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Evaluation of the Supra-Segmental Phonemes in the Novels of R. K. Narayan

Shakeba Jabeen Siddiqui, Ph.D. (Linguistics)

Abstract

The supra-segmental phonemes in the novels of R.K. Narayan were evaluated. Narayan used pauses, breaks and jerks in the sentences to emphasize what he and his characters state. Slight deviation in the sentence produces long durations, emphasizing the emotional ups and downs of the characters. He occasionally varied the pitch using the same lexeme in different situations. The same notation of the lexeme has been used on different occasions, for example the words 'Oh' and 'Ah' have different expressions of surprise, happiness, irritation, indifference, agreement, disagreements, satire, etc. No change in accent was noticed.

It seems Narayan deliberately avoided language variation in the depiction of his characters. All his characters speak simple, fluent and lucid Indian variety of English with high usage of indigenous and regional words with no change in pronunciation. Although Narayan purposefully avoided the change of accent in his writing, he used repetition of words as a prominent feature of providing stress to his essential dialogues that are important for readers' understanding. The importance of dialogues is stressed by the repetition of words. In addition, repetition also provides a slight tonal quality to the sentences.

The author beautifully mixed the rising and falling intonations in the text generating the differences in the audibility. This conveys the emotional fluctuations of the characters.

In order to convey the real tone of the speaker, the author used adverbs reflecting the voice quality of the speaker. Narayan selected the normal mode of writing in some of the places of the text, starting the dialogue of speaker with **H'm.**, expressing his thinking process,

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agreement or even disagreement. Similarly, he used many such non-lexemic items, such as, **Ha! Ha! Ha!**, **Ah!**, **Oh, O, Aha, Alas**, etc. to express the ups and downs in the emotions of the speaker. He also used rhyming words, to convey the patterns of sound, making the background in accordance with the situation.

To express hatred, anger, humiliation, criticism, frustration, irritation and emotional conflicts, Narayan adopted phonological deviation as a tool. He created jerks in the sentences with high usage of dash signs '____', ALL CAPS, **Bold**, *Italics* as tools, overlapping of pronouns and half/ incomplete words. This deliberate deviation produced a significant effect in the minds of readers.

Keywords: Supra-segmental phoneme, R.K. Narayan, Accent, Pitch, duration, stress.

Introduction

R.K. Narayan's art as a novelist was largely limited to story-telling, for the story is the distinguishing characteristic of his fiction. As a genial story-teller Narayan held his listeners simply spell-bound. The story really matters in all his writings. In his novels and short-stories, Narayan wrote a story of the middle or the lower middle class people, neither too well off nor too poor in the South Indian towns, which constitute his familiar fictional locale popularly known as Malgudi. An imaginary but loveable town, which exists nowhere in the map of India but it is considered to be the microcosm of India. There is a certain indefinable relationship between Malgudi and its people. The people make the town of Malgudi the way they like it, and the town, in turn, affects the traditional and modern society of South India.

R.K. Narayan's novels have attracted the attention and interest of many researchers. Trivedi and Soni (1973) discussed the problematic genre classification of Narayan's book *Dateless Diary*. Walsh (1979, 1982) reviewed Narayan's work chronologically focusing on Narayan's growing maturity and his embodiment of the spirit of Hinduism reflected in the tension between the one and the many. Woodcock (1985) compared R.K. Narayan and V.S. Naipaul and opposed Naipaul's view of Narayan's fiction as "essentially aimless and produced by profound doubt about the purpose and value of fiction." Young (1981) disagreed with Naipaul's dismissal of Narayan's "quietism" and argued that Narayan's work has a positive "transforming power". Ali (1986) examined Narayan's style of using English in *The Guide*, focusing on the combination of ironic comment and comic manner.

Although there are many studies of Narayan's fiction and short stories, the effect of sound (phonetics) in his novels is largely ignored. The present study is to investigate the effects of phonetics in the novels of R.K. Narayan with a special emphasis on the evaluation of the supra-segmental phonemes.

