THE MEANING OF THE TERMS 'PROSODY' AND 'INTONATION' IN THE ENGLISH PHONETIC TERMINOLOGY

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Abstract. Since phonetic terms 'prosody' and 'intonation' are used interchangeably by many authors, this article explores the terms' semantics and function by means of analysing various specialised English texts (linguistic articles and dictionary entries). The component analysis results point out that 'prosody' is used in most cases to denote pause, stress and rhythm, while 'intonation' more often covers melody, syllabic characteristics, loudness and timbre. The analysis of English specialised texts demonstrates that 'prosody' has broader semantics: it either includes intonation itself or some of its components (stress, tone and others), thus making the two terms only conditional synonyms with overlapping semantic structures.

Keywords: term; phonetic terminology; language for specific purposes (LSP); prosody; intonation.

The focus of this research is on the English phonetic terms 'prosody' and 'intonation', which are sometimes used as absolute synonyms in phonetic discourse. It does not only cause misunderstanding among phoneticians worldwide, but it can also lead to entanglement in the practices of teaching phonetics to students of various languages. Notwithstanding the fact that these specialized lexical units are used interchangeably by various authors, the terms 'intonation' and 'prosody' have different semantic structures, the latter being broader in meaning, and different functional parameters, as 'prosody' can be used to describe metrical characteristics in poetry. This article therefore aims to research their meanings and to determine to which degree these lexemes coincide in meaning and function in specialised contexts.

Following the recent study of the two notions in the Russian tradition (conducted by M. V. Belorukova and owing to the lack of academic research aimed at analyzing the semantic aspect of the terms 'intonation' and 'prosody' in English, the significance of differentiating between these two notions and corresponding terms is determined by the need to standardise the phonetic terminology as well as to make professional discourse easier.

Although linguistic terminology in general – and phonetic terminology in

particular – have become the first object of various types of research since the rise of the terminological science in the 1930s, there still remain some issues connected with the functional and semantic features of linguistic terms that require further study. The terms 'prosody' and 'intonation' and the corresponding phonetic notions, for example, have been subjected to numerous studies in the Russian linguistic tradition: M. V. Belorukova, in *Intonation and Prosody: Similarities and Differences* [12], claims that there exist two opposite views on this problem: some scientists make no differentiation between the terms in question, thus treating them as complete synonyms, while the others point out certain differences in their meaning and perceive them only as conditional synonyms.

For instance, in *The Basics of General Phonetics*, such Russian phoneticians as L. V. Bondarko, L. A. Verbitskaya and M. V. Gordina state that the Russian terms 'prosody' and 'intonation' are equal and interchangeable in professional phonetic discourse [13].

A number of substantial differences in the meanings of the two terms are nevertheless pointed out by A. M. Antipova, R. K. Potapova, N. D. Svetozarova and others. For example, N. D. Svetozarova, in *The Intonation System of the Russian Language* [20], formulates the distinctive feature of the two terms: the lexeme 'prosody' refers to any supersegmental units organizing syllables, phrases, etc., while the term 'intonation' is only referred to the type of organization of larger units like syntagmas and sentences. The phonetic

unit being the criterion of this differentiation, it becomes clear that the terminological meanings of the Russian lexemes 'prosody' and 'intonation', according to N. D. Svetozarova, overlap and coincide only partially, therefore making the two lexemes conditional synonyms.

Although the research conducted by M. V. Belorukova presents a certain value in distinguishing between the two phonetic notions, the sources analysed are confined only to Russian phonetic academia, leaving the view on the notions 'prosody' and 'intonation' from the English linguistic perspective unspecified. The objective of this research, thereby, lies in analyzing the meanings of the two terms in the English professional discourse, both in specialised dictionaries and academic articles devoted to the language for specific purposes of phonetics.

Professional communication, in various industries as well as the sciences, is made efficient through the system of special lexical means – terms which have only one meaning in the field in question. However, there arises the problem of synonymy among terms, which can lead to certain difficulties in specialised (professional) communication, since it is not clear whether these terms have equal meanings and can replace one another in specialised texts.

As shown in recent research, studying languages for specific purposes takes into consideration the functional styles' peculiarities [15]. Thus, one cannot but agree with K. Ya. Averbukh [11] that language for general purposes is realised in conversational,

public policy and artistic style, whereas languages for specific purposes (LSP) are used in the scientific style, the style of production and technology, and official functional variations.

