

**Rhetoric of speech. Art or technique of oral expression (UDC 808.5)**DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.18454/RULB.10.09>

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**ВАРИАТИВНОСТЬ МЕЛОДИЧЕСКИХ ХАРАКТЕРИСТИК РЕЧИ В СОВРЕМЕННОМ НОВОСТНОМ ДИСКУРСЕ***Аннотация*

*В последнее время в новостных выпусках на российском телевидении наблюдается переход к более разговорным речевым формам, которые затрагивают интонационно-просодический аспект новостного дискурса. Мелодические модели, звучащие в речи ведущих, все чаще напоминают англоязычные интонационные образцы. Статья ставит своей целью определить и описать модифицированные интонационные модели в речи русских дикторов современных выпусков новостей на основе перцептивного и акустического анализа. В центре внимания находятся мелодические модификации в предупредительной части интонационного контура.*

**Ключевые слова:** новостной дискурс; предупредительная часть интонационного контура; шкала; предшкала; терминальный тон.

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**VOCAL SHIFTS IN THE MODERNIZATION OF RUSSIAN NEWS PRESENTATION STYLE***Abstract*

*Russian TV newsreaders have moved from a didactic to a more conversational mode of discussing news. This shift involves the overall change of mass media language which has become less authoritative in tone. Russian news presenters now read scripts using more casual and conversational patterns of speech largely associated with the English vocal manner. The present research examines the major evolving vocal patterns in modern Russian news reading style. The results are based on perceptive and acoustic analyses of a vast corpus of authentic recordings from Russian TV news programmes. The melodic patterns discussed in this paper concern mainly and primarily the pre-nuclear part of an intonation unit.*

**Keywords:** news discourse; pre-nuclear contour; head; pre-head; nuclear tone.

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**N**ews reporting and reading are designed for communicating information to a broad audience in the form of established facts delivered in a precise form for ease of understanding by the audience. The full style of pronunciation, clear articulation, clear-cut paragraphs and pausation help to make public speech comprehensible. They also convey a sense of the relative importance of the information being delivered, to impress a sense of priority upon time-pressed viewers. News presenters and reporters actively use intonation to influence the audience by triggering positive or negative emotions and thereby provoking the desired attitude towards the news item.

Modern Russian mass media speech is being modified under the enormous influence of English vocal patterns. In a globalizing information environment, where viewers can turn to any number of sources for news via the Internet and satellite television, the dominance of English as the international language is influencing the presentation style of domestic news services. Certain English intonation contours are being borrowed by Russian media reporters. This change of prosodic patterns in news reading and reporting on Russian television and radio has been noticed by some linguists, in particular in Demina (2017) [4].

The present research seeks to establish the major vocal patterns in modern news reading style. The results are based on the analysis of a vast corpus of authentic recordings obtained from Russian TV news programmes. The narrow corpus included speech samples of five female speakers whose speech was affected by the English news reading manner. The recordings were subjected to thorough perceptive and acoustic analyses.

**The contour approach to intonation analysis**

English intonation analysis has long recognised that utterances are divided into chunks, or sense-groups [2]. House (1990) specifies that such groups tend to be associated with units of grammatical distribution, such as the

clause, or the noun phrase, though not in a strictly predictable way [8]. From the phonetic perspective, sense-groups are variously described as tone groups (O'Connor and Arnold, 1973) [10], intonation phrases (Wells, 2006) [13], intonational phrases (Cruttenden, 2008) [7], tone-units (Roach, 2009) [12], intonational groups (Vasilyev, 2009) [2], prosodic phrases (Bürning, 2016) [6], etc. Although accounts differ in terminology, phoneticians generally agree that an intonation unit has a certain structure. Within each intonation unit there is an obligatory 'nucleus', an accented syllable marked by rhythmic, dynamic and pitch prominence.

