

## Prosodic variation of the English word in terms of bilingual lexicography

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This paper has two aims. One is to present a detailed analysis of prosodic variation of the English word in the theoretical framework of lexicological phonetics. The second is to show how this aspect of lexical variation of the word can be treated in bilingual lexicography.

The reason why people speak of «phonetic sciences» in the plural is that the «expression plane» of language consists of a variety of different phonations. Of those speech sounds in the ordinary sense, as well as the different voice modulations, mainly as the «soul» of syntax, were most fortunate. They form the backbone of «sound» linguistics —*sound* in the fullness of the word's ambivalent acceptations.

This state of affairs naturally raises the question: why is it that linguists have shown, comparatively speaking, less interest in the «phonetics of the word»? This does not mean to say, of course, that the expression plane of the «lexis» has been completely unattended to. We possess almost exhaustive studies of phonotactics as part of morphology. We are well versed in the accentual patterns of different types of words. But very little has so far been achieved to demonstrate (the way it has been done for syntax) the dialectic unity of phonic expression and semantic content of the Word.

This is the gap lexicological phonetics is intended to fill. Lexicological phonetics is that branch of linguistics which concentrates on the prosody of lexical units in different speech situations. It studies various phenomena of sound with the help of which the semantic structure of lexemes as well as their inherent and adherent connotations are realized in speech. Its method consists in considering the flow of speech from the point of view of those units which are defined as words in the written form of language and marked off by spaces in traditional orthography. It goes without saying that the investigation of the phonetic behaviour of words is always carried out against the background of more general characteristics of different registers.<sup>1</sup>

Lexicological phonetics proceeds from the assumption that the word is a bilateral unit and its lexical meaning is a reverberation in the human consciousness of 'objects' of reality (phenomena, relationships, qualities and processes) which becomes a fact of language because (and only when) a constant and indissoluble connection is established between the reverberation and a certain sound (or sound complex, or 'caul'). Otherwise stated, the meaning of the word depends on its sound caul. The latter is indispensable not only because it is the physical expression of the content and the vehicle for communicating it to other people, but also because without it the given lexical meaning could not come into being, exist and develop.<sup>2</sup>

Since words have so far been studied in their standard orthographic form, which does not allow for the representation of prosodic parameters, it has been assumed that semantic variation of the word does not lead to any changes of the expression plane. The sound caul seems to remain identical irrespective of the fact that the word

1. Minajeva, Ludmila, 1982.

2. Akhmanova, Olga, 1966, p. 160, cf. also Smirnitsky, A.I., 1955.



up into constituent meanings indicated in a dictionary by means of Arabic figures, the division being based on an exhaustive study of different context in which the word may or does appear. But, as has been shown above, semantic modifications of the word may be signalled by its prosodic variation as well. It follows that prosodic variation together with the contextual criterion can help the lexicographer to draw finer distinctions between the different lexical semantic variants of words. The following example will illustrate this statement.

The basic nominative meaning of the verb «to pray» is «to commune with God» and is expressed colligationally by means of absolute syntactic position, for instance:

	They	knelt down and prayed.	
		pray · every morning.	
	Do you often pray?		

Then comes the meaning «offer thanks, make requests known», which is confined to the colligation to pray for smth/ smb, for example:

||I |prayed for forgiveness.||  
 ||The |mother-prayed for her baby.||

Here we can observe an interesting interaction of colligation and collocation. Subtle modifications of meaning depend on the words which are brought together in the same colligation.

The two meanings discussed above are not prosodically marked. The situation is drastically different in the case of pray<sub>3</sub> «to ask smb for a favour». This meaning finds its manifestation in the colligation to pray smb for smth/to do smth, for example:

||I |pray you to · think again.||  
 ||We |pray slowly you to show mercy.||

The meaning in question is generally accompanied by the marked prosodic variant. Modifications of loudness and pitch movement accompanied sometimes with slow tempo and breathiness make the word used in this meaning stand out in the flow of speech.

If we compare the pronunciation of pray<sub>3</sub> and pray<sub>4</sub> «a formal request equivalent to please» we shall see that the prosody of the word under analysis has changed once again:

||Pray, ask the · lady to · come out here.||  
 ||And 'may I know, pray, \what slowly, lady has the · credit of inspiring ·  
 'such réflexions?||

The semantic debasement of pray<sub>4</sub> finds its immediate manifestation in modifications of prosodic parameters: pray<sub>4</sub> does not carry a stress of its own and clings, as it were, either to the preceding or the following word.

