

PROSODIC MARKERS OF PUBLIC SPEECHES

Speech styles in English are fairly unanimously divided into formal and informal. A public speech addressed to a large number of people is commonly referred to the so called formal-official style. Certain extralinguistic factors such as a spacious room, vast audience, a complicated topic obviously require certain changes in the intonation patterns as compared to the informal-familiar style of every day conversation with friends and family members.

In order to show the objective difference in the prosodic structure of a public speech from a friendly casual conversation we have conducted a phonetic experiment. The participant of the experiment was an English woman who is an RP speaker. She was invited to assume the role of a dean of the faculty and address a large gathering of students on the subject of scholarship requirements. After that she had to imagine herself in a totally different situation where she had a leisurely conversation with her close friend about her son applying for a scholarship. Recordings of both of the speeches were made and later presented to trained phoneticians who intoned both of the resulting texts.

On the second stage of the experiment we analyzed the tempo modifications and proportions of various tones in the two experimental recordings.

The obtained data revealed that the tempo of a public speech appears to be almost 30% slower and pauses are much longer (sometimes twice as long at the boundaries of phonetic paragraphs). The choice of tonal patterns is also different. The tendencies are visible in the chart below.

Ratio of nuclear tones in public and casual speeches

Type of speech	\m	\m	\m	/m	√m	'm	√m	\m /m
Public	25 %	23 %	15 %	15 %	7 %	0 %	7 %	8 %
Casual	29 %	11 %	9 %	32 %	9 %	2 %	2 %	6 %

From our experimental data we can see that an English public speech is characterized by lower varieties of falling and falling-rising tones. When combined with high-pitched prenuclear parts they make the speech sound more weighty and significant as compared to the casual every day conversation where low rising tones have a tendency to be used not only in the middle or beginning of the utterance but also in the end.

Therefore, we can conclude that such extralinguistic factors as the size of the audience, the official social role of the speaker and a formal topic have distinct prosodic markers which native speakers of English are well aware of.