

# Promotion of a New Model of Learning of Second Language Intonation

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**Abstract** – The article is aimed at identifying the efficiency of a new strategy of learning English intonation. The authors show how learners employed the aspects of intonation with regular guidance and feedback through multi staged process. The authors present a model where students learn to work autonomously stating the aims and goals, working out learning strategies. This article reports on activities as a route towards promoting autonomous use of the BBC's online dialogues in and outside the classroom to enhance the second language ability in intonation presentation in increasingly informed and successful manner.

**Keywords** – *autonomy, intonation, dialogues, strategy, model*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Till present days, there is little awareness how to teach intonation of a foreign language. The matter is that at first, intonation seems to be a very complicated thing which is difficult to acquire and at second, two main approaches for studying intonation (the British school and ToBI system) appear to be too hard "notoriously difficult" [1, 2] for students. However, M. Wrembel notices in a right way that it goes opposite to a statement of Gimson that learners should be proficient in making pitch movements as important cues for signaling salient words [1].

Researchers paid attention to the fact that in the past 25 years there was not enough research in second language prosody with limited number of participants and small data [3]. Besides, research in this theme is restricted by the absence of possibilities to be in natural conditions, observations are held in artificial conditions of lessons.

M. Grice, S. Bauman also notice that intonation is seldom taught systematically. However it is clear that poor prosodic and intonational skills can have a devastating effect on communication and can make conversation frustrating [4]. Native speakers appreciate a person by his accent. They can talk about a personal emotional state, educational status, the social affiliation, the degree of intelligence by sound of a language. Even teachers of English have little awareness about the importance of intonation for successful communication. They are concentrating on general comprehensibility. Thus, it is crucial for language teachers to be aware of foreign prosody and intonation, what prosodic errors their learners can make and what are these errors stem from.

Besides, the content of classes in teaching intonation is still not worked out [5]. Because of inherent complexity of intonation there still a little awareness about how to teach

intonation although two main approaches in describing intonation (ToBI system and the British school) are well described. In the new conditions of educational system there is a need for a new methodology.

In recent research of teaching intonation there appeared a lot of approaches. They appeal to students' senses and emotions; they aim at raising students' awareness. These approaches tend to use inductive approach to make a person guess by himself about intonation of a foreign language so that a person can make conclusions himself [6].

## II. METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design*

The purpose of the present research is to show the efficiency and to gauge the impact of a new approach in teaching second language intonation. The researchers tried to summarize different approaches and combined what appeared resultative and effective, successful in teaching.

The objectives of the research: 1. to describe a new model of teaching intonation to Linguistic Majors; 2. to compare a traditional method in teaching intonation used at Novosibirsk state technical university (NSTU) with a new one based on a modern approach towards teaching intonation;

Hypothesis: using a new model of intonation acquiring in teaching and learning process will facilitate students' performance in producing native like prosody.

The sample and content: The experiment was developed during the autumn semester 2018. During the classes of Phonetics which were held once a week within the whole semester (15 lessons + final tests) the sample group 1 involved 30 students used the traditional model of learning intonation at NSTU. And other 30 students (the sample group 2) from the Faculty of Humanities within the NSTU used a new model of learning intonation. On the whole 60 students took part in the experiment. All students were taking Bachelor's course, majoring in Linguistics.

Methods of Research Used: a systematic observation during the classes of practical phonetics; tests; methods of mathematical statistics.

As a basis of the research the authors take concepts of Wrembel M. [1], Mehlhorn [7], Komar S. [8], Casoli M.L., Paderni R. [9], Knight R.A. and Cruice M. [10].

### *A traditional model of teaching intonation*

Here at NSTU the staff has extensive experience in teaching Phonetics. The work is traditionally based primarily on the Russian tradition of teaching Phonetics for Linguistic majors [11]. This traditional way in teaching Phonetics at NSTU for sample group 1 is not changed. The work with this group was based on the book "Ship or sheep" by A. Baker [12].