The example with «pray» was adduced to demonstrate the lexicographic rele-

vance of prosodic variation of polysemantic words at the preliminary stage of dictionary making—in semasiological analysis. But not only that: the evidence of this and many other examples of the same kind justify us in stating that the word's prosodic variation should be indicated in its dictionary entry. Indeed, if dictionaries register the phonemic structure and typical colligations of the word, why not describe its prosodic variation which is part and parcel of the word's expression plane?

It should be emphasised in this connection that prosodic variation should be first and foremost indicated in dictionaries meant for foreign learners of languages. It goes without saying that one cannot learn a foreign language unless one is aware of all the finer nuances which are not readily deducible from the written form of texts, and, consequently, are too frequently overlooked. Lexicography can help learners to bridge this gap.

Of course, one cannot deny that the indication of pronunciation in dictionaries (especially in bilingual dictionaries) is no easy task, and there are always many technical problems.<sup>6</sup> But if what we are after is an active dictionary for the foreign learner the indication of pronunciation is by no means of secondary importance, because, as is well known, lexicography exerts a great influence on the teaching of foreign languages.

The matter is further complicated by the fact that the prosody of the word depends to a great extent on its syntactic position, register of speech, various pragmatic factors. But it does not mean that prosodic variation does not lend itself to generalization. At this point, however, one important principle that is implicit in our approach to the study of the expression plane of the word must be made explicit.

The concept of prosodic variation is based on the assumption that «the continual, all-embracing, purposeful interplay of invariants and variations proves to be an essential, innermost property of language at each of its levels».<sup>7</sup> As far as the content plane as the word is concerned the invariant-variant relationship is expressed by means of the opposition meaning vs. uses, where meaning is thought of as the invariant and uses of the word-variants. The word's expression plane displays a similar opposition. It will be helpful at this point to lay side by side several sentences, which will illustrate the aforesaid opposition:

- I. vital<sub>1</sub> - «of or concerned with or essential to organic life»:
  1. ||His vital.energies were disappearing.||
  2. ||He was 'lucky that the.bullet hadn't.entered a.vital\organ.||
  3. ||It's\hopeless, | he is 'wounded in a.vital\ part.||
- II. vital<sub>2</sub> - «supreme, indispensable»:
  1. ||The pe'rmit and the.dig were 'too.vital for him to 'take the chance.||
  2. ||It was to overlooking 'this vital\point that my\own downfall in. Leices-ter Square was.due.||
  3. ||This is of 'vital importance.|| I |wish to.see the.man who.packed my things.||

It does not require a very close examination to see that there is a drastic difference between the two sets of examples insofar as their prosody is concerned. The

6. Various aspects of the problem are discussed in detail in Piotrovsky, T., 1987. See also Abercrombie, D., 1978.

7. Jakobson, R., 1985, p. 85.

nominative («of or concerned with or essential to organic life») and the nominative-derivative («supreme, indispensable») meanings of the adjective «vital» can be distinguished because of the accompanying regular prosodic modifications. Within each set the examples, though not identical in their suprasegmental arrangement, have one thing in common. When used in the nominative meaning «vital» does not violate the laws of syntactic prosody, whereas the nominative-derivative meaning is invariably accompanied by the modifications of suprasyntactic prosody. Otherwise stated, the prosody of the word varies a good deal from one context to another, and between different syntactic positions, but it is evidently neutral in the former case and emphatic in the latter one.

Thus, there is every reason to state that the prosody of the word obeys the general rule of linguistic variation: the prosodic invariant which corresponds to a meaning of the word can be «distilled» from the innumerable prosodic variants serving as the expression plane of concrete uses of the word in the same meaning.

I shall not attempt to further explicate the theory of the word's prosodic variation and confine myself to its lexicographic aspect. My concern at present is the indication of prosodic invariants in bilingual dictionaries.

The lexical phonetic research in the prosodic variation of different classes of words has made it possible to establish at least five prosodic invariants which create the opposition of unmarked, neutral and marked types of prosodic variation.

Neutral prosodic variation should not be indicated because it is determined not by the semantics of the word but by its syntactic properties.

