

# THE FUNCTION OF PROSODIC MEANS IN ORAL SPEECH

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**Abstract.** Alongside with verbal means, in speech it is important to use the prosodic means for complete description of the information. From the communicative viewpoint, prosody is a key segment of the text. Prosodic techniques help adequate comprehension of the text that means a correct decoding of the content. The aim of the research is to reveal the function of prosodic elements in speech, which is analysed on the basis of Kartvelian (South Caucasian) languages: Georgian and Megrelian. The empirical material consists of folk poems and proverbs. The research shows different outcomes for different genres, namely, in proverbs, the element preceding the pause is the prosodic one, whereas the element expressing a real pause at the end of a phrase performs a syntactic function. The authors propose that the prosodic element has appeared due to the syntactic structure of the language. In folk poems, the prosodic element appears independently, always occupying the final (real pause) position. In conclusion, the authors would like to say that in oral texts – folk poems and proverbs, the position of prosodic elements is different, but the function of the rhythm-rhyme is similar.

**Key words:** Kartvelian languages, prosody, information structure, oral texts, pause

## INTRODUCTION

Oral speech is a broad concept. It embraces spontaneous speech and examples of oral folk literature. These examples were spread orally for centuries and were recorded later. Proverbs, riddles and folk poems are oral texts that are given to us orally even today. Unlike written narrative, an oral text differs from a written narrative in its specific structure and peculiar means of expression of the content. Among these means, specific mention should be made of prosodic elements.

In an oral text, the structuring of information depends on verbal means and prosodic elements. The latter help to achieve correct decoding of the text, which, in its turn, leads to adequate perception of the text. Due to this, prosody and prosodic elements are important segments of communicative function in an oral text || oral speech.

The aim of the research is to reveal the initial meaning of grammatical elements in an oral text and identify their prosodic function.

The paper offers analysis of Georgian and Megrelian proverbs, as well as the examples of Georgian and Megrelian folk poetry.

Georgian and Megrelian are related languages. Alongside with other related languages (Laz and Svan), they form a group of South Caucasian (Kartvelian) languages. Out of these, Georgian is a literary language which is rich in dialects. Megrelian, Laz and Svan are non-literary languages, languages without their own script. The texts of dialects and non-literary languages are tokens of folk speech (oral speech).

The current research has been based on the descriptive, statistical, historical-comparative, substitution, contrastive and distributional (syntagmatic, paradigmatic) methods of analysis. All the stated methods are necessary for achieving the theoretical and practical objectives of the research. However, the statistical method is of supreme importance for the analysis of the empirical material. In general, statistics yields information regarding the systemic nature of the material and the scale of the problem. Statistical data define the research directions. Description of the material and statistical analysis play a key role in the current paper, because the research embraces diverse genres: proverbs and folk poems. It is widely known that folk poems frequently use prosodic elements. Likewise, they are diverse in the Georgian and Megrelian poems (naturally, the paper provides analysis of several examples). The prosodic element is found in one particular group of Georgian proverbs. Hence, the proverbs of this type are less frequent than folk poems.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Prosody is an individual and, at the same time, socially valuable communicative marker. It is widely known that prosodic elements make the text melodious and enrich the text with the national character and colouring. The melodic peculiarities are: pause, stress, intonation and tempo. It should be noted that each of these peculiarities has a different value in different languages (Tevdoradze, 1978: 12; cf.: Zhghenti, 1963: 19-20). In Kartvelian languages, prosodic elements do not exist in the pure form (they do not perform a solely prosodic function). This phenomenon is characteristic of numerous languages. In general, a language may apply morphological and syntactic elements with a prosodic function.

In the process of construction of the information structure (IS), it is essential to take into account the relation between the syntactic and prosodic elements. This relation is important not only from the viewpoint of function, but also from the perspective of the place of the above-mentioned elements in the sentence. Traditionally, the distribution of the distinguished components of the information structure (IS) is defined by the functional hierarchy (Rizzi, 1997). According to

the alternative approach, the construction of the syntactic structure does not depend on the status of the components of the information structure (Chomsky, 1995: 202).

