

THE PROSODY OF A WORD IN RUSSIAN SPOKEN BY MONGOLS

SVETLANA KASHCHAYEVA

Dept. of the Russian Language
Polytechnical Institute
Irkutsk, USSR, 664074

ABSTRACT

The phonetic distortions in the speech of Mongol learners at the level of the prosody of a word are prompted by the differences in the prosodic construction of a word in Russian and in Mongolian. They can be foreseen and foretold as the result of the comparative analysis of the prosodic means of both languages.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of the linguistic interpretation of various breaks in the prosody of a word in the Russian speech pronounced by Mongols seems to be important both in the theoretical meaning (the Russian speech of Mongols is not yet investigated from the point of the complex analysis of the suprasegmental phonology) and in the practical one (in teaching Mongols the Russian pronunciation it will give the chance of the explanation and foreseeing the pronunciation mistakes).

The prosodic means of Russian at the level of the prosody of a word is accent. By its phonetic nature it is quantitative, qualitative and dynamic. A stressed vowel is characterized by a set of phonetic means: the length, the timbre, the strength. According to these characteristics it is realized in communication depending on its functions: culminative (the accent makes a word a phonetic unit), constitutive (helps to identify words or their forms), distinctive (provides the differentiation of words and their forms, for example: плачу - плачу́, страны - страны́). A word-stress is traditionally considered to be one of the prosodic means of the Mongolian language. The first reference of it in linguistics is to be found 150 years ago, and up to now the prosody of a word is the least investigated branch of the Mongolian phonetics. In fact this problem has not yet been the subject of the linguistic research and was studied only from the point of the rhythmical nature of the Mongolian versification. There are various, sometimes contradictory opinions in refer-

ence to the word-stress in the Mongolian language, its phonetic nature and its seat in the word. Thus, J. Schmidt (1832), Y. Ramstedt (1908), A. B. Rudnev (1913), B. J. Vladimirtsov (1929), G. B. Sanzhayev (1960), Sh. Luvsanvandan (1967), G. Galsan (1975) say that a word-stress in the Mongolian language is expiratory (force) and always falls on the first syllable of the word. On the contrary, O. M. Kovalevsky (1835), A. A. Bobrovnikov (1848), A. M. Pozdneyev (1880), V. L. Kotvich (1902) think that the stress falls on the last syllable and is not expiratory (force).

Such contradictory opinions can be explained by the fact that the seat and the character of the stress were investigated only with the help of the auditory analysis without thorough phonetic research based on experiments.

The experiment results^{1/} show that any syllable can have a greater force, especially when it contains a long diphthong. We couldn't find any regularity in the correlation of vowels in different positions either in their length or in the change of the tone. The same is about the qualitative differences between them. The experiment and a number of psycholinguistic tests on the perception of a stress by Mongols show that in the Mongolian language there is no word-stress. This language can be related to unaccented ones.

In this case the length of a vowel in the Mongolian language is not the characteristic of the prosodic means but a phonematic indication of the segmental units - long vowels. It is the length of vowels that carries out the distinctive function characteristic of the Russian word-stress. It helps to differentiate words (судал - pulse; суудал - a seat; цас - snow, цаас - paper, etc.) and their forms (эвлэ - the imperative of "to reconcile", эвлээ - the one who reconciles, etc.).

Some clearness of the pronunciation of the vowels in the initial syllables (traditionally taken for stress) can be explained differently: the effect of the law of synharmony. Synharmony, that is the regulation of the succession of vo-

vels in a word - in other words - assimilation of vowels in prefixes to those ones in the root. Functionally synharmony is the main way of making the phonetic unity of a word (a culminative function), identification of a word in a number of other words (a constitutive function). The problem of the delimitative function of synharmony is not quite investigated in linguistics. To study this problem we made the statistic analysis of the poetical and prosaic texts in Mongolian. The differentiation of words according to the law of synharmony coincided with the semantic articulation in the poetical text for 73% of words. The received statistic data show that synharmony is a quite safe way of the differentiation of words.

The comparison of the prosodic construction of a word both in Russian and Mongolian show some likeness and some very essential differences. The likeness is to be found in the functional meaning: the culminative and constitutive functions characterize the prosody of a word both in Russian and Mongolian. The main difference is in the ways of realization of these functions. In Russian it is word accent, and in Mongolian it is synharmony. Besides, both the Russian language and the Mongolian language have different functions. Only the Mongolian prosodic system has a delimitative function. Only the Russian prosodic system has a distinctive function. In the Mongolian language the function is realized not with suprasegmental ways but with segmental ones - long vowels.

Thus we can say that in the situation of the subordinate bilingualism in the Russian utterances of Mongols the following probable errors can be expected:

1. Mongolian learners of Russian can construct a Russian word according to the law of synharmony, making its vocal structure close to the synharmonic models of their native language.

2. In the Russian utterances of Mongols we can expect the errors connected with the absence in Mongolian of the qualitative distinctions of vowels in different word-positions. As a result Mongols can find it difficult to give in their utterances a special timbre quality of a Russian stressed vowel, they are apt to see no difference between stressed and unstressed vowels with reference to the presence or absence of the qualitative reduction.

3. The qualitative reduction of vowels in the non-initial syllables can be expected in Russian utterances, and the further from the word-beginning is the syllable, the stronger will be a qualitative reduction of vowels in it.

4. We can suppose that having difficulties with the proper word-stress in Rus-

sian, Mongols will prefer to stress the initial syllables.

5. The length as a component of a Russian word-stress can associate with the length of vowels in their native language. Clusters of consonants in Russian words can be comprehended and reproduced as stressed ones.

6. As a consequence of the functional lack of coincidence of the prosodic means in both languages there can be errors in the segmentation of the auding: Mongolian students can differentiate the unknown words in accordance with the law of synharmony.

This is the brief description of a theoretically possible accent of Mongols in the prosody of a Russian word, which gives us a chance to find out difficulties for Mongolian learners of Russian.

The experiments in comprehension of the accent-rhythmical structure of a Russian word by Mongolian learners, the analysis of their errors prove that the foretold deviation actually take place in the Russian utterances of Mongols, in the prosodic structure.

/1/ Gerasimovich L.K. Mongolian versification: Experimental phonetic study, Leningrad, 1975.