

**FaR 2021****International Forum “Freedom and responsibility in pivotal times”****STAND-UP COMEDIANS' SPEECH AS A SOURCE OF  
PRONUNCIATION INNOVATION IN MEDIA COMMUNICATION**

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**Abstract**

At the turn of the 20–21 centuries, a significant restructuring of the labor market took place: large industrial production yielded primacy to the sector of services and the entertainment industry, available to everyone owning a gadget with Internet access. The competition is high – blogs, clips, social videos – everyone is trying to firmly establish themselves in their niche and become as popular and in demand as possible. Stand-up, which burst into the modern viewer’s life at the end of the 90s, became a real "explosion" in the entertainment business. Possessing a high degree of manipulation, the speech of stand-ups is of particular linguistic interest. In the course of an experimental-phonetic study, based on the German language material, the prosodic features of stand-ups’ speech were studied. Analysis of the data obtained showed that their speech is emotional and differs from the neutral speech of native speakers by a special prosodic organization due to the fast tempo, high frequency of the main tone at the focal element itself, significant intensity, melodic pattern of the phrase. The popularity of stand-up is determined by many factors, in particular, a wide thematic range, including some taboo topics, a large number of jokes, and ease of communication. All this makes stand-up comedians young people’s idols. The deviations from the established norms of pronunciation in the media that arise in the course of their speeches can be seen as a kind of pronunciation innovations that can lead to changes in pronunciation norms at the language level.

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## 1. Introduction

The basis for the existence of any society is mutual activity and communication. Any period in the history of human development is characterized by its inherent forms of communication, which depend not only and not so much on the cultural and educational background of society, but on the material and technical level of its development. This was especially pronounced at the turn of the millennium: at the end of the 20th – beginning of the 21st centuries. There are two factors that are characteristic of communication activity at his period of time: firstly, the rapid development of the Internet; secondly, the associated tendency of transition to audiovisual forms of communication.

The spread of Internet technologies has resulted in the formation of a new communication system: to the mode of "man<->man" has been added "man<->machine", and their interaction is increasingly taking on network forms. Literature, cinema, theater, concert halls, museums have gone to the network. It allowed them to beat television in the struggle for survival that had lasted for a longtime. As a matter of fact, television is also rapidly turning into one of the Internet platforms, and not a very popular one at that.

According to GlobalWebIndex's statistical report «Digital 2020» the number of Internet users on the planet has approached 5 billion, i.e. over 60 % of the population use information and network communication services. Every day, each Internet user in Germany spends almost 5 hours, and a citizen of Russia – more than 7 hours in virtual reality (Digital 2020, 2021). According to the statistics portal of Germany Statista, the number of Internet users in the country in 2020 was 88 % of the total population. And in the most active age group of 14–49 years it reached almost 100 % (Statista, 2021). All this cannot but affect the language as a means of communication and, of course, attract the attention of linguists. For example, there is a linguistics branch studying the linguistic personality on the Internet (Karasik, 2021; Kosyakova & Tkacheva, 2017; Lutovinova, 2013).

The concept of a linguistic personality is associated with the characteristics of a person or society (group, collective, etc.) through their speech activity. However, the simple perception of speech in oral and written form also has a great influence on the formation of linguistic competencies. For a longtime, television has dominated this area, but it has never been able to achieve such widespread coverage as the Internet, especially among the younger generation. According to Ericsson, mobile data consumption in 2020–2021 could reach more than half a trillion gigabytes. More than half of this volume will be streaming and video content, and 90 % of Internet users aged 16 to 64 are watching online videos today (Digital 2020, 2021).

Standup occupies a special place among modern video content both on the Internet and on television: a comedy genre in which a comedian performs in front of a live audience with prepared author's monologues and short improvisations. During the performance, stand-ups engage audience in conversation, telling entertaining stories from life. At the same time, in order to maximize the impact on the listener, valational, logical-conceptual and ontological norms are violated, a variety of linguistic means are used as much as possible: comic tonality, dynamism, game mode of communication, profanity, etc. (Lobova, 2017).

## **2. Problem Statement**

Given the popularity of stand-up shows among young people, there is no doubt that it has a great influence on the formation of linguistic innovations and new concepts in the field of vocabulary and grammar, which often do not coincide with traditional ideas about the culture of speech (Dubrovskaya & Manerova, 2019; Khokhonin, 2018; Paudyal & Filindash, 2019; Zaitseva, 2021). The main attention of researchers is usually paid precisely to this side of speech practice, while the pronunciation side, especially prosody, as a rule, remains out of consideration, although it is in the pronunciation of young people that new tendencies may appear and affect the further development of the language. It is from this point of view that stand-up shows are of particular interest, since their participants, as a rule, do not have special speech training, and their speech, including its prosody, is formed of the ideas of stand-ups.

