

РОМАНСЬКІ, ГЕРМАНСЬКІ ТА ІНШІ МОВИ

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LEARNING TECHNIQUES TO IMPROVE ENGLISH: TEACHING INTONATION

Intonation is important. A lack of it will make your students seem rude, bored, uninterested or just boring! Intonation is a feature of pronunciation and common to all languages. Other features of pronunciation include stress, rhythm, connected speech and accent. As with these other features, intonation is about how we say something rather than what we say. At its simplest, intonation could be described as 'the music of speech'. A change or variation in this music (or pitch) can affect the meaning of what we say.

The best way to improve intonation is simply to become more aware of it. By listening carefully to a recorded conversation (YouTube is a good place to start), students will begin noticing how other speakers use intonation to express themselves. Another idea is to record their own voice. These days, even the simplest mobile phones are equipped with a voice recorder. It is always fascinating (though sometimes unbearable) to listen to one's own voice because it sounds so different to what we expect! It is considered useful to record a dialogue with a friend for example, (a student could use a script from a course book or scene from a film).

With a recording, they can always rewind, listen again and try a new version. Recordings are an excellent way to keep track of the students' progress. They clearly show how you have improved over time. Most English course books provide some intonation practice, but you are more likely to find authentic and interesting examples of spoken English on the internet. A good place to start is with some British Council podcasts. For more advanced students, BBC podcasts offer a great variety of items, and you are sure to find something that sparks your interest [1]. There are lots of ways to teach intonation, but try and make it enjoyable and interesting. It is suggested the following:

Humming dialogues – students write short dialogues and practice the intonation of them through non-verbal humming.

One line emotional practice – Since intonation is linked to emotion and circumstance, have students practice saying the same things with different emotions. Note how it changes their intonation.

Role-plays – extend the above practice by doing role-plays and drama. Take a script or have students write their own script, thinking about how the character is feeling and how they show this in their intonation.

Contrastive stress. Contrastive stress is important when correcting wrong information and highlighting key words. Get students to play correct me, where one student deliberately changes what they have heard.

Remember that intonation depends on context and personality. Everyone's is slightly different. That's why it's better to avoid deep intonation theory. Besides, we can take a look at some key techniques that can boost students' English learning – and two widely-used techniques which a recent study has proven may be worth re-thinking. And two techniques you might want to ditch: – Highlighting. The same study which found flash cards and distributed practice to be worthwhile found that highlighting or underlining was an almost ineffective technique for boosting learning. – Mnemonic learning or image association. This is where we remember something by associating an image or metaphor with the word to help us remember it – however, studies have also shown that, unless this works particularly well for students' brain, it can actually over complicate the process [2].

Among the other tips in improving English is considered to be the following ones: Practice tests. A recent academic study found that practice testing is also a great way to improve students' learning. Not to raise stress levels, but because practice tests ask an activity of the brain which is different from when we are simply absorbing information – it challenges the brain's ability to recall and dig up information previously stored and put it together creatively. Students can practice by completing units in their courseware, or set themselves a task of practicing the vocabulary they've learned each week by writing a small text without consulting any of their materials.

Flash cards. The psychological education study found that flash cards, as another mode of practice testing, were an effective learning method for most types of study. Flash cards – which a student can find as part of his online course – are there to 'jog' his memory and get him thinking, digging up that information that's been stored in his brain by his distributed practice.

Implicit learning. Implicit learning is very common, yet has often not been recognised, so a common term for it is yet to emerge. Implicit, or invisible learning, is concerned with the part of the brain which absorbs actions and

information unconsciously. This article in TIME magazine explains: «In a study published earlier this year, for example, researchers at the University of Illinois at Chicago reported that people learning a new language showed «native-like language processing» on brain scans when they received implicit training (immersion in the speech of a variety of different speakers), but not when they received explicit training (instruction focused on the grammar of the language). So learning by simply surrounding yourself with a language – that includes immersion as we mentioned, travel, or listening to English language radio, could really help.

Abundance of information. Studies have also shown that this kind of learning, where the unconscious mind and body absorb actions and languages quickly and deeply, happens effectively in situations where there is an abundance of information. For instance, concentrating on one word or grammar phrase may not much help you; but listening to music, radio and films in the English language, as well as reading material, or being surrounded by natives, will allow you to absorb sounds and information without realising it.

In conclusion, we can stress that Pronunciation stress rhythm and intonation are the main elements in the proper learning of a foreign language. These elements are necessary for the learners to be intelligible to others. Teaching of pronunciation is a serious and challenging task. The teacher has to take these aspects of language teaching very seriously. Intonation is very important in expressing meaning, and especially in showing our feelings (eg, surprise, anger, disbelief, gratitude). However, intonation patterns are quite complex, and it is better for students to acquire them naturally rather than try to learn them consciously.

References:

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