

Rhythm as a linguistic notion

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According to the general term for “rhythm” it is understood as periodicity in time and space.

- Rhythm as a linguistic notion is realized in lexical, syntactical and prosodic means and mostly in their combinations.
- Speech rhythm has the immediate influence on vowel reduction and elision.
- Speech rhythm is traditionally defined as recurrence of stressed syllables at more or less equal intervals of time in a speech continuum.

It seems that the enclitic tendency (the initial unstressed syllables follow the nucleus) is more typical of English, though in speech flow it is sometimes difficult to define the borders of rhythmic groups, e.g.

Everest | is known | as the highest | peak | in the world. (the semantic / proclitic tendency is more typical for accurate and more explicit speech)

Everest is | known as the | highest | peak in the | world. (the enclitic tendency is more typical for informal speech)

The prosodic parameters are practically the same in every rhythmic unit but each time they come into play on a larger scale and in a new variety of interrelationship. In prose an intonation group, a phrase (a line in poetry) and a phonopassage seem to have similar prosodic organization:

- the beginning of a rhythmic unit is characterized by the tone and intensity maximum, the slowing of the tempo;
- the end of the rhythmic unit is marked by a pause of different length, the tone and intensity minimum, slowing of the tempo, generally sloping descending terminal tones;
- the most common pre-nuclear pattern of a rhythmic unit is usually the High (Medium) Level Head.

Rhythmically organized speech is easily perceived. From the psycholinguistic point of view the accuracy of the temporal similarity in rhythm has a definite effect on the human being. The regularity in rhythm seems to be harmony with his biological rhythms. This is by far more important the emotional effect of rhythm especially of poetic rhythm on a human being is very strong; its aesthetic significance is great. Rhythm in itself is functioning as a framework of speech organization and is a very effective means of speech expressiveness.

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