

STYLISTIC VARIATION AS MANIFEST IN THE INFORMATIONAL STYLE OF INTONATION (ON THE BASIS OF ENGLISH AND LATVIAN TV BROADCASTS)

MAIJA BRĒDE

University of Latvia, Latvia

Abstract. Language variation can be observed on all linguistic levels. Stylistic variation affects not only the segmental but also the suprasegmental level of speech, including intonation, stress, rhythm, tempo and voice timbre. Different speech situations require appropriate intonation styles: systems of interconnected intonational means used in a definite social setting to achieve some particular aim of communication.

The article looks into some features of the informational style of intonation in English in contrast to Latvian. For the analysis excerpts of a news broadcast from the *Sky News*, *BBC World* and *LNT* were chosen as presented by professional announcers. Auditive analysis provides data on voice timbre, logical division of speech, style-marking prosodic features and the prominence of semantic centres.

The results of the present analysis of the style of intonation in English in comparison with the one undertaken in 1991 reveal that the basic features remain relatively stable. A slight difference in the voice timbre of contemporary announcers has been observed: occasionally it bears traits of emotional colouring. The division of the text basically corresponds to grammatical constructions; the pauses are of variable length. The loudness of speech is normal. The English announcers use a relatively wide voice range. The pace of speech is characterized as moderate with a slow-down on prominent parts of the text. Informational style characteristics of English include also a number of high falls and wide falls that create the impression of emphasis on semantic centres.

The basic distinctions of the style in Latvian, in contrast to English, include a generally lower pitch level, a narrower range of high falls, frequent use of mid rises and an occasional high rise that is a feature of colloquial speech. The falling tone in non-final tone units, although less common than in English, is an efficient means of creating emphasis.

Key words: variation, style, intonation, intonational styles, informational style

INTRODUCTION

Language variation is typical of all language levels, including the stylistic level, and it applies to all language units. Style, interpreted very widely in linguistic literature, can be viewed as variations of language use against the background of some context (Simpson, 2004: 3, Verdonk, 2002: 6). Verdonk refers to style in language as distinctive linguistic expression used for some purpose and to

some effect. It is pointed out that style is a motivated choice of linguistic means (ibid: 3-5). There is an opinion that in spoken language the speaker's attitude is revealed more vividly, whilst written language uses different means to the same end. 'The advantages of the living word are associated with intonation as a semantic element, with melodiousness and with pauses, which can be recorded in the written form of language in only a limited way' (Rozenbergs, 2004: 142). On that account stylistic variation manifests itself not only on the segmental but also on the suprasegmental level of speech including intonation, stress, tempo, rhythm and voice timbre. Different speech situations call for different intonational means to ensure communication.

PHONOSTYLISTIC VARIATION

Styles of pronunciation that are not associated with regional variations are the subject matter of phonostylistics. Phonostylistic variations are determined by such factors as the aim and the form of communication (a monologue or a dialogue), the speaker's attitude, the degree of formality and spontaneity. 'What is significant are the changes in pronunciation made, consciously or unconsciously, by speakers according to their perception of the situation in which they find themselves, especially how formal or informal they feel it to be' (Hughes, Trudgill and Watt, 2005: 7). The variable by which pronunciation styles differ is predominantly speech sounds, however, in a particular style intonation contours have an exceptionally important role.

Concerning the sound level, in a formal situation speakers will tend to articulate individual sounds more slowly and carefully. In an informal situation speakers will be likely to speak less carefully, and some sounds will either have their values changed or be elided altogether. Variation conditioned by speakers' perception of the speech situation is stylistic variation (ibid). The style of pronunciation is determined not only by situational factors, but also by the speaker's personality and his/her belonging to a particular social class. A significant factor in determining the appropriate style of speaking is the speaker's relationship to the addressee. '[...] how well you know someone or how close you feel to them – relative social distance/solidarity – is one important dimension of social relationships' (Holmes, 2001: 224).

INTONATIONAL STYLES

Intonation, recognized as a linguistic universal, functions differently in individual languages. The features of one particular language used to achieve a certain semantic effect are not the same as in other languages. In the teaching/learning process of English intonation it is particularly important for non-native speakers to realize that familiar intonation contours may have different effects in a foreign language.