## **3. Research Questions**

The success of a stand-up comedian's live communication with the audience directly depends on the ability to attract and retain the attention of the audience. The performer and the audience are inseparable. The stand-up artist shares his thoughts, observations, and attitude to topical issues with the audience, but humor invariably remains the core of the comedian's performance. Caustic jokes and teasing of those present charge the audience with a good mood. The effect of participation, laughter creates a friendly atmosphere in which the audience is pleased to be. The success of this genre lies in the fact that comedians are able to present any topic, problem of a personal or global nature as an absurd, ironic situation. Taboo topics also increase interest in this genre, allowing them to ridicule the shortcomings of society or some events. "In order to attract their audience, comedians use various sound, musical and theatrical fragments, and to avoid the effect of being "artificial" and thoroughly prepared and rehearsed, the comedian must improvise with the audience" (Reshetarova & Gerasimenko, 2019, pp. 40–44). In this case, speech should be as close to spontaneous as possible. Therefore, the speaker, on the one hand, seeks to create the illusion of a conversation with well-known people, friends. On the other hand, their main goal is to maximize the attention of the audience. In this study, we have traced the changes in the prosodic characteristics enabling stand-up comedians to achieve this effect.

The object of the study is the speech of German stand-up comedians; the subject of the study is its prosodic characteristics.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to identify and describe the prosodic characteristics of German-speaking stand-up comedians' speech. For this research we have compiled a sound corpus and carried out an audit and instrumental-acoustic analysis of the selected initial statements. We have also carried out a comparison of the prosodic characteristics of the stand-ups' speech with similar statements in a neutral implementation. In the course of the study we identified and analyzed the prosodic features of the sounding speech of stand-up artists popular on the stand-up scene in Germany.

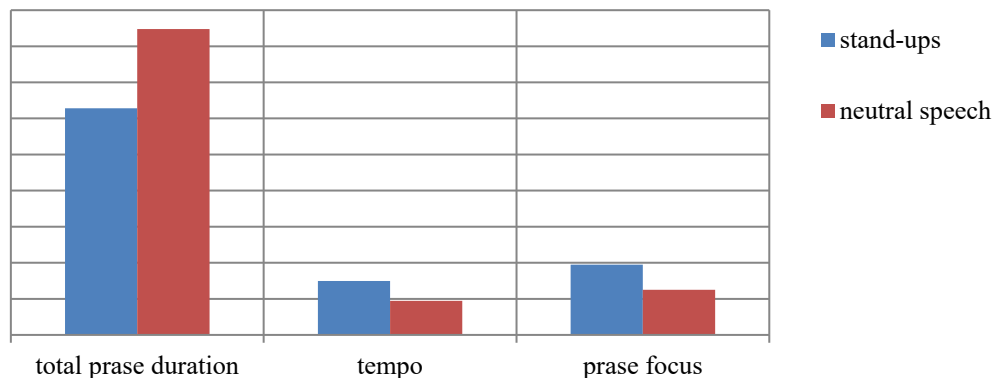
## 5. Research Methods

Based on the goals and objectives of the study, a complex research approach was chosen. It included the observation method, audit, instrumental-acoustic, inductive and comparative research methods. The observation method and audit analysis were used to select and classify the research corpus. With the help of the PRAAT computer program (authors Paul Boersma, David Weenink), we carried out a complete instrumental-acoustic study of the suprasegmental structures of emotional speech of stand-ups and neutral implementations of initial statements made by native speakers. The analysis of the results made it possible to compare the prosodic structures, carry out their linguistic interpretation and draw some conclusions.

