
INTONATION AND PREDICTABILITY

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All linguistic statements consist of an initial pole—where we find the emitter—who produces the acoustic signal(s) and a final pole, of the receiver, who collects these signals, if transmitted to him under optimal conditions.

From the phonological point of view, we may divide and analyse the statements into two components: the phonic segments and the suprasegmental units. The intonation is a suprasegmental element: it has an universal character, because there do not exist languages in which the oral communication would be possible without intonation. By *intonation* we mean all the phonic elements which characterize the different realizations of the same phonematic chain.¹ “Non-intonational” characters have only those chains of phonemes considered “by themselves”, as abstract entities. By *prediction* we mean the selective process the listener effects upon receiving a statement; knowing the first part of the statement, he may “guess” more or less, the elements which will ensue, from an unknown message, the information supposing a choice between more possibilities (2).

We shall try to establish if the intonation may contribute or not to the “prediction” of the elements which compose a statement.

Referring to the intonational contours, we observe that, generally speaking, the final part of an intonation is marked by the characteristic tone of the final contour. In the Romanian language, for instance, we observe that the tone [2] characterizes the contour //, and [1] the contour /↓/. While the contour /↓/ may be or not accompanied by pause /#/, (it follows that the information will be obtained by the choice between two possibilities), in another case, between // and /#/ we have to note a relation of exclusion: where one of the two elements appears, the other is excluded (that means, the perception of the toneme supposes an exact information concerning

¹ Among these elements, we include first and foremost the melodic line (that is, the variations of the tonemes), the accent of intensity, the duration, the pause, the speech-rate, the rhythm, the intensity with which we utter the whole sentence, as well as other acoustic-physiological elements, which were not sufficiently analysed until now (for instance, the “tremolo”, characteristic to a certain theatrical speech); we include here also the concept of regional or foreign “accent”, as well as the variations of tone of the same sound in different pronunciations, a. s. o. All these elements are quoted by us as being facts of intonation (1).

the pause, too; the absence of pause indicates that the statement continues (3). We may multiply the examples. We mention, for instance, that in a dialogue, after an interrogation (or a series of interrogations) an enunciative sentence is to be expected, as an answer to the questions. The distinctions can be continued: we can "predict" the structure of the answer, which will be different when we have to do with a general question or with a *yes* or *no* question. Some research-workers have also pointed out the existence of intonations characterizing different types of sentences (4). When we follow an enumeration, we "recognize" a specific intonation of enumeration and we are able to "predict" the elements which will follow (in a more accurate approximation, we have the intuition of homogene sequences, as: nouns, adjectives, etc.—which belong to the same class).

A characteristic organization of the tonemes is to be noted for the disjunctive propositions, or for the conclusive ones, in Spanish, for instance. On stating this, we do not consider that a necessary bound does exist between the intonational contours and the different grammatical categories. The intonation of the first part of the statement "suggests" only the melodic units which are to complete the contour. By these means, also the elliptic constructions may be understood. But for the entire knowledge of the statement, other elements are important, as well.²

We must keep in mind that, if in the transmission of the information, the unpredictable character of some sequences which compose the texts may modify the intonational contours, there exists an inverse phenomenon also: the intonation may contribute to the increasing of the quantity of information, by means of increasing the predictability of the sequences with which the intonational contours are associated.

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² The most important is, surely, the context. We have to note the degree to which we know a certain language. Sometimes, intonation is associated with mimes, gestures, etc.—a series of communication components which we cannot discuss here and now. We shall also omit in our report the affective elements which come to the fore only by means of intonation and whose reception has already been described by some authors (5), (6).