Based on the Georgian proverbs and Georgian-Megrelian folk poems, the authors analyse several prosodic elements and present new arguments proving that the prosody expressed by the clitic is flexible. In oral texts, it performs the function of graphemic-graphic aspect (Lyons, 1992: 24) and underlines the segment of communicative importance (Tedoradze, 1978: 24; Mujiri, 2006: 72-79, 115-188). Besides, in the process of distribution of the syntactic and prosodic elements, the authors find certain rules related to the specific features of the genre. In this regard, the proverb and the folk poem reveal a different situation (Zhghenti, 1963; Tevdoradze, 1978; Gudava, 1975; Shanidze, 1980; Kvachadze, 1988; Boeder, 1991; Apridonidze, 1991, 2023; Silagadze, 2014).

The theoretical framework of the research is based on modern scholarly works regarding the development of prosodic elements in Georgian (Borise, 2017) and the pragmatic function of prosody (Hirst, 2024).

## **INITIAL MEANING OF PROSODIC ELEMENTS AND THEIR FUNCTION IN PROVERB**

A proverb is a universal, yet national phenomenon. Modern linguists focus on the linguistic analysis of proverbs. Proverbs reveal both universal and specific linguistic aspects, due to which proverbs become more vivid and expressive.

Proverbs are created by the first person and, later, spread and generalized, they consist of evidential phrases which are based on the background knowledge; in Kartvelian languages, proverbs are marked with a special markers of indirect speech (Ism) (Margiani et al., 2019: 266).

In the Georgian language such particle is -o (Shanidze, 1980: 610; Kvachadze, 1988: 458-459). With regard to prosody, the authors will focus on this particle. W. Boeder terms it as 'a quotation particle' (Boeder, 1991: 145). The particle -o denotes literal repetition of what the third person has said, hence, it performs a syntactic function. It occupies a solid place in the sentence.

The construction with the particle -o is capable of expressing generalized opinion; consequently, it is widespread in the language of proverbs (Margiani et al., 2019: 222). 'The construction with the vowel 'o' at the end is peculiar of Georgian proverbs' (Apridonidze, 2023: 157). Thus, the natural place of the particle -o is at the end of the sentence, before a pause (ibid.: 158).

According to prosodic elements, the structure of a proverb may vary among related languages and within the same language. That is why the analysed material has been differentiated, and the authors focus on one type of Georgian and Megrelian proverbs.

In Georgian, there is a group of proverbs in which the lexeme given in the middle of a phrase (mostly a form of address) is also added by the element -o. It is rhymed with the word-form which has the particle -o at the end and brings rhythm and melody to the entire proverb.

Accordingly, the particle -o, regularly provided at the end of a Georgian proverb and performing a syntactic function (Indirect speech marker / *ism*), may also be used in the prosodic function (prosody / *pros*) when it is found in the middle of the word. Thus, the phrase of the proverb contains two formally similar elements that differ in their functions. For the element -o the syntactic function is crucial, whereas its usage in the prosodic function is of secondary importance. For example:

- (1) rac mogiva davita-o /pros , x'vela šeni tavita-o /ism  
[‘Whatever happens to you, David, you are to blame’].
- (2) egre ar aris tax’a-o /pros , šen rom mamuli gax’a-o /ism  
[‘Taka, it was not fair of you to divide the vineyard like this’].

In the proverbs of the type shown above, there are pauses of two types: real (in the final position) and semi-real (in the middle position). Apridonidze (2023: 159) calls the semi-real pause ‘psychological-imaginary’.

Thus, in the real position (final position), the particle -o performs a syntactic function (*ism*), but in the semi-real position (in the middle), the element -o performs a prosodic function. The appearance of the particle -o with a prosodic function in the middle position is caused by the existence of the particle -o performing a syntactic function at the end of the phrase.

It is widely known that a proverb is a figurative poetic phrase. It should be noted that the proverbs under analysis (see examples: (1), (2)) are examples of a quatrain of 16-syllable lines. This has been achieved due to the appearance of the middle and final elements.

The elements of prosodic and syntactic function divide the proverb into two parts. Due to the vocalic elements, there are an equal number of syllables in the rhymed units; hence, the entire phrase is rhythmically organized.

