

SENTENCE INTONATION IN LANGUAGE
AND LINGUISTICS

N.D. SVETOSAROVA

Department of Phonetics
Leningrad University
Leningrad, USSR 199034

ABSTRACT

In spite of the great interest of modern linguistics in the problems of intonation and a great amount of experimental data, intonation has not yet taken its due place in general linguistics. This can be accounted for by the fact that intonation is often viewed as peripheral to language system, belonging rather to speech than to language. Another reason is an extreme diversity in understanding the nature of intonation units - either as language signs or as a means of the plane of expression. It is assumed that intonation - with the multitude of its functions - belongs to the plane of expression of complex signs which should not be reduced to phonemics alone. The phenomenon of intonation demonstrates the inconsistency of the view on sound matter of language as the lowest level of language structure.

INTRODUCTION

One of the noticeable peculiarities of modern linguistics is increasing interest of linguists of various trends to the problems of sentence intonation. It's proved by the fact that intonation that has been the "cinderella" of linguistics for a long time, nowadays turns out to be its "core".

But in spite of the fact that a lot of experimental data on intonation have been accumulated, their introducing to the theory of linguistics does not seem to be a simple task although many linguists realize the necessity of their generalization and interpretation. Even the best of modern works in general linguistics lack serious discussions of intonation problems.

There are several interrelated reasons for this.

THE NATURE OF INTONATION UNITS AND THE PLACE OF INTONATION IN LINGUISTICS

The first reason is the still-remaining treatment of intonation as something peripheral to the language system and attributing it rather to speech than to language.

The second reason is the fact that it is not clear what aspect of linguistics should deal with intonation. Information on intonation in a particular language (if there is any) is given either in "Phonetics" or in "Syntax" or even in both of them. The latter is illustrated for Russian by the new academic edition of Russian Grammar /1/ (parts devoted to intonation are written by E.A. Bryzgunova).

The fact that different aspects of linguistics deal with the same subject seems to be quite natural as different branches of linguistics do not just study various language phenomena, but analyze them from different points of view.

The word is analyzed both in phonetics and lexicology. Nevertheless, one can hardly imagine that word - the main language unit - should be analyzed only in phonetics, that is, from the point of view of its form (plane of expression) or only in lexicology, that is, from the point of view of its meaning (plane of contents).

As to intonation units, the main debatable point is whether to attribute them only to the plane of expression or to regard them as bilateral units, that is, language signs.

Both viewpoints have their adherents. This is reflected in different definitions of intonation and its units.

The adherents of the view point that intonation units are signs do not give any special arguments to support their position. Probably they consider the ability

of intonation to convey definite meanings (thus be connected with meaning) to be quite a weighty reason. However, everything in the language is connected with meaning to a certain extent. The material form of the language does not exist just by itself but as a means of conveying information.

To prove the sign nature of intonation its signs should be compared with other language signs to see whether everything that is defined by "intonation" is equally and in the same way connected with meaning.

On the contrary, those who attribute intonation only to the plane of expression, i.e. to phonetics as the aspect dealing with the sound matter (form) of the language, think it is their duty to give special reasons for their position. Thus they present the well-known fact that the same formal means (intonation pattern) combined with different lexical and grammatical structures conveys different meanings, so that the meaning is not conveyed by intonation pattern alone, but by its combination with other linguistic means.

It seems, though, that special reasons for proving the non-sign nature of intonation units are required only if they are treated like phonemes. In case we attribute intonation to the plane of expression of language but do not confine it to phonemic alone admitting the existence of other sound means that have special functions, then we may regard intonation as an element of the plane of expression-capable of conveying some specific meanings (elements of the plane of contents) - communicative, modal and emotional.

According to the conception of the Shcherba Phonological School (or Leningrad Phonological School) the main function of the phoneme is the constitutive one /2, 3, 4/.

Phonemes, which have no meaning of their own and are singled out due to their potential link with meaning, constitute the sound matter of morphemes - the smallest meaningful language units.

The plane of expression of complex language units, such as words, word-groups, syntagms, sentences, paragraphs, texts, cannot be reduced to a mere chain of phonemes. Together with the relationship between the units of the lower levels /4: 257/ it contains a special constituent - prosody - performing some specific functions.

Intonation takes part in forming the so-

und matter of a complex language unit primarily as a means of organizing its components.

However, the fact that speech units (syntagms, utterances, paragraphs) can be organized in various ways enables intonation to express some specific meanings, either alone or in combination with other non-intonational means.

In some of its functions intonation is more conventional, that is its units are very close to the conventional language signs. This can be seen in some communicative types of utterances and some emotional reactions where such "meanings" as for example "question", "agreement", "non-agreement", "surprise", "doubt" have their "own" corresponding intonation patterns, which in some cases are used as the only means of conveying information. It can be proved by the fact of correct perception of the so called "pure" intonation (intonation without words) in colloquial Russian (hm? - hm. - hm! - hm!!).

