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TEACHING INTONATION TO B2 EFL LEARNERS THROUGH THE ANALYSIS OF EMOTIONAL TONE IN DIGITAL ENGLISH COMMUNICATION

Ziyoda Tulkinova

Uzbekistan state world languages university, English philology faculty

E-mail: shadylady0790@gmail.com

Madina Tuxtaxujayeva

Teacher



Abstract: Pronunciation plays an essential role in successful spoken communication because speakers use individual sounds, stress, rhythm, and intonation to express meaning, attitudes, and communicative intentions. For learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), understanding how intonation influences emotional tone is particularly important: the same sentence can communicate different meanings depending on the speaker’s voice and the surrounding context. Digital English communication, including short videos, voice messages, interviews, podcasts, and recorded discussions, provides useful material for exploring these features in context. This literature-based article examines how the analysis of emotional tone in digital English communication can support the development of intonation awareness and speaking skills among B2 university-level EFL learners. Drawing on Chapman (2007), Derwing and Munro (2005), Levis (2018), and Sonsaat-Hegelheimer and Levis (2025), it discusses the relationship between intonation, intelligibility, communicative meaning, and pronunciation instruction. It proposes a communicative, digitally supported teaching framework consisting of listening, guided analysis, controlled practice, and spoken production. The article also considers learner needs, instructional materials, feedback, accessibility, and responsible ICT integration. It does not report original experimental findings; rather, it synthesizes relevant scholarship and develops practical

methodological recommendations.

Keywords: English pronunciation; intonation; emotional tone; B2 learners; EFL teaching; digital communication; speaking skills; intelligibility.

INTRODUCTION

Successful communication in English requires more than the accurate use of vocabulary and grammatical structures. Speakers also communicate through pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation. These features influence how listeners interpret an utterance and understand the speaker’s attitude, emotions, and communicative purpose. For example, the sentence “That’s interesting” may express genuine enthusiasm, polite agreement, uncertainty, or even sarcasm depending on the speaker’s voice and the surrounding context.

Although pronunciation is an important part of communicative competence, it does not always receive sufficient attention in foreign language classrooms. Traditional pronunciation activities may concentrate mainly on individual sounds and word stress, while the communicative functions of intonation receive less systematic practice. Consequently, learners may pronounce individual words accurately but still experience difficulties expressing their intended attitudes or interpreting the emotional meaning of spoken messages.

This issue is particularly relevant for university students at the B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). At this stage, learners are generally expected to participate in discussions, express opinions, explain viewpoints, respond to other speakers, and communicate with a reasonable degree of fluency. Successful participation also requires them to use appropriate intonation and recognize how tone influences interpersonal meaning.

Digital English communication offers opportunities to address this need. Short videos, interviews, podcasts, recorded conversations, and voice messages expose learners to English as it is used in different communicative situations. Unlike written examples, audio and audiovisual materials allow students to observe how pitch movement, prominence, rhythm, facial expression, and context contribute to meaning. Chapman (2007) emphasizes the

communicative value of discourse intonation, while Levis (2018) explains how prominence and intonation patterns contribute to intelligibility.

Therefore, the present article addresses the following research question:

How can the analysis of emotional tone in digital English communication be used to develop intonation awareness and speaking skills among B2 university-level EFL learners?

The purpose of this article is to examine relevant pronunciation research and propose a practical teaching framework that connects digital listening materials with guided intonation analysis and communicative speaking activities.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Intonation refers to the movement of pitch in spoken language. It helps speakers organize information, indicate communicative intentions, express attitudes, and establish relationships with listeners. In English, falling, rising, and fall-rising patterns are among the commonly discussed intonation contours. A falling tone can frequently communicate completion, certainty, or a definite statement. A rising tone may indicate a question, uncertainty, or an invitation for a response. A fall-rising tone can express reservation, politeness, contrast, or an implied meaning.

