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(Հայ, ռուսա-անգլերեն և ռուսա-գերմաներեն)

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THE IMPLICATIONS OF PROSODIC DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ENGLISH AND ARMENIAN

Every language has its unique prosodic features. Some languages have many prosodic features in common and some share just only a few. The prosodic aspects of speech are the rhythm, stress and intonation. English and Armenian fall under different classifications of languages according to their timing. English is considered to be a stress-timed language and Armenian – syllable-timed one. This makes a huge difference between these two languages by itself, which can cause complications for a speaker to produce the language, which is not his first language. There will be implications also during perceiving the foreign language. Furthermore, the differences of stress and intonation between these languages make the perceiving and producing even more difficult. Some people might point out the fact that the vast majority of Armenians speak and understand Russian, which is also thought to be, in contrast to Armenian, a stress-timed language. Since early childhood, Armenians have way to many opportunities to practice spoken Russian due to the current political and geographical closeness of Armenia to Russia. But for English, one can find English media on the Internet only and meet English speaking people pretty seldom. On the other hand, the practice has shown that it takes about one-month-long active engagement in English speaking community for an Armenian teenager (aged 16-18) to develop capabilities for perceiving English speech. For the production of decent English, the Armenian teenager needs a three-month-long active engagement in English speaking community. After one year, when the teenager returns back to Armenian speaking community, he speaks the kind of Armenian, which “sounds like English”. Apparently the teenager transfers some of the acquired English prosodic features into the Armenian speech. These practical statistics are the average results of 40 Armenian students, who were taken to the USA with good lexical and grammatical knowledge in English, but they did not have any phonetic practice in advance. In addition to these difficulties in perception and production, the prosodic differences can cause misunderstanding. In the case of grammatical mistakes the speaker is usually understood, but for the phonological mistakes it is not the case. Thus, it is very important to study prosodic differences between these languages in order to acquire the foreign language in a possibly shorter period of time and avoid misunderstanding when speaking to foreign language speakers.

One of the well-known ways of classifying languages is done according with the prosodic unit which gives a language a rhythm. This classification is based on the assumption, that there is an equal interval between stressed syllables, syllables or moras in the language. At one extreme of this scale are stress-timed languages and at the other extreme are syllable-timed languages. Actually no language is entirely stress-timed or syllable-timed. English is mostly considered to be stress-timed language, and only D. Abercrombie explicitly stated English to be stress-timed language. Dutch, German, Russian, Swedish and other Germanic languages are also considered to be stress-timed languages while Spanish, Italian, French and the rest of Romance languages are thought to be syllable-timed. It is pretty simple to decide that Armenian is also mostly syllable-timed language, because the intervals between syllables are of equal length, regardless of where stressed syllables occur. Furthermore, the final syllables are almost always stressed with few exceptions, the intervals between them are of uneven length and generally Armenian does not have qualitative changes in vowels of stressed and unstressed syllables, which is a characteristic of stress-timed rhythm. In connected English speech stressed syllables tend to follow each other as nearly as possible at equal intervals of time and the unstressed syllables are produced within those intervals.

To some extent, tempo is the same in all languages. It is natural when the speaker speeds up or down the rate of rhythm in accordance with his emotional state. Usually, speakers produce with a faster tempo, when they are excited or impatient and speak with the slower tempo when they are thoughtful or weighty.

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But it must be noted that languages are also different in timing and rhythm is not based on the same prosodic unit. Transferring mother tongue's rhythm to a foreign language (e.g. English) will create an effect of sounding foreign and even cause misunderstandings between the speakers.¹

In order to illustrate and to check the validity of the above-mentioned statements, the analysis of the waveforms of sample texts in both languages is needed.

In order to illustrate and to check the validity of the above-mentioned statements, the analysis of the waveforms of sample texts in both languages is needed.

![Figure 1. The waveform for “The government is planning...”](image1)

It is quite noticeable in Figure 1, which is the waveform of the chunk “The government is planning...”, that syllables are of unequal length. But if the lengths have been carefully observed, it can be said that stressed syllables are of twice the length of unstressed syllables. This is due to varying tempo. The tempo of unstressed syllables speeds up according to the number of the unstressed syllables between stressed syllables so that the stressed syllables can occur at a certain rhythm.

![Figure 2. The waveform for “Կառավորությունը նախատեսում է...”](image2)

In the analysis of an Armenian text chunk “Կառավորությունը նախատեսում է...” (Figure 2), it is obvious that all the syllables are of equal length regardless of the stress. For instance, in the word “Կառավորությունը” the last syllable is stressed and has higher pitch level as it is supposed, and it is visible in the waveform (the waveband is relatively wider), but the length is equal to any other syllable in the word.

