PARALINGUISTIC MEANS IN ORAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract. This article examines the role of paralinguistic features in oral communication, emphasizing their combined impact on interlocutors, which is often difficult to convey in written language. It explores the significance of vocalic and suprasegmental means such as speech tempo, volume, timbre, pausing, and articulation clarity. It highlights how speech tempo is inherently uneven and influenced by both individual and situational factors, including the speaker's emotional state. Additionally, the article discusses how linguistic compression (e.g., contractions and reductions in English) affects speech perception, particularly for non-native speakers.

Keywords: paralinguistics, oral communication, speech tempo, articulation, suprasegmental features, prosody, linguistic compression, socio-cultural norms, spontaneous speech.

In real conditions of oral communication, paralinguistic means have a combined effect on the interlocutor, which is often impossible to convey through written language. Explanatory words and phrases can only approximately reflect the described reality. Vocal means cannot be considered adequate if they are not supported by a complex of paralinguistic means.

It can be agreed that well-known examples of pronouncing certain fragments illustrating indignation, interest, and other expressions of the speaker's emotions actually illustrate only realized modifications and are naturally far from reality. Only in combination with other means, including prosodic ones, can greater adequacy be achieved. It is important to remember that in each socio-communicative community, in a given historical period, certain norms regulate accepted paralinguistic realizations. Members of a community intuitively adhere to "normal" pitch, volume levels, and voice quality. To confidently master conversational speech in its natural conditions, listeners need knowledge of these norms.

At the same time, one particular feature of paralinguistic normativity should be noted — the correlation of axiological norms with idiosyncratic norms, i.e., those specific to individual speakers. It is necessary to clearly distinguish these speech norms and take their interaction into account when analyzing conversational speech. Many linguists believe that vocal suprasegmental means primarily include speech tempo, volume level, timbre, pausing, and pronunciation clarity [1].

Many argue that speech tempo is not a decisive factor determining phonetic differences. Moreover, an unambiguous interpretation of the concept of speech tempo is unfortunately absent, and different units of measurement are used: the number of beats per second, syllables per minute, sounds per second, etc.

However, the fact is that speech tempo is usually uneven, impulsive, and often deformed under the influence of the speaker's desire to convey the main idea as quickly as possible. At the same time, there are also pauses (for reflection). All this leads to a disruption of the tempo-rhythmic structure of the utterance as a whole, not to mention individual speaker

characteristics. Of course, among individuals, there are "born orators" whose speech metrics approach those of regulated speech, but even in this case, "isochronicity" manifests itself, causing speech tempo to slow down or speed up.

Difficulties in understanding foreign speech by non-native speakers are largely caused by unclear articulation due to the relaxation of speech organs, which is typical for informal communication situations. A factor exacerbating these difficulties is speech tempo. This does not just refer to the actual "speed of speech," i.e., the number of words per unit of time, but also to a specific set of lexical-grammatical compressions that allow for a greater exchange of information per unit of time compared to speech exchange at a normal tempo without using such units.

Examples of such compressions in English include: *praps* (perhaps); *probly* (probably); *'cose* (because); *'bout* (about); *gonna, wanna* (going to, want to), etc. [2]. The use of most of these and similar compressions does not violate the pronunciation norms of RP (Received Pronunciation) in informal communication; however, they should be avoided in situations requiring clear pronunciation.

Noticeable acceleration of speech tempo, almost inevitably leading to articulatory compression of the utterance, modifying the phrase, indicates a state of excitement or haste, while deliberately careless articulation suggests a lack of interest in the topic of conversation.

In real communication, other paralinguistic components are added to vocal nonverbal suprasegmental means of expression. For example, a loudly pronounced phrase accompanied by a gesture can give the phrase a completely different nuance.

Some of the phonetic features of conversational speech discussed above have been confirmed by several researchers in English phonetics. For instance, A. Bagmut emphasizes that “spontaneous speech is considered to consist of blocks with a specific prosodic structure and characterized by semantic incompleteness. The block-like nature of spontaneous speech allows the speaker to construct the speech flow as a continuous semantic chain. The block of spontaneous text does not fully correlate with a syntagm. Pausal segmentation of the block creates its clear acoustic boundaries.”

Linguists are unanimous on the need for an absolute differentiation of identical pairs of speech productions in cases where one member of the pair is realized spontaneously and the other is read from a script. Experimental evidence shows that a spontaneous utterance, when rendered in writing (i.e., deprived of intonation), is often perceived as incoherent and meaningless even by the speaker [4].

To some extent, this gap can be compensated for by special orthographic notation highlighting stressed syllables as well as separate blocks of the utterance, demarcated by normal and extended pauses, as demonstrated below.

Regarding volume, some aspects of its level are universal for many languages. Increasing or decreasing volume, even to the level of a whisper, is semantically relevant. More loudly pronounced statements may indicate that the speaker is angry, whereas lowering the volume is associated with secrecy, often intimacy [3]. In some cases, phrases spoken in a whisper may express extreme indignation or contempt.

To convey this state in written speech, specific phrases must be used. Like other parameters of paralinguistics, the volume level of everyday informal speech can be considered a sociocultural category. The same applies to telephone conversations. In this sense, the

widespread habit of loud phone conversations in certain societies may indicate gaps in speech culture education.

However, social norms are multifaceted and dynamic. Young people tend to speak louder than middle-aged or older individuals; women usually speak louder than men; foreigners speaking English often raise their volume level, fearing they will not be understood. Speech volume naturally increases in conditions of background noise (such as in a noisy room or on the street) or poor phone reception. Conversely, volume decreases in situations of intimate conversation. Finally, volume can be used as an additional stylistic device on stage or in public performances. Some researchers believe that participants in literary and conversational communication most often exhibit mutual accommodation in volume level, maintaining a set level until circumstances require a modification — either intensification or attenuation [2].

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