In accordance with the three latter styles to which LSP is confined, L. A. Manerko states that lexemes and word combinations (mainly terms) used in this or that LSP play the role of a storage form and as a means of imparting knowledge, since their aim consists in covering strictly defined parts of human cognition and in serving as a way of nomination [17]. The author's idea is thereby to emphasize not only the function of terminological units, but also to point out their nominative and definitive character.

Due to its complex nature there are a lot of various definitions of the 'term' in contemporary linguistics. For the purposes of the research in question the definition given by S. V. Grinev-Grinevich has been adopted: 'a term is a nominative specialised lexical unit (a word or a word combination) accepted to nominate notions in a precise way' [16, p. 30]. Hence, according to the author, the monosemantic character of a term serves as one of the criteria and requirements for terminological units.

In accordance with the triangle of meaning, synonyms in general linguistics are considered to be 'words nominating one and the same object but referring to different notions' [19, p. 97], that is why the existence of lexemes with synonymous meaning in terminologies is viewed by many linguists as a discrepancy between the terms themselves and the notions they designate [16]. In this case the vagueness in

the correlation between a particular notion and its verbal realisation (a term) in an LSP becomes evident.

Despite the requirements for terms to be monosemantic, the terminological units with equal (absolute synonyms) or similar meanings (conditional synonyms) [16, p. 105] can be observed in various terminological systems in different branches of science and technology. So is, for instance, the situation with the phonetic terms examined in the current research ('intonation' and 'prosody'): inasmuch as their meanings coincide only partially, they can be termed conditional synonyms.

It would be natural to presuppose that the situation observed in the Russian phonetic terminology (concerning 'prosody' and 'intonation') is analogous to the one in the English phonetic LSP, since the two terms were borrowed into Russian professional discourse from English. Nonetheless, there are no academic essays devoted specifically to investigating the meaning of English terms 'prosody' and 'intonation'. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that there is no unanimity among English authors as for the use of the terms under examination in specialised phonetic discourse, which therefore causes the need to study their semantics and the way the terms function in modern specialised texts on phonetics.

The edited collection, *Above and Beyond Segments: Experimental Linguistics and Phonetics* (eds. Caspers et al., 2014), provides valuable analyses of the way the lexemes "prosody" and "intonation" function in contemporary professional discourse. Some articles in the collection are devoted specifically to prosody and intonation issues,

which is of primary importance for the present research.

A. Cutler and J. M. McQueen, in *How Prosody is Both Mandatory and Optional*, [2, pp. 71–82], for instance, emphasize that prosody is an obligatory characteristic of speech, be it a native or a non-native speaker, and focus their attention on stress in lexical units perceived by language learners. The terms 'prosody' and 'intonation' are viewed as being synonymous and interchangeable in the given context.

Y. Gu and A. Chen in the article *Information Status and L2 Prosody: A Study of Reference Maintenance in Chinese Learners of Dutch* [2, pp. 120–130] do not point out any principal differences between the terms 'intonation' and 'prosody' using them as absolute synonyms ('L2 prosody' = 'L2 intonation'), whose meaning include duration and pitch.

B. Hoff, in *The Primacy of the Weak in Carib Prosody* [2, pp. 144–151], applies the term prosody in the original sense related to metric characteristics of verse. This paper does not provide any information on the interrelation of the terms in question, since the term 'intonation' has not been applied by the author. This fact can serve as an indirect proof of the fact that the two terms under examination are different at least in their area of use: the term 'prosody' can be used in various contexts related to poetry (metrics, namely), while in many of them the lexeme 'intonation' cannot be found.

Further research into the two terms' functional peculiarities conducted by means of linguistic articles databases *Google Scholar* (scholar.google.ru) and *Project MUSE* (muse.jhu.edu) has produced valuable results. 48 linguistic articles, article reviews and academic papers published since 2000 have been examined from the standpoint of what meaning 'intonation' and 'prosody' had in them. Only 6 (13 %) articles devoted to *prosody* issues [7; 9] deal with poetry – one article studying *intonation* of prose [6; 8]. In four academic pieces (8 %) prosody was connected with syntactical sentence peculiarities [7; 9]. That is why it is possible to state that the term 'prosody' is often used peculiarly in poetic contexts to cover metrical characteristics.

