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## Prosodic means' interaction in realising the anecdote humorous effect

### Взаємодія просодичних засобів реалізації гумористичного ефекту анекдоту

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#### Abstract

In the paper, on the basis of auditory analysis of English spoken anecdotes the authors come up with the system of prosodic means that serve to create the text humorous effect. To define the specificity of a complex interaction of emotional, pragmatic, structural and semantic factors of prosodic means' functioning in English anecdotes, we substantiated two algorithmic models presenting the text story-line development: one being similar to the structure of the fairy tale (introduction → commentary → code), and the other one resembling the riddle (topic → commentary → code). By way of using these models as well as the traditional method of linguistic interpretation of the auditory analysis results, the authors substantiate the specificity of prosodic, lexico-grammatical and stylistic means interaction of an English anecdote oral actualisation functioning within its structural components. It has been found out that realisation of the anecdote humorous effect is ensured by the predominance of the unidirectional functioning of the language means of all levels with the leading role of prosodic means aimed at drawing the listeners' attention to the anecdote's two-plane semantics and its key lexical units, thus stimulating their thinking activities while decoding the humour of the anecdote. The authors come to the conclusion that the application of a functional-and-energetic approach to the study of a complex interaction of emotional, pragmatic, semantic and structural factors makes it possible to present a comprehensive description of invariant and variant prosodic patterns of any type of texts.

#### Анотація

У статті за результатами виконання аудитивного аналізу текстів озвучених англійських анекдотів встановлено систему просодичних засобів реалізації їх гумористичного ефекту. Для визначення особливостей комплексної взаємодії емоційних, прагматичних і структурно-семантичних факторів функціонування просодичних засобів вираження гумору в текстах анекдотів, було обґрунтовано дві алгоритмічні моделі розгортання їх сюжетів: одна наближена за структурою до казки (вступ → коментар → кода), а інша – до загадки (тема → коментар → кода). Традиційним методом лінгвістичної інтерпретації результатів аудитивного аналізу з опорою на ці моделі узагальнено специфіку взаємодії просодичних та лексико-граматичних і стилістичних засобів актуалізації тексту англійського анекдоту в межах структурно-фабульних компонентів тексту. Встановлено, що реалізація гумористичного ефекту анекдоту забезпечується переважанням односпрямованої дії засобів усіх рівнів мови при провідній ролі просодичних засобів у приверненні уваги слухача до двопланової семантики тексту та ключових лексичних одиниць, стимулюючи його мислення під час декодування гумористичного ефекту анекдоту. З'ясовано, що застосування функційно-енергетичного підходу дозволяє встановити особливості комплексної взаємодії емоційних, прагматичних, семантичних і структурних факторів під час усної актуалізації текстів різних жанрів.

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**Keywords:** anecdote, humorous effect, structure, prosodic organisation, language means' interplay.

## Introduction

The study and description of humorous text features have been of interest to researchers from various branches of linguistics. The existence of a wide area of studies focused on this issue is quite common due to indispensable presence of humour in human life and its significant role in a person's everyday communicative activities (Aristotle, 340BC; McLachlan, 2022). Among the variety of humorous texts, an anecdote undoubtedly takes up the leading position since it serves both as an important vehicle for expressing emotions, attitudes and concerns of its recipients as well as a handy communicative device with a definite pragmatic orientation (Oring, 1986, p. 122-123). Another characteristic feature of an anecdote is its inherent ability to be recreated with each new recounting by different narrators in various circumstances or socio-cultural situations and thus with somehow different prosodic presentation given that each narration is a reflection of the moment.

At the same time, engaging the listeners into comprehension of the anecdote's humour and arousing their emotional response largely depends upon the skillfulness of the narrator to make a use of prosodic means. By applying intonation patterns in accord with the text semantics and making clear prosodic contrasts and emphases, a good narrator may engage his/her audience totally, directing or redirecting their thoughts, emotions, and, in some cases, even their behavior as well (Ginzburg et al., 2020).

The **aim** of the present paper is to define a set of invariant prosodic features of the anecdote oral actualisation that serve to create its humorous effect by way of identifying the correlation between emotional, pragmatic and structural features of an anecdote and its prosodic organisation.