- (1a) rac mogiva davita-o/pros, x'vela šeni tavita-o/ism 8/8  
cf.: *da-vi-ta-o* – *ta-vi-ta-o* (4/4)
- (2a) egre ar aris tax’a-o/pros, šen rom mamuli gax’a-o/ism 8/8  
cf.: *ta-x’a-o* – *ga-x’a-o* (3/3)

As it was mentioned before, the appearance of the final particle -o in a proverb is essential, since it performs a syntactic function and expresses a generalized idea. The prosodic element -o given in the middle establishes balance in the phrase by forming lexical units of 3 or 4 syllables (Gudava, 1975; Silagadze, 2014).

Experiments have proved that word stress is dynamic in Georgian. It always falls on the first syllable. This does not depend on the number of syllables in

the word. This can also be proved by the length of vowels. Comparison of the rhymed units has proved that the stressed vowel is longer than other vowels in the word (for details, see Tevdoradze, 1978: 19-61; Borise, 2017).

(1a) *da-vi-ta-o – ta-vi-ta-o* (4/4)

(2a) *tá-x'a-o – gá-x'a-o* (3/3)

The stress on the first vowel makes a logical accent on the word: 'Logical stress is achieved by means of increasing the intensity of the stressed syllable in the word' (Tevdoradze, 1978: 24). In its turn, stress causes the change in the tone and intonation: 'The tone performs a certain function in a phrase and is subject to the rules of melody [...]. The change in the tone of a phrase carries an important load' (ibid.: 41). Discussion of the issue is found in Hirst (2024: 159-191).

The intonation components in the examples under analysis (tone and pause) have been described using the system ToBI (Tones and Break Indices). The balance of the number of syllables is given in digits (see Figures 1-2).

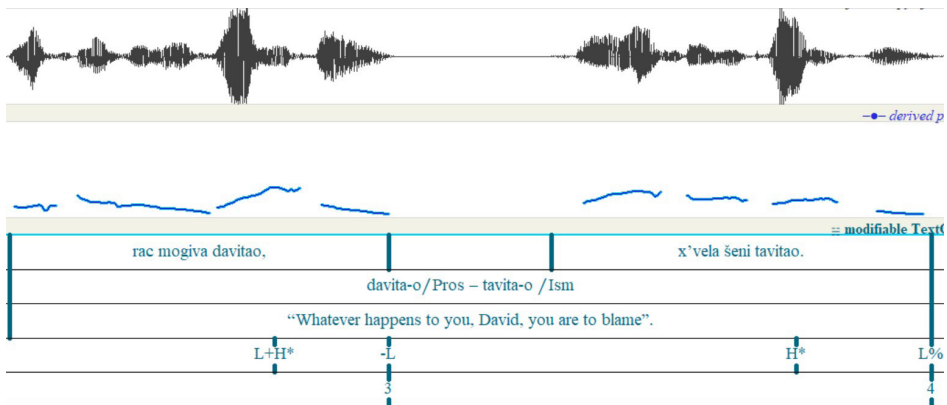


Figure 1. Prosodic characteristics of example (1)

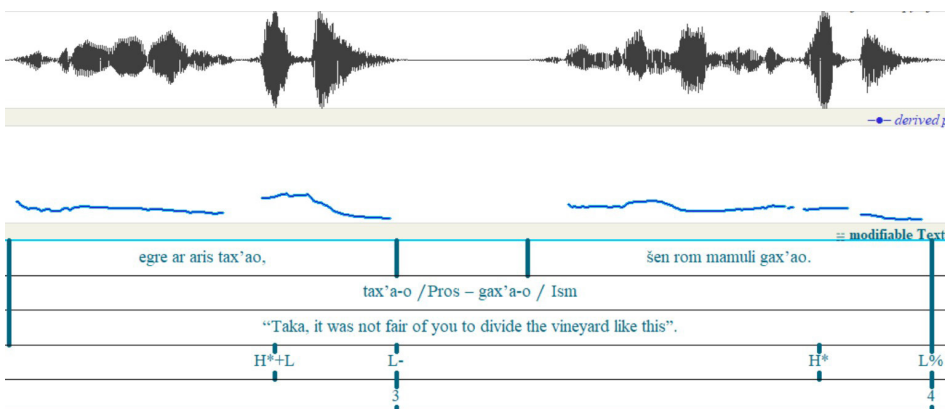


Figure 2. Prosodic characteristics of example (2)

INITIAL MEANING OF PROSODIC ELEMENTS AND THEIR FUNCTION IN FOLK POEMS

The use of prosodic elements in the metrical speech is characteristic of almost every language and represents a universal phenomenon. ‘The prosodic vowel is most peculiar of rhymed verse – frequently repeated rhymes. These are, above all, found in folk poems where the even lines are frequently repeated’ (Apridonidze, 1991; 2023: 159).

