

Theoretical and methodological foundations of phonological gradual relations in modern linguistics

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the theoretical foundations of phonological gradience and its development in world and Uzbek linguistics. Particular attention is paid to the views of the Prague Linguistic School, the theories of phonological opposition and gradual relations, as well as studies on prosodic units in French and Uzbek languages. The paper analyzes the scientific approaches of Ivan Baudouin de Courtenay, Nikolai Trubetzkoy, Roman Jakobson, Edward Sapir, André Martinet, Pierre Delattre and Uzbek linguists. The study reveals the systemic and functional features of gradual relations between segmental and suprasegmental units and their role in the formation of the phonological system of language. Based on a comparative analysis of French and Uzbek, the universal nature of phonological gradience is substantiated.

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phonology, phoneme, gradience, gradual opposition, prosody, intonation, phonological system, segmental units, suprasegmental units, French language, Uzbek language.

Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются теоретические основы фонологической градуальности и её развитие в мировой и узбекской лингвистике. Особое внимание уделяется взглядам представителей Пражской фонологической школы, теориям фонологической оппозиции и градуальных отношений, а также исследованиям просодических единиц во французском и узбекском языках. Анализируются научные подходы И.А. Бодуэна де Куртенэ, Н.С. Трубецкого, Р. Якобсона, Э. Сепира, А. Мартине, П. Делаттра и узбекских лингвистов. В статье раскрываются системные и функциональные особенности градуальных отношений между сегментными и суперсегментными единицами, а также их роль в формировании фонологической системы языка. На основе сопоставительного анализа французского и узбекского языков обосновывается универсальный характер фонологической градуальности.

Ключевые слова: фонология, фонема, градуальность, градуальная оппозиция, просодика, интонация, фонологическая система, сегментные единицы, суперсегментные единицы, французский язык, узбекский язык.

Phonology emerged as an independent branch of linguistics in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and this development is primarily associated with Ivan Baudouin de Courtenay. He distinguished the phoneme from the physical speech sound, interpreting it as a functional unit that serves to differentiate meaning. According to his view, the phoneme is formed in human cognition as a unit of mental representations of sounds and represents a psychological equivalent within the language system.

The phonological ideas of Ivan Baudouin de Courtenay later became the foundation for the emergence of several major phonological schools in European linguistics. In particular, the Moscow Phonological School, led by Nikolai Yakovlev, interpreted the phoneme as a stable component of the morpheme and paid special

attention to issues such as strong and weak positions and neutralization. Lev Shcherba, on the other hand, emphasized that the primary function of the phoneme is to distinguish and recognize words. Representatives of the Prague Linguistic School — Nikolai Trubetzkoy and Roman Jakobson — developed the theory of phonological oppositions and distinctive features, significantly advancing structural phonology. The theoretical foundations of phonology were further strengthened by Ferdinand de Saussure within the framework of structural linguistics. He conceptualized language as an autonomous system and distinguished between *langue* and *parole*, thereby providing a solid theoretical basis for the systemic nature of phonological units.

A significant contribution to the development of experimental phonetics and phonology was made by Lev Zinder. He argued that phonetic phenomena should not be studied solely from articulatory or acoustic perspectives but rather in terms of their functional role within the language system. By systematically analyzing phonemes and their variants, he promoted an integrated approach to phonetics and phonology. This perspective significantly influenced the advancement of experimental phonetics and modern linguophonetics.

Representatives of the Prague Linguistic School - Roman Jakobson and Nikolai Trubetzkoy - played a crucial role in the formation of structural approaches in phonology. They strictly distinguished between phonetics and phonology and interpreted language as a system of oppositional features. According to their theory, phonological units fulfill their meaning-differentiating function through oppositional relations. They also explained that the increase or decrease of certain distinctive features between phonemes can be interpreted in terms of gradual opposition.

The concept of gradience was first introduced into phonology by Nikolai Trubetzkoy, who classified oppositions into privative, equipollent, and gradual types. In privative oppositions, a feature present in one unit is absent in the other; in equipollent oppositions, units are contrasted on the basis of equally significant features; and in gradual oppositions, phonemes are distinguished according to different degrees of manifestation of a given feature. According to the scholar, in such relations phonological units are organized along a scale reflecting the increase or decrease of a common feature. In particular, vowels are engaged in gradual relations based on openness–closeness and tongue height, while consonants exhibit gradual relations according to the degree of voicing. Importantly, Nikolai Trubetzkoy substantiated gradual opposition not merely as an articulatory or acoustic difference, but as a phonological phenomenon with a meaning-distinguishing function. This demonstrates that gradience in language is not accidental, but rather a systematic phenomenon grounded in the internal laws of linguistic structure.

