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THE PROSODIC ORGANIZATION OF A NARRATIVE TEXT

Research article

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Abstract

The article dwells upon some issues connected with the theory of text intonation. The semantic structure of spontaneous narrative texts is analyzed from the meaning of the whole text to the meaning of its constituent dictemes and intonation groups. The analysis of the semantic structure is conducted from the standpoint of the theory of thematic-rhematic division. The units of analysis are intonation groups and dictemes. The structural elements of the text of various communicative weights are described: nuclear rhematic intonation groups and dictemes, non-nuclear intonation groups and dictemes, thematic intonation groups. The accentual-rhythmic and melodic features of various text segments are investigated. It is concluded that intonation in its organizing function divides spontaneous text according to the degree of semantic importance, optimizing the process of conveying the meaning of an oral message and ensuring its adequate perception.

Keywords: organizing function of intonation, dicteme, informative spontaneous monologues, thematic-rhematic structure of narrative text.

ПРОСОДИЧЕСКАЯ ОРГАНИЗАЦИЯ ПОВЕСТВОВАТЕЛЬНОГО ТЕКСТА

Научная статья

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Аннотация

Статья затрагивает вопросы, касающиеся дальнейшей разработки теории текстовой интонации. Проводится анализ семантической структуры спонтанных повествовательных текстов от смысла целого текста к смыслу составляющих его диктем и синтагм. Анализ смысловой структуры проводится с позиций теории актуального членения. Единицами анализа являются синтагма и диктема. Описываются структурные элементы текста различного коммуникативного веса: ядерные рематические синтагмы и диктемы, неядерные синтагмы и диктемы, тематические синтагмы. Исследуются акцентно-ритмические и мелодические особенности различных текстовых сегментов. Делается вывод о том, что интонация в ее организующей функции осуществляет членение спонтанного текста по степени смысловой важности, оптимизируя процесс передачи смысла устного сообщения и обеспечивая его адекватное восприятие.

Ключевые слова: организующая функция интонации, диктема, спонтанные монологические тексты информативного регистра, тема-рематическая организация повествовательного текста.

Introduction

The article reveals some results of phonetic research work aimed at analyzing prosodic organization peculiarities of informative spontaneous monologues. According to the theory of communicative registers suggested by G. A. Zolotova “the communicative function of the informative register units implies reporting on events while distracting from their temporal and spatial correlation to the speech performer” [9, P. 394]. This register tends to be the main one in narrative and descriptive contexts. Using this register, the speaker expresses knowledge about repeated typical occasions by recalling facts from the past.

Conducting such research is justified by some reasons. First of all, from the point of solving some general issues of the intonation organization of the text for the purpose of studying the role of intonation in fulfilling such a linguistic function as distributing a semantic significance degree and outlining nuclear rhematic centers of an utterance.

Secondly, studying the prosodic organization peculiarities of informative texts is necessary to solve some practical issues connected with teaching unprepared foreign language speech. Spontaneous monologues of the informative character is one of the most widespread types of speech used in foreign language teaching. Being aware of general principles of the prosodic organization of a complex speech pattern means a lot for effective communication.

An intonation group and a dicteme were chosen as units of the analysis of the semantic structure of the informative text in our research work. A dicteme is an elementary unit of a text. It can consist of one or several sentences and is part of a text. A

diceme can be distinguished by its vivid function to express a certain theme within the framework of its own integrative purpose [1], [2].

The research work is based on the approach assuming that the semantic analysis of the text is carried out from whole-to-part, from the meaning of the whole text to the meanings of its intonation groups and dicemes. Thus, a text is considered to be a set of interconnected language, verbal and cognitive aspects.

The role of intonation in its organizing function is considered to be the defining one in the process of delivering an oral text. Oral speech is realized in the form of a sound wave. Its modifications correspond to the semantic structure of the utterance, which is realized through the organizing function of speech intonation. Within the framework of this function, the intonation serves as a marker of a thematic-rhematic structure of the utterance, optimizing the process of its delivering and perception.

In the process of delivering a spontaneous text, parts of intonation groups, separate intonation groups and dicemes correlate [4]. This correlation gets its formal demonstration through the prosodic modifications, which are among the leading means of expressing the semantic structure of an utterance.

