

# Using Drama in Teaching Intonation

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**Abstract**—The article is devoted to using drama for acquisition of intonation in English as a foreign language. In drama there is the predominance of sense over meaning, of sentence over word, and of context over sentence. Drama techniques can be used in teaching as a platform for language practice. Drama is effective for developing different students' abilities, (sub-) skills and also learners' awareness of strategies. It contributes to achieving good pronunciation and speech habits. Some drama techniques can be used in the lesson to establish good rapport with students. Drama activities can be beneficial for learners' independence and responsibility and help to raise their motivation. Students have difficulty in imitating speech patterns, find it boring. Lack of creativity in the learning environment causes low motivation and initiative. Students' intonation needs practising and drama is meant to encourage students and fully involve them in the practice.

**Keywords**—foreign language education, drama, practicing intonation, creative environment

## I. INTRODUCTION

Foreign language education is oriented to creating natural environment for more productive study, developing students' learning potential. However, teaching practice shows there are some weaknesses in teaching pronunciation due to a teacher-centered model of language lessons.

The analysis of modern methods and techniques indicates that using creative skills enables students to learn more effectively. In this respect, "drama" seems to provide students with a new stimulus giving them the main role in their personal study process. According to Susan Holden, drama means any kind of activity where learners are asked either to portray themselves or to portray someone else in an imaginary situation: "In other words, drama is concerned with the world of 'let's pretend'; it asks the learner to project himself imaginatively into another situation, outside the classroom, or into the skin and persona of another person" [1].

The purpose for researching drama in language education is to prove the benefit of drama implementation into intonation practice. That makes us not only examine various approaches to define "drama" but also prove its value for language teaching as a platform for pronunciation acquisition in general [2].

## II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are different ways in which drama can be defined. Drama is considered to be an element of a communicative approach. Drama can be defined as an activity "involving people in a social context and stimulating effective communication that goes beyond language competence and includes the use of gesture, body posture, intonation and other prosodic features" [3].

Drama is based on Vygotsky theory that there is the predominance of sense over meaning, of sentence over word, and of context over sentence. These are rules of inner speech. Vygotsky claimed that language had both an external and an internal form, and it was the latter that could "provide the clearest window to thought" [4]. In inner speech "two important processes are intertwined: the transition from external communication to inner dialogue and the expression of intimate thoughts in linguistic form, thus making them communicative" [5]. External speech is the turning of thoughts into words, "its materialization and objectification" [4]. With inner speech it is a reverse process – speech turns into thought. Therefore, their structure must be different.

Vygotsky underlines that inner speech is silent and unvocalized and that it creates thinking, not the other way round. He demonstrates the development of words from motive to thought to inner speech through meaning to words (It is also known as Konstantin Stanislavski's system which is used at the Moscow Art Theatre). This idea is reflected in drama - the natural process of acquisition is imitated and the path to new word meaning fixed. So, the learners can be engaged in the endless variety of situations through the creative use of learning interventions.

Psycholinguistic and methodological analyses of drama help to come to the following principles which were highlighted by Godfrey and to add one which is critical as it defines the role of the teacher (the last one):

- **Interactive Learning:** entails a lot of pair and group work in the classroom, as well as genuine language input from the "real world" for meaningful communication.
- **Learner-centered Learning:** involves the giving over of "power" in the language learning process to the learners themselves. It also motivates personal creativity and input from the students, as well as taking into account their learning needs and

objectives. It also leads to creation of a “learning situation in which the student is also a teacher” [6].

- Cooperative Learning: stresses the “ensemble” like nature of the classroom and emphasizes cooperation. Students share information and achieve their learning goals as a group. Moreover, learners should be “permitted to take responsibility for their own learning in such a way that the teacher can take a less dominant role in the classroom without losing the respect of the class or losing control” [6].
- Whole language approach: is based on the concept that students need to experience language as an integrated whole. It focuses on the need for an integrated approach to language instruction within a context that is meaningful to students [3].
- A teacher who “suits the needs of their classes at any time so that learning is kept meaningful” [6] and who thinks about “dynamics of teaching” (ibid).

On the other side, in reference to intonation, Bygate underlined that mastery of motor-perceptive skills was all that one needed in order to communicate successfully [7]. Nunan confirms that “motor-perceptive skills are developed in the language classroom through activities such as model dialogues, pattern practice, oral drill and so on” [8]. However, students rather often find drilling intonation boring and unimaginative. So, it is essential to use an alternative approach to drilling and it can be drama.