In this book all exercises are predominantly "listen and repeat". The usual methodology in teaching intonation according to Russian tradition in teaching intonation is as follows: transcribing the whole dialogue from the book with marking the phonetic phenomena than listening to it and drawing intonation on a scale. Then students practiced reading the dialogue at home. After practicing the dialogue at home, students read it in the class using their scales.

However, the observations in class clearly show that depicting intonation between two horizontal lines is usually rather difficult and reading the dialogues is considered to be stressful by students.

Moreover, in the condition of reduced hours for learning English on the whole and for Phonetics in particular there is a peculiar need for working with this content in a different way. Moreover, the dialogues from the book are read by one person (RP speaker) and students do not get the idea about variants of English, they do not realize that pronunciation depends on the age, nationality, social status of speakers. It became transparent to make the process of intonation acquisition more time-consuming and less stressful for students.

### III. RESULTS

#### *A new attempt in teaching intonation*

To remedy problems in acquiring English intonation the authors summarized what has been worked out in different schools to produce a beneficial system of methods to be successful in producing intonation. The main requirement in a new learning condition is to work out an educational system where students can work independently for improving their intonation. For Russian students who get used to study under the strong supervision, working separately from the teacher is practically impossible. That is why the only way out in this situation is to raise students' awareness and teach them to work independently improving motivation and organizing adequate feedback.

That is why a new model of learning non-native intonation can be topical today. Following G. Mehlhorn advice in teaching non-native intonation [7], we decided to divide the process of learning into several stages. Several steps in intonation teaching involve class work; some steps offer individual work. On the whole a new model of learning English intonation is presented in Table I.

The first stage in teaching intonation is to show each student his failures and drawbacks. Even advanced learners do not realize that their intonation differs from the original one. For this (for sample group 2) the authors made a diagnostic test to state deviations from the norm and to raise awareness of intonation. During the first few classes the researchers worked

with each student individually to state the problems and work out aims and goals. This work included a test for possible deviations from the norm as well as stating aims and goals.

TABLE I. STAGES IN A NEW MODEL OF LEARNING INTONATION

| Stages in the process of intonation acquisition   | Group/Individual work  |
|---|--|
| I. <b>Noticing</b> (diagnosis of deviations);   | Teacher - student  |
| II. <b>Explanation</b> (presentation of theoretical content about intonation);  | Group work   |
| III. <b>Specific work with intonation</b><br>1. <b>Prediction</b> (reading the scripts of the original conversations and producing hypothesis about required intonation according to situation);<br>2. <b>Focusing</b> (listening to original conversations and analyzing intonation; depicting it on the scale);<br>3. <b>Imitation</b> of the original conversation; Kinesthetic involvement;<br>4. <b>Communication</b> (presentation of speech, discussion of problems);<br>5. <b>Choosing</b> learning strategies; | Individually<br><br>Group work/<br>individually<br><br>Group work/<br>individually<br>Group work/<br>individually<br>Teacher - student |
| IV. <b>Evaluation</b> (comparing the initial and final results);  | Individually   |
| V. <b>Writing</b> final essays about the course   | Individually   |

The test in pronunciation is entirely for raising awareness of problems in pronunciation and stating deviations in intonation from the original conversation. The authors extracted the sentence from the text which students read and marked what variants are different from the norm.

All data observed were put in a table where a student can easily see whether his/her pronunciation is very deviant from the norm or it is more native like. Each student was given a list with criteria when all deviations are presented after test reading. These criteria are presented in Table II (which is also the example of data taken from one student from sample group 2).

