

Márta Peredy: The euphony instinct

The goal of this talk: This talk challenges the view that hypothesises a strict division line between those aspects of human language which are considered to be linguistic and those which are considered to be non-linguistic. More specifically this work is a first attempt to point out quantitatively that euphonic factors play some role not only in poetry but also in everyday spoken language. I am going to show that in cases where variation is present, the choice of the one form or the other can be influenced by euphonic factors, namely, by a tendency towardS either harmony or antiharmony depending on the speaker. According to the results, in about 30% of the cases, this tendency could be pointed out.

Hypothesis: My assumption is that everyday speech is perceived as a “melodic product” beyond its obvious communicative roles and therefore speech production is influenced by unconscious euphonic preferences. Moreover, euphony can be sensitive not only to melody but also to grammatical patterns.

Experiments: In order to prove this hypothesis, I studied the role of repetition, more precisely, the choice of some varying word forms in second occurrence contexts. What was repeated was not exactly the same word but the same form of another verb of the same verb type. The three types of variation that were used in the tests are the following: (i) the 1st person singular indicative forms of *ik*-verbs (e.g. *elesek/elesem* 'fall-1Sg'), (ii) verbs which have an epenthetic stem (e.g., *ugornak/ugranak* 'jump-3Pl') and (iii) the definite/indefinite forms of the verbs *lát* 'see' and *figyel* 'watch'.

Experiment 1-2: In the first two cases, I worked with sentence-triplets, see example (1) for *ik*-verbs and example (2) for epenthetic verb stems. It was a free choice test, subjects could choose one of the two variants of the verb or accept both of them. The sentences of the triplets were judged separately and mixed with other sentence types. The (a) sentences were monoclausal containing a single verb, while (b) and (c) sentences were biclausal. The form of the first verb might trigger or prohibit the choice of the same form for the second verb. It is possible that the presence of the first verb has no influence. In this case, the subject will choose the same form for the second verb as he chose in sentence (a). This happens in 50-70% of the cases (see the 'consistent' column under 'cooccurrence' in Table 1. and 2.), but not always. The subject sometimes seeks for harmony, i.e., repeats the same variant, or prefers antiharmony, i.e., will form sentences containing two different verb forms. Columns are marked by '+harm' and '-harm' respectively. (The 'indep' columns show the proportion of the possible answers in sentences of type (a).)

(1) a. Ezzel az új görkorival még néha elesek / elesem.

This-with the new rollerskate-with still sometimes fall-INDEF.1SG / IK.1SG

b. Ha nem kapaszkodok a buszon, könnyen elesek / elesem.

if not hang.on-INDEF.1SG the bus-on, easily fall-INDEF.1SG / IK.1SG

c. Ha nem kapaszkodom a buszon, könnyen elesek / elesem.

If not hang.on-**IK.1SG** the bus-on, easily fall-INDEF.1SG / **IK.1SG**

(2) a. Sokszor csak onnan tudják, hogy tapsolni kell, hogy

meghajolunk / meghajlunk.

Often only there-from know-3PL that applaud-INF have-to that

PRT.bow-VOWEL-1PL / Ø-PL

b. Az ünnepségen külön-külön énekelünk, de együtt

hajolunk / hajlunk meg.

The ceremony-on separately sing-VOWEL-1PL but together

bow-VOWEL-1PL / Ø-PL PRT

c. Az ünnepségen külön-külön éneklünk, de együtt hajolunk / hajlunk meg.
 The ceremony-on separately sing-Ø-1PL but together bow-VOWEL-1PL / Ø-PL PRT

Experiment 3: In the third case, see example (3), there was an intervening subordinate clause between the initial definite object and the sentence-final verb of the matrix clause which should agree in definiteness with the object. This time subjects judged the sentences separately instead of choosing from the two possibilities. The comparison of the first and second two rows of Table 3 show that the form of the verb in the subordinate clause influences the acceptability of the verb form in the matrix clause although in this case the two competing forms are not possible alternatives of a variation but the grammatical (definite) and the ungrammatical (indefinite) forms.

- (3) a. A férfit, akit Mari figyelt, Enikő is figyelt / figyelte.
 the man-ACC whom Mary watched-Indef.3SG Enikő too watched-Indef.3SG / Def.3SG
- b. A férfit, akit Mari látott, Enikő is figyelt / figyelte.
 the man-ACC whom Mary saw-Indef.3SG Enikő too watched-Indef.3SG / Def.3SG

The results are based on the answers of 60 subjects.

Results:

(i) According to the first two experiments, in about 20-40% of the cases, harmonic tendencies influence the choice of the verb form, see Table 1-2,

(ii) Similar results could be obtained in the case of different variation phenomena (compare Table 1 and 2), which suggests that euphonic tendencies are more general.

(iii) Preference of harmony seems to be a bit more “popular” compared to antiharmony (although not all differences are significant at $p=0.05$).

(iv) According to the third experiment, the previous occurrence of the same form increases the acceptability of the ungrammatical form (compare the corresponding INDEF-INDEF fields to DEF-INDEF fields), while it decreases the acceptability of the grammatical form (DEF-DEF vs. INDEF-DEF). That is, formal similarity increases the uncertainty of the judgements.

(v) It is not the exact identity but only the grammatical identity that counts, i.e., there is no significant difference between the numbers of the same colour in Table 3.

Table 1	cooccurrence				indep.
	-harm	+harm	consistent	other	
K	16%	20%	50%	14%	44%
M	11%	19%	59%	11%	37%
same	11%	11%	68%	11%	19%

Table 2	cooccurrence				indep.
	-harm	+harm	consistent	other	
+epen	17%	21%	50%	13%	24%
-epen	13%	19%	57%	11%	47%
same	7%	14%	55%	24%	29%

Table 3			matrix clause			
			see		watch	
			INDEF	DEF	INDEF	DEF
relative clause	see	INDEF	9%	97%	16%	92%
		DEF	3%	83%	4%	85%
	watch	INDEF	8%	98%	15%	93%
		DEF	3%	90%	5%	88%