Personally, drama appeals to us as it is a valuable contribution to language learning and it can develop learners' imagination and stimulate their desire to communicate. Moreover, in the lessons where drama is used learners will have “to take responsibility, to offer alternatives, to come up with solutions, and even do some research” [6].

Much of our feeling is conveyed through intonation, and it is significant for students “to associate the intonation pattern with the feeling that gives rise to it” [9]. Moreover, intonation depends not only on our feeling but the mood and disposition of others. Drama techniques have the similar value of directly engaging students' feeling and, consequently, often making them aware of the need to be able to express them appropriately

In drama technique, students have more responsibility for their own learning. However, this does not reduce the importance of the teacher. It is the teacher's responsibility to guide the language learning process by:

- modelling pronunciation, intonation, stress, rhythm, and oral expression;
- stimulating interest and conversation, and interacting with the students;
- establishing an acting workshop atmosphere;
- creating a student-participatory language learning experience [10].

We completely agree with Wessel, who thinks that language learners can learn a great deal from the way in which actors prepare their voices for the stage. It is also

proved by Vygotsky theory and it is reflected in Stanislavsky's approach to teaching actors.

These include:

- relaxation and posture: exercises designed to release tension;
- breathing: learning to control and utilize breathing fully;
- tone: learning to use the whole resonator (mouth, nose, and pharynx) to produce sounds;
- pitch: exercises which practise the rise and the fall in the voice;
- articulation: reciting tongue-twisters, chants, or bits of poetry to secure clear speech [6].

As the experimental practice shows it is crucial for students to understand that they need to be physically and psychologically prepared for the practice intonation. Drama activities help students to be well-prepared for the next stage where different social context is going to be applied.

On the basis of the theoretical analysis we could describe the activities for voice preparation and their aims.

*Relaxation and posture.* When learners are tense, it is difficult for them to produce any sounds correctly. Their rigid bodies depend on the way they breathe, and without control over their breathing they cannot use their voices fully. Teacher and students do some simple activities to relax.

When we are tense, our bodies become stiff and rigid. It is difficult for us to produce any sounds correctly. No matter how hard we try. Our rigid bodies in turn affect the way we breathe, and without control over our breathing we cannot use our voices fully. Teacher and students do some simple activities to relax:

- students stand up straight, legs slightly apart, shoulders relaxed and head upright;
- students rotate their necks slowly, four times to the left, and four times to the right;
- students roll their shoulders backwards; first the left shoulder four times, then the right shoulder four times; finally both shoulders together eight times;
- students inhale and raise their arms to shoulder-height, then exhale and raise them above their heads;
- students stretch up ten times with the right hand, and then ten times with the left;
- students inhale and lower their arms to shoulder-height, then exhale and lower their arms to their sides;
- students massage their neck and shoulders [6].

*Breathing.* Learners of foreign languages need to direct their breathing consciously to produce the correct sounds in the language. Teacher and students do the following activities:

- students put their fingers on the ribs with the thumbs behind, pointing towards spine, three or four inches above the waist;
- students breathe laterally;
- teacher monitors;
- students inhale and let out the breath on a long  
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA /  
OOOOOOOOOOO / EEEEEEEEEEEEEEE /  
MMMMMMMMM / NNNNNNNNNNNNNN;
- students practise the combination above with a rising and falling pitch.

*Tone.* Language learners are learning to use mouth, lips, jaws and tongue precisely as native speakers.

Lip reading. In pairs, students “mouth” first words, then short sentences until their partners understand what they are saying. They should make no sound; only use the shapes of their mouth to convey the message.

Split dialogues. Half the class have the initiations of different dialogues, the other half should have responses. The initiators have to say their part loudly and clearly from one side of the room, so that the others on the other side can respond correctly.

A: What’s the time?

B: Nine o’clock.

A: It’s Wednesday today.

B: That’s right.

A: It’s a nice day today, isn’t it?

B: It’s a wonderful day.

A: Give me pepper and salt, please.

B: Salt and pepper, bread and butter.

A: Let’s have lunch together one day.

B: Let’s.

A: When’s the best time to call you?

B: I’m usually home after seven.

*Pitch.* Students learn to hum, chant, or sing in rising or falling pitch. Throwing a poem over the class. Students stand in different corners of the room and they produce nursery rhyme line by line and one by one:

A: 1-2-3-4

B: who’s that knocking on my door?

A: 5-6-7-8

B: birthday party don’t be late

A: for the disco disco disco dancing

B: disco disco disco dancing

Students read the poem with the intonation:

The ↗ splendour ↗ falls on ↗ castle ↘ walls

And ↗ snowy ↗ summits old in ↘ story:

The ↗ long ↗ light ↗ shakes across the ↘ lakes,

And the ↗ wild ↗ cataract ↗ leaps in ↘ glory.