Supra-Segmental Phonemes Evaluation

Sounds undergo many changes. Many contrasts in language are developed in the phonological processes. These take place at a higher level, a level that will involve sequences or strings of sounds, or even of words and phrases. This is the domain of *supra-segmental phonology*. Stress, rhythm, and intonation are phonological realities that manifest themselves at the supra-segmental level, spreading over segmental phonemes and parts of words and

throughout the sentence. Stress and intonation contours can even have phonemic (contrastive) value since only difference in stress placement establishes the distinction between **envoy** (the noun) and **envoy** (the verb). The same word, phrase or sentence pronounced with different intonational contours could express surprise, satisfaction, and matter-of-factness.

R. K. Narayan exploits these features in his own characteristic way developing his own tools. The way he handled these in his novels clearly demonstrate that a mere use of native English intonations and supra-segmental features would not do because his characters are almost always Indian, who may have learned English as a foreign or a second language, with no real mastery over the supra-segmental features employed by the native speakers of English.

The supra-segmental level includes duration, pitch, accent, stress through repetitive words, rising and falling intonation through dialogues and selection of sounds in Narayan's works.

Evaluation of Duration in Narayan's Novels

Narayan focused on the delivery of dialogues through the gaps and pauses in the speech or talk of the speaker. This durational pause can explain the inner feelings and emotions of the speaker and the style of delivery of dialogues in conversation with the characters in the novels. Example:

"I suppose...H'm". Nothing further was said (Narayan, 2000).

Narayan, R.K. (2000). *The Magic of Malgudi. The Bachelor of Arts*. Page 163.

The pause denotes the prolonged thinking leading to a speechless condition of the speaker.

"I have given her every comfort at home, provided her with all the jewellery and clothes a girl needs but^{1A}...." . (He paused slightly).

"You son of a^{1B} ...".

"How far is^{1C}.....?" The pause indicates a name, which Narayan didn't want to tell the readers.

"A box of jewellery left in safe custody at the Bank^{1D} of". The pause indicates a name of the bank, which Narayan didn't want to reveal.

"I have, of course, enough stock with me, but if I run out^{1E}....". Here, the pause reflects the confusion in the mind of speaker.

"I didn't beat the shop man. The man who beat him was ^{1F}...". He gave a number of local names. Here, Narayan used pause to mention numerous names, which he didn't want to reveal to the readers.

She started crying, 'After all.... After all^{1G}..... Is this right what I am doing'. The pauses indicate the hidden guilt, which is troubling Rosie, as she wants to re-confirm that whatever she is doing is right.

“and when the tempo is varied^{1H}...” (This was something, which Gafur could safely overhear).

She stopped now and then explain: ‘*Nari* means girl - and *mani* is a jewel^{1I}...’.

(Narayan, R.K. (1958). *The Guide*, , Methuen, London. ^A Page 15, ^B Page 24, ^{1C} Page 55, ^{1D} Page 42, ^{1E} Page 60, ^{1F} Page 124, ^{1G} Page 120, ^{1H} Page 124, ^{1I} Page 125).

“I’m, I’m..... a teacher in a school^{1A}”.

“Someone is coming to stay with us, and he wants^{1B}”.

“Do you know how many people^{1C}”.

“He is not a tenant, but a friend^{1D}”.

“Why could you not have straight away gone through the usual formality, that is^{1E}”.

“I thought since..... since you have..... you might adjust your accounts^{1F}”.

“What about^{1G}?”

“Babu said there was, was..... Some giant here^{1H}”

“All sorts of low-class women are wandering around this press nowadays^{1I}”.

“What about^{1J}?”

(Narayan, R.K. (1962). *The Man-eater of Malgudi*. Heinemann, London. ^A Page 19, ^B Page 75, ^{1C} Page 77, ^{1D} Page 78, ^{1E} Page 79, ^{1F} Page 87, ^{1G} Page 100, ^{1H} Page 104, ^{1I} Page 105, ^{1J} Page 101.)

