scale and falling terminal tone is typical in prepared thought-out speech. The use of these tonal combinations in semi-spontaneous speech is explained by the narrative character of analyzed monologic statements. The given example illustrates the singer's ability to simultaneous narration/recollection, maintaining steady speech pattern.

The combination of a stepping intonation scale and a low and medium falling terminal tone provides the informant's speech with a confidently measured tone. Even if the speaker hesitates and uses many pauses, he still sounds calm due to the usage of descending stepping scale:

‚No, / ‚really,/ ꞌsince I ꞌlearnt to ‚relax about ‚it, /I ꞌfind it ꞌmuch ‚easier, / ‚actually, /I ꞌused to get ꞌreally ꞌreally ‚paranoic /and after ꞌevery ‚show /I had to ꞌgo ꞌstraight back to the hotel. [George Michael]
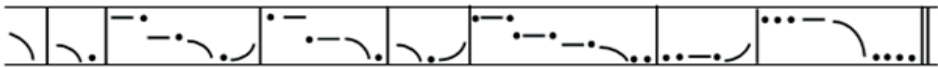
The given above example implies how the universal combination stepping intonation scale + falling terminal tone eliminates inconsistency of narration, notwithstanding congestion of pauses the statement sound confident and convincing. The semantic center is distinguished by a decrease in the tonal level, an increase in the steepness of the angle of tone incidence.

That can be explained by the fact that the speakers have much experience in public speaking and the intonation scale is used automatically even if the person is in doubt or contemplates. Prosodic characteristics are of particular importance for constructing a statement as well as for an adequate perception of the key speaker's message, especially for the genre of interview.

Conclusions

The conducted research shows that semi-spontaneous speech, which is an «intermediate link» between spontaneous and prepared types of speech, is characterized by prosodic features of both – spontaneous and prepared speech. As the task of the interviewer within a «star interview» is to get as much information about the «star» as possible and the goal is achieved by asking

a large number of personal questions, the speaker can often predict those feasible questions and aspects to be discussed during the interview. Semi-spontaneous speech cannot be constantly controlled by the speaker due to lack of preparedness and potential unexpected questions form the interviewer, that results in a number of pauses of hesitation. Pauses appear in semi-spontaneous speech, when the formation of thought occurs simultaneously with speech expression. Hesitation pauses are used by the speakers to find the desired word or expression, the desired word order, to give speech to feelings. The frequency of hesitation pauses usage depends on the individual characteristics of the person, their physical and mental state, how well the speaker understands the content, etc. One and the same speaker can practically avoid using hesitation pauses, when setting out well-known material, while in a situation where he or she needs to fathom the topic discussed, more pauses of uncertainty will occur. Otherwise, the combination of a stepping intonational scale and a low and medium falling terminal tone that are predominant is speakers' speech – are markers of prepared speech. It is contemplated that the mentioned combination is used automatically due to the speakers' great experience in public speaking.

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АНОТАЦІЯ

Статтю присвячено аналізу поняття квазіспонтанного мовлення у порівнянні зі спонтанним та підготовленим типами мовлення; у роботі вивчені та описані просодичні характеристики квазіспонтанного мовлення виражені у жанрі інтерв'ю; досліджено вплив рівня підготовленості мовця до комунікативного акту на просодичну поведінку та розмежовано пропорцію підготовленості у спонтанному, підготовленому та квазіспонтанному типах мовлення; висвітлено окремий специфічний жанр мас медійного дискурсу – «зіркове інтерв'ю», його структуру та диференційні ознаки, визначаючи роль та функції інтерв'юера у комунікативному ланцюгу «мовець – інтерв'юер – цільова масова аудиторія». Матеріалом дослідження слугували аудіо записи інтерв'ю із трьома популярними британськими музикантами: Філом Колінзом, Стінгом та Джорджем Майклом. Було проаналізовано окремі монологічні висловлювання мовців під час інтерв'ю з точки зору просодичних особливостей мовлення, приймаючи до уваги теми, що обговорюються, бажання мовця поглибитися у тему чи, навпаки, щонайшвидше змінити тему на більш пріоритетну для спікера. Аудиторський та акустичний види аналізу націлено на дослідження таких просодичних параметрів, як: інтонаційна шкала, термінальний тон та особливості паузації мовлення досліджуваних представників британської поп культури. В центрі уваги даного дослідження знаходяться диференційні ознаки, що характеризують квазіспонтанне мовлення. Представлена стаття описує основні аспекти, що впливають на основні просодичні характеристики усного мовлення, а саме: володіння мовцем досвіду публічного говоріння, індивідуальні характеристики мовця, його психологічний та фізичний стан, ознайомленість із темами, що обговорюються, особисте бажання освітити певні аспекти.

Ключові слова: *квазіспонтанне мовлення, просодичні характеристики, жанр інтерв'ю, комунікативний акт, інтонація, термінальний тон, особливості паузації.*

Бялик Елена. Просодические особенности квазиспонтанной речи

АННОТАЦИЯ

Статья посвящена анализу квазиспонтанной речи в сравнении со спонтанной и подготовленной типами речи/ В работе детально изучены и описаны просодические характеристики квазиспонтанной речи, выраженные в жанре интервью; исследовано влияние уровня подготовки говорящего к коммуникативному акту на просодическое поведение, а также разграничено пропорцию подготовленности в спонтанной, подготовленной и квазиспонтанной речи; освящено отдельный специфический жанр медийного дискурса – «звездное интервью», его структуру и дифференциальные признаки, определяя роль и функции интервьюера в коммуникативной цепочке

«говорящий – интервьюер – целевая массовая аудитория». Материалом исследования послужили аудиозаписи с тремя популярными британскими музыкантами: Филлом Коллинзом, Стингом и Джорджем Майклом. Были проанализированы отдельные монологические высказывания говорящих в процессе интервью с точки зрения просодических особенностей речи, принимая во внимание темы, которые обсуждаются, желание говорящего углубиться в тему или же, наоборот, как можно быстрее сменить тему на более предпочтительную для интервьюируемого. Аудиторский и акустический виды анализа направлены на исследование таких просодических параметров: интонационная шкала, терминальный тон и особенности паузации в речи исследуемых представителей британской поп культуры. В центре внимания данного исследования находятся дифференциальные признаки, которые характеризуют квазиспонтанную речь. Представленная статья описывает основные аспекты, которые имеют влияние на основные просодические характеристики устной речи, а именно: наличие у говорящего опыта публичной речи, индивидуальные характеристики говорящего, его психологическое и физическое состояние, ознакомленность с обсуждаемыми темами, личное желание освящать определенные аспекты.

Ключевые слова: квазиспонтанная речь, просодические характеристики, жанр интервью, коммуникативный акт, интонация, терминальный тон, особенности паузации.