## Theoretical Framework

At the current stage of phonetic development, the study of prosodic means organising the texts of various genres inevitably requires turning to the methods of multivariate analysis, which allow determining the regularities of a complex interaction of structural, communicative-pragmatic and prosodic characteristics of the narrated texts. Consequently, it seems expedient

**Ключові слова:** анекдот, гумористичний ефект, структурна побудова, просодична організація, взаємодія мовних засобів.

to apply in our research methodological provisions of the speech energetic theory, put forward by Alla Kalyta (2015). The substantiated methodology allows a researcher to study the text's prosody as a result of a complex interplay of emotional, pragmatic, semantic and structural factors.

Therefore, viewing any text as a structural and semantic unity, it is worth emphasising, in the first place, that language units the text is made up of are capable of producing an essential influence on its structural and semantic characteristics. It is under these circumstances that language means being driven by the author's idea can acquire new additional meanings generated by the content within the framework of the text (Turaieva, 2012, p. 10–11).

Prior to the analysis of the text humorous effect realisation, it's expedient to resort to Aristotle (350BC) who pointed to the necessity to take into account the mode of the text presentation (lexical, grammatical and stylistic organisation of the text), the manner of its presentation (intonation contours and paralingual means) as well as the object of the text presentation (the target audience or recipients).

Thus, there arises a necessity for the prosodic analysis of an anecdote oral actualisation aimed at defining an interrelation between its prosodic patterns on the one hand, and semantic, stylistic and structural features, on the other hand.

Describing the specificity of language means' functioning in the text of an anecdote, one should mention that it is socio-culturally pre-conditioned. In this regard, M. Bakhtin pointed out that the nature of an anecdote is based on the inherent to human beings' culture binary perception of the world, explained by the necessity to construct the world or life differently from the real one (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 99-100, 73-74).

This opinion is shared by A. Karasik (2001), who emphasises that the two-facet nature of the anecdote is based on the contrast between reality and an imaginary or conditional state of affairs as well as points out that it is reality that is ridiculed in anecdotes. At the same time, the logic of anecdotes can be constructed in such a way that

the imaginary or “another” world is based on a “pseudo-norm” or stereotype, the deviation from which is discussed in the text of the anecdote.

V. Raskin (1985, p. 25–26) also put forward the theory of a binary, or the two-level essence of the anecdote. Advancing the idea of a clear orientation of the text of an anecdote at two different oppositional planes of reflecting reality, Raskin singles out the following main types of humorous utterances: mockery, laughing at oneself, riddle, pun, protest humour, etc.

In the process of unfolding the content and pragmatic potential of the anecdote, the technique of changing the method of communication is often used, connected with the need to tune the listener to its perception with the help of meta-text input. At the same time, the mechanisms of humorous effect creation are based on the play of meanings, which arises as a result of two meaningful realities’ collision within the listener’s cognitive sphere. According to I. Fónagy (1982, p. 64), such duality of content, which is at the heart of anecdotes, is created by combining the literal meaning of the sentence with the idiomatic one formed in the context of an anecdote.

Since the anecdote is built on the basis of semantic contrast or by the use of the elements of incompatibility (Attardo, 1994; Attardo, 2017), the initial contradiction at the beginning of the text is exacerbated to its extreme up till the tension is relieved, thus causing a laughing discharge. The outlined mechanism diverts the story in a completely unpredictable direction and, by using a multitude of certain methods and means, leads to a completely unexpected and impressive result (Oring, 1986, p. 125). As a result, the inconsistency and incongruity of the conclusion in the anecdote appears as a trap (Oring 2011) into which one of the characters or the addressee falls into, or as a mockery of logical constructions.

From a cognitive point of view, laughter arises as a result of the listener’s imaginary interpretation of the surrounding reality and is determined by the structures, content, organisation of representations of knowledge and the processes that control them (Ortony et al., 1988). It becomes obvious that the play of overt and covert meanings lies at the heart of the language play, which is of fundamental importance for the anecdotes’ functioning.

Thus, since an anecdotic narrative subordinates to the creation of humour, it is also characterised by the interplay of verbal and non-verbal techniques that help the anecdote’s narrator

divert the flow of its events into an unpredictable course. The ambiguity in the text of anecdotes is usually described by the following stylistic techniques: metaphor, metonymy, polysemy, homonymy, ellipsis, inversion, lexical repetition, syntactic parallelism, the use of antonyms and idiomatic expressions, similes, puns, oxymoron, zeugma, pragmatic anomalies, and the word play within the syntactic level or semantic ambiguity achieved by the use of foreign words.