Phoneticians at different periods distinguished the following (often overlapping) functions of intonation: communicative, distinctive, grammatical/syntactic, attitudinal, expressive, semantic, discourse, etc., the stylistic function is also singled out. In the second half of the 20th century linguists started to consider the discourse function of intonation (Couper-Kuhlen, 2003). Brazil is of the opinion that the discourse function of the utterance depends on the degree of understanding between the speaker and the hearer: '[...] the discourse values [...] are determined on the basis of who knows what' (Brazil, 1997:100). Roach also acknowledges that it is best to see intonation as an essential component of the discourse structure of speech. To communicate it is necessary to interact with the listeners. In a most recent book on English intonation its author distinguishes the following functions: attitudinal, grammatical, focusing (accentual or informational), discourse, psychological and indexical (Wells, 2007: 11-12). Functions of intonation can be interpreted within the framework of stylistic variation.

Cruttenden holds that all languages and dialects involve some intonational variation in style, class and sex. In all languages there are varying styles of intonation appropriate to different situations (Cruttenden, 1997: 128). Sokolova, Gintovt, I.Tihonova, R.Tihonova define them as systems of interconnected intonational means used in a definite social sphere to achieve some particular aim of communication (Соколова, Гинтовт, И.Тихонова, Р.Тихонова, 1991: 153). On the basis of field work research (an analysis of radio broadcasts, the speech of Oxford and Cambridge University students, a public speaker and a lecturer), the authors singled out the following intonational styles: informational, academic (scientific), publicistic (oratorical), declamatory (artistic) and conversational (familiar). In reality the number of styles is indefinite, and there is a certain overlapping between them. Among the factors that are taken into account when analysing intonation styles are the following: the speaker's voice timbre, the borders of utterances marked by pauses, style-marking prosodic features, such as levels and ranges, tempo, pauses, and accentuation of semantic centres: the use of tones in tone units, pre-nuclear patterns and the contrast between accented and unaccented segments (Соколова et al., 1991: 31, 161).

This model serves as the basis for the present analysis, since it comprises the essential parameters of intonation patterns related to some particular style.

INFORMATIONAL STYLE

A text can be presented as spontaneous or prepared speech in a formal or informal manner, or by reading it out. The speaker can address the public or an individual listener. Every intonational style has its own purpose. The purpose of informational style is to present information in a relatively neutral manner. The style usually becomes apparent when a written informational text (educational,

press report or broadcast in the form of a monologue, dialogue or polylogue) is read aloud (СОКОЛОВА et.al., 1991: 155).

Most often texts presented in this style can be heard on the radio or TV. Since the two media differ concerning the visual presence or absence of the speaker, there is a certain difference in both the prosodic features of text presentation and the accompanying paralinguistic features.

Observations on the basis of the earlier analysis of a radio news broadcast (СОКОЛОВА et.al., 1991) indicate that despite certain variation in terms of the degree of formality and emotional colouring on the part of the speakers all discourse types of informational style share several common features. (Regrettably, the authors do not give full information on the volume of the data; the items analysed take approximately 3 minutes to read.) Voice timbre is resolute and assured, besides professional announcers use the effect of a special chilly distant sounding. Delimitation of utterances is logical, loudness is normal or slightly increased on the borders of phonofragments. Pitch variations include an increase at the beginning of a new piece of information and a decrease in its final part. The pace is rather slow, particularly on important sections of the utterance. Pauses tend to be rather long, mainly at the end of a news segment.

In view of the anticipated fields and purposes of communication in English by non-native speakers (here: the contingent of students of linguistics in Latvia), it is vital they familiarize themselves with the informational style of intonation at least to some extent.

It is of particular interest whether the present characteristics of news reading show any deviation from those observed about 20 years ago, or whether they remain basically the same.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To obtain information about the intonational characteristics of one of the discourse types of informational style – news presentation – excerpts of a news broadcast from the *Sky News* read by a female announcer and from the *BBC World* read by a male announcer were selected for auditive analysis (the recording was made in 2010). The news items take 7 minutes to read. The excerpts were transcribed indicating stresses, nuclear tones and pauses as heard in the news presentation. The sign ['] before a syllable indicates stress with no pitch contrast between high and medium (most often, and also in the present material the speakers use descending scales); the sign [,] marks a low level stress, [·] – a half-accented syllable. Nuclear tones are marked as follows: [ˆ] – a high falling tone, [˘] – a low or medium falling tone, [˙] – a low or medium rising tone, [ˊ] – a high rising tone, [↘] – a wide high falling tone, [ˇ] – a falling-rising tone and [↑] – a special rise. The sign [|] stands for a short or medium pause and [||] – for a long pause. 'W' is the abbreviation for a female-, and 'M' for a male announcer.