Prosodic vowels impose certain rules in the system of versification, since they regulate the meter. In the Georgian folk poems, as it is the case in the proverbs, the prosodic element is the vowel -o, which is only found in the final position. For instance (The prosodic characteristics of the sample is displayed in Figure 3.):

- (3)    čit'o, čit'o, čiorao! 4/4  
          [‘Bird, bird, little bird!']  
          rao, bat'ono melao? 4/4  
          [‘What is it, Fox?']

(This verse of two lines is included in the folk tale ‘The Fox and the Bird’).

čit'o, čit'o, čiora-o / pros  
rao, bat'ono mela-o / pros

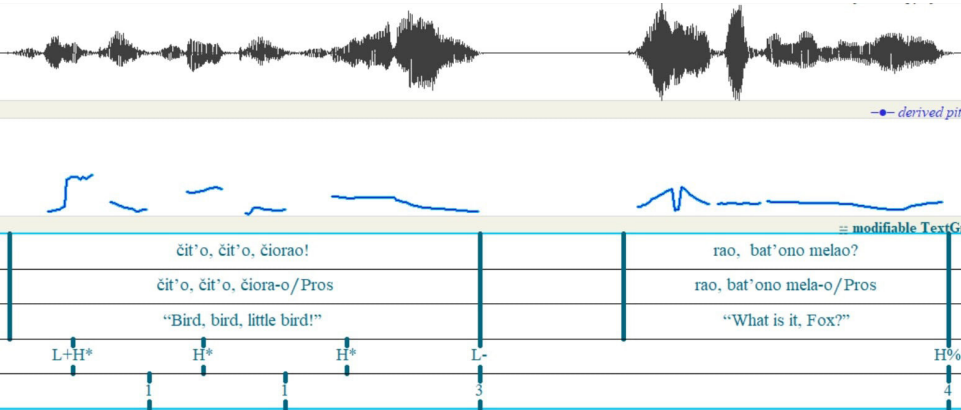


Figure 3. Prosodic characteristics of example (3)

This verse is continued with a prosodic element -a which occupies the final position (real pause). In this case, the prosodic function is performed by the emphatic vowel. Scholars denote the emphatic vowel by different terms (for instance, ‘suffix’) and underline its diverse functions. Apart from the obvious syntactic function (Zurabishvili, 1956: 228), scholars have noticed its phonetic-rhythmical

function (Potskhishvili, 1959: 22-23). For instance (The prosodic characteristics of the sample is displayed in Figure 4.):

- (4)    *culs movit'an cunculas-a* /pros 4/4  
          ['I will bring an axe']  
      *xeličos da c'aldunas-a* /pros 4/4  
          ['An adze and a bill-hook']  
      *xesac movč'ri, xis žirsac-a* /pros 4/4  
          ['I will cut down the tree and its bark']  
      *šenc šegč'am da šens švilsac-a* /pros 4/4  
          ['And eat you and your child'].

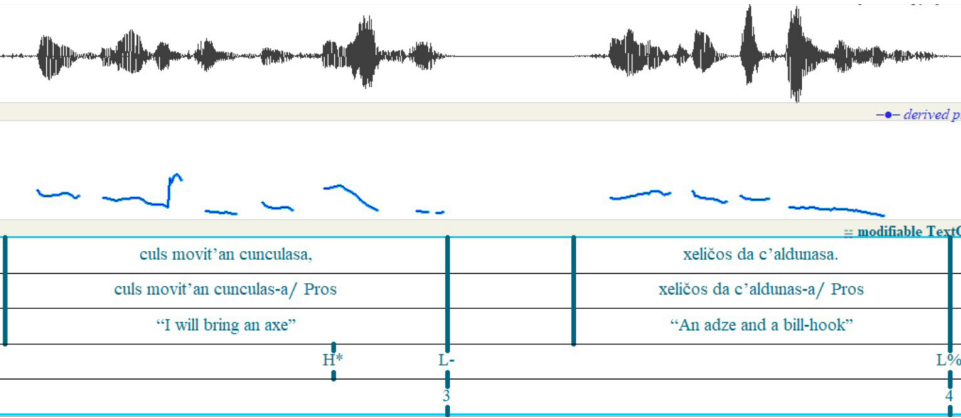


Figure 4. Prosodic characteristics of example (4)