Semantically, in 9 papers (18.7 %) the two terms are used as absolute synonyms, while in 4 items (8 %) 'prosody' includes 'intonation', making the former broader in meaning. The opposite situation (when 'intonation' is a wider notion and it includes 'prosody') can be observed in 3 (6 %) linguistic articles [6; 7; 8; 9].

The component semantic analysis of the terms 'prosody' and intonation' used in the linguistic material obtained from Google Scholar and Project Muse databases includes the following suprasegmental features: pitch and melody (tone / tune); pause / pausing; stress / accent; syllable characteristics; rhythm; loudness; rate / tempo; duration; timbre; elision. The results of this analysis can be presented in the form of a diagram (see *figure 1*).

Figure 1, therefore, shows that the term 'prosody' is used in most cases to denote *pause*, *stress / accent*, *rhythm*, *rate / tempo*, *duration*. It should be noted here that 'prosody' can be used to denote elision and other sound peculiarities [7; 9].
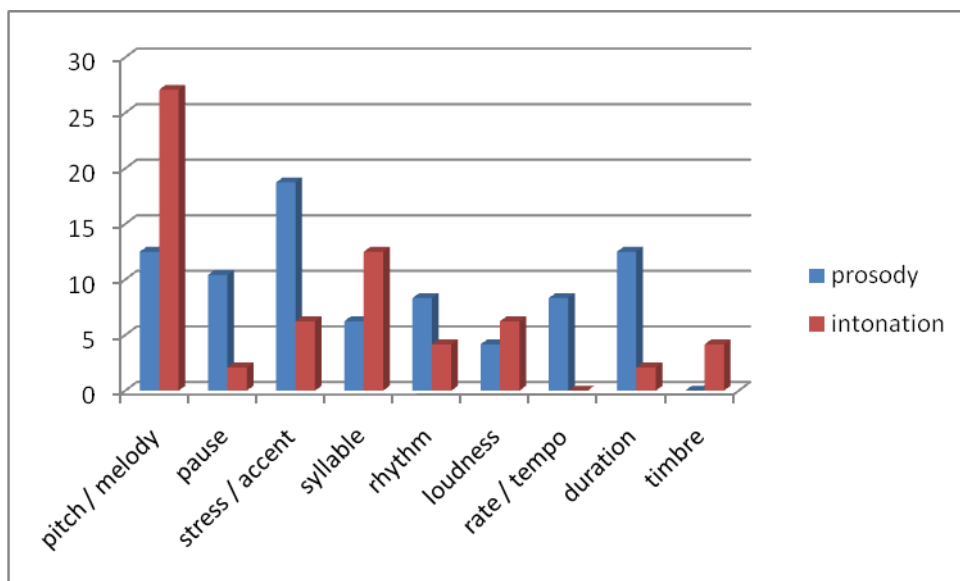
Fig. 1 – **The correlation of supersegmental features included in the semantic structure of the terms 'prosody' and 'intonation' (% of the linguistic papers)**

The term 'intonation', on the other hand, more often denotes *pitch / melody*, *syllabic characteristics*, *loudness* and *timbre*, the latter statistics only slightly exceeding the corresponding ones for 'prosody' [6; 8].

The research showing that the terms 'intonation' and 'prosody' are used interchangeably by many authors, but many supersegmental features included in their semantics overlap (as shown in *figure 1*). Therefore it becomes evident that there is a certain difference between the two lexemes (both in function and meaning), and it is worth engaging the historical information about their terminological development.

Examining the initial sense of the term 'prosody' introduced by J. R. Firth and reflected in his article *Sounds and Prosodies* [5] may reveal the terminological meaning enclosed by the author and founder of the Lon-don Phonetic School. In his research J. R. Firth did not focus his attention on phonemes but on prosodies as characteristics of interphonemic and intersyllabic connection.

According to J. R. Firth, the word 'prosody' comes from Greek, where it referred to hard and smooth breathing. The following prosodic features were pointed out by the author:

— the number of syllables;

— syllable structure (open / close);

— syllabic units;

— the sequence of consonants;

— the sequence of vowels;

— the stressed syllable position, nature and characteristics;

— dark / light syllable character [5, p. 129].