Evaluation of Pitch in Narayan’s Novels

Pitch is one of the three major auditory attributes of sounds along with loudness and timbre, and it represents the perceived fundamental frequency of a sound. While the actual fundamental frequency can be precisely determined through physical measurement, the actual fundamental frequency may differ from the perceived pitch because of overtones, also known as partials, harmonic or otherwise, in the sound. The human auditory perception system may also have trouble distinguishing frequency differences between notes under certain circumstances. According to American National Standards Institute (ANSI) acoustical terminology, it is the auditory attribute of sound according to which sounds can be ordered on a scale from low to high.

The pitch in the dialogues from Narayan's novels can be understood with the help of the usage of 'Oh' by the author to convey different moods of the speaker. In sentence 1, Oh is used to convey the happy mood of the speaker, while in sentences 2 & 3 Oh represents a tinge of disagreement by the speaker. In sentence 4, Oh represents apologetic behavior of the speaker with a stress on the word ‘**no**’. In sentence 5, ‘Oh’ represents the mood of admiration of the speaker.

Example: The usage of **Oh** by Narayan

1. ‘**Oh**, wonderful. Where did you learn to write novels’^{1A}.
2. ‘**Oh**, no, I’m just interested that’s all’^{1A}.
3. ‘**Oh**, no, it’s not that’^{1A}.
4. ‘**Oh**, no! apologized Jagan’^{1B}.
5. “**Oh**, charming! Charming! Charming!”^{1C}”.

(Narayan, R.K. (2000). *The Magic of Malgudi. The Vendor of Sweets*. ^{1A}Page 294, ^{1B} Page 296, ^{1C} Page 316, ^{1D} Page 301.)

Example: Narayan used some of the **non-lexemes** to picturize the emotions and the inner feelings of the speaker.

1. ‘**H’m.**’^{1D}

The usage of 'H 'm shows that the speaker is thinking and also agreeing with the other person. Other examples of the mood of the speaker through pitch are

1. ‘**Wow!**’ (Page 316).(happiness)
2. “**Ah!**, here it is!” (Page 316)(satisfaction).
3. “**Ah!**”, **jeered the cousin genially** (Page 316).(empathy))

(Narayan, R.K. (2000). *The Magic of Malgudi. The Vendor of Sweets*)

Evaluation of Accent in Narayan’s Novels

An **accent** is a manner of pronunciation of a language. Accents can be confused with dialects which are varieties of language differing in vocabulary and syntax as well as pronunciation. Dialects are usually spoken by a group united by geography or social status.

When a group defines a standard pronunciation, speakers who deviate from it are often said to "speak with an accent". People from the United States would "speak with an accent" from the point of view of an Australian, but people from Australia may also "speak with an accent" from the point of view of an American.

The concept of a person having "no accent" is meaningless, although a variety used in formal settings, such as BBC English, is sometimes informally designated as "accentless". Narayan is not very fond of using different accents in his novels as he does not change the accent of his speaking character. This could be a deliberate effort of the author that the language of his characters does not vary in any context of socio-economic status, their ethnicity, their caste and their nativity.

A single example of Narayan using foreign accent is as follows:

“**Yeah**” Even here the identity of the character is the major goal, not any other aspects and functions of varying accents.

Evaluation of Stress in Narayan’s Novels

Stress is an important feature of English. It is defined as the degree of prominence a syllable has. If a word has more than one syllable, the syllable, which is more prominent than the

other, is said to receive the accent. The relative prominence of a syllable is generally due to stress, i.e. greater breath force, but very often stress and pitch work together to make a syllable more prominent. Most Indian speakers of English put stress on wrong syllables. As a result, their pronunciation becomes very much unintelligible to the native speakers of English. The syllable on which there is a pitch change is said to have the primary or tonic accent. Any other prominent syllable is said to have a secondary accent.

Narayan revealed the importance of any given sentence by giving stress on a vowel of a word.

Kailas muttered: ‘Good boy. You are a good friend in need is a friend *inde-e-e-ed*³.’
(Narayan, R.K. (2000). *The Magic of Malgudi*. The Bachelor of Arts. Page 218)

Here, the vowel 'e' has been over-stressed. It seems that the author was not very keen in focusing on a particular syllable, but he gives the sense of stress by using words repeatedly.