In its other manifestations (significantly more common) intonation reveals its non-sign nature. I believe that in such functions of intonation as the delimiting or the prominence-lending, intonation patterns can hardly be viewed as bilateral linguistic signs (for the opposite point of view see, for example /5/).

So, obviously, the author of an intonation theory will regard intonation units as more or less sign units depending on the fact which of its functions are in the centre of his investigation.

Thus, the third reason for rather a vague status of intonation among the other linguistic aspects is different interpretation of the essence of intonation, the extent of its functions and the character of its units.

INTONATION: SYNTACTIC OR SEMANTIC?

The great variety of view points on intonation, in my opinion, can only be explained by the complexity and heterogeneity of its phenomena.

The fact that intonation has long been outside the sphere of main linguistic problems can be accounted for not by an insufficient amount of experimental data but by the fundamental difference of intonation from other linguistic phenomena. The term "intonology" coming nowadays into use in the Soviet Union is a symptom of the realization of this difference.

Paradoxical as it may seem any further

deepening of the investigation of intonation aggravates the state of things.

Large quantities of experimental data show that intonation correlates more closely with the semantics of an utterance than with its syntax.

Thus, the so called communicative types of utterance as well as many phenomena of sentence accentuation are, in fact, semantic by their nature. For example, some features of the intonation structure of an utterance may be caused by the specific meaning of words and word-groups constituting this utterance.

The results of the experiments proved that the metaphorical use of the word, its specific semantic capacity, the presence of a number of meanings (semantic components) in its semantic structure (as for example, the meanings of evaluation, contrast, result, negation /6,7/) serve as factors causing a greater degree of its prominence. On the contrary, the semantic "emptiness" of some of the words is the cause of their weaker accentual prominence.

Thus, intonation which has long since been called "syntactic phonetics" has a real chance of being called "semantic phonetics".

INTONATION AND THE LEVEL STRUCTURE OF LANGUAGE

The problem of the place of intonation in the language system as far as the levels of the language structure are concerned is even more complicated than the problem of the place of intonation in linguistics.

It is significant that in the majority of conceptions of the language levels system the place of intonation is not put forward for special discussion.

On the other hand attempts "to insert" intonation with its all-embracing means and functions into the proposed hierarchy of the levels show the inadequacy of the construction itself.

One of the main difficulties of the traditional approach to language levels, where the phonetic (phonological) level is considered to be the lowest, is the impossibility of explaining how the non-sign elements of language level construction - phonemes - form the meaningful linguistic units - morphemes - at the next level. The inclusion of intonation into this lowest level aggravates the

difficulty still more, for intonation units form neither morphemes nor other linguistic units, the relation between them being quite different.

Thus, not everything that is included in phonetics can equally be included in the phonetic level, considered to be the lowest level of the language structure.

To avoid this difficulty we might assume that intonation units are language signs (which - in my opinion - is true only for a smaller part of intonation phenomena), but this gives rise to another difficulty.

The attempt to include these "intonation signs" into one of the traditional sign levels reveals the variety and the specific character of such signs.

On the other hand it is impossible to place "intonation signs" between the traditional sign levels, as no sign level can either be composed of or decomposed into intonation units alone.

The only solution is to remove intonation from the hierarchy of levels and to assign intonation phenomena to different sign levels in accordance with the variety of intonation functions. Then intonation will easily find its place in the language structure, but only as an inherent element of the plane of expression of the complex signs. Intonation is related, in some of its functions, to such complex units as the sentence, the paragraph and the whole text. In its other functions, intonation is connected with smaller units, such as the syntagm and even, the rhythmic group.

This approach, natural and even traditional as it is (compare the usual distinction between segmental and suprasegmental means, or features), involves a certain contradiction. How does this high level use of phonetic means correlate with the fact that the phonetic level is considered to be the lowest one? I think that intonation facts demonstrate the inadequacy of this conception.

The phonetic means, i.e. sound matter in all of its aspects (both segmental and suprasegmental) naturally correlate with different levels of language structure (beginning with the word and up to the text) due to the fact that they do not form a separate level but an aspect without which no level can exist.

The acknowledgement of the specific role of the sound matter of language predeter-

mined by human nature, which in its turn predetermines the main properties of the language, is extremely important for the conception of the Shcherba Phonological School. It is well-defined in the works by L.R.Zinder /2/ and L.V.Bondarko /3/ and especially in the recent book by V.B.Kasevich "Phonological Problems in General and Oriental Linguistics" /4/, in which the author proposes a new conception of the phonological component of language.

CONCLUSION

The study of such a complex and specific phenomenon as sentence intonation leads us to the conclusion that the conventional division of language into separate levels is too straightforward and should be considered more critically.

A revision of some of the ideas concerning the place of phonetics and intonation in the language system makes it possible to describe intonation in all its manifestations within the framework of phonetics as linguistic science.

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