The study of intonation went through many changes in the twentieth century, and different theoretical approaches emerged. As Roach (2009) explains, in the earlier part of the last century, a common approach was to treat all pitch movement in the intonation unit as a single 'tune' [12]. Tune 1 was typically descending and ending in a fall, while Tune 2 ended up rising [5], [11]. A similar account of Russian melodic and rhythmic patterns was developed by Bryzgunova (1977) and has generally adopted the sentence as the unit of analysis for both intonational and syntactic phenomena, recognizing only one primary stress per sentence [1]. According to Roach (2009), with time different theoretical approaches to intonation became gradually more elaborate and difficult to use. Thus in English no particular tone was recognized to have a unique 'privilege of occurrence' in a particular context [12].

In more modern phonetic accounts, an utterance is presented as a sequence of tonal and non-tonal stressed syllables. Within the British contour, or 'tonetic' approach to an intonation unit, accented material preceding the nucleus indicates the presence of a head, while any initial unaccented syllables constitute a 'prehead' [8].

Defining intonational 'meanings' doesn't become any easier with time, though. According to Gimson (1980), "Intonation changes are the most efficient means of rendering

prominent for a listener those parts of an utterance in which the speaker wishes to concentrate attention” [9, P. 264]. House (1990) notes that the close links between pitch and stress in English have long highlighted the important role played by intonation in structuring information, its accentual function, associated with the distribution of accents across an utterance [8]. The accentual function of intonation alongside its attitudinal one are of vital significance in the presentation of news and therefore of the vocal style of the newsreaders.

This paper applies the conventions of the British intonation tradition to Russian speech patterns. The British contour approach goes into more detail and scrutinizes not only nuclear tones but also subtle varieties of pre-nuclear pitch movement within an intonation unit. The research looks at some typical occurrences in the speech patterns, which are annotated using tonetic marks derived from O’Connor and Arnold (1973) [10] and Vereninova (2012) [3].

**Types of Heads in Russian newsreaders’ speech**

In news reading intonation units usually comprise long heads accommodating two or more accented syllables. According to our data, affected Russian news presenters’ speech quite often comprises modified English pre-nuclear pitch contours, and thus develops new ‘hybrid’ intonation patterns. They are distinguished further according to the changes of the pitch movement: Descending Head (Zigzag or Level), Ascending Head, Sliding Head, and Scandent Head.

**1. Descending Zigzag Head**

According to Roach (2009), “Some writers on intonation claim that the intonation pattern starting at a fairly high pitch, with a gradual dropping down of pitch during the utterance, is the most basic, normal, “unmarked” intonation pattern; this movement is often called declination” [12, P. 140]. The claim that declination is universally unmarked in all languages has strong support in phonetics. However, for Russian conversational speech the zigzag pitch movement of the pre-nuclear part of the intonation unit is generally considered to be traditional, the first stressed syllable in a phrase being pronounced at a relatively low pitch level and then rising [2]. Besides, the rising pitch direction is usually performed in a wide range.

The data obtained by acoustic measurement prove the presence of the Zigzag Head in the selected speech samples but in a modified, descending form. This ‘hybrid’ pattern presumably results from imitation of English speaking manner with its descending movement. Thus, in a Descending Zigzag Head, successive accented syllables form a series of zigzag steps, each one lower pitched than the preceding. This intonation pattern dominates in Russian news discourse, e.g.

(1) Среди выставок лучшей стала нашумевшая экспозиция Серова...

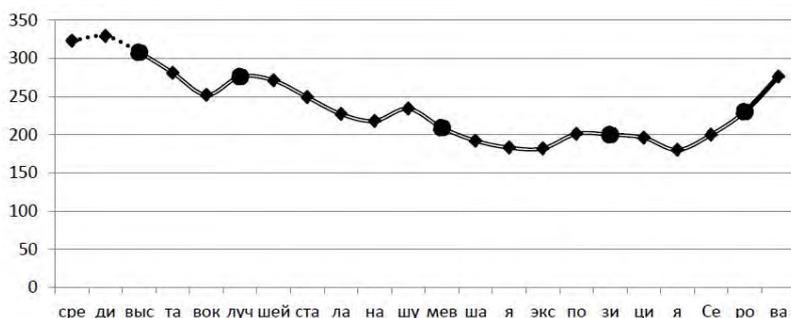


Fig. 1 – Descending Zigzag Head in the phrase: “Среди выставок лучшей стала нашумевшая экспозиция Серова...” (Hz, pitch range 10 st)