To indicate some difference between the English and Latvian intonation contours for students to realize the contrast and concentrate on the most characteristic features of English patterns, a few excerpts from the *Latvian Independent Television Channel (LNT)* were chosen, presented by two professional announcers (a man and a woman) (also recorded in 2010). The running time of news reading is 5 minutes. Information about the intonational character of the news presentation was obtained after repeated listening to the selected stretches of speech. A precondition for obtaining relevant results is experience gained by regular listening to mass media informational texts.

It can be noted that the English – Latvian contrast might be useful also to students whose native language is Russian, since there are some common features of intonation patterns in Latvian and Russian, particularly concerning the pitch of pre-nuclear contours and the character of nuclear tones. These features can be observed in the pronunciation of Latvian and Russian speakers in their daily communication, and they frequently appear to interfere in the class when students start acquiring peculiarities of English intonation.

INTONATION CONTOURS OF ENGLISH INFORMATIONAL STYLE OF INTONATION IN CONTRAST TO LATVIAN

Since informational style has a definite function, it is expected to share several common prosodic features in different languages. Comparing English with Latvian, there is relatively little difference in voice timbre: it is assured and convincing (one must admit that labels for characterizing timbre are often impressionistic since the phenomenon is not easy to describe). The above mentioned ‘special chilly distant sounding’ of English professional announcers does not seem characteristic of the present-day style at all either in English or in Latvian. On the contrary, especially the male announcer’s manner of presenting news can be described as extremely lively, even emotionally coloured and appealing to the public. The effect is intensified by the facial expression and gestures. The flow of speech, in this case reading, is logically structured, with emphasis on more important pieces of information, which is revealed in the use of nuclear tones and the distribution of pauses. In longer sentences pauses serve to attract attention to what is going to be said next. The impression of slowing down in tempo on semantic centres, especially in the final part of the news item in both languages, is also much the same. The rate on the whole can be described as moderate, although it may vary considerably since it is determined by time constraints.

The analysed material is a monologue consisting of an account of facts, which necessitates an absolute prevalence of falling terminal tones. What is especially characteristic of English informational style is the use of falling tones in non-final tone groups, e.g.:

- (1) **W:** The 'rocketed a `ttack|,happened in the 'country's 'capital
 ˘Sana'a|this ˘morning. ||
- (2) **W:** It 'happened at the 'Q'M V ˘compound,|just out'side
 ˘Sana'a|this ˘morning. ||
- (3) **W:** An 'armed ˘vehicle |'carrying the 'deputy , head |of the
 'British ,Embassy | in `Yemen | 'has been a'ttacked by
 ↘ terrorists. ||

The effect is emphasis, especially when the falling tone is realized as a wide high fall (in the first and third tone groups of example (4)):

- (4) **W:** 'Gunmen have ˘set 'fire to 'twenty 'five ↘ tankers |
 trans'porting ˘fuel | to ↘NATO ,troops | in ,Af`ganistan. ||

A wide high fall (example (3)) and a high fall (example (4)) as terminal tones also add to the importance of the information provided.

Similarly, the Latvian examples show that a fall in non-final tone units serves for drawing the listeners' attention to particular words, especially if the tone is realized as a wide fall:

- (5) **W:** 'Tā 'slimnīcas ,teritorijā |'izvietotajā ↘ glābējsilītē |'ievietots
 ˘bērniš. ||
- (6) **M:** 'Kā 'jūtas un kas 'nomāc ↘ Skrundas ˘iedzīvotājus, | to
 'devās 'noskaidrot 'Gatis ˘.Suho ˘,veckis. ||

However, the range of the tone in Latvian is narrower than that in English.

