

SYLLABLE TONEMES IN LATVIAN

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ABSTRACT

The present contribution attempts to verify and specify the analogous phonological opposition of the two syllable tonemes occurring in the North-East Vidzeme and Latgale variants of the High Latvian dialect. The unification process of syllable tonemes which is under way in the Latvian Standard language has also been analysed.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Latvian the initial syllable bears the stress, as a rule. It is only in some cases that the stress may rest on any other syllable. The syllable toneme is an independent prosodic feature in Latvian. It functions irrespective of word-stress. In some cases the syllable toneme has a semantic function, for example, luōks 'spring onion', luōks 'a bow or shaft-bow', luōks (-gs) 'window'.

2. LATVIAN STANDARD LANGUAGE

In the Latvian Standard language three types of syllable toneme are conventionally distinguished: falling (˘), broken (glottalized) (^) and drawling (˜), yet the use of two tonemes: drawling and non-drawling is compulsory. It is left for a speaker to choose

either one syllable toneme (basically falling) or distinguish between the falling and broken toneme within the limits of non-falling syllable tonemes. Sometimes the choice of these tonemes has semantic function, for example, when distinguishing the adverb kā (kā tu roc? 'How do you dig?') from the pronoun kā (kā tev nav? 'What do you lack?') Latvian linguistics lacks experimental research concerning both the systems of syllable toneme in the Standard language and dialects, and the processes proceeding in them. At present the u n i f i c a - t i o n of syllable tonemes can be observed in the Standard Latvian language. Formerly the attention to this phenomenon was drawn by J. Endzelins [3], V. Dambē [2], S. Rāge [6]. The present research attests that the unification proceeds in several directions: I. Under the influence of the Low Latvian dialect, called Lejzemiēku, the drawling syllable toneme, as a hypernormal feature, may be heard in some words, for example, maizē 'bread', tauta 'people', ieļa 'street'. S. Rāge [6] and V. Dambē [2] had also noted the occasional wrong use of the drawling syllable toneme, in-

stead of the falling one, by High Latvians under the influence of Low Latvian dialects. II. In Present-day Standard Latvian the use of the falling toneme has notably increased. In the speech of professional linguists, too, one can often hear the wrong usage of gaitē 'cord', gukāt 'to brush', siņucis 'onion', taupa '(he) saves'. (Some cases, for example, taupa, may also serve as a reverse reaction to the hypernormal pronunciation of tauta). Basically two reasons account for this: 1) the impact of the High Latvian dialect (In this dialect the falling toneme is substituted for the drawling one. A great number of Latvian intellectuals are born High Latvians); 2) the impact of the Russian language: a) the drawling syllable toneme that is marked by the duration of vowels is pronounced shorter. Therefore it is quite credible that duration marks the drawling toneme only in the syllables containing open and half-open vowels; b) The specific features of a broken toneme tend to disappear - there is a notable decrease of glottalization. The latter is more level, and the increase of duration of the broken tonemes is occasionally noted. Besides, the falling toneme is specified by stability in the Latvian Standard language. In general, within the system of three syllable tonemes which comprises two tonemes of level character, e.i. falling and drawling, the falling toneme is effected more precisely (usually by the level of falling duration of the intensity and the fundamental pitch)

than in the area where two tonemes are used. In the latter they must differ, for example, only from the broken toneme which, in its turn, is marked by a cut intensity and the fundamental pitch changes. We have already pointed out the variations in the intensity of the falling tonemes and the fundamental pitch direction in the two tonemes area [4]. In 1923 A. Abele wrote [1] that when word-stress in the Latvian was shifted to the initial syllable, the drawling toneme turned into the falling one under the impact of the East Slavonic neighbours. In the Present-day Latvian language the accentuation of the initial syllable has become fixed. You need not go East in search of the impact of the Russian language. Consequently, the shifting process of toneme is recurring.