However, it is important to understand that prosodic organisation of the text of an anecdote remains to be potentially the most significant resource for the correlation of the deep structures of the anecdote two-level semantics against the background of other linguistic means.

### Methodology

The results of our previous studies of English small form folk texts’ prosodic organisation (Taranenko, 2017) confirm the expediency of searching, in the first place, for an invariant algorithmic pattern of the anecdotes’ structure based on the analysis of their plots, or story-line development. This algorithmic pattern, or model, will serve as the methodological basis for defining the prosodic means’ interplay in creating the humorous effect of an anecdote.

To meet this methodological requirement, we, first of all, searched for a model functioning as a hierarchical system of elements that comprises main structural components of the anecdote plot. The second step presupposed a concise explanation of the plot elements’ content. Considering this, we have undertaken a substantiation of the invariant algorithmic pattern of the English anecdotes’ structure based on the analysis of their plot development.

As is known, an anecdote is the text constructed according to specific rules since any funny short story per se doesn’t make an anecdote. At the same time, almost any funny story may be recounted as the anecdote when its text changed correspondingly.

Most anecdotes are made-up narratives similar to fairy-tales, some of them having the form of a riddle or a proverb. Unlike that of a fairy-tale, the form of an anecdote aligns the narrative sequences within its plot with the comic effect achieved owing to unexpected plot twists (Oring, 1986, p. 125). This seems to be the driving force behind the tendency to subdivide fairy-tales according to their motifs into three main classes: fairy-tales about animals, fairy-tales proper and

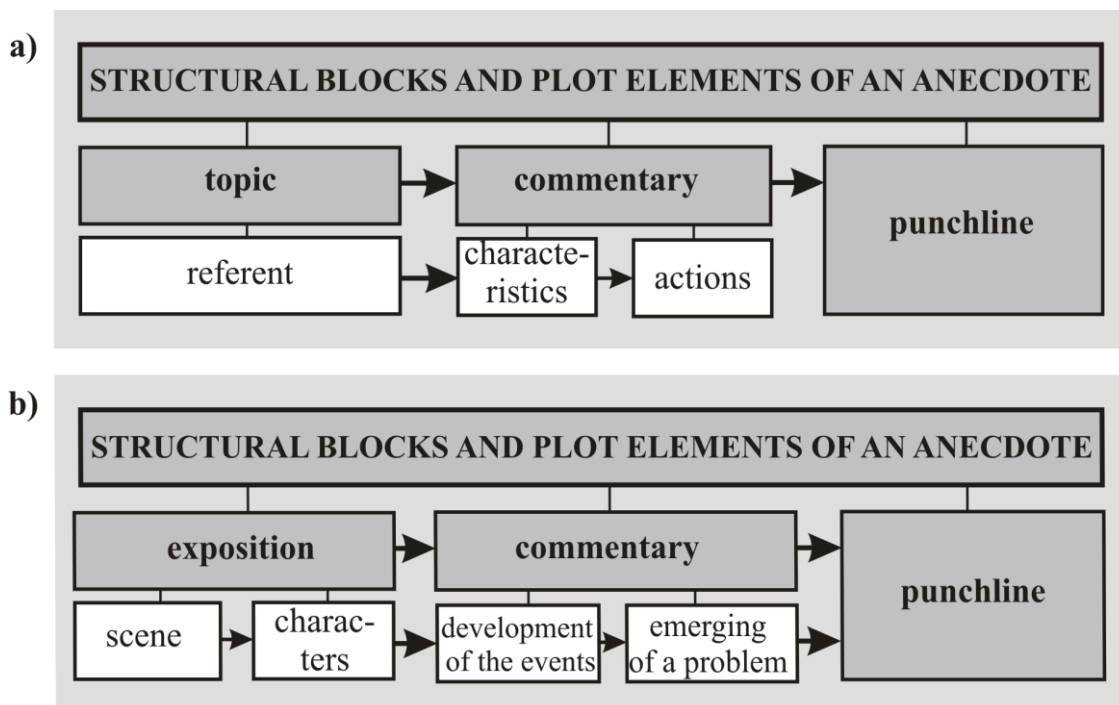
anecdote like fairy-tales (Green, 1997, pp. 17-19).