J. R. Firth claimed that stress, length, nasalisation, aspiration, tone, voicedness, palatalisation, specific

sounds of a language, synharmonism constitute prosody [18, pp. 264–265], [4, p. 13], which only partially coincides with the meaning of 'intonation' as a range of suprasegmental characteristics (tone, rhythm, tempo, etc.). So, the two terms coincide only partially in meaning and are treated as condiotional synonyms.

After revealing the historic meaning of the lexeme 'prosody' and the interrelation of the phonetic terms 'prosody' and 'intonation', it is significant to examine some classical papers on supersegmental units, such as *Prosodic Systems and Intonation in English* by D. Crystal [4], whose main focus is the methodological problem of teaching intonation to students learning English as a second language. The book does not differentiate between the two terms in question – on the contrary, they are used as lexemes with almost equal meaning: for instance, 'intonation is viewed as a product of conflation of different prosodic systems of pitch contrasts' (the semantic structure of the one being an integral part of the other). The author, later on, points out two main uses of the term 'prosody' – the general one ('the general senses of melody and metrical structure') and the one found specifically within the context of supersegmental theory [4, pp. 61–62].

In his later work – *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* (2008) – D. Crystal includes pitch and melody in the terminological meaning of 'intonation', while the lexeme 'prosody' is used to refer to 'variations in pitch, loudness, tempo and rhythm' [3, p. 252, 393]. Thus, the meanings of the two terms overlap, and, moreover, the lexeme 'prosody' has broader semantics.

To further examine the modern meaning of the terms 'prosody' and 'intonation' it is essential to analyse entries in English language dictionaries both for general and specific purposes. Thus, the Oxford English Dictionary [1] gives the following definition of the lexeme 'prosody':

(in the theories of J. R. Firth and his followers): a phonological feature having as its domain more than one segment. Prosodies include the class of 'suprasegmental' features such as *intonation*, *stress*, and *juncture*, but also some features which are regarded as 'segmental' in phonemic theory, e.g. *palatalization*, *lip-rounding*, *nasalization*.

The word 'intonation' in its terminological meaning is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as 'a manner of utterance of the tones of the voice in speaking; modulation of the voice; accent' [1]. Consequently, the term 'prosody' has a broader meaning, including the 'intonation' semantics as well as some phonemic parameters.

The Oxford English Dictionary, though being one of the most reliable sources of information concerning English vocabulary, cannot present the fullest data about some specific lexemes. The group of English language dictionaries for specific purposes can be represented by the *Dictionary of Phonology and Phonetics* by R. L. Trask [10], which reveals the meaning and functional aspects of various phonetic terms.

It defines intonation as 'the use of pitch, and possibly of additional prosodic phenomena such as loudness, tempo and pauses, over a stretch of utterance generally longer than a single word for the purpose of conveying meaning' [10, p. 184]. Besides it gives several definitions of the term 'prosody':

1. The study of stress, pitch and intonation.

2. A phonological element which is realized phonetically on more than one segment, including for example (in certain circumstances in certain languages) lip-rounding, backness or nasalization.

3. A phonological element which can only be described with reference to a domain longer than a single segment, including all those mentioned in sense 2 and also suprasegmental elements like stress and tone [10, p. 295].

Firstly, the meanings analyzed demonstrate that the term 'intonation' has a narrower meaning and the corresponding notion is included in the broader concept – 'prosody'. Secondly, the analysis reveals a certain polysemantic character of the latter: it refers to suprasegmental units, sometimes including stress and tone, which makes the two notions ('prosody' and 'intonation') overlap.

On conducting the analysis of English specialised texts on phonetics (both academic articles and monographs), as well as reference books, important results have been obtained concerning the meaning of the terms 'prosody' and 'intonation' in the English language. It is clear that these two terminological units are not fully syn-onymous, although they are sometimes used interchangeably in contemporary phonetic discourse. The meaning of the lexeme 'prosody' is broader: it either includes intonation itself or some of its components (stress, tone and others).

Furthermore, the research has provided valuable results demonstrating that the term 'prosody' has at least two meanings: the general one including supersegmental characteristics (stress, tone, pitch, etc.) and the sense used specifically by the followers of J. R. Firth's theory (suprasegmental features and segmental features like labialisation, lip-rounding, etc.). It should be noted here that the latter meaning is represented in the plural form of the term 'prosodies', and therefore it is advisable that care be taken when applying the terms in question in professional phonetic discourse and when translating specialised texts into other languages.

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