A low rise in non-final tone units mostly helps distinguish the grammatical structure of the utterance, signalling the interdependence of grammatical units and incompleteness of what has been said so far:

- (7) **W:** 'Three ,people | in'cluding a 'British 'Embassy o,fficial |were
 ˘wounded. ||
- (8) **W:** 'Foreign ,Secretary |'William ,Hague |has de'scribed
 the a,ttack |as ˘shameful. ||
- (9) **W:** 'And in a 'separate ,incident |just out'side the ,capital |the
 'French ,manager | of an 'Austrian 'oil and ,gas 'company | has
 been ˘shot. ||
- (10) **W:** O'fficials be,lieve | he was 'in the ,process | of 'setting ˘up
 a 'branch of the `Taliban | 'in the 'U ˘.K. ||

In Latvian the rising tone in the middle of a piece of information is much more common than the falling tone. Often the rising tone, in contrast to the one in English, sounds close to a mid rise:

- (11) **M:** 'Ventas ,krastā | aiz šiem ,kociem | 'noslēpusies 'Latvijas |
 jaunākā ,pilsēta. ||
- (12) **W:** Un jo 'tuvāk nāk 'vēlēšanu ,datums, | jo 'iedzīvotāji ,kļūst |
 'aizvien pesimistiskāki. ||

Among the rising tones one can occasionally hear a high rise that is commonly used in colloquial speech (the first tone unit in example (13) and the second in (14)):

- (13) **W:** 'Otrs | 'attīstītākais 'Latvijas ,reģions | uz'reiz pēc ,Rīgas, |
 'taču | 'Kurzemes ,mazpilsētās | 'statistikai ar ,dzīves 'realitāti |
 'tiešas 'saistības ,nav. ||
- (14) **W:** 'Ārkārtas 'vēlēšanu izdevumi | 'Rojā | un , Mērsragā | būs
 , jāatmaksā | 'pašai 'Rojas 'novada , domei. ||

A high rising tone is more characteristic of women's speech, and can also be regarded as an individual feature. The main function of the tone does not differ much from that of a low or mid rise, i.e. it points to incompleteness of the thought; in addition, it also brings about a certain impression of liveliness.

In the male announcer's reading in English a combination of two falling tones without a noticeable pause in between was registered (in the fourth tone unit of (15)). Both the low and the high fall highlight the important words in the given information:

- (15) **M:** In'telligence o'fficials ,say | a 'British ,man | 'killed by the ,air
 'strike in ,Pakistan | 'may have been ,linked to the plot | to
 'bomb ,New 'York's 'Time ↘ Square. ||

The news presentation contains also a falling-rising tone that is a common feature of English speech. In this material it was registered in the male announcer's reading:

- (16) **M:** ↘ First | 'China's ,Premier | ad'dresses 'Europe's ,business |
 [...]
- (17) **M:** In ↘ fact | 'over the 'first 'seven ↘ months of this ,year |
 the 'E ·U 'exported | just ,over 'one ·hundred ↑ billion
 ,dollars | ,worth of ,goods to ↘ China. ||
- (18) **M:** ↘ But | it is 'less than ↑ half the a ↘ amount | that 'went in the
 ↘ opposite di,rection. ||
- (19) **M:** ↘ They ,say | of ,course | the 'weak yu,an | is 'making it
 ↘ tougher for ,Europe's ,exporters | 'and has 'led to a 'trade
 im ↘ balance. ||

In the first tone unit of examples (16), (17), (18) and (19) the complex tone introduces the following piece of information. As a combination of a high fall with a low rise the tone creates the effect of emphasis and signals continuing the thought (in the second tone unit of (17), in the third of (18) and in the fourth tone unit of (19)).

There are cases when some particular word should be singled out in the middle of a tone unit. The function is performed by a special rise (in the fourth tone unit of (17), in the second of (18) and in the fourth tone unit of (20):

- (20) **M:** These are the 'latest and most `serious at,tacks | on sup`ply
,convoys | after ,Pakistan | 'shut a ↑key `border ,crossing |
into Af'ganistan 'last ˘week.

A fall-rise can be heard also in Latvian; however, it does not seem to be as common as in English (in the third tone unit of (21) and the first and second tone units of (22)):

- (21) **W:** 'Te | 'cilvēki 'sastopas | ar 'tādām `pašām ,problēmām, |
,kādas ir ,arī ,citos ˘reģionos. ||
- (22) **M:** Kā `daudzviet ,Latvijā, | arī `Skrundas ,iedzīvotājus |
'galvenokārt 'uztrauc ˘bezdarbs. ||

In two cases only, before a hardly noticeable pause, level tones have been registered (in the fourth tone unit of (13) and in the third tone unit of (17)).

