

**Teriaiev D. O.,***PhD in Philology,**Associate Professor at the Department of East Slavic Philology
and Applied Information Studies at the Institute of Philology**Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv;**Lecturer at the Institute of Ukrainian Studies of the University of Prešov**<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8667-090X>*

PHONETIC VARIATION IN CONTEMPORARY UKRAINIAN SPEECH: NORM AND COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICE

Summary. The article examines phonetic variation in contemporary Ukrainian speech in relation to linguistic norms and communicative practices. The relevance of the study is determined by ongoing processes of language change, driven by sociocultural transformations, media environments, and intensified language contact. Special attention is paid to the variability of pronunciation, stress patterns, intonation models, and the adaptation of foreign elements in modern speech. The aim of the research is to identify the main types of phonetic variation and establish their correlation with the codified norms of the Ukrainian language. The methodological framework is based on the descriptive method, elements of phonetic analysis, and a functional approach to language phenomena. The empirical material encompasses examples from both spoken and written discourse, precisely media texts, public speech, and everyday communication. The results verify that phonetic variation is an inherent feature of contemporary Ukrainian speech and manifests itself at distinctive levels, from segmental to prosodic. The study reveals tendencies toward simplification of pronunciation, variability in stress placement, and fluctuation in intonation patterns. It is contended that communicative practice often precedes normative codification or contributes to its transformation. The study concludes that phonetic variation reflects the dynamic nature of language development and plays a pivotal role in shaping modern linguistic norms. Further research prospects comprise experimental phonetic analysis and the investigation of media influence on phonetic processes.

Key words: phonetic variation, Ukrainian speech, linguistic norm, communicative practice, stress, pronunciation, intonation, phonetic adaptation, media speech, prosody.

Problem Statement. The current stage of Ukrainian language development is marked by active processes of variation, especially in spoken communication. The phonetic level of language, being one of the most dynamic, is highly sensitive to sociocultural change, the intensity of interlingual contact, and the influence of mass communication. Under these conditions, it is essential to examine the correlation between the codified linguistic norm and actual communicative practice, which increasingly reveals divergences from established orthoepic standards.

The relevance of the study lies in the need to understand contemporary phonetic processes in the context of their functioning in living speech. In public spaces, particularly in the educational environment, the media, and everyday communication, considerable diversity is observed in the pronunciation of sounds, word stress, and the intonational shaping of utterances. Phenomena such as stress fluctuation (e.g.,

zavzhdy / zavzhdy), the simplification of consonants in rapid speech, or the variability of intonation models attest to the dynamic character of the phonetic system and require systematic scholarly analysis.

The problem of phonetic variation is not new to linguistics; however, under present-day conditions, it acquires new dimensions. Traditionally, the phonetics of the Ukrainian language has been analysed from the standpoint of describing the sound system, pronunciation norms, and their codification. Simultaneously, contemporary approaches are increasingly oriented toward the functioning of linguistic units in real speech, which presupposes treating variation as a regular phenomenon rather than a deviation. Within experimental phonetics, the principal focus is on the acoustic characteristics of sounds, speech tempo, and prosodic parameters, which enables the objective recording of language change [1].

Review of Previous Research. In parallel, contemporary linguistics is actively developing research connected with linguistic norms and their transformation. Scholars emphasise that linguistic norms are not static but are shaped by the interaction between codification principles and living linguistic practice [2; 3]. A primary role in this process belongs to public speech, including that of the mass media and educational and scholarly institutions, where norms are not merely reproduced but also partially reconsidered.

Bacevych's work on communicative linguistics [4] and Bondar's description of the phonetic and orthoepic system of the modern Ukrainian literary language [5] provide the descriptive foundation for treating pronunciation norms, while Zahnitko's theoretical synthesis of contemporary linguistics [6] situates variation within a broader functional paradigm. Within Western scholarship, Laver's account of the principles of phonetics [7] and Gussenhoven's treatment of phonological structure [8] supply the instrumental apparatus for analysing segmental and prosodic variability, whereas Coupland [9] and Trudgill [10] foreground the social conditioning of stylistic and dialectal variation, and Crystal [11] situates such processes within the broader dynamics of a living standard language.

