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**ЭКСПЕРИМЕНТЫ ПО ВОСПРИЯТИЮ ЗВУЧАЩИХ  
ТЕКСТОВ НА АНГЛИЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ (РОЛЬ  
ЗВУЧАЩЕГО КОДА ТЕКСТА В ФОРМИРОВАНИИ ЕГО  
АКСИОЛОГИЧЕСКОЙ ОЦЕНКИ)**

*В статье описываются результаты психометрического эксперимента по формированию аксиологической оценки звучащего кода (интонации, качества речевого голоса и дикции исполнителей) текстов разных жанров с участием испытуемых.*

**Ключевые слова:** восприятие, интонация, испытуемые, код, дикция, качества речевого голоса.

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**EXPERIMENTS ON PERCEPTION OF ENGLISH ORAL  
TEXTS (ROLE OF THE LINGUISTIC CODE IN FORMING  
ITS AXIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT)**

*The paper discusses the results of a psychometric experiment on axiological assessment of the linguistic code (intonation, voice qualities and diction of the speakers) of texts of different genres with participation of subjects.*

**Key words:** perception, intonation, subjects, code, diction, voice qualities.

The topic, as suggested, presents a view on language and one of its subsystems-intonation – in the semiotic context of culture. Speaking metaphorically, intonation is the "soul", the music of the language and helps to preserve it in "its own juice". Intonation "works" not only within the language, but also within the culture, its different layers and levels, spheres and contexts. But, as metaphor never proves anything, considering intonation as part of the linguistic code of culture requires some solid theoretical foundations. It is not ungrounded, therefore, to refer to the following conceptual assumptions:

- 1) intonation is a broad aesthetic category [1, 2];
- 2) language is one of the most important codes of culture;
- 3) culture is a multimodal phenomenon;
- 4) speech and intonation perception and comprehension is part of an individual's general language culture.

These are the four preliminaries for analyzing intonation within the socio-cultural semiotic context.

As it has been proved experimentally, two-thirds of the information of a verbal text are rendered by intonation. Moreover, some authors (Borev Yu.B, Radionova G.Ya.) say that we can speak not only about the close ties of language and thinking, but also of those of intonation and thinking. Intonation moulds thinking [2, с. 224-244]. This thesis presupposes an approach to intonation as a broad aesthetic category, meaning that it is not the prerogative of speech only, but we can "hear" it in gestures, mimics, movements, arts: music, literature, theatre, cinema, etc. В. Assafyef viewed intoning as the man's intellectual activity («интонирование – деятельность человеческого интеллекта»), as a specific form of the man's thinking («особая образно-интонационная форма его мышления»). And intoning, as it is known, is the basic part of intonation.

Bearing language in mind, it is reasonable to state that intonation, implicitly or explicitly, is present in any verbal text, oral or written. And, as any text, including verbal, constitutes a cultural phenomenon, it is logical to view intonation as part of this cultural phenomenon. How does it work in this context? One of the possible cues to that intricate question is not to forget that intonation of spoken texts is heard. And in the long run, for the socio-cultural balance in the society the culture of auditory perception and comprehension is one of the most valid testimonies to the general language culture. Individual's culture of auditory perception and comprehension skills are "nurtured" by the whole cultural context of the society [4]. But as it is known, our auditory sensory skills, as well as visual ones, can be measured and analyzed with special psychometric methods. It is possible to prove experimentally that general language culture depends on the skills and habits of auditory perception of verbal texts in oral forms within the general cultural context of the time.

On the basis of the four theoretical assumptions a series of experiments has been set [2, 5, 6, 8]. An attempt has been made to prove that perception of different types of spoken texts by subjects having different levels of knowledge of English reveals difference in general language culture. To be more exact, two categories of subjects: native speakers and bilinguals. They are liable to have different systems of the nurtured sensory auditory skills. The native speaker subject is an auditory expert. He is an Englishman for whom listening was part of his professional duties. He is Master of Education, teacher of English as a foreign language.

The other groups of subjects were more numerous, from 4 to 37 in a group. Group 1 – first-year students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Group 2- fifth-year students of the same faculty. These two groups were called bilingual subjects. Group 3 – Russian teachers of English – phoneticians – teaching phonetics to the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> years. They were called bilingual phoneticians. To sum it up:

Group 1 a native speaker, an auditory expert.

Group 2 bilingual subjects, 1st year students.

Group 3 bilingual subjects, 5<sup>th</sup> year students.

Group 4 bilingual phoneticians.

The idea with the 4 groups of subjects is this: they have different level of auditory experience and skills. And they are bound to hear different things in the recorded texts.