These associations should not be treated as fixed rules that apply identically in every situation. Their interpretation depends on context, discourse purpose, and the relationship between speakers. Chapman (2007) discusses discourse intonation as a way of understanding how pitch movement influences the communicative value of spoken language. His work suggests that teaching intonation becomes more meaningful when learners examine it in communicative situations instead of memorizing isolated pronunciation rules. Students should therefore identify not only the tone used but also why it may be appropriate in a particular interaction.

A central issue in pronunciation teaching is the difference between sounding like a native speaker and being understood by other speakers. Derwing and Munro (2005) argue for a research-based approach to second-language pronunciation instruction and emphasize the importance of setting realistic learning priorities. Their work challenges the assumption

that learners must eliminate every feature of their foreign accent to communicate successfully. Instead, instruction should help learners develop speech that is understandable and appropriate for communication.

Levis (2018) further explains the relationship between intonation and intelligibility. He identifies prominence, tune, and pitch range as important components of English intonation. Prominence concerns the relative emphasis placed on particular words or syllables, while tune refers to pitch movement across an utterance. These features influence how listeners understand the organization and intention of spoken messages. For example, changing the emphasized word in “I didn’t say she was wrong” can change the information a speaker wishes to highlight, even though the words remain unchanged.

Emotional tone refers to attitudes or feelings communicated through a speaker’s voice. These may include enthusiasm, disappointment, irritation, confidence, hesitation, surprise, or politeness. Its interpretation is not always straightforward. A rising pattern may communicate a genuine question, uncertainty, or a request for confirmation; a falling tone may indicate confidence in one situation but sound abrupt in another. Learners should therefore consider vocabulary, grammatical structure, speaking speed, emphasis, facial expressions where available, the relationship between speakers, and the overall communicative situation.

Sonsaat-Hegelheimer and Levis (2025) investigated whether explicit teaching of three final intonation contours—falling, rising, and falling-rising—could improve perception and production among Turkish EFL learners. Their exploratory study involved 31 learners in a three-week pronunciation programme. The results indicated improvement in perception of all three contours, while production improved for rising and falling-rising contours. The study supports the inclusion of explicit instruction, listening practice, and opportunities for spoken production. Nevertheless, it involved a particular group of learners, so its results should not be treated as a guarantee that every B2 classroom will demonstrate identical outcomes.

The proposed framework is designed for university-level EFL learners at the B2

proficiency level, generally students with an established foundation in English grammar, vocabulary, listening, and speaking. At this level, students are expected to communicate with a degree of fluency, participate in discussions, express opinions, explain arguments, and understand the main ideas of complex spoken texts.

These difficulties should be identified through classroom observation and initial listening activities rather than assumed to be identical for all students. The main instructional content is English intonation in context, with particular attention to pitch movement, sentence stress and prominence, emotional tone, contextual interpretation, and spoken production. A communicative approach supported by explicit pronunciation instruction is proposed. Students encounter short digital recordings, identify relevant pronunciation features, compare possible interpretations, practise selected patterns, and produce their own spoken responses. The emphasis is on understandable speech, appropriate expression, and effective communication—not imitation of a particular native accent.