TABLE II. CRITERIA TO APPRECIATE ENGLISH PROSODY AND STUDENTS' DEVIATIONS FROM THE NORM

| Intonation patterns                      | Scale:<br>Very deviant < > native like (1...5) |   |   |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|---|---|
|  | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Intonation of general questions          |  |   | X |   |   |
| Intonation of special questions          |  | X |   |   |   |
| Intonation of enumeration                | X  |   |   |   |   |
| Intonation of tags                       | X  |   |   |   |   |
| Intonation of alternative questions      |  |   | X |   |   |
| Intonation of polite and rude statements | X  |   |   |   |   |
| Intonation of correcting ideas           | X  |   |   |   |   |
| Rhythm                                   |  |   |   |   |   |
| -reduction of vowels                     |  | X |   |   |   |
| -syllable structure                      |  |   |   | X |   |
| - number of pauses                       |  | X |   |   |   |
| Accent position                          |  |   |   |   |   |
| -sentence stress                         | X  |   |   |   |   |
| -word stress                             |  |   | X |   |   |

After noticing their own difficulties and problems, students decide which particular difficulty they want to work with, what problem deserves more attention, which one is small. J. Cross supposes that when learners' activity is goal-directed, it promotes focused attention to the given task, greater intensity of effort as well reducing the risk of performing poorly [13].

At the second stage the authors discussed theoretical content about intonation. The essence about intonation, some

intonational models, the difference between intonation of native and foreign language were presented to students without any practice just for introduction. The researchers were concentrating on specific difficulties in English intonation for Russian learners which are mentioned in the article of I. Mennen [4]. These difficulties are: a narrower pitch range, incorrect placement of prominence, replacement of rises with falls and vice versa, incorrect pitch on unstressed syllables, differences in final pitch rises, starting pitch too low and problems with reset from low level to mid-level after a boundary, a smaller declination rate.

Such subtle differences between target and source language intonation are extremely important for Linguistic majors for their future work. These differences depend on anatomy, regional background, emotional state and influences of socio-cultural factors [4]. Work with this content is extensive one but finally realized it becomes a dire necessity in producing speech. How to notice all these things and what are peculiarities of English intonation are required through the next stages.

At the third stage specific work for teaching intonation began. For analyzing English intonation with the sample group 2 we took some dialogues from the BBC. Podcasts can provide up-to-date online information and video broadcasts. Podcasts are often accompanied by links to topic-related written texts and a transcript of the listening text [8–10, 13]. It is a special value for us.

A teacher should accompany learners how to find, and download appropriate podcasts for self-study as well as present learning strategy appropriate to types of podcast content and engage learners in transcript analysis. By the way, it is still teacher-centered and classroom-focus orientation.

In the sample group 2 students were usually divided into groups during each class. Each group was given a script of a dialogue. Students made hypotheses about required intonation based on the theory. Then they compared their findings with the other groups. Inductive approach, i.e. hypotheses about intonation is considered as a very productive and we made sure about it ourselves. Students began to appreciate material in a conscious manner.

The second step was listening to an original conversation from the BBC and comparing their marked text with the original. This step involved discussion of deviations of former hypotheses with the original speech.

All together the authors made the process more vivid, a teacher and students after listening to a text, depicted intonation of each sentence from this text between two horizontal lines using the British school analysis. All together students learn how to draw intonation on paper using interlinear transcription. A student can observe all stressed and unstressed syllables, falls and rises, pitch accents, sentence stress, breaks in speech. At this stage a teacher has possibilities to explain subtle differences between a target and a source intonation. It is an example and a student makes further work at home taking an electronic version of a text with him. Computer programs, video of dialogues provide a visual display of intonation. M. L. Casoli underlines the fact that multimedia environment is a necessary tool in acquiring intonation [9].

The third step is imitation of a dialogue. Before imitating the dialogue the authors tried to appeal to senses and emotions as well as the whole body movement in order to involve perception of students. In order to do it students did not seat at the desks. The authors tried to depict intonation using the whole body movements. To show rising tones students stood on tiptoes, to show falling tones they bent on their knees. Tapping the desk, hand and head rising, rising from the chair – such practice is important to escape mental instruction, which is considered not very productive. While learning foreign intonation all possible tools are important, thus visual channel, tactile sensation, sound images, even relaxation techniques were used to fulfil the need of each person.