Now a few words about the texts. For this set of experiments they were 30: 12 of them in female presentation and 18 – male presentation:

1. a piece of prose	male	actor R. Hardy
2. an improvised dialogue	female	native speakers
3. 6 monologues	female \ male	native speakers
4. 14 poems	female \ male	actors

5. an educational program of British TV	male	prof. Attenborough
6. 2 news broadcasts of British TV	female \ male	native speakers
7. 2 TV sports news	male	native speakers
8. 2 TV weather forecasts	male	native speakers
9. a TV fairy-tale "Little Cook"	male \ female	actors

Now about the instructions to the subjects. The auditory experiment was conducted in two sessions. The instruction for the first session reads: "Listen to the texts and mark (on a graphed sheet) if you like the way the text sounds". What is meant by "the way the text sounds"? First of all, the voice of the speaker, the way he or she intoned the text, the manner of pronouncing sounds. So, the audition is prosodically biased. But, of course, it should be noted that it is impossible to erase semantics. Our oral speech perception, as it is known, is semantically biased. The subjects were to put a "+" sign in one of the corresponding columns: "yes", "no", "can't define".

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> session they were to define why they liked the text: either due to its intonation or diction (sounds) or the speaker's voice. This time the experimental sheet has 4 graphs: "intonation", "sounds", "speaker's voice", "nothing appeals to me in this text".

Now that the experiment is described, though in most general features, its results can be analyzed. The results of the analysis and counting of the "pluses" in the experimental sheets testify to some revealing **perceptual paradoxes**. The thing is that the bilinguals and native speaker (auditory expert) liked in most cases different texts. Thus, the bilinguals were impressed by three poems which the native speaker didn't like at all. He didn't like the prolonged final syllables of each line which produces an exaggerated passionate effect. The bilinguals didn't notice this effect. Neither was it noticed by the phoneticians, who also liked the way the poem sounds. The author of the article can suggest one of the possible explanations to this perceptual paradox. The fact is that these poems are very easily perceived just due to the distinctly and very correctly articulated sounds, correct "syntactic" intonation producing short syntagms, in other words, the way the aesthetic cultural component is interwoven into the semantic component of the poems. In case with the native speaker (auditory expert) this procedure is subconscious, automatic, he doesn't have to waste time on deciphering the meaning of separate words because he belongs to the socio-cultural environment in which the texts evolved. He hears what the bilinguals failed to hear being busy with deciphering the meaning of the words. Mentally, they are doing a double job: they are to understand what the text is about, then to assess its intonation, sounds and manner of presentation. And this assessment is possible only through a semantically differentiated perception.

The analysis of the allophonic transcription and intonation notation of the poems reveals the fact that these poems are easy to comprehend; they are intelligible which facilitates perception. The affection, dramatically passionate effect mentioned by the native speaker are achieved with the prolonged pronunciation of the sonorants [... ʌnd 'm:æ:nn 'dɪz 'flɔ:ri bɪt hiz 'taimm ...] and voiced consonants in the finals of the lines, and, on the whole, through distinctly articulated sounds.

As for prosody, passionate effect is a result of the unexpected rises and prolonged falls of the nuclear tone and of a rather slow tempo, explicit pauses of different lengths and of their syntactically correct localization.

The analysis of the results of the auditory sessions also testifies to one more interesting fact. The bilinguals seemed to be fond of an artistic poetic and prosaic speech. They didn't seem to like the improvised dialogue of two British students. It was a casual informal talk of two friends. They preferred Shakespeare to it. It would have been natural and quite understandable if it had been otherwise. This perception paradox can be explained by at least

three reasons: first, by intonation expectations, second, by a specific mechanism of speech perception of bilinguals, and third, by a specific charm of artistic prose and poetry and the manner of their oral presentation [7]. Of these three factors the first one is most important in the context of a phonetic paper.

The thing is that there can be different types of expectations: social, if we, for example, speak about social interaction; literary expectations – if we speak about the effect of deceived expectations and so on. Within the sphere of verbal expectations I think it is possible to refer to intonation expectations, because the role of intonation in oral texts is revealing and illuminating. Intonation expectations constitute part of speech stereotypes formed in the course of a foreign language acquisition. Prosodic stereotypes of bilinguals are, as it is known, formed on the basis of oral texts, which, more often than not, belong to philological artistic genres. They give a refined verbal picture no matter how spontaneous they might be. Besides, there is one more explanation to the results of the experiment: culture is a multimodal phenomenon and language is only one of its codes, though being the most important and universal. In its turn, verbal interaction is part of the general interactive process and the verbal code is only one of the numerous cultural codes. Verbal interaction without gestures, mimics and other non-linguistic codes is possible, but it will be very poor as it is robbed of its naturalness. So, listening to the recording without the visual row being provided, the subjects were to do without it relying on their imagination and cultural outlook. The auditory impressions were devoid of visual ones. That is why their auditory perception of the texts belonging to a different cultural context is incomplete, and the stereotypes formed on this basis are deficient. Consequently, intonation expectations function on this deficient foundation. These stereotypes can be called bilinguistic meaning that students or learners of English are nurtured on good voices, syntactic intonation, full articulation and other attributes of the so called correct speech, teaching norm. And that is why when presented with or experimental texts they choose what they are used to: texts of philological genres and artistic presentation.

The conclusion comes out natural: 1) learners of English should be presented while learning the language with different types of English oral texts; 2) audio texts are not sufficient – audio-visual texts are necessary. So that learners can hear and see and, as a result, develop both visual and auditory sensory skills, and in effect be presented with all the cultural codes of social interaction existing in this culture.

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