Research methods and principles

The material of the research is comprised of 9 spontaneous monologues, each of them representing a narrative story on a certain theme. The total amount of the sounding material is 15 minutes. The patterns underwent the semantic, auditing and electroacoustic analyses. The electroacoustic analysis was carried out by means of the computer programme Speech Analyzer (3.0.1). The data received during the computer analysis made it possible to confirm and demonstrate the results of the auditing and semantic analyses of the spontaneous monologues.

The semantic analysis of the material allowed to distinguish some structural elements in the narrative texts: nuclear rhematic intonation groups and dicemes, non-nuclear rhematic intonation groups and dicemes, thematic intonation groups. Nuclear rhematic intonation groups and dicemes are the key segments of a text, defining the dynamics and the perspective of the semantic development of a text. Non-nuclear rhematic intonation groups and dicemes are abundant segments of a text specifying and detailing key text elements. Thematic intonation groups contain the information already mentioned in the speech context.

It should be mentioned that in spontaneous texts there are practically no thematic dicemes. It means that in some cases there occurs a succession of intonation groups containing the information already known. The number of separate thematic intonation groups in the semantic structure of the narrative text is small. The majority of text segments introduce new information. S. L. Rubinshtein admitted that “The main nerve of the thinking process consists in the following: during the thinking process the object integrates into new ties, demonstrating its new qualities fixed in new terms; the object is constantly revealing its new contents; each time it turns its different side ...” [5, P. 98-99]. In this way, the speaker tries to express his/her idea more vividly. For this purpose the speaker uses new analogies, comparisons not used before, details not mentioned yet.

Main results

The analysis of the semantic structure of a narrative text demonstrated that there exists such text segments (intonation groups and dicemes) where the division of rhematic and thematic components implies some difficulties. It is supposed that the obtained results prove the idea that “units of thought and units of speech are not equal” [10].

The results of the auditing and electroacoustic (computer) analyses of the intonation characteristics allowed to uncover some certain rules of the structural organization of narrative monologues.

The results of the research showed that regardless of the length of a text, the average number of intonation groups in each diceme is about five. The total sample of intonations group test is 430 units. The total sample of dicemes is 67 units.

The results confirmed the opinion existing in psychology and linguistics that delivering a spontaneous speech is a complex psychological process which determines strict tempo conditions and implies restrictions on the thought development within the framework of a diceme [3], [6], [7].

The minimal length of dicemes in the texts is one intonation group, the maximal number of intonation groups in a diceme is 14. Here is an example of the smallest diceme (it is outlined):

at that stage of experience / I had just finished Cambridge / and I drove through / the Muslim country of Turkey / and Iran //

and then / actually lived / with the tribesmen / in Afghanistan / and / shared their tent / shared their meals / and you saw all the different aspects / of the Muslim faith / really / on that short journey //

and then / in both Afghanistan / Pakistan / and India / you saw the Buddhist faith //

so you saw three great religions //

This diceme is a certain conclusion, generalization of the previous facts of the speaker's biography. The number of such dicemes in the analyzed narrative texts is small.

The following example of a diceme consists of 14 intonation groups:

although / part of my family is from Ireland / most of it / half of it / is / originally from / Lithuania / and Belorussia / on my father's side / and on my mother's side / they're from Scotland and Ireland / but I'm not quite sure / how we ended up / living in Kilburn //

A greater length of this semantic text segment is explained by a certain number of semantically equal intonation groups. Besides, we may notice conjunctions and linking verbs realized as separate intonation groups. It is natural for English spontaneous speech.

Discussion

Our observations proved that nuclear rhematic intonation groups in the texts of the informative register are mostly pronounced with a medium tempo (80,2%) and more seldom with a slowed down tempo (19,2%).

Non-nuclear rhematic and thematic intonation groups are mostly pronounced with a medium tempo (55,5% of intonation groups) and more seldom with an accelerated tempo (20,4%). A few intonation groups are pronounced with a quick (8,7%) and a slowed down tempo (12,4%).

Most of the non-nuclear intonation groups pronounced in a slowed down tempo are text extracts produced while thinking over the next speech segment, for example, / >and eh / we >used to / after >that / >or (eh) /.

The analysis of the accentual-rhythmical structure of the intonation groups revealed that the most common structure for all the intonation groups is a rhythmical structure beginning with a non-stressed syllable (80,2%).

