

LEXICO-SEMANTIC FEATURES OF PARALINGUISTIC UNITS IN ENGLISH

Bozorova O'g'iloy Qurbonali qizi

O'zbekiston davlat jahon tillari universiteti magistratura talabasi
bozorovaogiloy329@gmail.com

Abstract. This article addresses the issue of the lexico-semantic features of paralinguistic units in English spoken discourse and analyzes their contribution to changing lexical meaning. In recent years, linguistics pays increased attention to the multimodal aspect of spoken communication, recognizing that meaning is generated not only through verbal signs but also paralinguistic elements, such as intonation, stress, pitch, pauses, tempo, etc. The work relies upon the qualitative approach to description and interpretation. Examples of the paralinguistic interpretation of lexical units indicate that the same words might convey different ideas, depending on their prosodic performance (sincerity, sarcasm, sense of urgency, emotional involvement).

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada ingliz og'zaki nutqida uchraydigan paralingvistik birliklarning leksik-semantik xususiyatlari hamda ularning leksik ma'noga ta'siri tahlil qilinadi. So'nggi yillarda tilshunoslikda og'zaki muloqotning multimodal tabiatiga qiziqish ortib bormoqda. Bu esa shuni ko'rsatadiki, ma'no faqat so'zlar orqali emas, balki intonatsiya, urg'u, ohang, pauza va nutq tempi kabi paralingvistik vositalar yordamida ham shakllanadi. Tadqiqot sifatli, tavsifiy va talqin qiluvchi yondashuvga asoslanadi. Tahlillar shuni ko'rsatadiki, bir xil leksik birlik turli prosodik ifodalar orqali turlicha ma'nolarni — masalan, samimiylik, kinoya, shoshilinchlik yoki hissiy jalb etilganlikni — ifodalashi mumkin.

Key words: paralinguistics, lexico-semantic features, prosody, lexical meaning, English spoken discourse, multimodal communication

Kalit so'zlar: Paralingvistika, leksik-semantik xususiyatlar, prosodiya, leksik ma'no, ingliz og'zaki nutqi, multimodal kommunikatsiya

Introduction. In recent decades, linguistics has placed much more focus on speaking as a complex and multilevel activity. Language is not thought of any longer only words and grammar rules. While communicating verbally, people use numerous phenomena beyond words that can serve as additions, corrections, or even substitutes for the linguistic content of speech. These elements are referred to as paralinguistic units and include intonation, stress, pitch, pause, facial expression, gesture, and posture (Trager, 1958; Crystal, 2003). The functional analysis of paralinguistic elements, along with their lexico-semantic investigation, is significant because they play a crucial role in meaning formation and interpretation in the English language.

One of the most significant lexico-semantic functions of paralinguistic units is their ability to strengthen, weaken, alter lexical meaning (Dwight Bolinger .1989)

Literature review. The topic of lexico-semantic features of paralinguistic units in English has been actively studied in modern linguistics, in particular, from the perspectives of pragmatics, discourse analysis, and phonetics. In this context, a number of researchers have made their invaluable contribution to knowledge about interaction between non-verbal and prosodic units and lexical meanings in spoken English communication.

The first one who introduced paralinguistic units was George L. Trager (1958). Paralinguistic characteristics were viewed by him as vocal but non-lexical elements accompanying spoken language; they included tone of voice, pitch, and rhythm. Thus, Trager's work laid a solid foundation for subsequent research by proving that meaning of speech was not only expressed by means of lexical and grammatical elements. David Crystal (2003) is known for his contribution into studying prosodic and paralinguistic characteristics of spoken English. Crystal pointed out that in spoken discourse, it is crucial to consider the role of such features as intonation, stress, and pitch. Indeed, all those characteristics have their own meaning which is not represented by the words themselves. According to Crystal, prosodic features structure speech and indicate what parts of it should be emphasized.