Searching for the anecdote's compositional structure, it is to be mentioned that the discourse of an anecdote is known to be of a pure anthropocentric nature having two anthropocentres within: that of the author and that of the personage. The specificity of an anecdote as a modern folklore genre, as compared with the traditional folklore, lies in a rather complicated structure of the represented picture of normative values, which is connected (Tabulova, 2007, p. 16) with the subject of their evaluation, i.e. introspective consciousness of the intelligentsia. This structure is three-fold in an anecdote: "the norm – the stereotype – the anti-norm" (ibid.). Thus, the text of an anecdote is superimposed on a certain basic layer serving as a starting point. V. Karasik believes (1997, p. 150) that the basic textual layer of an anecdote is made of its denouement and ending as well as a dynamic model of an anecdote plot development. At the

same time, an anecdote usually combines two incompatible statuses: improbability alongside with reality, or the psychological possibility of an event.

Due to the very nature of an anecdote, its structural and communicative organisation is characterised by a block-like composition with complex syntactic unities being the most acceptable way of splitting it into meaningful parts. This presupposes singling out the text of an anecdote into two parts: the author's words and direct speech (Kuznetsova, 2010, p. 16-17).

As it follows, there are two main varieties of anecdotes as their content suggests: a narration about a certain event if their structure is similar to that of a fairy-tale, and a witty short dialogue if their structure is close to that of a riddle or a proverb. Taking such a viewpoint as a basis for modelling an anecdote's composition, we have come up with its structural variety models as shown in Fig. 1.



**Fig. 1.** Algorithmic patterns of the anecdote story-line development according to its plot elements: a) approaching the structure of a riddle or proverb; b) approaching the structure of a fairy-tale.

As is seen from Figure 1, the structural blocks' chain of an anecdote actualised according to the scheme "a" comprises the following algorithmic sequence: topic → commentary → punchline, while the structural algorithm of anecdotes composed by the scheme "b", has such a sequence: exposition → commentary → punchline. Then, considering the difference in

the content of the so-called "anecdote-riddle" and the "anecdote-tale", at the lower level of their structural systems we introduced specific plot elements directly related to these differences. Thus, the plot elements of the Fig. 1a are presented by the following chain: referents → characteristics → action → punchline.

As an example of the plot elements correlation in accordance with the 1a model, let us consider the following anecdote:

(1) *“Let us see whether you are smart at arithmetic, Charley! I have twenty shillings and borrow fifty from your aunt and thirty from your dad. What does that make?”*  
*“Debts, uncle!”.*

In this text the “enquiry about the boy’s mathematical abilities” serves as the referent, the characteristics is presented by “a mathematical task”, the action is displayed by “the imaginary mathematical action”, while the punchline is in “the child’s unbiased response”.

Tackling the specificities of an anecdote’s structure which, according to scheme “b” (Fig. 1) resembles the structure of a fairy tale, we are to mention the viewpoint presented by V. Karasik (1997, p. 152) who qualified the anecdote as a typical narrative, consisting of an exposition, the plot development, and the climax in its full or condensed form.

A more elaborate, though, is a structural model of a humorous text put forward by W. Labov and J. Waletzky (1967, p. 41). It comprises five elements: a) *abstract* (a gist of what a story will be about), b) *orientation* (sets the time, place, and introduces the characters), c) *complication of the events* (recounts the main events that form the story), d) *resolution* (suggests resolutions of the events), e) *coda*, or *punch line* (serves as a link between the plot and its narration).

Let’s not leave out the well-known opinion that structural elements of an anecdote contribute to its climax, usually termed as a *punchline* (Green, 1997, p. 17-19), or ironic meaning formation (Kuznetsova, 2010, p. 16), an unexpected witty ending (Propp, 2012, p. 228) based on pun, or the effect of defeated expectancy.

Summarising the aforementioned, we have outlined an algorithmic sequence of the generalised plot elements content as shown on the lower hierarchical level of the model “b” (see Fig. 1): 1) the scene → the characters → development of the events → emergence of a problem → the punchline.

The following text may serve as an example of an anecdote content unfolding in accordance with the scheme given on the Fig.1b:

(2) *A talkative passenger asked a lady who was in the same compartment: “Have you any family, madam?”*

*“Yes, sir, one son,” she answered.*

*“Indeed! Does he smoke?” he continued to ask.*

*“No, sir, he has never touched a cigarette,” she said.*

*“So much the better, madam. Tobacco is poison. Does he belong to a club?” asked the passenger.*

*“He has never set foot in one,” she answered.*

*“Then I congratulate you. Does he come home late at night?” he asked again.*

*“Never. He always goes to bed directly after dinner,” she said.*

*“He is a model young man, madam. How old is he?” asked the passenger.*

*“Ten months today,” was the answer.*

In the given example, the anecdote plot elements are marked by the following content: “a train compartment” (the scene) → “a chatty passenger and a woman” (the characters) → “an inquiry about the woman’s son’s habits” (development of the events) → “an inquiry about the woman’s son’s age” (emergence of a problem) → “an unexpected answer of the woman” (punchline).