Figure 1 illustrates a pitch track for rendering of (1). The pitch track shows the frequency of the vibration of the vocal chords of the speaker, as it changes over time in Hertz. A solid grey line during the segments shows the pre-nuclear pitch pattern, i.e. the Head. A dotted line preceding the Head shows the pitch movement within the Pre-Head, which can be either low (unmarked) or high (marked). In (1) the Pre-Head is high, which is used as an additional emphasis. A solid black line at the end of the intonation unit corresponds to the tonal change (rising).

**2. Descending Level Head**

In the Descending Level Head there is a series of accented and unaccented syllables, and each one starting at a slightly lower pitch than the preceding one. Thus the syllables form a linear, gradually declining contour (Fig. 2). This is a marked pattern in Russian news discourse as it sounds more dynamic, urgent and business-like, and stands out against the general zigzag intonation field, e.g.

(2) [... Белоруссия беспощинно закупает российскую нефть,] а взамен экспортирует бензин.

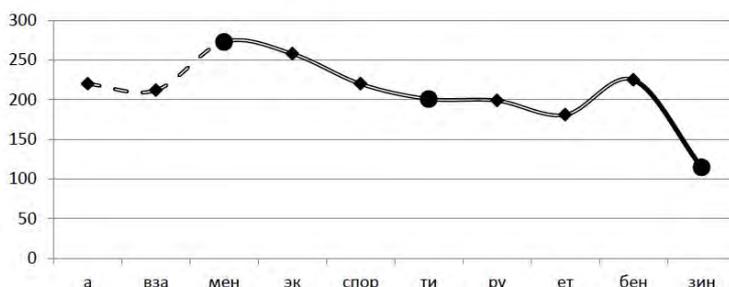


Fig. 2 – The Descending Level Head in the phrase: “...а взамен экспортирует бензин” (Hz, pitch range 11 st)

### 3. Ascending Head

The Ascending Head is formed by a series of syllables in which each stressed syllable is pitched a little higher than the preceding one [2]. The unstressed syllables between them also rise gradually (Fig. 3a). This head is sometimes known as a “complex rising head” (Wells, 2006) [13] or a ‘climbing head’ (O’Connor and Arnold, 1973) [10]. In English the head

may convey such attitudes as protest, impatience, irritation, interest and involvement in the situation. In Russian newsreaders’ speech the Ascending Head is usually followed by an emphatic high falling tone on a word, which is given particular prominence, e.g.

(3a) [Другие, впрочем, не исключают, что] *это произойдет уже сегодня.*

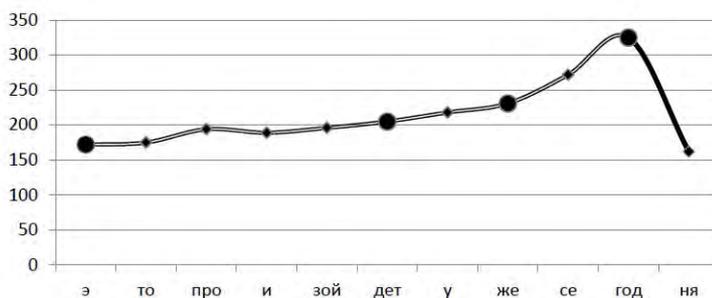


Fig. 3a – The Ascending Level Head in the phrase:

“...это произойдет уже се<sup>^</sup>годня” (Hz, pitch range 8 st)

Speakers can add even more emphasis to an intonation unit by using the Ascending Head with a ‘marked’ (distinctive) pre-head. In a high pre-head all the syllables are said on the same high pitch. As Wells (2006) notes, the unaccented beginning in such a case is “usually higher than any pitch within the rest of the intonation unit – sometimes up in the falsetto range. Thus the high pre-head is higher pitched than the onset at the start of a high head” [12, P. 215]. Wells specifies that high pre-heads are usually quite short: not more than two or three syllables (Fig. 1, Fig. 3b).