In the folk poems, the vowels -o and -a form an additional syllable and thus fill the line, creating a ready-made rhyme, which is later repeated in other lines. Thus, all the passages repeat the same rhyme. This rhyme supports the rhythm and melody. In Example (4), the rhythm is created not only by means of the prosodic vowel -a, but also by adjacent rhymes (*aabb*):

- (4a) *cunculas-a* – *c'aldunas-a*, *žirsac-a* – *švilsac-a*

In the Megrelian language, the particle -a is a third person indirect speech marker (Ism). It performs a syntactic function and, formally and functionally, corresponds to the Georgian particle -o. In the word-forms ending in a consonant, the particle -a is preceded by the vowel 'i', which performs the function of a divider. The sequence -i-a comprises two syllables, but acoustically they sound as one ending -ia, creating a corresponding rhythmical-melodic structure in the text (Kipshidze, 1914: 395; Lomia, 2005: 182).

In Megrelian folk poems, a complex suffix *-ia* is used to create monosyllabic rhyme and form a rhythmical-melodious structure. For example (Its prosodic characteristics is displayed in Figure 5.):

- (5) vo, maria, *mar-ia* /pros 4/3  
 kogi'ork do *var-ia* /pros 4/3  
 gi'orkuda, 'ko' kotkvi, 4/3  
 vamic'ua *var-ia* /pros 4/3  
 vo, maria, *mar-ia* /pros 4/3  
 čkim xat'i do *žvaria* 4/3 (Gudava, 1975, No. 140: 72-73).

In this poem, 'Maria' is a female name. The narrator addresses the woman, and, later, other units are rhymed with 'Maria' – *var-ia* 'No' – *žvar-ia* 'Cross' etc.

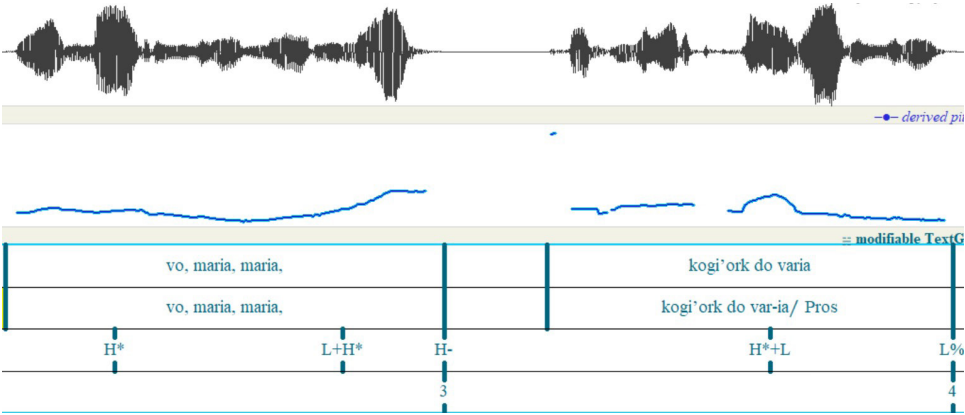


Figure 5. Prosodic characteristics of example (5)

## CONCLUSIONS

The formal-functional transformation of prosodic elements in the Georgian and Megrelian oral texts (proverb, folk poem) can be described, as follows:

- 1) In Georgian and Megrelian proverbs and folk poems, prosodic function is performed by grammatical elements that usually perform a syntactic function.
- 2) The structure of the prosodic elements is simple: they either consist of a single vowel (V/-o/, /-a/), or disyllabic (VV/-ia/).
- 3) The position of the prosodic elements reveals a steady difference based on the genre: in proverbs, they occupy a middle position, and in folk poems, they occur at the end.



- 4) Prosodic elements appear in the proverbs and folk poems due to the requirements of rhythm and rhyme.
- 5) Prosodic elements make the text melodious and distinguish a segment which performs a communicative function. This is achieved based on different characteristics like pause, stress, intonation and tempo.

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