Thus, it seems expedient to use the substantiated structural models of the anecdote’s plot unfolding (see Fig. 1) in the course of our experimental study of prosodic regularities and dynamics of English anecdotes’ emotional and pragmatic potentials’ changes while producing the text humorous effect. One of the models is close to the structure of a fairy-tale (exposition → commentary → punchline), while the other one resembles the composition of a riddle (topic → commentary → punchline). Each of the structural components of the presented models contains a series of similar plot elements (Fig. 1). While setting tasks for phoneticians, special attention should be given to defining the impact of these differences in the anecdotes’ structural models on their invariant and variant prosodic patterns.

## Results and Discussion

In the course of our experimental study we analysed 75 spoken English anecdotes (2022) having total duration of 32 minutes.

The results of the auditory analysis attested to the correlation between the type of the anecdote’s structural model and prosodic means of its actualisation. It has been found out that in

anecdotes that have the form of a narration about a certain event and are similar in their structure to a fairy-tale, an introductory element contains those plot elements which help a listener

immerse into the situation and get them acquainted with the characters and the scene, as in the examples:

(3) *One afternoon, a science teacher was lecturing his class in biology.* || (What's for lunch);

(4) *A butcher, who had had a particularly good day, proudly flipped his last chicken on a scale and weighed it.* || (The Last Chicken);

As it ensues from the examples above, an introductory plot element of an anecdote, similar to the “exposition” in a fairy-tale, is characterised by short intonation groups consisting at most of three rhythmic groups; the variation of voice range from mid to widened; the use of checked heads, gradually descending stepping or broken descending stepping heads, a low falling tone in the terminal rhythmic group, as well as moderate tempo and loudness. In other words, introductory component of an anecdote is formed by neutral intonation parameters and, accordingly, is distinguished by a low level of emotional and pragmatic potentials. The increase of its emotional potential is evident only in certain lexical units pronounced mostly with an

accidental pitch rise to attract the listener's attention to the details essential for the situation development and comprehension of an anecdote punchline.

In cases when the structure of an anecdote is close to that of a riddle or a proverb, an anecdote is, as a rule, presented in the form of a short witty dialogue whose elements form the following algorithmic sequence: topic → commentary → punchline. Despite the lapidary text of such anecdotes, as the model suggests, their “topic” is characterised by prosodic contours similar to those of the “exposition” of anecdotes actualised according to the model outlined above, for instance:

(5) *An elementary school teacher sends this note to all parents on the first day of school.* || (School teacher's note);

(6) *A man receives a phone call from his doctor.* || (Good news).

The examples illustrate that a listener's acquaintance with an anecdote's referent (characters, situation, scene, etc.) is carried out, as it was mentioned above, by means of emotionally neutral intonation components, namely: a checked head, gradually descending stepping and broken descending stepping heads, rising-falling intonation contour, a low falling terminal tone (in affirmative sentences) or a low rising tone (in general questions), moderate tempo and loudness, absence of abrupt pitch fluctuations. At the same time, the rhematic elements of the “topic”, which are to be fixed in a recipient's memory as crucial for an anecdote decoding, can be marked by the special rise and a high falling tone of an emphatic configuration

(i.e. a rising pitch movement within a nuclear syllable and a falling or level one in the tail).

Thus, the initial structural elements in anecdotes of both models are distinguished by low level of emotional and pragmatic potentials, which are prosodically actualised via neutral parameters of intonation components.

At the same time, the structural element “commentary”, which resembles a fairy-tale, is characterised by a greater variety of intonation means, due to actualisation of such plot elements as “development of the events” and “emergence of a problem”, for example:

(7) “My \goodness!” the old man said to the person  $\xi$  who was \sitting next to him  $\xi$  – on the bench. || “Do \you \see that person | with the \loose pants | and \long \hair?” | is it a boy  $\xi$  – or a girl? ||

“A \girl”, said his neighbor. || “She’s my \daughter”. ||

“Oh!” the old gentleman said quickly. || “Please  $\xi$  – \for\give me, | – I didn’t know  $\xi$  that you were her \mother”. ||

Prosodic organisation of these texts and other similar fragments indicates the increase of their emotional potential to the middle level, being highlighted, in the first place, by a sufficient number of pitch intervals, mostly at the “pre-terminal part – nucleus” juncture (*loose pants*; – or a girl; A \girl; –for\give me; I didn’t know, etc.), high falling terminal tones and the combination of several kinetic tones within one intonation group (...that \you were her \mother).