To emphasize the importance of rhythmic differences, it is worth mentioning the practical experiment carried out on infants. There were 8 languages (4 stress-timed, 3 syllable-timed and 1 mora-timed), 4 speakers per language to exclude interpersonal emotional factors and 5 sentences per speaker. The outcome was as follows: newborn babies discriminate between English/Italian, French/Russian, English/Spanish, English/Japanese and English+Dutch/Spanish+Italian, but they failed to discriminate between English/Dutch, Catalan/Spanish and Spanish/Italian. In other words, even newborns discriminate different rhythms in languages.² There is also evidence that children initially adopt syllable-timed rhythm and eventually develop stress-timed rhythm timing. Researches on children learning English as their first language have shown a general absence of unstressed syllables with reduced vowels. Further findings show that this phenomenon transfers to foreign language learners. Thus, syllable-timing is the rhythm that foreign language learners initially adopt regardless of their mother tongue's rhythm. Studies have shown that children learning English do eventually develop stress-timed rhythm, yet it is not clear whether adult second language learners ultimately adopt a stress-timed rhythm. Not only syllable-timed language speakers face the problem of adopting stress-timed rhythm for the second language, but also stress-timed language speakers face the problem of adopting syllable-timed language and transfer stress-timed rhythm to the second language when they are required to use syllable-timed rhythm.³ As it was seen from the

2 Ramus F., Languages' rhythm and language acquisition, Laboratoire de Sciences Cognitives et Psycholinguistique, Paris.
practical example how the forty teenagers studying in the USA adopted stress-timed rhythm and even transferred it to Armenian, we may conclude that it is possible to eventually adopt it when the second language is in active use and the first language is not used concurrently. It has to be noted that most of the second language learners actively use their first language along the first and it hinders to acquire the rhythm of second language. It goes without saying that learners of the second language also need theoretical knowledge of this difference and will need to practice on voluntary basis and listen to recordings of native speakers paying special attention to the rhythm.

So far stress has been only slightly mentioned in the scope of rhythm, that is how in English stressed syllables occur at an almost nearly the same intervals and in Armenian almost always take the final syllables of the words and are not distributed evenly in time. But there are many peculiarities concerning stress in both of the languages.

In English to give greater prominence to utterances the following means are used:  
1. greater loudness,  
2. change in pitch level or direction,  
3. lengthening,  
4. preserving the quality of the vowel in the stressed syllable.

In Armenian the stressed vowel is characterized by:  
1. greater loudness,  
2. higher pitch.

It is obvious, that the lengthening and differentiation in vowel quality are absent in the Armenian language. The change of pitch level or direction is one of primary means of stressing, and further study of it is needed. In the English language, the change of pitch, either in level or direction, is used to stress the most important piece of information in the sentence. If the most important bit of information consists of more than one word, then it appears only in the final position of a sentence or a sense group in English language and bears both final sentence stress and terminal tone. The most important piece of information is called communicative center.

E.g. *We’re studying English, or* We’re *studying the English language.*

In the examples above, the terminal tone carries the word “English”, and it stands out in the utterance as semantically the most important information. But Armenian speakers are going to have trouble in figuring out the communicative center of this sentences, unless they are aware of the fact that the change in pitch level or direction is a characteristic of a sentence stress in English. If we were to translate this sentence into Armenian, then we should consider the word order in Armenian. In Armenian, sentence stress falls on predicate, unless there is an adverbial modifier or an intensifying phrase (such as միայն “only”, նույնիսկ “even”, մինչև “even”, etc.) preceding it, which usually take the sentence stress. In order to make the word “English” in Armenian translation to carry the sentence stress, we have to position this word before the predicate.

Compare these two variants.  
a) Մենք անգլերեն ենք սովորում։  
b) Մենք սովորում ենք անգլերեն։

In the sentence A, the word “անգլերեն” carries sentence stress as it precedes the predicate. In the sentence B, sentence stress falls on the predicate “սովորում”. This is true for the contrary if we were to translate a sentence from Armenian to English. We have to take care that the word or word-group carrying sentence stress in Armenian took the final sentence stress and terminal tone in the English language. In the case of having a single word as a communicative center, we are more flexible during oral translation because the communicative center can occupy any place in the sentence.

Thus, for instance:  
Եղբայրս ամեն շաբաթ գնում է կինո։

1 Vassilyev V.A., p. 118.  
3 Vassilyev V.A., p. 119.  
4 Dum-Tragut J., p. 50.  
5 Vassilyev V.A., p. 120.
Another feature characteristic of English speech is the alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables. In connected English speech, speakers avoid having two stressed syllables in succession. This characteristic helps the speaker to make time intervals between stressed syllables nearly of equal length. This peculiarity seems to be conflicting with characteristics of the Armenian stress, that is the stress in Armenian has fixed position (final syllables of words) and it is not dynamic as seen in the English language.

Words, which have primary and secondary or two equally strong stresses when pronounced in isolation, lose one of the stresses in connected speech due to this feature of English stress.

a) a stressed word loses its first stress when it is immediately preceded by a stressed word,
b) a stressed word loses its second stress when it is immediately followed by a stressed word.

