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Variation as Main Feature of Norm

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Annotation: *The past half-century has witnessed remarkable growth in the study of language variation, and it has now become a highly productive subfield of research in sociolinguistics. Variability is everywhere in language, from the unique details in each production of a sound or sign to the auditory or visual processing of the linguistic signal. The justification for this, following Chomsky, is that much of the variation found in utterances is due to non-linguistic factors, and thus idealization is necessary in order to see the underlying patterns behind speakers' linguistic performance (Chomsky, 1965).*

All languages that we can observe today show variation; what is more, they vary in identical ways, namely geographically and socially. It's no secret that languages like English are full of variation. So, the aim of the article is to detect the reasons of variation and to uncover rates of usage of different free variations for a given set of lexical items.

1. Introduction

It is for a long time the researches have been working on the issues of the norm and variation of linguistic means. However, the analysis of references shows that one can hardly say that it is sufficiently developed, especially in the research of norm and variation of phonetic units in so much as there is no single approach to the definition of pronunciation norm and its criteria and also no more or less distinct definition of phonetic variation and factors contributing to it.

Furthermore, many disputes arise in deciding the problem of the relation between norm and variation. In particular, the view that the variation is inherent only to speech and signifies its chaotic nature and the language should be fully free from it is absolutely unacceptable. To our opinion, a point of view that norm and variation are common language categories is most objective, where variation is the basic feature of norm (Verbitskaya, 1996). For instance, according to G.P. Torsuyev, variation in line with constancy is deemed to be essential properties of language structure without which language wouldn't exist and develop (Torsuyev, 1977).

According to N.D. Arutyunova, the concept of norm relates to practically all the aspects of worldview (Arutyunova, 1998). Certainly, language is not an exception.

The language norm usually refers to the aggregate of language habits and set of rules for language public use established within a given society and in a given era, where with regard to the structure, the norm is one or more realizations of such a structure, adopted in the society.

Taking into account above mentioned, one can suggest the following definition of pronunciation norm: "Pronunciation norm is an accepted way of formatting the sound side of an individual's speech" (Rayevskiy, 1986). Many linguists define norm as a common language category, so one should talk, for instance, about literary norm, norm of conversational style, official speech, scenic speech, dialect norm, sociolect, etc. In this article we will review the norm of literary conversational style whose importance of studying can hardly be argued.

As for the factors of norm development (including pronunciation one), most of the authors recognizes the priority of linguistic factors denying, however, the influence of extra linguistic factors, "selecting" the direction of such development, changing its rate and, as a result, the language system itself.

Meanwhile, a number of authors neglect a linguistic aspect of the norm as such, concentrating their research on a non-language aspect. Thus, N.I. Heilman and Y.I. Steriopolu referring to Nikolskiy accentuated three key factors regulating norms of linguistic behavior, such as theme, the social status of a speaker and/or a listener and speech situation (Heilman, Steriopolu, 1989). It should be recognized that such conditions have a decisive impact on the realization of lexical and grammatical levels of language system. Yet it is not so well with the realization of phonetic level. The analysis of literary sources allows us to state that today in linguistics there is no objective data on the direct relation of one or another generally accepted way of realization of phonetic system to the theme of utterance or, for instance, professional appurtenance of the speaker in a given language.

2. Method of investigation

The research work is carried out by using the descriptive, comparative methods by subjecting to analysis the specific language materials.

3. Scope of investigation

The discovery of law of variation became a starting point for the evolution of linguistics. The problem of search of variation facts and its role in the functioning of language system concerns many specialists from the outset. The scope of the investigation was to set up a system out of chaos of phenomena. Currently, the fact of conditionality of variation by system relations existing in the language is considered to be established. We hold the view of V.G. Gak who believes that the interaction of language form, a human being and his psychology, as well as non-language factors should be taken into account. Moreover, V.G. Gak specifies a group of universal and particular causes of variation (Gak, 1982).

4. Variation of phonemes as a main feature of norm

Currently it is no doubt that the variation of phonemes is a main feature of norm and a fundamental property of language shown itself foremost in a conversational style. Furthermore, the formation of linguistics as science was connected with the discovery of law of variation.

One of the most important shortcomings in the definition of the concept of variation is the absence of a clear distinction between variation and variant in the works of many authors

(Moshnina,1988; Solntsev,1971; Torsuyev,1977). Variant implies the simultaneous use of several equal or hierarchically organized variants (optional variants). In most cases variant is tied to diachrony and/or dialect and sociolect. But variation is mainly studied in a synchronic aspect, although the complete denial of a diachronic one couldn't be considered to be productive.

It can be said that the concept of variation is close to that of allophonic variation which includes positional and free variation as it is not contradictory to the concept of allophones as types of one phoneme.