## 6. Findings

The source of the research material was the YouTube platform on the Internet. We selected 6 video performances of German stand-up artists (3 men and 3 women from 27 to 44 years old). During the initial audit observation, 30 sentences were selected with a total duration of 3 to 10 seconds, depending on the speaker's speech rate. The material suitable for the purpose of the study was cut from the video performances using the Sony VegasPro 12 software and saved to electronic media in MP3 format. The selected sentences were numbered from 1 to 30. For the audit analysis we involved native speakers and researchers of Nizhny Novgorod State Linguistics University, specializing in the phonetics of the German language and having the skills of auditing speech characteristics. The auditors' task was to track signs of speech emotional expression in the sounding sentences. As a result of the analysis, 10 sentences were selected (gender distribution: 6 men and 4 women) lasting from 2 to 6 seconds, which were distinguished by the highest emotionality and expressiveness of speech. These sentences were spoken by native speakers in a neutral implementation. The comparison of the initial and neutrally pronounced sentences during the second stage of the audit analysis showed that the speech of the stand-ups differs from neutral implementation primarily in the pitch.

The next stage of the study was the instrumental-acoustic analysis. We were primarily interested in the parameters that allow determining the differences in neutral sentences and emotional statements, namely: the frequency of the main tone (FMT), the presence of focus and its duration, the rate of tone change, as well as the rate of speech (Yartseva, 2016). The data obtained in the course of the instrumental experiment showed that the emotional speech of the stand-ups differs from the neutral speech in terms of the given temporal, melodic and dynamic parameters. An example of the ratio of the phrase total duration, the tempo, the value of the phrase focus of the stand-ups' emotional speech and neutral implementation is shown in Figure 01.



**Figure 1.** Comparative characteristics of temporal and melodic indicators of stand-ups' emotionally colored phrase and their neutral equivalents

So, the total phrase duration of the stand-ups' speech is 1.5 times as short (varies from 560 to 1690 ms) as that in the neutral equivalents, where the values of the total phrase duration are in the range from 655 to 1900 ms. The rate of emotional utterance, which is understood as the ratio of the number of syllables to a unit of time, also corresponds to the characteristics of emotional speech. In the speech of stand-ups, the relative value of this indicator is approximately 2 times higher than that in the neutral speech. The values of the phrase focus, which show the frequency of the main tone (Hz) in the stand-ups' speech, are in the range from 195 to 495 Hz, which is about 1.7 times higher than in the neutral implementations (190–338 Hz). This difference shows the presence of the most significant word in the utterances, and also confirms our hypothesis that emotionality is expressed, first of all, due to the high frequency of the main tone. It is noteworthy that the values of the phrase focus in women stand-ups are in the range from 447 to 495 Hz, and in men from 195 to 473 Hz. This difference in indicators can be explained by the fact that for a male voice the average frequency range is 100–250 Hz, for a female – 200–400 Hz (Raevsky, 1997). Consequently, the female voice has a higher performance and lies in the frequency range approximately one octave higher than that of the male. This is due to anthropometric differences between the genders, namely, the structural features of the speech apparatus (Zharenova, 2014). The next parameter that was analyzed is intensity. However, when comparing the obtained data, we were faced with the fact that the intensity of the phrase focus in neutral statements is higher, which calls into question the assumption that the stand-ups' speech differs in its intensity. We analyzed the intensity indicator for all statements and calculated its relative value and came to the conclusion that this dynamic indicator of the stand-ups' speech in general for all statements is greater than  $\approx 1.0$  than in neutral sentences. This result shows that emotionality expresses, first of all, the melodic component (TMF), therefore, the intensity indicator is not relevant here. The rate of change in TMF at the beginning and at the end of the phrase focus played a special role in the study. So, in 4 out of 10 emotional sentences, TMF rises faster (average value 0.32–2.6 Hz/ms) than that in the neutral equivalents (0.12–0.14 Hz/ms). In 6 other sentences pronounced by the stand-up artists, the TMF speed is slower

(average value 0.33–7 Hz/ms), in the neutral implementations – 0.72–40 Hz/ms. These results can be explained by the need to focus the audience's attention on important points, to "hold up" a joke. The rate of change in the TMF rate at the end of the phrase focus (average value 0.29–16 Hz/ms) once again proves that the emotional speech of stand-ups is characterized by a rapid change in the frequency of the main tone.

## 7. Conclusion

Prosody is an important component of speech and serves as the most important means of expressing speech pragmatics. With the help of prosodic means, the speaker can influence the interlocutor, keep their attention. The correct use of certain prosodic means (stress, pause, melody, change in the voice pitch) helps the speaker to achieve a certain goal in the process of communication. Stand-up comedians, being especially popular among young people, blur the line between the language of media communication and the everyday language of communication. So, by means of "careful violation of the norm" in order to impress the audience, stand-up artists contribute to the gradual spread of prosodic innovations in the mass media (Yanko, 2008), which are going into everyday speech of the younger generation.

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