↗ Blow, ↗ bugle, ↗ blow, ↗ set the ↗ wild ↗ echoes ↘ flying,

↗ Blow, ↗ bugle; ↗ answer, ↗ echoes, ↗ dying, ↗ dying, ↘ dying.

*Articulation.* Learner practise tongue-twisters. First, they do it together, then in pairs, and finally on their own. It helps to develop their confidence and raise their willingness to do it.

Group reads easy nursery rhymes with a strong rhythmic beat that can be read as rounds:

Chewing chestnuts hurts my teeth

Chewing chestnuts hurts my teeth

It makes them crack and then fall out

It makes them crack and then fall out

And that’s why I hate chestnuts

And that’s why I hate chestnuts

By incorporating drama techniques into the teaching of pronunciation, we can help our students to develop deeper awareness and understanding of what goes into the production of individual sounds, and the process of individual pronunciation practice will be more “meaningful and productive” [6].

By working together, the students learn to be more confident. Another reason is that they are learning to rely on “one another for their ideas and therefore using a considerable amount of language for discussion, argument, agreement and disagreement, organisation and execution” [9]. In the class while speaking their main problem of not wanting to speak or not knowing what to say is that the students are not moving physically and not using gestures as we usually do in our real life. While doing activities such as “Split dialogues”, “Learning rhythm” and practising dialogues in groups and pairs, students are allowed to move and act according to the context. It also reduces the time between the formulation and articulation stages of speech production [4].

In terms of background and approaches to learning, students differ widely. There are some learners who are totally dependent on the teacher, they can be shy and are not willing to participate in anything that is not important for their learning, and they are against the methods that conflict with the ones they are used to. One of the main aims of using drama in a language lesson is to develop the student’s language learning potential providing an active, stimulating and creative environment. Students are encouraged “to explore English using their imagination and creativity and to express this through language and other forms of communication” [3]. Drama also requires from teachers thorough planning and structuring and the ability to create a learning solution “which will ensure a constant supply of stimuli to the students, which will keep them active and alert” [6]. Everything in the lesson is aimed to meet the students’ needs.

DeCoursey mentions that the purpose of using drama in the language classroom is to mark elements of language with emotion so that students will remember them [11]. As drama activities involve emotional aspects, learners will have an emotional attitude towards the drama activities themselves. Such positive feelings as enjoying a creative atmosphere and pride in achievement will prevail, but such negative emotions as insecurity or stage-fright will make the process more memorable [12].

Additionally, it is claimed that drama activities will be more successful and memorable if teacher promotes positive environment; emotional involvement; collaborative and creative atmosphere; a sense of achievement. They facilitate students' emotional development, inspire their imagination, and "transfer the responsibility for learning from teacher to learners" [13].

The class we implement drama is B2. They attend one-month intensive General English course. The students have different language learning background. Three weak students need support and encouragement. They usually rely on the strongest students and try to participate in pair or group work. They have difficulty in imitating speech patterns, even find it tiresome and boring. It causes low motivation. Though, their intonation needs practising. Drama is meant to encourage students and fully involve them in the practice. The aim of the experiment is to verify the effectiveness of drama implementation for practising intonation with upper-intermediate EFL students [14].

The success of a drama lesson can be measured by asking a number of questions related to the major objectives of using drama in language teaching the other trainee and the students. Evaluation is based on peer-observation, self-reflection and questionnaire for the students. For peer-observation there are used two tasks which are given below in Table 1 and Table 2. Task 1 is to be completed by a teacher as well to compare the inner perception of the lesson with the peer's one and analyse the answers. The students are supposed to answer five questions and if they have time they are welcome to give clarification (Students' questionnaire). All the questions are taken from the book by Wessel and clarified.