Nevertheless, despite the considerable body of work devoted to phonetics, orthoepy, and linguistic norm, the problem of a systematic analysis of phonetic variation specifically in the context of contemporary communicative practice remains insufficiently investigated. A coherent account is still lacking of how variant phonetic phenomena function across different types of speech, which of them tend to consolidate and which remain peripheral. It is precisely this gap, the absence of an integrated description linking segmental and prosodic variation with the discursive conditions of its use, that the present article seeks to address.

The necessity of studying the phonetic variation of contemporary Ukrainian speech, with due regard to its interrelation with linguistic norm and with real communicative processes, thus determines the relevance of this work. Addressing this problem clarifies the current state of the Ukrainian language's phonetic system and outlines its further development under changing linguistic conditions.

Aim and Objectives of the Study. The purpose of the study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the phonetic variation of contemporary Ukrainian speech, taking into account the correlation between codified norm and real communicative practice.

To achieve this purpose, the following tasks are set:

1. to outline the theoretical foundations for the study of phonetic variation in contemporary linguistics;
2. to analyse the principal approaches to understanding linguistic norm and its dynamics;
3. to identify the main types of phonetic variation in contemporary Ukrainian speech (at the segmental and prosodic levels);
4. to examine the specific features of variation in stress, sound pronunciation, and intonation models;
5. to clarify the role of communicative practice in the formation and transformation of orthoepic norms;
6. to determine the tendencies in the development of phonetic processes within the contemporary linguistic environment.

The object of the study is contemporary Ukrainian spoken discourse in its normative and variant manifestations. The subject of the study is the phonetic variation of contemporary Ukrainian speech, in particular the peculiarities of pronunciation, stress, and intonation, and their functioning in real communicative practice.

Results and Discussion.

1. Theoretical foundations of phonetic variation.

Phonetic variation is one of the fundamental characteristics of any living language. Speech, as the process of realising the language system, is never entirely homogeneous, since it is produced by living people who embody individual, social, geographical, and contextual differences. In contemporary Ukrainian, this variation is particularly noticeable owing to active sociocultural change, the expansion of new communicative domains, and the intensive influence of various discourse types (public, media, digital).

In the classical linguistic tradition, phonetic norm is defined as a system of established pronunciation standards fixed in dictionaries, reference books, and textbooks [12; 13]. However, contemporary research increasingly views phonetic norm through the prism of living speech, where variation is not perceived as a deviation but as a natural element of linguistic dynamics. Communicative practice frequently precedes codification: new tendencies that arise in everyday or media communication may later be recorded as normative. This underscores that phonetic variation is not a chaotic phenomenon but a regular process of language-system development. Changes in the pronunciation of complex consonant clusters in everyday speech serve as a source of norm updating, which is later fixed in dictionaries – this is best illustrated in words such as *chesnyi*, *smiietsia*, *proiekt*.

2. Types of phonetic variation in contemporary Ukrainian speech.

Phonetic variation is realised at several levels. This article foregrounds the segmental and prosodic levels, since they most vividly demonstrate the interaction between norm and speech practice.

2.1. The segmental level.

Segmental variation covers changes in the pronunciation of individual sounds and their combinations in contemporary Ukrainian speech, namely:

- 1) simplification of consonant clusters in rapid speech: [stn] → [sn] (*chesnyi*), [zdn] → [zn] (*zdatnyi*);
- 2) reduction of unstressed vowels: the word *selo* may be pronounced with a reduced vowel, likewise *kozuhkh*, particularly in rapid everyday speech;
- 3) fluctuation in the pronunciation of borrowings and foreign-language elements: *menedzhment* ['menədʒmənt] → ['menədʒmənt] (reduced articulatory effort); *marketynh* ['ma:rkɛtɪŋ] → ['markɛtɪŋ].