All possible variants of imitation were practiced: mirroring (repeating simultaneously with a speaker), miming, repeating the tunes, tracing (repeating with the speaker without mirroring gestures), imitating gestures and facial expressions and echoing (repeating after the speaker). Shadowing, as Y. Hamada indicates, is used during a study which is considered to be a paced, auditory tracking task which involved immediate vocalization of auditorily presented stimuli, i.e. word-for word repetition in the same language, parrot-style. Shadowing is theoretically explained as a phonological loop, visuo-spatial sketchpad, episodic buffer, and central executive. The phonological loop consists of phonological store, which retains phonological information and the articulatory rehearsal, which actively rehearses the phonological information [14].

Besides, as R.-A. Knight indicates it is very good not just to listen to a dialogue but to watch video to observe people' gestures and behavior [10]. Socio-cultural approach in Phonetics is a prerequisite of a time. Students analyze people' behavior. Students repeated the dialogue in pairs and evaluated each other. This work also involves discussion of problems and the ways how to deal with them.

It is not everything what we did to practice intonation. Discussion of intonation of the BBC dialogues together in class was the only beginning of work. Further, students were expected to work individually. A teacher was able to explain how to use language learning software, how to benefit from listening tasks, songs, audio books, where the learner can find rules and exercises for his individual problems on a CD-ROM, which exercises are appropriate for which difficulty, etc. All these help identify individual learning strategy in intonation acquisition. Students help each other analyzing learning strategies. What appeared to be successful for them, students share their experience with each other.

The final step is presentation of a BBC dialogue. It can be a simple reading or drama in role play. Usually the researchers changed the age or a social status of the speakers so that to see how intonation changes depending on the age or some other factors. Or students changed their attitude to the situation in the dialogues and the intonation also changes. Students evaluate each other noticing the successful things in producing intonation and ask to improve mistakes.

The students were asked to record themselves every week to compare with the previous reading and to state progress or not. It is very helpful as they see immediately their progress. They gave their recordings to the teacher and it is one more

stimulus to work hard. Students see whether to maintain the chosen strategy or revise the procedure or maybe change individual program.

Nowacka M. draws our attention that Jones advocates the greater use of phonetic-awareness raising activities with the focus on first language and second language interference, which he notes might be more beneficial than error correction. The ability of self-monitor development has also the positive influence [15]. To raise students' awareness in learning strategies we all together after some meetings created a list of evaluable techniques and strategies for learning foreign intonation. In discussion valuable experience was born. We made up a table with techniques; students marked what they did and what they didn't because it is suitable or not suitable for them.

The fourth stage is evaluation. One of the general approaches towards teaching of second language prosody is systematic evaluation and self-evaluation of students' ability. After a great deal of practice with different dialogues from the BBC students at the end of the semester returned to the control dialogue they began with as a diagnosis and read and recorded themselves. They compared their results with the first reading of a dialogue.

Besides, to expand learners' self-evaluation abilities they were asked to write about their difficulties they had experienced. In such a way we encouraged learners to increase their problem-solving capacities. Analyzing their writing, we saw that learners had experienced a variety of difficulties with learning intonation. Their solutions to existed problems sometimes were not realistic but some of them reflected their capacity in problem solving.

The final stage finished the learning process. It took place at the end of a semester. Students were asked to write a short evaluation of their progress.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

This paper illustrates what appeared to be successful during intonation teaching using the new model of leaning intonation. The authors tried to summarize innovative methods in teaching intonation of a foreign language and explored in the class with university students. They compared the results of two sample groups to the acquisition of foreign language pronunciation. The effectiveness of exercises with kinesthetic involvement, drama activities has been corroborated on the basis of informal observations and a longstanding experience as a phonetics teacher as well as self-reported data collected from the students by means of essays.