Narayan also used repeated words to **stress** the sentence. The purpose is to stress the importance of the situation and to make the conversation more interesting to the readers. He is not very fond of using symbols but he uses repetition:

“**Poor boy, poor boy**¹, let him be” (Page 281).
 “Oh! **Father, Father**¹,” the boy cried (Page 286)
 “**Yes, Yes**¹, I meant college” (Page 290)
 “**Oh, no, oh, no**¹”, cried the cousin (Page 290)
 “**College, college**¹, and of course college” (Page 291)
 “**No hurry, no hurry**¹.” (Page 291)
 “**Go back, go back**¹ to his wife” (Page 295)
 “**Of course, of course**¹.....” (Page 296)
 “**True, true**¹” (Page 297, 302)
 “**No, no**¹, its my duty” (Page 302).
 “**I know, I know**¹” (Page 308)
 “**Oh, charming! Charming! Charming**¹!” (Page 312)
 “**Yes, yes**¹, I understand” (Page 315).
 “**You will, you will**¹....” She said (Page 315).
 “**Oh, oh, Father, Father**¹, get me one of the letters” (Page 315).
 “**Yes, yes**¹,” said Jagan (Page 322).
True, True².....(Page 31)
 “**Yes, Yes**²,” he agreed readily. (Page 33)
 “Oh, **Yes, Yes**², of course,” Vasu said faintly.(Page 33)
 “**Yes, Yes**², that’s a good idea .I’ll always be round you. (Page 32).
 “**No, no**², it’s not that” (Page 76).
 “**Yes, Yes**²,” he said mockingly (Page 101).
 “**Yes, Yes**²”, I said “Why not” (Page 105).
 “**Stop! Stop**²!” (Page 80).
 “**Suppose, suppose – suppose**³? What? I myself could not specify” (Page 115).

¹ Narayan, R.K. (2000). *The Magic of Malgudi*. *The Vendor of Sweets*.

² Narayan, R.K. (1962). *The Man-eater of Malgudi*. Heinemann, London.

³ Narayan, R.K. (1958). *The Guide*. Methuen, London.

Evaluation of Selection of Sounds in Narayan's Novels

Narayan used H'm to describe the thinking process of the speaker.

Example

“I suppose...**H'm**.” Nothing further was said

¹ Narayan, R.K. (2000). *The Magic of Malgudi. Swami and Friends*.

He used H'm to highlight agreement.

Examples

“**H'm.**, that's better”, Vasu said, sitting down (Page 28).

‘**H'm...** But I have got to tell you -----’ (Page 28).

‘**H'm.** You talk the matter over with one or two of your friends and see me again with some definite programme for the inaugural meeting’ (Page 28).

Narayan, R.K. (1962). *The Man-eater of Malgudi*. Heinemann, London.

Narayan used H'm to mention the disagreement of the speaker.

Examples

‘**H'm.** You can't can you?’ (Page 65).

Narayan, R.K. (2000). *The Magic of Malgudi. Swami and Friends*.

‘**H'm.** But I wouldn't advise you to make it a habit (Page 147).

Narayan, R.K. (2000). *The Magic of Malgudi. The Bachelor of Arts*. Page 163

“**H'm!**”. Don't get too serious (Page 18).

Narayan, R.K. (1962). *The Man-eater of Malgudi*. Heinemann, London.

He used Ha! to express the intensity of the laughter and pride of the speaker.

Examples

Ha! Ha! Ha! Vasu stopped laughing (Page 31).

Tiger blood? **Ha! Ha!** Pure alum solution. (Page 61).

Narayan, R.K. (1962). *The Man-eater of Malgudi*. Heinemann, London.

Narayan used “Ah!” phoneme to express the pleasure and pity of speaker.

Examples

He picked up the manuscript and glanced at the title page: “**Ah!**”, he exclaimed (Page 95).

He kept exclaiming, “**Ah!**” “**Ah!**” and Margayya sat before him and watched with complete aloofness (Page 95).

Lal kept exclaiming, “**Ah!**” “**Ah!**” every few seconds (Page 95).

Margayya said, “**Ah, that is interesting....**” (Page 105).

Narayan, R.K. (2000). *The Magic of Malgudi. Swami and Friends*.