These examples highlight speakers' orientation toward a general tendency observed across living languages, namely the economy of articulatory effort [7].

2.2. The prosodic level.

Prosodic variation manifests itself in changes of stress, rhythm, and intonation of speech:

- 1) stress variation: *alfavít* / *álfavit*; *pómylka* / *pomýlka*; *vesnianýi* / *vesniányi*; *závzhdy* / *zavzhdý*;
- 2) intonational variation: in public speech (lectures, television broadcasts), the intonation contour is simplified in order to speed up the assimilation of information, whereas in everyday communication, more flexible, emotionally coloured intonation models are observed.

Thus, prosodic variation ensures communicative flexibility while simultaneously meeting the social and pragmatic needs of speakers [8].

3. Phonetic variation and linguistic norm.

A key aspect of contemporary Ukrainian phonetics is the interaction between norm and variation. Norm ensures the unity, stability, and recognisability of the language by consolidating standardised pronunciation. Concurrently, variation reflects real speech processes and becomes a source for updating the norm itself. A vivid example is the change of stress in borrowed words, whereby a formerly peripheral variant gradually becomes established in standard speech owing to the frequency of its use [3]. Phonetic norm, therefore, is not a static category: it is formed through continuous interaction with communicative practice.

4. The role of communicative practice.

Communicative practice directly shapes the development of phonetic processes and the realisation of variation, depending on the communicative sphere. In public speech, during lectures, scholarly presentations, or official addresses, strict normative pronunciation clearly predominates. Media communication, in news broadcasts, television programmes, and online platforms, combines a striving for standardness with a tendency toward simplification. The greatest freedom of pronunciation and stress is admitted in everyday communication, where convenience comes to the fore. The communicative environment thus shapes adaptive pronunciation strategies in which official normativity and practical functionality interact harmoniously.

5. Tendencies in the development of phonetic processes.

The analysis of contemporary speech makes it possible to distinguish several primary tendencies, among which the simplification of articulation through the reduction of complex sound combinations stands out first, e.g., the shift from [stn] to [sn] or from [zdn] to [zn]. At the same time, considerable stress variation is observed, especially in borrowed words that have not yet undergone full cod-

ification, while in public speeches and media texts, a unification of intonation models is increasingly occurring. In addition, the level of variation is significantly influenced by the communicative environment, in which the choice between formal and informal speech determines the degree of adherence to norms. All these phenomena testify to the high adaptivity and dynamism of contemporary Ukrainian, in which phonetic variation functions not as a violation of rules but as a means of effective communication and an important indicator of real language change.

6. Phonetic variation across discourse types.

The phonetic variation in contemporary Ukrainian speech is largely conditioned by the type of discourse in which it is realised. Different communicative spheres impose unequal requirements on the accuracy, speed, and normativity of pronunciation, which directly affect the character of phonetic processes.

In educational and academic discourse, particularly in the university environment, a tendency toward maximal adherence to codified norms is observed. The speech of lecturers, teachers, and scholars is generally characterised by clear articulation, adherence to orthoepic rules, and stable stress, owing to both the need to ensure the accuracy of information transfer and the model-setting function of such speech. Nevertheless, even in this environment, elements of variation occur, conditioned by individual speaker characteristics, speech tempo, or the tendency to simplify complex sound combinations; for instance, in the course of a rapid explanation of complex material, reduction processes arise that do not always meet normative requirements but do not undermine overall intelligibility.

In media discourse, the situation is more complex and contradictory. On the one hand, journalistic speech is oriented toward normativity, since it serves as a public model. On the other hand, the high tempo of information delivery, the need for promptness, and the desire to reach a broad audience favour simplified pronunciation. This is particularly noticeable in reduced articulatory precision, the unification of intonation models, and stress variation.