Moreover, “commentaries” in anecdotes of this structural model are distinguished by the interaction of prosodic means conveying various emotional states, feelings or attitudes of the characters to the described situation or problem. In the analysed example above, the combination of pitch intervals with a high or mid-level rising tone (e.g., long \hair; is it a \boy), which goes

through all pitch zones and stands out with an increased intensity, serves to convey dissatisfaction and annoyance of the anecdote’s personage, his astonishment and surprise caused by misunderstanding.

As we can see, the wider or narrower the pitch interval in different segments of the intonation group of “the commentary” is, the higher becomes its emotional potential.

The study of prosodic organisation of the “commentary” within the anecdotes unfolding according to the model close to that of a riddle proves that although they are characterised by a lesser variation of intonation components, the leading means of their prosodic organisation is a widened pitch interval, for example:

(8) So,  $\xi$  he \said to his \students, | “Let me \show you this frog  $\xi$  – in my \jacket \pocket”. || Then he \reached into his pocket  $\xi$  and \pulled \out...  $\xi$  a \up chicken sandwich! || (What’s for lunch?).

In the given example, the contrasted pitch levels occurring in different segments of intonation groups (“pre-head – head”, “pre-terminal part – nucleus”), actualisation of the falling tones of different pitch levels, and the presence of perceptive pauses altogether enhance semantic contrasts within the “commentary” attracting the recipient’s attention to them.

If the “topic” of an anecdote starts with an enquiry for information pronounced with the rising tone of low or slowed down rate of its movement, the “commentary” usually contains the reaction to this enquiry which due to a high falling tone acquires sincere sounding, with enthusiasm and interest as well as with a shade of encouraging inducement, for example:

(9) A: Doctor, | will I be \*able to \play the piano  $\xi$  \after the \operation? ||  
B: Yes, | of course. || (Doctor).

The transition from the “commentary” to the final component of an anecdote “punchline” is marked by a mid or short-length pause in both structural varieties of anecdotes. “Punchline” as an unexpected denouement of an anecdote designed to create a comic effect stands out with the highest level of emotional and pragmatic

potential, expressed on the prosodic level by the following emphatic prosodic means: slowed down tempo, increased loudness, timbre modifications, pitch level contrasts, the combination of two kinetic tones within one intonation group, mixed rhythmic structures, as in the examples:

- (10) *The woman paused for a moment, then made her decision. || "I know what," she said, "I'll take both of them!" || (The Last Chicken);*  
 (11) *Great. | I never ↑ could before. || (Will I be able);*  
 (12) *I'm not. | I'm her mother. || (Boy or Girl);*  
 (13) *Great. | I never ↑ could before. || (Will I be able);*  
 (14) *I'm not. | I'm her mother. || (Boy or Girl).*

The data obtained during the auditory analysis proved that "punchline" can be manifested in the

form of a rhetorical question or an exclamatory sentence, e.g.:

- (15) *"You were late this morning, Brown." ||  
 "Yes, sir, I'm sorry, I over-slept." ||  
 "Good gracious: do you sleep at home as well?";*  
 (16) *Judge (sternly): The next person who interrupts the proceedings will be sent home. ||  
 Prisoner: -Hoo→ray! ||*

The aforementioned examples show that both the rhetorical question and exclamatory sentence are pronounced with emphatic parameters of intonation components. In the first excerpt such means are represented by the combination of a high pre-head with a low-level head, a high rising terminal tone preceded by a positive widened pitch interval and a perceptive pause whose interplay gives the rhetorical question of a punchline the meaning of sarcastic surprise with

a hint of reproach. The exclamatory sentence, being uttered with increased loudness at a high pitch, adds an unexpectedly optimistic sounding and a general positive tonality to the anecdote.