The further development of the concept of gradience was significantly influenced by the ideas of Edward Sapir. In his analysis of gradual relations, he identified key notions such as the starting point, the gradual scale, and its poles. He interpreted gradation as a psychological process related to human cognition, arguing that any phenomenon that can be described in quantitative or qualitative terms inherently possesses a gradable nature. This approach allowed gradience to be understood not only as a phonological property, but also as a broader linguistic and cognitive phenomenon. Edward Sapir analyzed the phenomenon of gradience from logical, psychological, and linguistic perspectives, emphasizing that the process of gradation is closely connected with human cognition and emotional perception. According to the scholar, even simple comparative forms such as “more” and “less” may, in specific contexts, express subjective evaluation and emotional attitude. These ideas subsequently stimulated extensive research into the manifestation of gradual relations within lexical and grammatical systems.

Jumabayeva interprets the concept of graduonymy as a relation expressing semantic gradation between linguistic units. The researcher notes that the terms “graduonymy,” “gradual relation,” and “gradation” are often used synonymously in modern linguistics, all denoting semantic opposition based on the increase or decrease of a given feature. From this perspective, gradation is regarded as an important linguistic category reflecting hierarchical and scalar relations between language units. Abduvali Hojiev defines gradation as a stylistic phenomenon associated with the step-by-step intensification of speech content. He also interprets gradual opposition as a phonological contrast based on different degrees of realization of the same feature within opposing units.

Within French structuralism and functional phonology, André Martinet introduced a new approach to gradual relations. He criticized the absolute nature of classical binary oppositions and argued that the language system operates according to the principle of economy. According to him, the phonological system is not composed of strictly discrete boundaries but rather of functional variability and dynamic equilibrium. This perspective significantly contributed to the theoretical grounding of the gradual nature of prosodic units.

In studies of French phonetics and prosody, the works of Pierre Léon, Albert Di Cristo, and Jacqueline Vaissière occupy a special place. These scholars experimentally demonstrated that intonation and melodic variation possess both continuous and stepwise characteristics. In particular, Jacqueline Vaissière showed that the perception of intonation is closely linked to an acoustic continuum, thereby further strengthening the scalar nature of prosodic phenomena. The development of the theory of prosodic gradience is also significantly associated with the work of Pierre Delattre. His work *Les Dix Intonations de base du français* is dedicated to the functional classification of major intonational contours in French and provides a scientific basis for the continuous nature of the intonational system. In particular, he interprets the gradual decrease of pitch across rhythmic groups in melodic phrases as a practical manifestation of prosodic gradience. This approach made it possible to describe the French intonational system in terms of a phonetic continuum.

In Uzbek linguistics, the study of relations between linguistic units has a long tradition dating back to classical sources. In particular, in Alisher Navoi's work *Muhokamat al-Lughatayn*, the series of verbs expressing "crying" arranged in a progressively intensifying scale is regarded as one of the earliest examples of semantic gradation. In later periods, issues of Uzbek phonology and phonetics were extensively studied in the works of Abdurauf Ghulomov, Vladimir Reshetov, Shukrullo Shoabdurahmonov, Alexander Shcherbak, Abduaziz Nurmonov, Akmal Abduazizov, and Mirtojibev. These studies provide scientific analyses of phoneme theory, phonological oppositions, morphophonology, and the relationship between speech sounds and their variants. In particular, Akmal Abduazizov interpreted Nikolai Trubetzkoy's theory of phonological oppositions on the basis of Uzbek language data.

The issue of gradience in Uzbek linguistics has been systematically studied in the works of Otabek Bozorov, who revealed the continuous and stepwise nature of gradation across phonological, lexical, and morphological levels. Similarly, Zokir Raimjonov conducted a comparative study of the category of intensity in French and Uzbek, highlighting the functional properties of gradual relations.

In her study on neutralization, Dilfuza Nurmonova analyzed oppositions and their neutralization across phonological, morphological, and syntactic levels. Nargiza Do'stmamatova investigated the semantic and pragmatic features of lexical graduonymy in Uzbek and Russian from a comparative perspective. Likewise, Jumabayeva examined the semantic and structural characteristics of lexical and stylistic graduonymy in Uzbek and English, while G'oziyeva focused on the linguopragmatic functions of prosodic means. At the same time, as Jumabayeva notes, gradual relations at the phonological level have not yet been sufficiently systematized in world linguistics. This situation highlights the need for a more in-depth study of phonological gradience as an independent scientific category.

In conclusion, a comparative study of gradual relations between segmental and suprasegmental units in French and Uzbek languages contributes to identifying the universal and typological features of phonological gradience. Such an approach enables the interpretation of phonological gradation as a distinct systemic phenomenon and further enriches the general linguistic foundations of gradience theory.

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