The nature of intonation units and the place of intonation in linguistics

The first reason is the still-reigning treatment of intonation as something peripheral to the language system and attributing it rather to speech than to language.

The second reason is the fact that it is not clear what aspect of linguistics should deal with intonation. Information on intonation in a particular language (if there is any) is given either in "phonetics" or in "syntax" or even in both. In other words, one is illustrated for Russian by the new academic edition of Russian Grammar /1/ (parts devoted to intonation are written by E.A. Bryzgunova).

The fact that different aspects of linguistics do not deal with the same subject seems to be quite natural as different branches of linguistics do not study various language phenomena, but analyze them from different points of view.

The word is analyzed both in phonetics and lexicology. Nevertheless, one can hardly imagine that word — the main linguistic unit — should be analyzed only in phonetics, that is, from the point of view of its form (plane of expression) or only in lexicology, that is, from the point of view of its meaning (plane of content).

As to intonation units, the main debatable point is whether to attribute them only to the plane of expression or to regard them as bilateral units, that is, language units.

Both viewpoints have their adherents. This is reflected in different definitions of intonation and intonation units.

The adherents of the view point that intonation units are signs do not put special arguments in support of this position. Probably they consider the ability of intonation to convey definite meanings (can be connected with meaning) to be quite a weighty reason. However, everything in the language is connected with meaning to some extent. The material form of the language does not exist just by itself but as a means of conveying information.

In the opposite, those who attribute intonation only to the plane of expression, i.e., to phonetics as the aspect dealing with the sound matter (form of the language, think it is their duty to give special reasons for their position. Thus, they present the well-known fact that the same formal means (intonation pattern) combined with different lexical and grammatical structures conveys different meanings, so that the meaning is not conveyed by intonation pattern alone, but by its combination with other linguistic units.

It seems, though, that special reasons for proving the special role of intonation units are required only if they are treated like phonemes. In case we attribute intonation to the plane of expression of language but do not confine it to phonemic alone admitting the existence of other sound means that have special functions, we may regard intonation as an element of the plane of expression capable of conveying some specific meanings (elements of the plane of contents), that is, communicative, modal and emotional.

According to the conception of the Phonological School (or Leningrad Phonological School) the main function of phonemes is the constitutive one /2, 3/.

Phonemes, which have no meaning of their own and are singled out due to their potential link with meaning, constitute the sound material thus the smallest meaningful language units.

The plane of expression of complex language units includes several phenomena: intonations, sentences, paragraphs, texts, among others reduced to a mere chain of phonemes. Together with the relationship between the units of the lower levels /4, 5/ it constitutes the plane of constituent — prosody — performing some specific functions.

Intonation takes part in forming the sound matter of a complex language unit primarily as a means of organizing its components.

However, the fact that speech units (sentences, paragraphs, texts) can be organized in various ways enables intonation to express some specific meanings, either alone or in combination with other non-intonational means.

In some of its functions intonation is more conventional, while in others it is very close to the conventional language signs. This can be seen in some communicative types of utterances and some emotional reactions where some "meanings" or "sentences" as for example "question", "agreement", "non-agreement", "surprise", "doubt" have their own corresponding intonation patterns, which in some cases are used as the only means of conveying information. It can be proved by the fact of correct perception of the so-called "pure" intonation (intonation without words) in colloquial Russian (нап — ha! — нра! — нра!).

In its other manifestations, specifically, more common intonation reveals its non-sign nature. I believe that in such situations, intonation seems to be either the defining or the prominence-lending, intonation patterns can hardly be interpreted as general linguistic signs (for the opposite case of view see, for example /6/).

So, obviously, the author of an intonation theory will regard intonation units as mere or less sign units depending on the fact which of its functions are in the centre of his investigation.

Thus, the third reason for rather a vague status of intonation whether it is a linguistic aspect is different interpretation of the essence of intonation, the extent of its functions and the character of its units.

Intonation: syntactic or semantic?

The great variety of view points on intonation, in my opinion, can only be explained by the complexity and heterogeneity of its phenomena.

The fact that intonation has long been outside the sphere of main linguistic problems can be accounted for not by an insufficient amount of experimental data but by the fundamental difference of intonation from other linguistic phenomena.

The term "intonation" coming nowadays into use in the Soviet Union is a symptom of the realization of this difference.

Paradoxical as it may seem any further
deepening of the investigation of intonation aggravates the state of things.

Large quantities of experimental data have shown that intonation correlates more closely with the semantics of an utterance than with its syntax.

Thus, the so-called communicative types of utterance as well as other phenomena of sentence accentuation are, in fact, semantic by their nature. For example, some features of the intonation structure of an utterance may be caused by the specific meaning of words and word-groups constituting this utterance.

The results of the experiments proved that the metaphorical use of the word "syntactic sematics" in its specific semantic capacity, the presence of a number of meanings (semantic components) in its semantic structure (as, for example, the meanings of evaluation, contrast, result, negation, etc.) serves as factors causing a greater degree of its prominence. On the contrary, the semantic "emptiness" of some of the words is the cause of their weaker accentual prominence.

Thus, intonation which has long since been called "syntactic semantics" has a new meaning of being called "semantic phonetics".

INTONATION AND THE LEVEL STRUCTURE OF LANGUAGE

The problem of the place of intonation in the language system as far as the levels of the language structure are concerned is even more complicated than the problem of the place of intonation in linguistics.

It is significant that in the majority of conceptions of the language systems the place of intonation is not put forward for special discussion.

On the other hand attempts to insert intonation with its all-embracing means and functions into the proposed hierarchy of the levels show the inadequacy of the construction itself.

One of the main difficulties of the traditional approach to language levels, where the phonetic level is considered to be the lowest, is the impossibility of explaining how the non-sign elements of language level construction - phonemes - form the meaningful linguistic units - morphemes - at the next level. The inclusion of intonation into this lowest level aggravates the difficulty still more, for intonation forms neither morphemes nor other linguistic units, the relation between them being quite different.

Thus, not everything that is included in phonetics can equally be included in its phonetic level. It is considered to be the lowest level of the language structure.

To avoid this difficulty we might assume that intonation units are language signs (which - in my opinion - is true only in a smaller part of intonation phenomena), but this gives rise to another difficulty.

The attempt to include these "intonation signs" into one of the traditional sign levels reveals the variety and the specific character of such signs.

On the other hand it is impossible to place "intonation signs" between the traditional sign levels, as no sign level can either be composed of or de-composed into intonation units alone.

The only solution is to remove intonation from the hierarchy of levels and to assign intonation phenomena to all of them. A new sign level in accordance with the variety of intonation functions. Then intonation itself will finally find its place in the language structure, but only as an inherent element of the plane of expression of the complex signs. Intonation is related, in some of its functions, to such complex units as the sentence, the paragraph and the whole text. In its other functions, intonation is connected with smaller units, such as the syntagm and even, the stylistic group.

This approach, natural and even traditional as it is, is (compare the usual distinction between segmental and suprasegmental means of features), involves a certain contradiction. How does this high level use of phonetic means correlate with the fact that the phonetic level is considered to be the lowest one? I think that intonation facts demonstrate the inadequacy of this conception.

The phonetic means, i.e. sound matter is all of its aspects (both segmental and suprasegmental) naturally correlate with different levels of language structure (beginning with the word and up to the text) due to the facts that they do not form a separate level but an aspect of language without which no level can exist.

The acknowledgement of the specific role of the sound matter of language predeter-

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