In everyday (colloquial) discourse, phonetic variation reaches its highest level. Here, speakers are not constrained by rigid normative requirements, which allows a wide range of pronunciation variants to be realised. Simplification of sound combinations, vowel reduction, and intonational variability become typical phenomena; such deviations are not perceived as violations but form a natural part of speech behaviour. This discourse type is therefore one of the determining factors of phonetic variation, shaping different models of the relationship between norm and speech practice.

7. The influence of social and individual factors.

Phonetic variation is conditioned not only by communicative context but also by a range of social and individual factors influencing speech behaviour. Among the social factors, the linguistic environment, speakers' educational level, professional activity, and regional features play substantial roles. For example, the speech of persons with a philological or pedagogical education is usually closer to the norm, whereas in a non-specialist environment, greater variation is admitted; likewise, professional activity connected with public speaking fosters more conscious control over pronunciation.

The regional factor also remains significant. Despite the general tendency toward the unification of speech, elements of dialectal phonetics may persist, especially in vowel pronunciation or intonation models, which adds individual specificity to speech while simultaneously creating an additional level of variation. Individual factors include speech tempo, emotional state, speech experience,

and the level of linguistic reflection: in rapid speech, the number of reductions and simplifications significantly increases, whereas in slow, controlled speech, such phenomena are minimised; the emotional state of the speaker likewise affects intonation and articulatory clarity. Phonetic variation thus results from the complex interaction of social and individual factors that determine a particular speech realisation.

8. Variation as a resource of communicative efficiency.

In the traditional normative paradigm of linguistics, phonetic variation has often been interpreted as a deviation from established orthoepic standards, an approach grounded in the pursuit of speech unification and stability. However, contemporary linguistics increasingly favours another view, according to which variation is not a violation but an inevitable, natural, and functionally conditioned component of speech activity.

From this perspective, phonetic variation appears as an important factor and resource of communicative efficiency, ensuring the flexibility of speech and its capacity to adapt to different communicative conditions. This concerns, above all, speakers' ability to modify their pronunciation according to the situation, the addressee, and the communicative goal. One of the fundamental functions of variation is the adaptation of speech to a specific communicative context: in formal situations, for example, during public speeches, lectures, or official statements, speakers tend toward clearer and more normative pronunciation, which enhances the precision of information transfer and the speaker's perceived competence and authority. In informal communication, speech becomes freer and admits diverse phonetic variants that do not impede understanding but make communication more natural and less formalised: for example, *zaraz* → *zarz/zaras*, *budemo* → *budem*, *nichoho* → *nicho*, typical of relaxed communication.

Another important function is the economy of speech effort, manifested in the simplification of complex articulatory structures. In rapid speech, speakers seek to minimise the expenditure of time and energy, which leads to sound reduction, the shortening of consonant clusters, and the smoothing of intonation contours; for example, *shistsot* is often realised as *shisot*, *shistsdesiat* as *shisdesiat*, *pizno* with reduced clarity of the consonant, *shchastia* as *shastia*, and *zshyty* as *shyty*.

Phonetic variation also accelerates communication, which is critically important in the contemporary information environment. In media discourse, where promptness and dynamism of information delivery are essential, simplified pronunciation allows larger volumes of messages to be conveyed more efficiently within a limited time, while maintaining a balance between speed and intelligibility that is crucial for successful communication.

No less important is the function of expressing emotional and pragmatic shades of meaning. Intonational variation, changes in speech tempo, and the accentuation of particular elements of an utterance allow speakers to convey their attitude toward information, to emphasise the significance of individual components, and to create an appropriate emotional background; a rise in tone, for instance, may signal interest, surprise, or irritation, while a fall may signal completeness, confidence, or indifference.

It is important to stress that the effectiveness of variation is directly linked to speakers' communicative competence: the ability to use different phonetic variants appropriately, depending on the situation, is a marker of a high level of linguistic culture. In this sense, variation does not contradict the norm but coexists with it,

performing an adaptive function. Phonetic variation should therefore be regarded not merely as a structural characteristic of speech but as an important instrument for ensuring its effectiveness, allowing speech to be flexible, dynamic, and adapted to diverse communicative conditions – a necessary precondition for successful interaction in contemporary society [4; 9].