Whereas the use of an unmarked Ascending Head in Russian news reading adds prominence to the last accented word in the intonation unit, using a high pre-head adds emphasis to the whole intonation unit owing to the sudden rapid change of pitch at the start of the head, e.g.

(3b) [Среди выставок лучшей стала нашумевшая экспозиция Серова в Третьяковской галерее, куда люди буквально] *выламывали двери.*

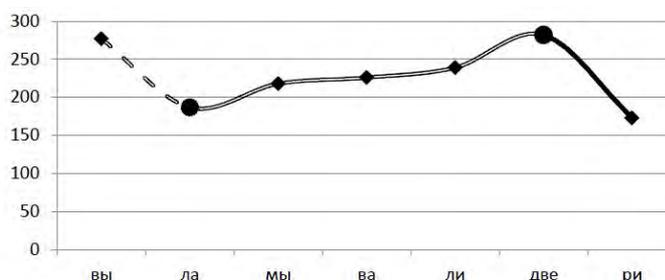


Fig. 3b – The Emphatic Ascending Scale with a High Pre-Head in the

phrase: “...вы<sup>^</sup>ламывали ^двери” (Hz, pitch range 7 st)

### 4. Sliding Head

In the Sliding Head accented syllables are pronounced with a series of downward pitch movements. Together with the following unaccented syllables they create a pattern of ‘falls’ in utterances (Fig. 4a). Each accented syllable starts at a slightly lower pitch than the preceding one. This type of head is described as a “complex falling head” by Wells (2006) [13] and it is mainly used in English conversational speech [2].

In Russian news discourse it gives additional prominence to each accented word in the intonation unit and makes the speech of the news reader sound excited, agitated, impatient, and anxious. Besides, this type of head modifies the rhythm and accelerates the tempo of the utterance, e.g.

(4) [Евросоюз перед сложным выбором:] (a) *решить миграционный кризис* (b) *и пойти на условия Турции.*

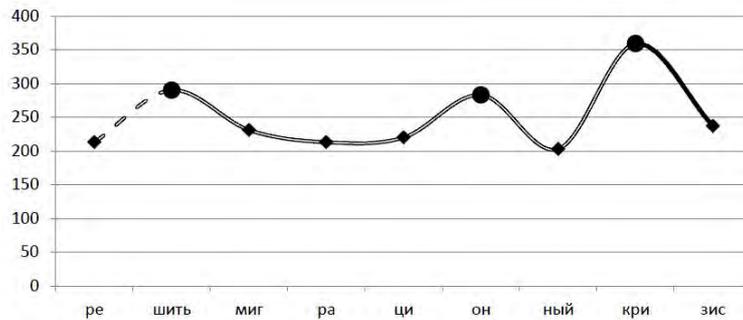


Fig. 4a – The Sliding Head in the phrase:

“... ре<sup>^</sup>шить миграци<sup>^</sup>онный <sup>^</sup>кризис...” (Hz, pitch range 6 st)

In the top diagram, pitch maxima on ‘реШИТЬ’ and ‘миграциОНный’ are clearly visible with the latter discernibly lower than the first one. It is still possible to make

the Sliding Head even more salient by using a contrastive low pre-head (Fig. 4b).