Free variation is a well-known phonological phenomenon that occurs when two (or more) phonemes –the free variants- may replace each other in the same position in a word without any change in meaning. For example, some words in English are pronounced differently by different speakers. Some speakers pronounce the word *economics* with an initial (i) and others with an initial (ɛ). In this word, (i) and (ɛ) are said to be in free variation. However, we cannot substitute (i) and (ɛ) in all words. As in the sentence *Did you beat the drum?* does not mean the same thing as *Did you bet the drum?*

The existence of phonological free variation is caused by different types of factors. These include ongoing sound changes (e.g. /ʊə/-/ɔ:/ for sure in BrE representing the general replacement of /ʊə/ by /ɔ:/ in the system) or phonetic and/or phonological processes such as assimilation, dissimilation, epenthesis or liaison. For example, /febjuəri/ for *February* –as well as /februəri/– due to dissimilation of the two nearby /r/s. Sociocultural aspects such as speakers' awareness and knowledge or beliefs about the relationship between spelling and pronunciation in the mother tongue or in foreign languages are also a fruitful source of free variation. For example, /weɪstkəʊt/ for *waistcoat* as well as the former /westkɪt/-/westkət/ in an attempt to follow more closely regular sound/spelling correspondences.

Independently of the causes of phonological free variation, phonological free variants can be related to different variables studied by traditional sociolinguistics. These variables include, for instance, the social/professional group to which the speaker belongs (e.g. /raʊt/ for *route* in BrE army usage vs. /ru:t/, more generally) or the speaker's accent (e.g. AmE /təmeɪtəs/ for *tomato* vs. BrE /təmɑ:təs/). Another relevant factor is age. For example, /mɔ:l/ for *mall* –shopping centre – preferred by younger speakers to /mæl/, preferred by those born before 1953 (Wells, 2008).

In addition, free variation may occur between allophones or phonemes. Free variants shouldn't be mixed with optional ones. As John Lyons notes, the conditions for the appearance of free variants can be particularly formulated in phonological terms whereas optional variants are of a random nature (John Lyons, 1978).

It is difficult to agree with the last statement because in language nearly everything is due to objective linguistic and extra-linguistic reasons. It should be specified that it is rather difficult or practically impossible to trace the phonetic etymology of many optional variants at this stage of the evolution of language. Moreover, dealing with the optional variant of the same word we

can also encounter with historic, dialectic or colloquial interchange of various phonemes that is not possible in free variation.

What remains to be done is to define the relation between the concepts of positional and free variation. If the free variants of one phoneme are found in the same phonetic environment, it is impossible for positional ones. They never encounter in the same position (Trubetskoy, 2000).

As we mentioned above, one cannot deny the influence of social factors on pronunciation norm. According to A. Martine, “language would be out of order” if there was no continuous social impact expressed in a constant regulation connected with the necessity of mutual understanding” (Martine, 1960).

Speaking of the factors of regulation of pronunciation norm, to our opinion, it might be appropriate to refer to the direct impact of stylistic and indirect impact of sociolinguistic (for example, personal and professional relationship between interlocutors) factors, though it is impossible to draw a clear distinction between them. Therefore, linguistic and social factors are characterized by diffusion and interdependence. In essence, they constitute various aspects of one problem and are constituent elements of a single macro effect – communicative intention.

N.D. Arutyunova mentions an obvious variation of the concept of norm referring to the existence of various types of norm (Arutyunova, 1998). There is a general division of pronunciation norm into codified and non-codified ones, which some researchers understand as a norm of dialect (Rayevskiy, 1986) and sociolect that is also quite controversial considering that many features of realization of phonemes generally used for a long time are not codified. The equating of non-codified norm to dialect and sociolect could raise doubts about the linguistic value of such features that is utterly unfounded. It is not possible to equate the dialect and sociolect pronunciation and non-codified norm.

For this reason a generally accepted approach is criticized. Many researchers think it advantageous to replace a traditional division of pronunciation norm into prescriptive (prescriptible – codification) and descriptive (realized) ones (Verbitskaya, 1996). However, to our opinion, the proposed terminology may directly or indirectly give rise to misconception about the randomness and “non-prescriptibility”, to the absence of objective conditions of regulation of a descriptive norm that is completely incompatible with the concept of norm as such. For that reason we consider it feasible to abide by the traditional terminology subject to the clarification that by using such terms as “norm”, “normative”, we shall mean not only and not so much a codified norm, but generally used phonetic phenomena, regardless of dialect and sociolect.

N.D. Arutyunova emphasizes slightly different attributes of the concept of norm, unrelated to the character of deviations that state the following:

1. Possibility / impossibility of deviations (absoluteness or relativity of norm).
2. Sociality / naturality (created and uncreated norms).
3. Positivity / negativity (recommendatory and prohibitive rules).