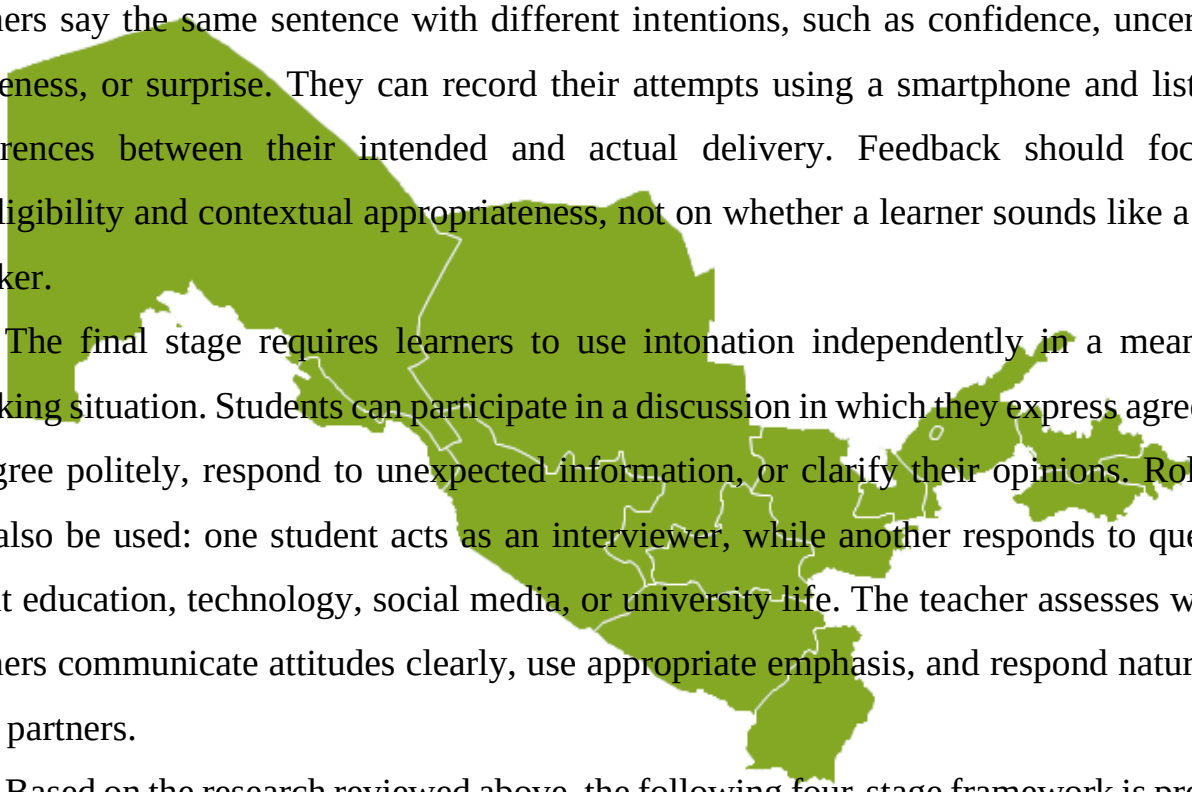
Digital materials provide examples of intonation in realistic communicative contexts. Suitable resources include short interviews, educational videos, podcast extracts, public speeches, and recorded conversations. Teachers should select materials according to the lesson objective, language difficulty, audio quality, and relevance to learners’ interests. For example, an interview may contain expressions of surprise, agreement, hesitation, or disagreement. Students can listen for the words that receive emphasis and notice how the pitch changes.

Technology should not be used simply because it is available. Each recording needs a clear instructional purpose and should contribute to the intended learning outcome. Short extracts are often more manageable than long recordings because they allow repeated listening and focused attention.

Before producing particular intonation patterns, learners need opportunities to recognize them. A useful activity is to present the same sentence in two or three different ways. Students identify how the speaker’s attitude changes and explain which vocal features influence their interpretation. For example, “Really?” may communicate surprise, genuine

interest, doubt, or disbelief depending on pitch movement and context. Students should support their interpretations with evidence from the recording rather than relying entirely on personal assumptions.

After listening and analysis, students practise the target features. The teacher models selected sentences and draws attention to the movement of the voice. Students repeat the expressions individually and then in pairs. Contrastive practice is particularly useful: learners say the same sentence with different intentions, such as confidence, uncertainty, politeness, or surprise. They can record their attempts using a smartphone and listen for differences between their intended and actual delivery. Feedback should focus on intelligibility and contextual appropriateness, not on whether a learner sounds like a native speaker.



The final stage requires learners to use intonation independently in a meaningful speaking situation. Students can participate in a discussion in which they express agreement, disagree politely, respond to unexpected information, or clarify their opinions. Role-play can also be used: one student acts as an interviewer, while another responds to questions about education, technology, social media, or university life. The teacher assesses whether learners communicate attitudes clearly, use appropriate emphasis, and respond naturally to their partners.

Based on the research reviewed above, the following four-stage framework is proposed for B2 university-level EFL learners. It is a pedagogical proposal derived from existing scholarship and has not been experimentally tested in this article.