For example, compare the word 'sixteen' in the following sentences.

Hay is sixteen years old.
Hay is just six teen.

Words having only one stress may change their stressed syllable.

E.g. Ber’lin, but Berlin streets.

On the other hand, English speakers need to strive to stress final syllables of Armenian words in order to sound natural.

In the sphere of stress, proclitics and enclitics may sum up to the difficulties of perception for foreign learners. In connected speech, unstressed words are attached either to the next stressed word or the preceding stressed word. They are correspondingly called proclitics and enclitics, e.g. Do you go there? ‘tis (it is) difficult, don’t, aren’t, etc.

English speakers need to pay appropriate attention to enclitics and proclitics in Armenian: auxiliary forms with եմ "em", as in երգում եմ “I sing”, the enclitic adverb էլ “el”, e.g. երգում էլ “goes to the cinema”.

Arán_el yek. “Ara came as well”, verbal particles և/երբու/էրբո piti/petk and թող togh used in imperative mood, such as և/երբո piti_kardas “you have to read” and թող թող_gna “Let (him) go!” etc.

Last but not least, the psychological pause of the English language can have its implications because it is one of the most confusing phenomena for the Armenian speakers. One unit silent pauses ( | ) are normally made between sense groups within a sentence and serve as additional delimiters between sense groups. It must be noted that they are not required in this positions. The primary means of delimiting one sense group from another is a pitch change at the junction of two sense groups, be the change either in level or direction. A pitch change at the junction of the sense groups creates the effect of pause on the listener and is called a psychological pause.

Apparently, a pitch change is not perceived as a pause by Armenian speakers. Thus, it can lead to misunderstanding between Armenian and foreign speakers.

To illustrate how Armenians misinterpret the connected speech, let us analyze an excerpt from the song “Hit the Road Jack” performed by Ray Charles:

Hit the road jack and don’t cha come back
No more no more no more no more...

Many Armenian speakers perceive the second line of the lyrics as the repetition of short for special name Monica, that is Unun “Mono”. This line with intonation markings can help explaining the phenomenon: ‘No, more no, more no, more ’no, more. The rising tone on the word “more” is used in order to create the effect of psychological pause between the sense groups consisting of the words “no more”. But apparently this rising tone does not have the same effect on Armenian speakers. They, by ignoring the rising tone, perceive more as unstressed syllable “Un”. Then immediately without one unit silent pause or at least with short variant of this pause follows the stressed word “no” and it turns out to be perceived as a
stressed syllable, which implies an end of a word. In other words, an Armenian speaker perceives this very same text as "Մոնո Մոնո Մոնո Մոնո...".

It will be quite reasonable to conclude with following claims and observations. First of all, English and Armenian can be considered rhythmically polarized languages in the sense, that they seek to the opposite extremes of the rhythm timing continuum. This, in effect, can have implications both on perception and production of the second language. For example, it can hinder to clearly perceive and understand the message uttered by a foreign speaker. Furthermore, a rhythm or some of its features can be transferred from one language to the other one. In this case, foreign rhythmic features can be the cause of sounding foreign. Second, peculiarities in connected speech, such enclitics and proclitics, dynamic stress position in English, more static stress position in Armenian and differences between the means of sentence stress can multiply the impact of the difficulties for second language learners. It is worth mentioning again, that the use of a pitch change as a sentence stress can be of a particular complexity for Armenian speakers to decide which word or word-group in the sentence is given prominence. Finally, the psychological pause can imply greatly on how the Armenian speaker might perceive a message. The capability of hearing pitch changes will help to decide sense group boundaries and, as a result, a wrong message will not be interpreted. For second language learners, it is possible to achieve a decent level of perception and production. Just practice and acknowledgment of the prosodic differences are needed to achieve the desired level.
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THE IMPLICATIONS OF PROSODIC DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ENGLISH AND ARMENIAN

Keywords: prosody, suprasegmental, rhythm, stress, intonation, pitch change, second language acquisition, timing, stress-timed, syllable-timed

English and Armenian have their prosodic peculiarities, which have their implications when communicating with foreign speakers. These implications can be the cause of difficulties in perception and production of the second language.

In this article, some differences of rhythm, stress and pitch change between these languages are observed. The analysis of uses of prosodic features is made per language basis, and then they are compared with each other. In order to illustrate these theoretical comparisons, every statement is illustrated with a practical example. The represented instances are common mistakes made by the majority of second language speakers. Misunderstandings while speaking foreign languages often happen either due to transferring prosodic features from one language to the other or misinterpretation of these features.

So, it can be concluded, that by studying the prosodic differences between English and Armenian, it is possible for second language speakers to achieve a decent level of perception and production within shorter period of time and at the same time to avoid many misunderstandings on the way of acquisition.