Inversion has also been registered within the structural element "punchline" which serves to enhance an utterance or any of its part emotionally by way of breaking its syntactic structure, for instance:

- (17) *"Little boy," said a man, "why do you carry that umbrella over your head? || It is not raining and the sun isn't shining." ||  
 "I carry it now," answered the boy, "because when it rains Pa wants it, and only when the weather is good can I use it." ||*

The example testifies to the inversion being marked by a widened pitch range, a wave-like movement of the tone formed by a mid-raised pre-head and a high falling-rising terminal tone of a wide range. Such a synergic one-way interaction of stylistic and prosodic means contributes to the overall emotional colouring of the "punchline", making it stand out against the

mostly neutral intonation organisation of other plot elements and attracting the listener's attention to it.

The unexpected denouement of an anecdote can also be enhanced by elliptical sentences within the "punchline" pronounced with emphatic intonation parameters, for instance:

- (18) *Once the teacher asked his pupil: "Bobby, how many fingers have you?" || The pupil answered at once: "I have ten fingers." || The teacher asked him another question: "Well, if four were missing what would you have then?" || "No music lessons," was the answer. ||*

In the given example, the accentual prominence of the "punchline" is attained by both the absence of the principal parts of the sentence and the widened voice range realisation, having the key

word pronounced with a high falling tone of a decreased rate of its movement changes. Such a unidirectional interaction of grammatical and



suprasegmental language means boosts up the anecdote's humorous effect.

The auditory analysis also revealed that regardless of the model of an anecdote structure the listener's perception of the transition from the "commentary" to "punchline" is realised due to semantic contrasts amplified by prosodic means. For example, in the utterance "Oh no! | If that's the *↑good news*, | then what's the *↓bad news*?" || (Good news) the lexical unit "good" marked with

(19) "If you *↓promise* *↑not to believe* *ξ* everything your *↓child* says *↑happens at school*, | I *↓will promise* | *↓not to believe* *ξ* everything your *↓child* says *ξ* happens at home." || (School teacher's note).

As we can see from the example, due to the difference in prosodic actualisation of the word "promise" used in adjacent structural components (the falling head accentuating the word "not" in the first instance and a rising tone – in the second one, being preceded by that word "will" which is pronounced with the highest intensity and a high falling tone of a wide range), the listeners acquire the opportunity to perceive various implicit meanings of the word "promise", which helps them trigger the search for associations while decoding an anecdote. In a similar way, the recipient perceives the contrasted prosodic prominence of the word "child" used in adjacent structural elements (the falling head in the "commentary" and a high falling tone of a wide range in the "punchline"). This word, owing to its prosodically highlighted functioning acquires the status of the key word, while its distant placement within the text contributes to liaising information in the adjacent plot elements and the listener's overall comprehension, and thus to the adequate decoding of an anecdote's punchline.

(20)

The *↓chemistry professor* *ξ* wrote the *→formula* *ξ*  $HNO^3$  on the *↓blackboard*. ||  
Then he *↓pointed a finger* *ξ* at the *↓inattentive student* *ξ* and *→said*: *ξ* "Identify *↓that formula, please*." ||  
"Just a *↓moment*," *↓answered the student*," | I've *↑got it* *↑right on the tip of my tongue, sir*." ||  
"Then," *↓said the professor* *↓softly*, *ξ* "you'd *↓better spit it out*. || –It is *↓nitric acid*." ||

The example demonstrates that prosodically the idiom is marked by the broken descending stepping head with a falling-rising terminal tone preconditioned semantically and structurally. A touch of humour in this expression is decoded only on comprehension of the following lines

an accidental rise is opposed to the word "bad" pronounced with a high falling terminal tone of a wide range, which is perceived as the key one owing to a preceding positive wide pitch interval. In the following example there is a contrast between several lexical units (*promise, child, school, home*) which occur both in the "commentary" and the "punchline". It is their distant realisation that ensures a tight linkage between these structural components of an anecdote:

There is an interesting fact that some notional words of the "commentary" may lose their utterance stress (e.g. *says*) in order to intensify those words that are more important for the anecdote's meaning comprehension. It follows that thanks to prosodic contrasts actualised in the text of an anecdote, the semantic focus is located on those lexical units that help the listener perceive the humour of an anecdote. By interacting in this way, the semantic and prosodic contrasts of the anecdote serve to boost up its emotional and pragmatic potentials, which gradually increase towards the "punchline".