Variations of tempo include a slow-down on some particular words, which is another way of creating emphasis. Occasionally announcers choose to stress function words. Apart from the effect of emphatic rhythmical patterns, stressed function words also slow down the tempo of speech. For instance, stressed function words appear in example (10): the preposition 'in'; in (18): the conjunction 'but'; and in (19): the conjunction 'and'. Example (23) illustrates how tempo reduction is achieved by using a strong stress on the prefix of the final word at the end of the news passage:

- (23) **W:** The 'nature of the 'link be-tween the 'two ,men | is ,said to
be 'un`clear. ||

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions on the nature of the informational style of intonation in English and Latvian as revealed in news presentation are summarized in the following table.

Table 1

Phonostylistic characteristics of news presentation in English and Latvian

Timbre	English: assured, business-like, proficient, occasionally with slight emotional colouring	Latvian: assured, business-like, proficient
Segmentation	logical, corresponding to grammatical constructions	logical, corresponding to grammatical constructions
Loudness	normal, with slight variations	normal, with slight variations
Levels and ranges	increase at the start of a news item, decrease towards the end of it; relatively wide range	variable, different for female and male announcers, rise at the beginning of a news item; normal range
Rate	moderate, slow on semantic centres	moderate, slow on semantic centres
Pauses	variable (short, medium or long)	medium, relatively long
Rhythm	stable	not greatly variable
Nuclear tones	predominance of falling tones, esp. high falls	falling, rising
Pre-nuclear patterns	descending scales	considerably variable
Contrast between the accented and unaccented segments	perceptible	perceptible

Comparing the results of the present analysis of the informational style of intonation in English and the one undertaken in 1991 (with a view of the fact that the recent analysis was based on the TV but the earlier one on the radio material), one can conclude that the basic features of the style remain stable, although some parameters bear a slight difference. Pauses in the material of 1991 are characterized as rather long and loudness as normal or increased; the contrast between the accented and unaccented segments is described as 'not great' (Соколова et al., 1991: 178). Also in the present analysis minor variations of loudness were observed: the announcers tend to pronounce more important stretches of speech a little louder. The only conspicuous difference observed lies in the announcers' voice timbre which in the contemporary announcers' pronunciation appears to have lost the effect of 'chilly distant sounding'.

The main style-marking prosodic features do not differ essentially in the female and male announcers' pronunciation; an exception is pitch that depends on

peculiarities of the voices of both sexes. A slightly variable range can be ascribed to the individual manner of the announcers.

The basic distinctions of the informational style of intonation in Latvian in contrast to English are the following: a generally lower pitch level, a narrower range of high falls, frequent use of mid rises and an occasional high rise that is a feature of colloquial speech. Non-final tone units may comprise both the falling and the rising tone; the falling tone, although less current, like in English, is an efficient means of creating emphasis.

Every parameter characterizing intonational style in general and the informational style of intonation in particular undoubtedly requires a detailed research. This refers in particular to pre-nuclear patterns that demonstrate considerable variety in English and Latvian.

REFERENCES

- Brazil, D. (1997) *The Communicative Value of Intonation in English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Couper-Kuhlen, E. Intonation and Discourse: Current Views from Within. In D.Schiffirin, D.Tannen, H.E.Hamilton (eds.) *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (pp. 13-14). Blackwell Publishing.
- Cruttenden, A. (1997) *Intonation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal, D. (1999) *The Penguin Dictionary of Language*. London: Penguin Books.
- Holmes, J. (2001) *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Longman: Pearson Education.
- Hughes, A., Trudgill, P. and Watt, D. (2005) *English Accents and Dialects*. Hodder Arnold.
- Roach, P. (2001) *Phonetics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rozenbergs, J. (2004) *The Stylistics of Latvian*. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds.
- Simpson, P. (2004) *Stylistics*. Routledge.
- Verdonk, P. (2002) *Stylistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wells, J.C. (2007) *English Intonation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Соколова, М.А., Гинтовт, К.П., Тихонова, И.С., Тихонова, Р.М. (1991) *English Phonetics*. Москва: Высшая школа.

Maija Brēde (Prof., Dr. philol.) is currently working at the University of Latvia. Her research interests include phonetics and phonology and a few aspects of discourse analysis. Email: mabred@lanet.lv