9. Prospects for the normalisation of phonetic processes.

In the context of contemporary linguistic transformations, the question of the normalisation of phonetic processes is particularly significant. On the one hand, linguistic norm is a necessary condition for the functioning of the literary language, since it ensures the unity of communication, the stability of the language system, and mutual understanding among speakers. On the other hand, real speech practice demonstrates considerable variation that does not always accord with codified standards.

The codification of phonetic norms plays an important role in spheres such as education, the media, and official communication: it establishes guidelines for correct pronunciation, fosters the formation of linguistic culture, and ensures the unification of speech in the public space. Without clearly defined norms, it is impossible to achieve stability in the language system, an indispensable factor under conditions of intensive social and cultural change. Meanwhile, excessive rigidity of normative requirements may come into conflict with real speech practice: language, as a living system, is in constant change, and these changes are frequently reflected precisely in the phonetic sphere. Ignoring these processes may lead to a rupture between norms and practice, which, in turn, reduces the effectiveness of communication and complicates the assimilation of linguistic standards.

Accordingly, the contemporary approach to the normalisation of phonetic processes must be more flexible and account for the dynamic character of the language system. A promising direction is the combination of normative and descriptive approaches, whereby codification relies not only on traditional notions of correctness but also on the analysis of real speech, enabling consideration of current tendencies and their gradual integration into the system of language norms. A special role in this process of normalisation is played by social institutions: educational establishments form the basic skills of normative pronunciation, laying the foundations of linguistic culture, while the mass media serve as a powerful factor in disseminating linguistic models, since it is through them that language patterns become accessible to a broad audience – media may either reinforce the norm or contribute to the spread of variant forms. Scholarly research serves as the basis for theoretical understanding of language processes and lays the groundwork for well-founded codification, since it is precisely through the systematic analysis of phonetic phenomena that it becomes possible to determine tendencies in language development and to forecast changes in the normative system. The prospects for the normalisation of phonetic processes are thus linked to achieving a balance between the stability and the dynamics of the language system: an effective linguistic norm must not only fix established pronunciation models but also reflect real speech processes, thereby ensuring both precision and naturalness in communication.

Conclusions. The results obtained make it possible to reconsider the correlation between norm and communicative practice and provide grounds for a broader generalisation of the role of phonetic variation in contemporary Ukrainian speech. The phenomena recorded during analysis are not random but reveal systemic ten-

dencies conditioned by both intralinguistic regularities and external sociocommunicative factors. In the traditional linguistic paradigm, phonetic variation was often interpreted as a deviation from the normative model requiring correction or elimination; the results of this study, however, accord with contemporary approaches according to which variation is regarded as an inherent property of speech that ensures its flexibility, adaptability, and diversity [14; 15].

A comparison of the obtained results with existing research in the field of phonetics and media linguistics allows one to state that the observed tendencies correspond to the general regularities of language development in the contemporary globalised world; the striving for economy of speech effort, manifested in the simplification of articulation, is a universal phenomenon recorded in many languages, while the specificity of Ukrainian speech lies in the combination of these universal tendencies with nationally conditioned features of accentuation and the sound system. Media space plays a particular role in the formation and dissemination of phonetic variants: contemporary mass media: television, radio, and digital platforms function as a powerful factor of norm-formation, on the one hand orienting themselves toward established linguistic standards and, on the other, reflecting living speech practice in which variant forms actively function; as a result, a complex system of interaction between normativity and variation emerges, in which the media not only reproduce linguistic tendencies but also influence their consolidation.

The scholarly novelty of the results obtained also consists in the attempt at a comprehensive analysis of phonetic variation that takes its functional aspect into account: whereas earlier attention was concentrated predominantly on the description of individual phonetic phenomena, in this study, they are examined within a broader communicative context, which allows a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of interaction between the language system and speech practice.