Research methodology. This study uses a qualitative descriptive and interpretative methodology in order to analyze the lexico-semantic characteristics of paralinguistic units in spoken discourse in English language. The qualitative methodology is used since the main purpose of the research does not presuppose the use of any calculations and measurements. The primary data used for the research include authentic examples of spoken discourse in English language taken from different sources, such as films, television programs and public interviews. The use of these types of data allow identifying and analyzing paralinguistic features of spoken discourse in English language, such as intonation, stress, tempo, pauses and others. According to this approach, paralinguistic units perform different communicative functions, including emotional expression, emphasis, irony, sarcasm, politeness, disagreement and discourse regulation. The procedure for conducting the analysis can be considered the following. First, authentic examples of utterances are chosen and transcribed. Then, lexical units included in the selected utterances are analyzed individually in order to determine their main semantic features. Next, paralinguistic features are described in terms of their acoustic or contextual realization. Finally, an integrated analysis of lexical units and paralinguistic features is performed in the context of their roles in meaning-making.

Lexico-semantic analysis of paralinguistic means in English. Paralinguistic units often contribute to the main message by **strengthening or intensifying** the lexical meaning, thus making the speaker's communicative intention more obvious and emotionally salient. In spoken English, the lexical items by themselves often only give the bare semantic framework, whereas it is the paralinguistic features that provide the emotional and attitudinal depth necessary for a full interpretation. Crystal (2003) remarks that prosodic elements like stress and intonation give the speaker the power to emphasize certain words, thus these words will gain more weight in the discourse. With variations of pitch, emphasis, and voice quality, the speaker gives a signal that the parts of the utterance that are more important for communication and carry more of an emotional load are those that are. The reinforcing function of paralinguistic units is especially clear in the case of evaluating and expressive language, the meaning of which is not only based on the content but also significantly on the manner of expression. Gumperz (1982) states that prosodic cues have a major role in indicating speaker stance and in directing the understanding of the listener as the conversation progresses. When paralinguistics accompany the reinforcing of the lexical meaning, they enable the recipients to separate the neutral data from the emotionally charging ones or those that carry emphasis. This coexistence of lexical meaning and paralinguistic realization expresa that the semantic strength of oral communication results from their joint

influence rather than from the lexical content alone. The following examples, taken from English-language films, television series, and public interviews, illustrate the critical role of paralinguistic features in **intensifying the semantic force** of lexical items.

1. Friends (Season 5) — **“That was amazing.”**

ROSS: “Okay, I just can’t believe you pulled that off with no rehearsal.”

MONICA: “I know, right?”

RACHEL (smiling, rising pitch, stress on was, increased loudness): “That was amazing.”

The preceding utterances set up surprise and admiration. Rachel’s expressive prosody (high pitch, increased loudness, and stress) strengthens the lexical meaning amazing to convey genuine praise and emotional engagement, not just a casual comment. Paralinguistic effect: High pitch + loudness amplify positive evaluation.

2. Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (J.K. Rowling) — **“This means everything to me.”**

Harry pauses, heart racing, wand trembling.

HARRY: “I... I did what I had to do.” He breathes again, then says with lowered, heartfelt tone: “This means everything to me.”

The slow pacing and drop in voice quality strengthen means everything, suggesting profound emotional significance. Paralinguistic effect: Slowed tempo + low pitch deepen emotional meaning.

3. BBC News Interview — **“I honestly didn’t expect that.”**

REPORTER: “Were you surprised?”

INTERVIEWEE (stress on honestly): **“I honestly didn’t expect that.”**

Stress functions to signal truthfulness. Paralinguistic effect: Stress reinforces sincerity..

4. Friends — **“Could that BE any funnier?”**

CHANDLER delivers (rising pitch on BE): “Could that BE any funnier?” Although lexical phrase is humorous, paralinguistic stress intensifies comedic effect. Paralinguistic effect: Unexpected stress conveys sarcasm/enthusiasm.

5. Reign movie : **“This is absolutely unbelievable.”**

CATHERINE: “We cannot risk everything for a rumor.”

MARY (pauses, stress on absolutely): **“This is absolutely unbelievable.”**

CATHERINE: “Mary, compose yourself. Consider the consequences.”