For nuclear rhematic intonation groups, the most common accentual-rhythmical structure is a two-stressed syllable one (45,2% of all the intonation groups). The number of three-stressed syllable intonation groups is 22% and the number of one-stressed syllable intonation groups is 20%. According to the results, the number of nuclear rhematic intonation groups with four or five stressed syllables is less than 5% of all tested text nuclear segments.

The comparative analysis of the accentual structure of the text non-nuclear segments demonstrated that for these text elements, the most frequently used structures are one-stressed syllable intonation groups (48%). They are followed by two-stressed syllable intonation groups (25%) and three-stressed syllable intonation groups (15%). The number of non-nuclear intonation groups with four or five stressed syllables is also less than 5% and this variable coincides with the same one received on the material of the nuclear intonation groups.

The analysis of the intonation group tone aspect of various semantic importance was carried out in conformity with the following parameters: a tone type, full/non-full tone variants, a degree of the perceptual tone brightness.

Statistical data of the tone distribution in the tested tempo variety demonstrate that for the nuclear rhematic intonation groups the most frequently used tones are Low-Fall, Fall-Rise and Mid-Level tones. There are also some nuclear intonation groups pronounced with Low-Rise.

Non-nuclear rhematic and thematic intonation groups pronounced in a slowed down tempo are characterized by the Mid-Level tone because most of them express hesitation.

The most frequent tones for intonation groups pronounced with a medium, accelerated and quick tempo are low-rising and low-falling tones.

Intonation groups expressing completed thought segments are pronounced with the low-falling tone. Semantic significance of an intonation group, whether it belongs to nuclear rhematic or non-nuclear rhematic or thematic components, do not influence the above-mentioned fact.

The most typical tone peculiar to completed thought fragments is the full low-falling tone which forms and integrates text units: (when I was very young / I used to (eh) / sit outside the back of the house / where I used to live during the summer / and I used to watch the ants //).

In the example mentioned above, the low-falling tone forming the intonation groups and the dicteme is rather full because it is realized in more independent and complete semantic units.

It is known that the perceptual tone brightness is defined by a pitch range and by the change speed of the main tone frequency and correlates to the degree of a word prominence [8].

The steepness variability of the terminal tone occurs within the limits of 0,2-0,5 Hz/ms.

It is considered that the perceptual tone brightness in most cases allows to differentiate nuclear and non-nuclear text segments. In this way, nuclear rhematic intonation groups are formed by perceptually bright tones achieved in a medium or in an extended range, with a medium or an increased speed of the main tone frequency change. According to our observations, the perceptual prominence of the tone syllable is also ensured by the contrast of the medium syllable duration between the nuclear syllable and the pre-nuclear part of the intonation group.

Non-nuclear rhematic and thematic intonation groups are mostly shaped by perceptually unclear tones achieved in a medium or in a narrow range, with a medium or a low speed of the main tone frequency change. It is obvious that these text fragments are not greatly outlined due to their supportive role for the semantic text prospect.

It is proved that apart from the communicative intonation group weight, the most frequent melodic model is Low Pre-Head+ High Level Head / Falling Head + Low Fall. This model is used in 50% of the nuclear rhematic intonation groups and in 65 % of the non-nuclear thematic intonation groups. The example of this model is demonstrated in the following nuclear dicteme (nuclear intonation groups are underlined):

the older I became / the more senior I became / I think the more difficult it became / I was quite relieved / when I was able to ... retire //

The number of intonation groups accomplished without a head is 23% of all the tested intonation groups. The number of intonation groups accomplished without a pre-head is 10%.

Conclusion

In this way summing up the description of the prosodic organization peculiarities of the narrative text we may imply that the next research of the intonation in its organizing function within the framework of text linguistics is possible when establishing the patterns of the prosodic organization of texts belonging to various communicative registers.

Конфликт интересов

Не указан.

Рецензия

Все статьи проходят рецензирование. Но рецензент или автор статьи предпочли не публиковать рецензию к этой статье в открытом доступе. Рецензия может быть предоставлена компетентным органам по запросу.

Conflict of Interest

None declared.

Review

All articles are peer-reviewed. But the reviewer or the author of the article chose not to publish a review of this article in the public domain. The review can be provided to the competent authorities upon request.

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