The study has established that phonetic variation is an integral characteristic of contemporary Ukrainian speech, reflecting its dynamic and adaptive character. It manifests itself at various levels of language organisation, from the segmental to the prosodic, and is conditioned by both intralinguistic regularities and the influence of the communicative environment.

It has been established that variation is realised in the simplification of articulatory structures, fluctuations in the pronunciation of sounds and sound combinations, and variation in stress and intonation models. Such phenomena are not random or chaotic but systemic, corresponding to general tendencies in the development of speech, in particular the striving for economy of speech effort and increased communicative efficiency.

The study has shown that the relationship between phonetic norm and speech practice is dynamic. Linguistic norm performs a stabilising function, ensuring the unity and intelligibility of communication, but it is not immutable: communicative practice frequently precedes codification, generating new pronunciation tendencies that may subsequently be fixed as normative. This allows variation to be regarded not as a deviation but as one of the mechanisms of the language system's development.

It has been established that phonetic variation performs important communicative functions, namely the adaptation of speech to different communicative situations, the optimisation of speech effort, the increase of the speed of information exchange, and the conveyance of additional emotional and pragmatic shades

of meaning. Variation thus functions not only as a structural characteristic of speech but also as an effective instrument of communicative interaction. A particular role in the dissemination and consolidation of phonetic variants belongs to the contemporary media space, which combines an orientation toward normativity with the reflection of living speech, serving as a mediator between norm and practice and contributing to both the standardisation of speech and the dissemination of new variants.

Phonetic variation in contemporary Ukrainian is therefore a regular and functionally significant phenomenon that reflects the interaction of stability and change within the language system; taking it into account is necessary for an adequate description of speech and for the formation of contemporary approaches to linguistic norm.

Prospects for further research include deepening the analysis of phonetic processes through experimental-phonetic methods, which will enable refinement of the acoustic and articulatory characteristics of variant realisations. It is likewise relevant to study the influence of different discourse types, in particular media and educational discourse, on the formation of pronunciation norms, as well as to investigate the sociolinguistic factors that determine the specific features of phonetic variation in the contemporary linguistic environment.

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Теряєв Д. Фонетична варіативність у сучасній українській мові: норма та комунікативна практика

Анотація. У статті розглянуто проблему фонетичної варіативності сучасного українського мовлення з точки зору мовної норми та комунікативної практики. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена активними процесами мовних змін, що відбуваються внаслідок соціокультурних трансформацій, медіасередовища та інтенсифікації міжмовних контактів. Акцент зроблено на аналізі варіативності вимови звуків, наголосу та інтонаційних моделей, а також на адаптації іншомовних елементів у сучасному мовленні. Метою дослідження є виявлення основних типів фонетичної варіативності та з'ясування їхнього співвідношення з кодифікованими нормами української мови. Методологічну основу становлять описовий метод, елементи фонетичного аналізу, а також функціональний підхід до вивчення мовних явищ. Матеріалом дослідження слугують приклади усного та писемного мовлення, насамперед медійні тексти, публічні виступи та повсякденна комунікація. У результаті дослідження встановлено, що фонетична варіативність є невід'ємною рисою сучасного українського мовлення і проявляється на різних рівнях – від звукового до просодичного. Виявлено тенденції до спрощення вимови, коливання наголосу та варіювання інтонаційних структур. Доведено, що комунікативна практика нерідко випереджає норму або впливає на її трансформацію. Зроблено висновок, що фонетична варіативність відображає динаміку мовного розвитку та є вагомим чинником формування сучасної мовної норми. Перспективи подальших досліджень пов'язані з поглибленим експериментально-фонетичним аналізом та вивченням впливу медіа на фонетичні процеси.

Ключові слова: фонетична варіативність, українське мовлення, мовна норма, комунікативна практика, наголос, вимова, інтонація, фонетична адаптація, медіамовлення, просодія.

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