4. Expansibility (variation) or commonality (typical and precise norms).
5. Diachronism / synchronism (regularity of development or rules of operation).
6. Prestige / non-prestige (for social norms) (Arutyunova, 1998).

We believe above-described classification is also fully applicable to pronunciation norm as all of these types are surely found within its limits and are interdependent and interpenetrating.

Therefore, pronunciation norm is an integrated concept which includes pronunciation prescribed by a dictionary and its types depending on communicative intention of a speaker defining the style of pronunciation and relation of speech types.

The phonetic variation is defined by V.M. Solntsev as the presence of phoneme in the language in a form of a set of variants (or allophones). He describes a discrete nature of linguistic units as general condition of variation. The author specifies two main factors of variation:

1. Presence of each unit as some class.
2. Constant use of one member of class in speech (Solntsev, 1971).

The given position needs some clarification. Regarding discreteness, only taxonomic units should be taken into account, and speech is continuous. So, R.K. Potapkina thinks that discreteness of speech is a seeming phenomenon. It is the result of the process of recognition of characters, brought to the speech by the analysis (Pozharitskaya S.K., Knyazev S.V., 1997) which is carried out at the level of language system considering the context and various extra-linguistic factors. According to the author, in this case it would be more correct to talk about a phenomenon of perpetuity (continuity) and discreteness. The objectivity of the above-mentioned point of view demonstrates the impossibility of optimum segmentation of speech flow only on phonetic characteristics.

There is one more point of view stating that variation is defined as a consequence of distribution of phonemes in the structure of words and sentences which is reflected in allophonic variation of phonemes (Romashko S.A., 1987), however, it is not possible to deeply reveal the causes of variation based only on the laws of phonotactics.

G.P. Torsuyev determines the following causes of variation:

1. Configuration of organs of speech as pneumatic mechanical basis of all the sound units and the process of speech itself.
2. System relationship, position of sound units in the structures of words and sentences.
3. Style and genre of speech (Torsuyev, 1977).

The style and genre of speech and level of its training depend on the communicative situation and can be joined under the title of situational variation. Dialectal and local differences, equally as sociolect, outlined as the fourth cause are more likely related to dimorphism.

One of the most important causes of variation - the principle of economy of speech efforts owing to which the easing of articulation occurs – was formulated by A. Martine. Analyzing P. Passy, the author describes the law of least effort:

- language constantly strives to get rid of the excess;
- language constantly strives to highlight the necessary (Martine,1970).

However, the easing of phoneme articulation is not a mutation of the phoneme itself, but the selection out of variants provided for by the system, which is made by a man under the influence of linguistic and extra-linguistic factors.

It is necessary to outline the following factors of variation:

1. The interaction of physiological and phonemic components defining the economy of speech efforts and its' level. Causes connected with the interaction of such components are commonly referred to as linguistic. Positional conditions can be specified as a main cause of variation.
2. The communicative intention of a speaker considering style and genre subject to the communicative situation, criterion of spontaneity or non-spontaneity, theme and relationship of communicants. Causes connected with the interaction of the components of such factor belong to extra-linguistic. This factor plays a subordinate role although it is very active: among the options provided for by the system the communicant chooses those which are in conformity with his communicative intention developing them and thereby leading to changes in the system.

The issue of correlation of linguistic and extra-linguistic factors in changing the system still remains contentious. Some linguists believe that “all the changes in language are eventually conditioned by the requirements of communication, namely, factors outlying beyond the language system itself. However, the inner structure of the system also puts a certain pressure on the evolution of language...determining it in one direction or another” (Mishin A.B., 1985).

However, the author of the above mentioned conception does not agree that social factors play an active role in changing the system, but the phonetic system as a system of possibilities does not change if there are no objective linguistic causes. L.A.Verbitskaya is completely right to state that potential changes of the system are embedded in the very system, and it is extra-linguistic factors, particularly social ones, which the direction of changes depends on (Verbitskaya,2001).

5. Conclusion

Summing up the above-mentioned issues we would like to add that variation as a main feature of norm is outlined by the language system and conditioned by the complex interaction of linguistic (co articulation and prosodic features of utterance) and extra-linguistic (communicative intention of a speaker in one communicative situation or another) factors. Pronunciation norm is considered by us as an integrated concept including pronunciation prescribed by a dictionary and its forms depending on the communicative intention of a speaker

that defines the style of pronunciation and relation of types of utterance. By non-codified norm we mean generally used features of realization of phonemes irrespective of dialect and sociolect, which are not reflected in the existing dictionaries to this moment.

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