“**Ah**, you are showing some spirit after all, that’s good” (Page 101).

“**Ah**, I did not know that” (Page 200).

“**Ah, Ah, Ah!** Do you think my hair is dyed” (Page 215).

“**Ah!**” said Kailas (Page 217).

(Narayan, R.K. (2000). *The Magic of Malgudi. The Bachelor of Arts.*)

Narayan used “Oh!” for the expression of surprise, irritation, gratification, sorrow, grief, apology, abuse, please and happiness. In the below mentioned examples, the words in parentheses show the exact emotions conveyed by the sentences with 'Oh!'.

Examples

‘**Oh**, wonderful. Where did you learn to write novels’ (Page 294). (surprise).

‘**Oh**, no, I’m just interested that’s all’ (Page 294). (disagreement).

‘**Oh**, no, it’s not that’ (Page 294). (rejection).

‘**Oh**, no! apologized Jagan’ (Page 296). (apology).

“**Oh**, charming! Charming! Charming!” (Page 312). (admiration).

Narayan, R.K. (2000). *The Magic of Malgudi. The Vendor of Sweets*.

‘**Oh**, no!, we cannot afford to make it look like a gazetteer’ Page 103). (satire).

Narayan, R.K. (1952). *The Financial Expert*. Methuen, London.

“**Oh**, no! I am not such a big businessman” (Page 76). (disappointment).

Narayan, R.K. (1962). *The Man-eater of Malgudi*. Heinemann, London.

“**Oh**, yes, yes, of course” Vasu said faintly (Page 33). (agreement).

“**Oh!** that’s all-right” (Page 76). (agreement).

“**Oh!**” Vasu groaned, “That original again” (Page 32). (irritation).

“**Oh**, poor creatures,” I said. I hope they aren’t hurt (Page 38). (sympathy).

“**Oh**, poor dog!” (Page 99). (sympathy).

“**Oh**, no, they won’t be hurt” (Page 38). (casualness).

“**Oh**,” I said casually. “he is good fellow, though his speech is blunt sometimes (Page 45). (casualness).

“**Oh!**” said his wife gratified (Page 102). (gratification).

“**Oh!**”, she said, “Is that book printed?” (Page 102). (query).

“**Oh**, that nobody can say” (Page 45). (rigidity).

“**Oh**, please do something and print my cards”, he cried, exasperated (Page 22). (desperation).

He was quick to catch it. “Friend! **Oh! Oh!**” (Page 79). (exhausted).

“**Oh**, idiot Sastri!” (Page 91). (abuse).

“How many things they demand and keep demanding! **Oh!** God” (Page 75). (annoyance).

“**Oh**, how?” (Page 80). (query).

(Narayan, R.K. (1962). *The Man-eater of Malgudi*. Heinemann, London.)

Narayan used “Alas” for the expression of sorrow, disappointment and grief.

Example

‘**Alas!** I don’t know what her caste is, so how can’.

Narayan, R.K. (2000). *The Magic of Malgudi. The Vendor of Sweets*. Page 387.

Narayan used “Oho, Aha” for the expression of taunting and happiness.

Example

‘**Oho!**’ said my uncle. ‘She has reached the stage of addressing you as mother (Page 173).

‘**Aha**’ you are proud of that, are you? He said. ‘You are showing a lot of liberality to your mother, aren’t you’ (Page 174).

‘**Aha**, that’s a good idea,’ the man said jocularly (Page 77).

‘**Aha**, you are proud of that, are you?’ he said. (Page 174).

¹ Narayan, R.K. (1958). *The Guide*. Methuen, London.

Narayan used certain phonemes for showing the backdrop rhythm.

It is seen from Narayan’s novels that Narayan deliberately used the expressions described above to describing certain essential situations. As his audience was primarily Indian, he chose to make use of simple devices, which are easily printable and easy to read and understand. Moreover such devices are also already in use in Indian languages. He exploited the existing conventions for creating appropriate backdrop for his characters, content and events of his story. For example, he described the sound produced by the tip toes and sandals to graphically describe the situation and to create an atmosphere of suspense making his novels more interesting and binding.