TABLE I. TASK 1: OVERCOMING RESISTANCE TO THE TARGET LANGUAGE (PEER-OBSERVATION AND SELF-REFLECTION):

№	Question	Tick if you agree			Other comments
		<i>spontaneity</i>	<i>involvement</i>	<i>enjoyment</i>	
1	Is the experience enjoyable?				
2	Are the targets realistic?	<i>the level of difficulty</i>	<i>amount of work</i>	<i>accessibility of the situation for the learners</i>	
3	Is there a creative "slowing down" of experience?	<i>A conscious attempt by the teacher to slow down the</i>	<i>A suitable context for the situation</i>	<i>acting out the story or dialogue</i>	

		<i>experience of the lesson</i>			
4	Can the lesson be linked to the students' own experience?	<i>an attempt to link the activity to the real-life experience of the students</i>			
5	Are the students in a state of readiness to learn?	<i>adequately prepared physically and psychologically for the activity</i>			

TABLE II. TASK 2: CREATING A NEED FOR SPEAKING (PEER-OBSERVATION). TICK IF YOU AGREE:

№	Stages of the lesson questions	1	2	3	4	5	6
		Lead-in	Conveying the meaning	Practice of preparation activities	Controlled practice	Freer practice	Discussion
1	<i>Are there situations / problems that demand solution?</i>						
2	<i>Is responsibility placed on the learner?</i>						
3	<i>Would the lesson involve all the students, including the shy or weaker ones?</i>						

Students' questionnaire: 1. Was the lesson enjoyable? 2. Do you need the material from the lesson in real-life communication? 3. Did you have enough time to do all the activities? 4. Have you ever practised it in your life? 5. Do you want to have more lessons with the same activities?

To achieve the aim it is essential to take the specific steps and accomplish the following objectives:

1. To see how engaged the students are during the stages of controlled practice and freer practice in practising intonation (peer-observation task 1 question 1; task 2, questions 1 and 3; and students' feedback).

2. To judge whether the students take responsibility for completing the task during the whole lesson (peer-observation task 2 question 2 and self-reflection).



3. To find out whether drama encourages me to be less teacher-centered, more flexible to the students' needs in the lesson and provide students with appropriate activities (peer-observation task 1 questions 2, 3, 4 and task 2 question 1; self-reflection task).

4. To check if drama helps me involve students in practising intonation (peer-observation task 1 questions 1, 5 and task 2 question 3; self-reflection and students' feedback).

Overall, the diagnostics reveals that the lesson was a success: the students were involved in all the activities, which they were asked to do; they managed to produce the dialogues with appropriate intonation and were really active in the lesson. Having conducted a questionnaire among the students it is possible to present the given results:

*Was the lesson enjoyable?* – 10 yes, 0 no and sometimes.

*Do you need the material from the lesson in real-life communication?* – 6 yes, 2 no, 2 sometimes.

*Did you have enough time to do all the activities?* – 10 yes, 0 no, 0 sometimes.

*Have you ever practised it in your life?* – 6 yes, 4 no.

*Do you want to have more lessons with the same activities?* – 7 yes, 1 no, 2 sometimes.

The results of peer-observation, self-reflection and students' questionnaire were analysed and the following results of evaluation are to be stated.

The students were engaged in practising intonation of the dialogues. They did not ask anything and spent less time than it is anticipated. They even managed to act them on the "stage" and found it very enjoyable. They confirmed that they would like to have the same activities in the subsequent lessons [15]. The peer-observer also highlighted the students' involvement.

At the beginning of the lesson the students needed some encouragement from a teacher as it was only the lead-in and we used authentic video materials which were difficult to understand. The task for watching video was achievable and the students coped with it after discussing in pairs their ideas. In the stages of practice students decided themselves how to "perform" better (it was a competition) and chose the most "accurate" way as they thought. They worked on the intonation of the dialogues themselves and did not consult me. They were supportive to each other and applauded after "performance".

In the lesson the teacher played the role of "the professor of theatre", but they felt that they were only "coordinators of the process". The lesson was less teacher-centred. In the lesson we managed to "slow down" the pace and adapted the activities for the students' needs [16]. The students answered in the questionnaire that they "had enough time to do all the activities" [17]. The peer-observer also noticed it; however, the peer-teacher added that it was not obvious that we slowed down the pace of the lesson.

From the peer-observation we can say that drama contributed a lot to achieving our fourth objective. Though, not all the students can see the connection between the importance of pronunciation and development of other skills.

We should have clarified it in the lesson as they did with intonation for speaking.

### III. CONCLUSION

Summarizing the results of the research we can state that drama techniques can be a part of one lesson or used in teaching as a platform for language practice. It is effective for development of skills and sub-skills, for example, developing students' ability of anticipation which is needed for receptive skills. Although it could seem funny at first sight, it could help to develop different students' abilities, (sub-) skills and also learners' awareness of strategies. It contributes to achieving good pronunciation and speech habits avoiding teaching through recognition- or repetition-based on mechanical drills. Some drama techniques can be used in the lesson to establish good rapport with students. Also, drama activities can be beneficial for development of learners' independence and responsibility and help to raise their motivation.

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