Several tests were included in the experiment stating achievements of students (from two sample groups) to the acquisition of foreign language intonation. The tasks in the tests included reading the text where we registered a number of pauses, a proper place of stress, sentence stress, syllable structure, reduction of unstressed syllables, and the intonation of communicative types of sentences. All in all, three points: rhythm, intonation and accent position were compared in two sample groups using the scale from 1 ("very deviant") to 5 ("not deviant") to cover gradual pronunciation deviances. The results are presented in the Table III.

TABLE III. PERCENTAGE OF GOOD PERFORMANCE IN PRODUCING ENGLISH INTONATION BY TWO SAMPLE GROUPS OF STUDENTS

| Students used the traditional model of learning English intonation<br>1 <> 5<br>Very deviant <> not very deviant |            |                 | Students used the new model of learning English intonation<br>1 <> 5<br>Very deviant <> not very deviant |            |                 |
|--|------------|-----------------|--|------------|-----------------|
| Rhythm   | Intonation | Accent position | Rhythm   | Intonation | Accent position |
| 5 – 0%   | 5 – 23%    | 5 – 28%         | 5 – 21%  | 5 – 58%    | 5 – 34%         |
| 4 – 36%  | 4 – 37%    | 4 – 32%         | 4 – 25%  | 4 – 24%    | 4 – 43%         |
| 3 – 42%  | 3 – 29%    | 3 – 22%         | 3 – 37%  | 3 – 18%    | 3 – 23%         |
| 2 – 12%  | 2 – 11%    | 2 – 12%         | 2 – 17%  | 2 – 0%     | 2 – 0%          |
| 1 – 10%  | 1 – 0 %    | 1 – 0 %         | 1 – 0%   | 1- 0%      | 1 – 0%          |

The results show the proposition of good performance in producing English intonation in three main categories. The percentage of good performance in producing native like rhythm, intonation in different communicative types of sentences and accent has been increased not so greatly but to a small extent. English rhythm presents major difficulty. However, it is seen that there is a slight positive difference in the number of good performance: from 36% of good performance by students used the traditional model, the results of students used the new model was increased by 24 %. The percentage of good performance in producing English like intonation in communicative types of sentences and accent position of students used the new model also has been slightly increased.

These numbers make the authors assume that teaching and learning process has a positive impact and participants improved their results due to new possibilities given them during the course. The authors suppose it is due to their new technology in learning English intonation. The improvement appeared not as striking as it was expected earlier but even a little increase shows improvement. What is more, class observations and written responses give evidence that in comparison with the traditional model of teaching intonation at NSTU, a new model requires less time and seems to be less stressful for students. Besides, students work individually. Earlier the intonation acquisition took a lot of time.

The teaching experience of the authors clearly illustrates a definite improvement in acquiring intonation by Linguistic majors using innovative methods. Relaxation techniques, kinesthetic movements involved in the process of teaching play their positive role in classes.

#### V. CONCLUSION

This paper demonstrates a new attempt in teaching English intonation for Linguistic majors. The need for changes is influenced by the necessity of a modern education. At present there is not enough time for studying and practicing intonation at University. However, a dire necessity to learn English intonation for communication makes us search for other technologies besides a traditional model of learning intonation used at NSTU. The way of improving the situation with the lack of hours for Phonetics is to provide a specially organized learning environment.

A new approach is based on the conscious awareness of the ways the intonation is realized in the conversations. The authors suggest the following ways how to reach this goal. First, work

out individual learning strategies which become a necessary prerequisite in learning environment. Second, the use of authentic materials which give the possibilities to get acquainted with variants of English depending on age, nationality and social circumstances of conversation. Third, intonation acquiring is seen as a multi staged process where each step is accompanied by an adequate feedback and response from classmates. Finally, appealing to students' senses and emotions, kinesthetic involvement is a necessary tool for learning.

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