Mary’s prosodic stress and slight pause amplify the disbelief expressed by unbelievable, transforming it from lexical meaning to strong emotional outrage.

6. Afsungar — **“You have to see this.”**

MERLIN: “The spell has caused the lake to glow!”

GWAIN (stress on have to, raised pitch): “You have to see this.”

MERLIN: “It’s incredible!”

Stress emphasizes urgency; lexical meaning see this is made imperative and compelling. Paralinguistic effect: Stress + raised pitch intensify call to attention.

Results & Analysis. As seen from the results of the analysis, lexico-semantic meaning in spoken English relies on paralinguistic units like intonation, stress, pitch variation, pauses and voice quality. All the examples provided prove that lexical meaning in English speech is dynamic in nature and always depends on prosodic aspects. Among the main conclusions one can state that paralinguistic units are used to

emphasize lexical meanings of the word-forms. Thus, increased stress, pitch variation and loudness tend to increase emotional intensity of lexical meaning. The research supports Crystal's (2003) claims that such prosodic characteristics as intonation and stress have a great impact on emphasis and marking information structure in spoken language. For example, the utterance "That was amazing" is made emphatic by means of rising intonation and stress and thus shows strong admiration.

Similar ideas were expressed by Bolinger (1989) who suggested that intonation performs the role of a "semantic amplifier". His opinion is fully supported by the findings of the analysis. It is observed that the use of expressive prosody contributes to increased evaluativeness of the word-forms. In the course of communication, prosodic features do not just accompany but create lexical meanings of the word-forms used in the utterances.

It should be mentioned that paralinguistic features may lead to change of meaning. Paralinguistic units like falling intonation, lower pitch and pauses tend to give sarcastic, ironic, mocking meaning to lexical items used in spoken language. This idea is supported by Bolinger (1989) who stated that spoken language is extremely susceptible to prosodic influences. Thus, the use of such prosodic features as falling intonation, pause and slow tempo tends to reverse the meaning of word-forms. For example, the word "great" in a sarcastic utterance "Oh great, just what I needed!" gets ironic meaning. It should also be mentioned that the research results support Crystal's (2003) idea about multilevel character of meaning creation in spoken language. All the examples discussed prove that spoken language has a multimodal nature where meaning creation is done by the interaction of lexical, prosodic and contextual features. Besides, it is possible to state that Gumperz's (1982) theory about importance of speaker attitudes in interpersonal interaction is also proved. Speaker attitude is revealed mostly by paralinguistic units like intonation, stress, pauses, etc. Such phenomena are frequent in communicative process and contribute to understanding speaker intent. The lexico-semantic functioning of paralinguistic units in spoken English includes **strengthening of lexical meaning, weakening of lexical meaning and alteration** of lexical meaning.

Conclusion. The analysis performed within the framework of the current paper has revealed the peculiarities of the lexico-semantic characteristics of the paralinguistic units. In particular, it has been established that meaning creation in English spoken discourse is not only dependent on lexical choices. In fact, prosodic factors and paralinguistic phenomena have an enormous impact on the construction of speaker meaning and interpretation of lexical items. As has been found out, paralinguistic cues work as the modifiers of lexical meaning. That means that, depending on the purposes of the utterance and communicative situation, paralinguistic units either emphasize the lexical meaning, diminish it or create the sense that differs greatly from it. In its turn, it has been discovered that certain paralinguistic phenomena intensify emotions and evaluation in speech. On the other hand, such factors as pauses and reduced tempo may serve as the means of expressing hesitation, politeness and uncertainty in communication. Furthermore, it has become evident that paralinguistic units help to convey pragmatic meanings of irony, sarcasm, sincerity and emotional involvement, which cannot be done through lexical choices only.

Overall, it has been found that spoken English is characterized by the dynamic interaction between paralinguistic and lexical aspects of the communicative process. The results obtained confirm the ideas of Crystal (2003), Bolinger (1989), and Gumperz

(1982). Thus, according to the perspectives proposed by the scholars, the successful transmission of speaker intentions is only possible in case of the combination of verbal and non-verbal vocal means.

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