

ON THE CONSISTENCY OF PRONUNCIATION SKILL

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ABSTRACT

In the 1960s Russian researchers carried out a broad study in the field of Russian standard sounding speech using text read on tape by native speakers. This material allows us to raise the question of how consistent a person's pronunciation is throughout life. Over 35 years later, 20 participants took part in an experiment in which each read the same text. The comparison of the two recordings provided the basis for the current research.

Usually the issue of the dynamics of pronunciations standards comes up when sounding speech of different generations is compared. But this issue can be regarded differently, if we compare the person's pronunciation in different periods of his life.

1. In 1960s a group of researchers headed by Panov M.V. made a mass research of Russian standard sounding speech with the help of an experimental text which was read on tape by native speakers. The experimental text Antonovich was created especially for this occasion, and was rich in phonetic facts. The analysis of reading of this text gave the opportunity to observe how the standards of Russian pronunciation function in different local varieties of the language, in speech of different generations and different social groups.

2. We believe that the scientific potential of these recordings is not exhausted. The phonetic material which was collected in 1960s raises the issue about consistency of a person's pronunciation throughout life. 20 participants who had taken part in the experiment in 1960s read the same text on tape again. The comparison of these two records (named below as T1 and T2) formed the ground for the current research.

2.1. According to the following categorical divisions (which may be considered to be conditional), we have highlighted three pronunciation standards from the 20th century which were eventually substituting one another: 1) pronunciation standard of people whose pronunciation was formed between the end of the 19th century and the 1920s. 2) pronunciation standard which can be observed in people's speech from the 1920s to the 1960s; 3) system of Russian standard pronunciation which includes

pronunciation used during the last quarter of the XXth century. Conditionally we can name these orphoepical cuts senior, middle and junior pronunciation standards of the 20th century.

Needless to say none of the participants had pronunciation which could be placed within only one pronunciation standard, but definitely there were prevailing features of one.

During the first recording (T1), 7 participants demonstrated senior standard while 13 displayed middle standard of pronunciation. By the time of the second recording the speech of all the participants had changed but the changes in each case were different.

We found out that most of the participants "grew younger" in terms of their pronunciation between the first recording and the second recording, but none changed their pronunciation by more than one generation: those with dominating senior standard during the T1 recording developed some traits of middle standard during T2. Those in T1 displaying middle standard showed traces of junior standard during T2.

For example, we can observe that in realization of a consonant phoneme in a hard or soft sound before a soft one. For instance if the participant during T1 was pronouncing a dental consonant before a soft [l̥] which according to the senior standard should be always pronounced softly as in *je[s̥l̥]i* (*if*), *[s̥l̥]eva* (*to the left*), *ra[z̥l̥]ilas* (*spilled*), *[z̥l̥]as* (*being angry*), *vo[z̥l̥]e* (*near*), *ko[z̥l̥]ik* (*kid*) in T2 the distribution of variants in most cases corresponded the middle standard: soft within the root and hard on agglutinative morpheme boundaries: *je[s̥l̥]i*, *[z̥l̥]as*, sometimes *[zl̥]as*, *vo[z̥l̥]e*, *ko[z̥l̥]ik*, but *[sl̥]eva*, *ra[zl̥]ilas*. But if while during T1 the participant had middle standard, during T2 the dental consonant before [l] was always pronounced as a hard one which is typical for junior standard: *je[sl̥]i*, *[sl̥]eva*, *ra[zl̥]ilas*, *[zl̥]as*, *vo[zl̥]e*, *ko[zl̥]ik*.

None of those participants who during T1 was using senior standard (a dental consonant was always soft before [l̥]), started pronouncing a hard dental sound before [l̥] inside the root, which is characteristic of junior standard. As the research shows the distribution of variants within this can be explained by two different factors. Either the dynamics of the individual standard of

speech are determined by inner development of the language, which means the laws of ontogenesis definitely coincide with philogenesis. Our receptivity towards pronunciation innovations is different in different periods of our life: perhaps people who are using the senior standard used to be influenced by the middle standard which surrounded them but were unable to change their pronunciation by the time the junior standard was formed.

2.3. Pronunciation variants which in T1 were distributed according to the positions, in T2 behaved differently from those which were specific for concrete words.

2.3.1. The variants of pronunciation lexicalized during T1 remained practically unchanged by the time of T2. This is true for such standards of pronunciation as correlation of variants

[C:]/[C:] (dro[C:]i - dro[C:]i - *yeast*); sounds in place of letters ÷i (slivo[tn]yi - *cream*), etc.

2.3.2. In individual speech changes in pronunciation, which are connected with the positionally attached orphoepic variants, can occur in two different ways. The phenomenon typical for a more junior standard got into the speech of some participants by capturing new phonetic positions. In other cases it happened by revealing only in certain words, which means through the stage of lexicalization.

For example, it can be observed in distribution of hard/soft consonants before the following soft one. During T1 3 people had a distinct senior standard: the consonant before the following soft sound could be only soft. The speech of 17 people belonged to middle standard: only a soft sound after a soft sound inside the root; hard on agglutinative morpheme boundaries, soft on fusion morpheme boundaries. During T2 the realization of this norm was as following. 8 participants had positional distribution of the variants: soft in the root not before [l:], [n:]; hard in the root before [l:], [n:]; hard at the beginning of the word; hard after a hard consonant; hard on agglutinative morpheme boundaries; soft on fusion boundaries. 12 participants had variants of pronunciation which were determined not by the position but by certain words: a new variant gets into certain words, and different people have approximately the same way of capturing of the words. In most cases it's possible to find reasons for that. For example many participants pronounced *ja[sn:]eje* (brighter), but *rado[sn:]eje* (jollier) - obviously the sound [s] before [n:] behaves differently in the place of phonemes /sn/ and /stn/. A lot of participants pronounced *je[s:l:]i* (if), but *sma[sl:]itcem* (with butter). Perhaps the

difference is caused by the factor that in the second case there is a very strong connection with the word *maslo* (butter), in which [s] is in position before a hard sound. Besides the word *jesli* (if) is very well-spread which usually helps to save the old variant.

Why some participants have variants which are distributed according to the positions and others - to words? Evidently the attachment of a variant of pronunciation to some concrete word is always a step from one positional dependence to another. Besides the individual speed of the process of phonetic changing varies and our participants are on different stages of this process.

2.4. Many of the T2 informants compared to T1 are more inclined to use the possibility of marking the phrases semantic position by certain orphoepic variants.

Chelovek on strogyi i vla[stn]yi (*He is a strict and authoritative person*) (marked position);

Matwei begaet, vla[sn]o pokrikivaja na loshadei (*Matwei is running around yelling authoritatively at the horses*) (unmarked position).

In T1 the words with the same root in these texts were pronounced differently by 3 participants, and in T2 there were 10 out of 20.

In T2 compared to T1 the possibility of marking strong positions with [e]-variants is used much wider: *Zara stanovitsa n[e]miloserdnoj* (*Heat is becoming unbearable*)- 5 participants pronounced it this way in T1 and 13 people in T2.

These observations probably allow us to speak about the increasing role of prosodic markers in the speech associated with the end of the XXth century.

2.5. The speech of most of participants revealed the decreasing role of variants of pronunciation which were specific for marginal subsystems (borrowed words, interjections etc.)