3. DIALECTS

The syllable tonemes in dialects appear to be more stable. The area of the very singular High Latvian dialect with two syllable tonemes (˘ and ^) in use, embraces the territory of two Latvian regions: Latgale and North-East Vidzeme. We have made experimental measurements of the syllable tonemes used in Latgale, namely, in the subdialects of Baltinava, Berzgaile, Silajani and Preiļi. The obtained data have been compared to the characteristics of the syllable tonemes used in the formerly explored sub-dialects of North-East Vidzeme, namely, Ziemeļi [4,5], Aluksne, Jaunlaicene, Jaunroze, Karva, Vec-laicene [5]. The sub-dialects under discussion are still used in daily commu-

nication and farming. I have analysed tonemes in the syllables containing long monophthongs and diphthongs in both isolated words and phrases. It may be concluded that the characteristic features of the syllable tonemes in isolated words, as well as in phrases, are identical irrespective of the fact that the duration of produced speech sounds in isolated words of the sub-dialects under consideration at an average 1,3 times exceeds the duration of the speech sounds fixed in phrases. The experiment concerned with the investigated Latgale sub-dialects permits to conclude the usage of two phonologically distinctive types of syllable tonemes: 1) the level toneme (conventionally called falling and marked by \searrow). This type of toneme is specified by level intensity and fundamental pitch changes and longer duration. The intensity and fundamental pitch direction can be specified as level falling, level rising - falling, or level rising; 2) the acute toneme (conventionally called broken and marked with \wedge). This type of toneme is specified by the acute intensity and fundamental pitch changes and shorter duration. The intensity and fundamental pitch direction can be described as acute falling, acute falling-rising, or acute rising-falling. In the Berzgaile sub-dialect the oscillogram of the monophthong \underline{a} produced by an informant shows a particular saw-shaped design with a rising-falling -rising-falling direction. This type (\wedge) of toneme is specified by glottalization, i.e. a decrease in the regula-

rity of the vocal cords vibrations. Yet it is impossible to state the starting point of glottalization only by oscillograms. Both types of toneme are contrasted to each other by the presence or absence of a specific prosodic distinctive feature - an acute or level characteristics of the intensity and fundamental pitch changes. Yet it is indisputable that intensity changes is a more precise toneme indicator, for example, the monophthongs \underline{i} , \underline{u} , \underline{a} , \underline{e} , \underline{o} , produced in phrases, differ in the intensity of the second part of monophthongs; in the absolute distinction between the intensity of the first and second part of a monophthong; they differ in the distance to the upper limit of intensity maximum; in the distance between the maximum and minimum intensity; in the range of the rise and fall; in the rapidity of the intensity of rise and fall. The above mentioned indicators have a credibility rate of toneme distinction which is $> 97,0\%$ - $99,9\%$ (by Student's criterion). According to the fundamental pitch changes the same monophthongs differ only in the average fundamental pitch and that of the second part of the monophthong. Besides these indicators are only relative toneme distinctive features (85,3% and 86,4% distinctive credibility by Student's criterion). Other measurements produce similar results. Consequently, in Latgale sub-dialects which produce level and acute toneme opposition dynamics is the basic distinctive feature of these tonemes. I have arrived at similar conclu-

sions from my former research when investigating level and acute toneme oppositions in North - Vidzeme sub-dialects I4,5I. So this permits generalization that in the High Latvian Non-selonian sub-dialects, where two syllable tonemes prevail, two types of toneme - level and acute are phonologically distinctive in both North-East Vidzeme and Latgale. Dynamics serves as the basic distinctive feature between them. The High Latvian dialect comprises another group of sub-dialects, the so called Selonian. However, I temporarily lack a sufficient number of experimental tests to offer the complete specification of these tonemes. I may only share the hypothesis advanced by A.Sarkanis I7I to the effect that in Selonian sub-dialects, the musical or melodious moment predominates as a distinctive feature of tonemes. It would be essential to subject to experimental test also some other phenomena of the High Latvian dialect, for example, the usage of the rising syllable toneme, characteristic of the Selonian sub-dialects, in the speech of the Non-selonian (e.g. Izvalta) native population. The syllable toneme, which occurs in the result of contraction and reminds of the drawing toneme and some other syllable toneme variations, also deserve experimental research.

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