As far as unmarked variation is concerned it is represented by what can be described as «zero prosodic invariant» ( $PI_0$ ) which is observed when the word in one of its meanings has no prosodic contour of its own and «clings» to the preceding or the following lexical unit. A case in point is «pray<sub>4</sub>» adduced above.

The zero prosodic invariant is also typical of «oh», «ah» and «well» when they function as vocal pauses rather than interjections, for example:

1. ||Oh, 'that's\nonsense, Algy.||
2. ||'Have you-studied that card?||Well, \tell me,'does-anything/strike you about it?||
3. ||'Ah, 'what's in\the bottle, boy?||

It does not require a close examination to see that in these sentences «oh», «ah» and «well» are prosodically suppressed: they have no stress of their own and are pronounced very quickly and softly. The effect produced is that of a parasitic sound.

Marked prosodic variation is represented by three invariants: positive ( $PI_+$ ), negative ( $PI_-$ ) and intensifying ( $PI_x$ ). All the three invariants are marked because they make the word stand out in the flow of speech. But the prominence of the word is expressed by different invariants differently.

The positive prosodic invariant (widened pitch range, emphatic pitch movement, increased loudness, slow tempo) is the expression plane of those meanings which are inherently charged with meliorative expressive-emotional-evaluative overtones. Thus, for instance, the nominative meaning of «advantageous», «beautiful», «charming», «to delight», «excellent», «fun», «happy», «perfect», «remarkably», «superb», «wonderful», etc., and the nominative-derivative meaning of «angel», «to bless», «gallant», «galaxy», «honey», «to love», «sweet», etc., are accompanied by the positive prosodic invariant.

We deal with the negative prosodic invariant when we come across those meanings of words which are endowed with pejorative expressive-emotional-evaluative overtones. Thus, for example, the expression plane of the nominative meaning of «absurd», «cowardice», «horrible», «filth», «insolent», «miserable», «odious», «ugly», «wickedness», etc., and the nominative-derivative meaning of «bitter», «dry», «coldness», «ghastly», «hollow», «morbidness», «terrible», «swine», etc., can be described in terms of the negative prosodic invariant — narrow pitch range, emphatic pitch movement, increased loudness, slowed-down tempo, tense articulatory setting.

The intensifying prosodic invariant (raised placing of the tone in pitch range and slow tempo) can be observed in words like «absolutely», «enormous», «entirely», «huge», «mighty», «totally», «utterly», etc.

The prosodic invariants described above can be indicated in the following way. In an English-Russian dictionary:

precious /'preʃəs/ a 1. ДРАГОЦЕННЫЙ; ~ stone ДРАГОЦЕННЫЙ КАМЕНЬ. 2. PI+ ДОРОГОЙ, ЛЮБИМЫЙ; his devotion is very ~ to me Я ОЧЕНЬ ЦЕНЮ ЕГО ПРЕДАННОСТИ. 3. PI- МАНЕРНО-ИЗЫСКАННЫЙ 4. PI× ЭМОЦ-УСИЛ. АБСОЛЮТНЫЙ, СОВЕРШЕННЫЙ; do not be in such a ~ hurry! НЕ НЕСИТЕСЬ СЛОМЯ ГОЛОВУ!

In a Russian-English dictionary:

СОКРУШАТЬ., СОКРУШИТЬ. (ВН.) 1. smash (d.) 2. (ОГОРЧАТЬ.) PI\_ distress

The indication of prosodic invariants becomes particularly important when different meanings of the Russian head word are translated by means of the same English word because they signal the semantic diversity of the latter, for example:

ДОРОГОЙ I. (ДОРОГОСТОЯЩИЙ) dear, expensive 2. (ЛИМЫЙ) PI+ dear, PI+ darling

In cases of this kind prosodic invariants help the user to gain a deeper insight into the polysemy of the English word.

The facts and suggestions outlined in this paper are aimed at presenting the problem and describing possible ways of its solution. Lexical-phonetic study of the English vocabulary, which is still under way, yields evidence of a sufficiently substantial nature that there are prosodic modifications of the word correlating with its certain semantic features. Prosodic variation of the word is an issue of considerable delicacy. But even at the present stage of investigation there are grounds for looking more closely at this phenomenon in terms of both lexicology and lexicography.

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