Listening and recognition. Students listen to a short digital recording containing examples of different emotional tones. They identify the communicative situation and the speaker’s possible attitude. The teacher may ask: What is the speaker trying to communicate? Does the voice sound confident, uncertain, surprised, or disappointed? Which words receive the strongest emphasis?

Guided intonation analysis. Students listen again and identify pitch movement, sentence stress, and prominent words. They compare two versions of the same expression

and discuss how intonation changes its possible interpretation. The teacher explains the relevant pronunciation features and provides examples.

Controlled and supported practice. Students practise selected sentences using different intonation patterns. They work individually and in pairs, repeat teacher models, and record short examples. Peer feedback focuses on clarity, appropriate emphasis, and the intended emotional meaning.

Communicative speaking and reflection. Students participate in a short role-play, discussion, or interview. They express opinions, respond to different viewpoints, and use appropriate intonation. At the end, they reflect on their performance and identify one aspect of pronunciation they would like to improve.

Assessment can consider five criteria: recognition of intonation patterns, appropriate sentence stress, clarity of emotional expression, communicative effectiveness, and ability to reflect on pronunciation choices. The teacher can use a simple rubric with three performance descriptions: developing, satisfactory, and effective. This assessment approach combines pronunciation awareness with the learner’s ability to use intonation meaningfully.

Digital technologies can support pronunciation instruction by making spoken language easier to access, replay, record, and analyse. Teachers may use audio recordings, video platforms, digital quizzes, collaborative boards, or smartphone recording applications. Students can listen more than once, compare different versions of an utterance, and review their own spoken production. ICT should remain connected to learning outcomes: a digital activity is useful when it improves listening, pronunciation practice, interaction, feedback, or accessibility.

There are also practical and ethical considerations. Not all students have equal access to devices, stable internet connections, or particular applications. Teachers should therefore provide alternatives such as downloadable audio, printed transcripts, teacher-led listening, and offline pair activities. Students should not be required to publish their voices or personal recordings on public platforms. Recording and sharing should follow institutional requirements and informed permission. For video materials, teachers should consider

copyright, attribution, captions, readable visual presentation, and audio quality.

This article is a literature-based methodological discussion rather than an experimental study or systematic review. The proposed teaching framework has not been tested with a particular group of B2 university students; therefore, no claims are made that it produces a specific improvement in pronunciation, listening comprehension, or speaking proficiency. The research discussed also differs in scope and methodology: Chapman (2007) examines discourse intonation teaching, Derwing and Munro (2005) discuss broader principles of pronunciation instruction, Levis (2018) focuses on intonation and intelligibility, and Sonsaat-Hegelheimer and Levis (2025) investigate explicit instruction in selected contours.

Although these studies provide a foundation for the proposed approach, their findings should not be generalized without considering learner background, proficiency, teaching context, and instructional conditions. Future research could examine the framework with B2 university students, compare audio-only and audiovisual materials, and investigate how repeated recording and feedback influence perception and production. Further studies could also explore whether learners become more successful at expressing emotional attitudes and interpreting implied meanings in spontaneous conversations.

CONCLUSION

Intonation is an important component of spoken English because it contributes to the communication of meaning, attitudes, and interpersonal intentions. Learners may know the vocabulary and grammar needed to express an idea but still communicate a different attitude if their pronunciation does not support their intended meaning. The literature reviewed in this article highlights the importance of teaching pronunciation through communicative contexts, prioritizing intelligibility, and providing explicit opportunities to recognize and practise intonation patterns. The proposed framework focuses on B2 university-level EFL learners and connects digital listening materials with guided analysis, controlled pronunciation practice, and communicative speaking activities. It also emphasizes meaningful feedback, learner needs, accessibility, and responsible use of digital resources. Ultimately, pronunciation teaching should not aim to make every learner sound identical to

a native speaker. It should help learners communicate clearly, express their intended attitudes, and participate confidently in different English-speaking situations. Carefully selected digital materials and structured classroom practice can make the analysis of emotional tone a practical way of connecting pronunciation with meaningful communication.

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