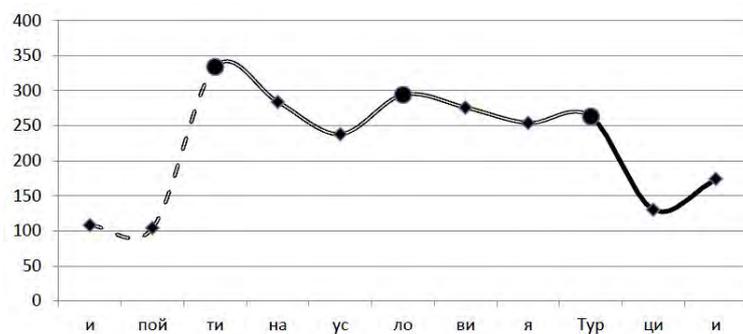


Fig. 4b – The Emphatic Sliding Head in the phrase:

“... и пой<sup>^</sup>ти на ус<sup>^</sup>ловия <sup>^</sup>Туршии” (Hz, pitch range 20 st)

In the second pitch track (Fig. 4b), the perceived prominence owes to the ‘pitch leap’ from a discernible local minimum in the pre-head to the maximum of the first accented syllable.

**5. Scandent Head**

In this head each stressed syllable is pronounced with an upward pitch movement and is placed lower than the preceding and following unstressed syllables. Acoustically

this results in a succession of ‘dips’ that focus the listener’s attention on the contrast in mood, often ironic or negative, in comparison with previous news details (Fig. 5). The Scandent Head gives additional prominence to all accented words in the utterance and is used for emphasis, e.g.

(5) [Однако в январе] страна поставила меньше процента [от объема прошлого года...]

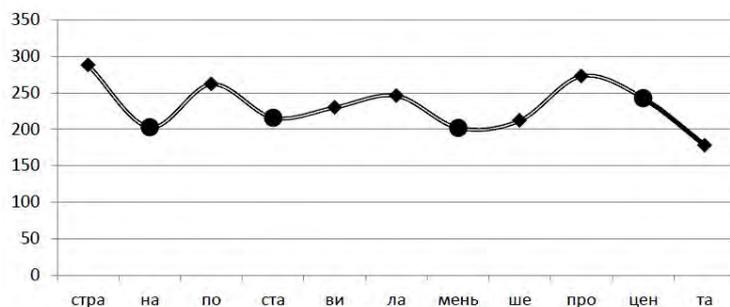


Fig. 5 – The Scandent Head in the phrase:

“... стра<sup>^</sup>на по<sup>^</sup>стави<sup>^</sup>ла <sup>^</sup>меньше процента” (Hz, pitch range 7 st)

At first sight the pitch track in Figure 5 resembles the wavy, staccato melodic pattern from the previous diagram. On closer inspection though, we see that local pitch maxima are placed on the unaccented syllables, whereas the accented ones look like ‘dips’ in the diagram.

In the English language the Scandent Head may convey teasing, coquettish, patronizing attitudes and is often used in

speaking to children [2]. In Russian news reading it often shows surprise or irritation and implies ulterior motives or a certain inconsistency in facts.

**Conclusion**

This study presents the results of phonetic analysis aimed at establishing vivid examples of evolving melodic patterns in Russian news reading style. They show that the use of

melodic tones in news reporters' speech is conditioned by pragmatic orientation of news discourse. The selected newsreaders predominantly make use of a mix of 'hybrid' complex heads within the same intonation unit. Such head patterns enable the reader to accent more than one syllable in the pre-nuclear material and, in terms of intonational meaning, add emphasis or weightiness to the intonation unit as a whole (rather than to particular words). Naturally, phonetic analysis of polysyllabic heads runs into much greater variety than these examples suggest. However, the proposed pre-nuclear types are probably the base for building more complex contours and, therefore, can be viewed as the precursor for a more elaborate system of modern Russian intonation patterns.

In contrast with British news reading tradition, which emphasizes an absence of emotion in delivery of news, Russian presenters try to influence the audience at the level of melodic contours. This can be connected with the policy of the TV channel, influenced by the state's attitude toward events, in seeking to shape public opinion. While superficially modernizing news delivery in a more competitive international environment, then, Russian presenters are also in some sense retaining their traditional role as authoritative sources of information imparting the 'appropriate' stance toward developments for viewers.

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