Examples

As the ***pit pat***¹ of the sandals were heard(Page 115).

Narayan, R.K. (1952). *The Financial Expert*. Methuen, London.

“He heard the ***creak-creak*** of the sandals far off”. (Page 24).

“His feet said ***pish- pish- pish pat- pit- pat-*** swish and crackled.” (Page 119).

Narayan, R.K. (2000). *The Magic of Malgudi. Swami and Friends*.

Now over the ***chug, gluck, pat*** and ***tap*** I heard a new sound a repeated ***tap*** on the grille that separated me from Vasu’s staircase (Page 154).

The sound of treadle parts came in a series, ***chug, gluck, pat*** and ***tap*** (Page 153).

Narayan used ***tap tap*** phoneme to describe the knocking sound on a metal.

Tap tap on the steel mesh (Page 154).

Narayan, R.K. (1962). *The Man-eater of Malgudi*. Heinemann, London.

Narayan at a particular situation in his most famous novel, *The Guide* made a rare introduction of rhythmic reduplication to describe the actual situation of dancing posture by Rosie, the dancer, and the beloved of Raju. It can be depicted from the Narayan's writings that he was not very fond of using rhythmic utterances to make his novels decorative and language ornamental. But, Narayan deliberately selected these rhythmic repetitions to give a clear picture of the situation in the minds of his readers. Readers thus are able to imagine and fantasize the Rosie's feminine attraction. This is a good example of Narayan's selection of delicate rhythmic repetitions to describe the important behavioral and bodily features of his characters.

She uttered its syllables, '**Ta-ka-ta-ki-ta, Ta-ka**' (Page 124).

Narayan, R.K. (1958). *The Guide*. Methuen, London.

Other Deviations of Sounds in the Narayan's Work

Other deviations of sounds are usually found in the portions of novels and short stories, where there are hatred, anger, humiliation, criticism, frustration, irritation and emotional conflicts. These areas can be realistically depicted through the deliberately constructed deviations in the sound patterns by the authors. Narayan skillfully used the deviations of sounds to express these emotions of his characters. Some of the examples are as follows:

"The scoundrel, that cook is a buffoon....Wait a minute" [This sentence depicted the forced anger of Rajam after being ignored by the cook] (Page 22).

"He- the Pea - wrote TAIL - Big Tail - on the black board - big - " [Swami with full anger said the above sentence on top of his voice] (Page 31).

"No - I didn't, you - --" screamed the Pea (Page 31).

"It is - my - examination list" [Swami said this sentence with utter nervousness] (Page 45).

.....No?..... I came on urgent business [Here No signifies 'not interested.'](Page 55).

'Give me - urgent - six pies - got to have it - coachman goes away for a week - may not get the chance again - don't know what to do without hoop....' [The repeated jerks in this sentence show the hesitation of Swami while lending money from Mani] (Page 55).

"Oh, Mani - the police - or the boy himself - he is frightful, capable of anything" (Page 57).

Swaminathan hesitated for a moment to discover if there was any trap in this question and said: **'Why - erOf course.....'** [Swaminathan stammered in hesitation.] (Page 73).

It is —it is—never mind what.... I have given it to Rajam.' (Page 135).

"Where is your er office or" (Page 15).

“**I – I – could not come**”, stammered Swaminathan [Swaminathan stammered in hesitation.] (Page 80).

“**I – I – I – really can’t say**” [Swaminathan stammered in hesitation.] (Page 129).

'You are **a—a** very careless fellow (Page 130).

“**Remove it from the table, you -----**” He roared at the cook (Page 21).

Narayan, R.K. (2000). *The Magic of Malgudi. Swami and Friends*.

Conclusion

After phonologically evaluating the language used by Narayan, especially the supra segmental phonemes, I may conclude that the author used rhythmic lexemes which met fully the contextual and character depiction needs. I also found that there are repeated pauses, breaks and jerks in the sentences denoting pitch, duration and intonations. Almost same lexemes are used for pitch variation in different situations. In Narayan's language the expression of surprise, happiness, irritation, and satire are notified by the same lexeme in various situations.

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