To define the prosodic patterns that serve the humorous effect creation, it proved expedient to come up with the regularities of prosodic means' accompaniment of other language levels means (lexical, grammatical, and stylistic). The anecdote given below is an example of an idiomatic expression used in the structural component "punchline":

(... "you'd better spit it out. It is nitric acid."), due to their wide voice range, descending sliding scale, high falling tone of a wide range and increased loudness. Such a combination of lexical and prosodic means facilitates not only the expansion of the meaning of the idiomatic

expression (from the figurative one in the “commentary” of an anecdote to the literal one in its “punchline”) but also adds an ironic and mocking sounding to the whole text and makes the utterance, containing the anecdote punchline, stand out and convey the text humour.

(21) *Mother*: \Jane, \xi\what is \Mary doing? ||

*Jane*: →Well, \xi\she is skating \xi\if the \ice is as \thick as she thinks, \xi\but if the \ice is as \thin as I think, \xi\she is \swimming. ||



The example and its intonogram testify to the fact that detached antonyms (*thick* – in the “commentary” and *thin* – in the “punchline”) are interconnected both semantically and grammatically since they are the constituents of two parallel constructions. The antonyms are marked on the suprasegmental level by a so-called mirrored intonation pattern, i.e. gradually descending and ascending sliding heads functioning in adjacent intonation groups. Here it becomes obvious that the antonymous lexical units “*thick*” and “*thin*” play a crucial role in the comic effect formation, whose adequate decoding is attained by their prosodic accentuation against the background of prosodic organisation of the anecdote adjacent structural components. This is achieved by the prosodic opposition of the intonation group *if the ice is as thick as she thinks*, characterised by a simple regular rhythm due to even distribution of the utterance stress, to the following intonation group (*but if the ice is as thin as I think*), whose

Another frequent way of creating a humorous effect in an anecdote is the use of antonyms in its adjacent components as can be seen from the example below:

rhythmic regularity is broken on account of a high falling tone on a personal pronoun “*I*” and a partial stress on the notional word (*think*). This and similar examples prove that antonymous lexical units are capable of producing the anecdote humorous effect when used in adjoining plot elements and accompanied by contrastive prosodic parameters, in particular, as it is shown in the example above, with the contrastive pitch movement in adjacent intonation groups: a falling movement in the head of the first one and the rising – in the second one which is quite natural since a fact is stated in the first intonation group, while in the second one some denial or disagreement is delivered.

Another typical feature of anecdotes is that their comic effect is realised with the help of polysemantic lexical units, prosodically marked by emphatic uses of intonation components, for instance:

(22) *Customer*: \I would \\*like a \book, \please. ||

*Bookseller*: \Something \light? ||

*Customer*: \That doesn't matter | \I have my \car with me. ||.

In the context of this anecdote, the word “*light*” having the initial meaning of “a rather entertaining genre of literature” acquires the meaning of “not heavy, easy”. The listener gets the opportunity to unambiguously perceive the anecdote’s implicit meaning thanks to the prosodic distinction of this lexeme as a key unit (request for additional, clarifying information) by means of a high rising terminal tone intensified by a widened positive pitch interval at the juncture of the head and the nuclear group. It is this emphatic prosodic arrangement of a polysemantic lexical unit, that in the context of an anecdote reveals several meanings

simultaneously. This serves to attract the recipients’ attention and arouse their interest in finding out the essence of the anecdote.

The outlined prevalence of a one-way interaction of an anecdote’s lexical units’ semantics, its grammatical means, stylistic devices and prosodic organisation can, in our opinion, trigger in a listener’s psychic sphere a cognitive mechanism of searching for associations aimed at the correct decoding of anecdote content.

## Conclusions

The carried out analysis suggests that the creation of the anecdote's humorous effect largely depends on prosodic accompaniment of its lexicogrammatical and stylistic means and is achieved by way of parallelism of supra-segmental units, contrasts of pitch levels within intonation contours, fluctuations in loudness and tempo as well as variability in timbre.

We believe that interplay of verbal and non-verbal means within the text of an anecdote generates in the recipients' psychic sphere a cognitive mechanism aimed at searching for associations that help them correctly decode the humorous content of the text.

The performed analysis of the anecdote's linguistic specificity allowed us to single out the following features of its textual organisation: the use of figurative language to evoke a definite idea in the recipients' mind as well as the ability to produce a mini-performance with the use of non-verbal means aimed at making the listener laugh. The mechanism of laughter in the anecdote largely depends on semantic play, achieved as a result of the collision of two meaningful planes within one short text which creates a certain ambiguity to be interpreted in the individual's psychic sphere.

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