

Using Tongue Twister to Improve Students' Pronunciation

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Abstract

Speaking skill comprises five components; pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency and accuracy, which are very essential in delivering messages or information clearly. As one of the five components of speaking, pronunciation is an essential component in oral communication and a basic ability of speaking English. Since English is a foreign language, correct pronunciation becomes a crucial matter to avoid misunderstanding between a speaker and a listener. Therefore, teaching pronunciation to EFL students is very essential, and it is not an easy task for English teachers. The main reason is that English pronunciation is difficult for most foreign language learners since what is written is different from what is spoken. Regarding the difficulty of the students, teachers should be creative to select a technique of teaching pronunciation. One technique that is suitable for teaching pronunciation is tongue twister. This technique was applied to the eleventh grade of SMA Muhammadiyah 3 Jember in the 2015/2016 academic year. The results of the classroom action research which was done in two cycles showed 77.14% students got score ≥ 75 and 77.13% of the students were active in teaching learning process. The results had met the criteria of success of the research.

Keywords: pronunciation, tongue twister

Pronunciation is the way we pronounce a word, especially in a way that is accepted or generally understood. The way we speak also conveys something about ourselves to the people around us. Learners with good English pronunciation are more likely to be understood even if they make errors in other areas.

It is true that pronunciation is the most important skill of spoken English. If speakers have very bad pronunciation, their speech will not be understandable to listeners (Gilakjani, 2011). Gilakjani, (2012) also states that pronunciation is an integral part of foreign language learning since it directly affects learners' communicative competence as well as performance. Limited pronunciation skills can decrease learners' self-confidence, restrict social interactions, and negatively

affect estimations of a speaker's credibility and abilities. Moreover, Hayati (2008) states pronunciation no doubt is one of the most significant and inevitable parts of teaching English in particular and any other languages in general. Whereas Prommak (2010) states pronunciation is an integrated part of language learning. It consists of segmental (e.g., consonant and vowels) and suprasegmental (e.g., stress, intonation, rhythm, rate, and volume) elements. Clearly, mastering these elements supports the communicative process. In other words, learners desire to gain communicative competence are to learn and understand pronunciation.

Pronunciation is one of the English components that considered as the devise to develop the students' oral communication

ability. However, related to the condition and situation right now, there are some students who still unable to pronounce the English words correctly. This is because English has a distinct set of sounds but Indonesian does not. Therefore, learners should pay a very close attention to pronunciation as early as possible and it should be taught in all English language classes through a variety of activities.

In learning foreign language especially English, it must be understood that English sound systems are different from Indonesian. There are some sounds of English language which are not found in Indonesian language, such as /ʃ/ sound in 'cash', and /θ/ sound in 'theory' or /ð/ sound in 'the'. In English, many words have the same pronunciation but are written differently and have different meanings. For example "to, two, too" which all have transcription /tu/. Sometimes, words which are written similarly, but they have different pronunciation like thought and though. Students are indicated with the International Phonetic Alphabet and followed by example and exercises.

In learning English, the ability to express words, phrase, and sentences as well as, the right pronunciation as the native speaker of English pronunciation is the main point. It is very important because in English, wrong pronunciation influences the meaning of the word. As a consequence, the information will not be accepted clearly.

The results of preliminary study which was done by a class observation and an interview to the English teacher of SMA Muhammadiyah 3 Jember, the eleventh grade students had low speaking/ pronunciation achievement. The students mean score of speaking achievement was 60, while the standard speaking score of the curriculum was 75. The students had difficulty in pronouncing the English words well. The difficulty in pronouncing the English words causing the students to be passive in the speaking class. In this study, the researcher wanted to solve these problems until the students had a good

pronunciation, achieved the standard score, and were active in speaking class. Therefore, the teachers had to be creative to teach and help students to increase their ability in pronouncing English words. Teachers had to use varieties of methods in teaching pronunciation; one of the alternatives in teaching pronunciation is using Tongue Twister. Thus, the researcher proposed a way to solve the students' problems using Tongue Twister.

Tongue twister is a phrase or sentence that is difficult to say because it contains many similar sounds. According to Beare (2014) Tongue twisters are short, memorable lines that are difficult to pronounce, especially rapidly, because of alliteration or a slight variation of consonant sounds. Tongue twisters are especially useful in pronunciation when focusing on a specific, related phonemes, or sounds. Gonzales (2009:3) states tongue twister are used to repeat it as many times as possible, as quickly as possible, without mispronunciation.

Tongue twisters are useful in learning pronunciation, and it is very helpful to improve students' pronunciation, not only practicing and pronouncing words, but also developing memory skill as well. For someone who speaks to a listener, working with tongue twisters to build on his/her phonemic awareness helps to develop better articulation and pronunciation of words. In line with these, Gonzalez, (2009:3) states that tongue twister often used to practice pronunciation. Further, Gonzales, (2009:4) states that tongue twister is a fun activity in any language classroom. Practicing tongue twisters allows people who are learning English to strengthen their speech skills. The faster a person can say the tongue twister without slipping up, the stronger their language skills become.

Goldrick and Blumstein (2008:7) assumed that the tongue twister paradigm induces phonological planning errors, in addition NCDC (2008:7) Tongue twisters are characterized by repetition of certain sounds and words or phrases with emphasis

on pronunciation, stress, intonation, speed and speech. They are also intended to help the learners identify the difference between similar and confusing letter sounds. Ruth and Steve (1991: 326) states the tongue twister activities start from ask children to repeat a variety of tongue twisters, encourage children to increase their speed or to make up some original verses. Examples - “Sally sells seashells by the seashore” or “Bubby baby buggy bumpers” or “Busy Barry Bear barely bakes berries” or “Peter Pepper picked a peck of pickled peppers”.

Method

A cycling model consisting of four stages i. e., planning, acting, observing, and reflecting of A Classroom Action Research was used in the research. The model was adopted from Kemmis and Mc Taggart in Arikunto (2013: 137). Planning was made based on the findings in the preliminary study which was done by interviewing the English teacher of the school and observing the teaching learning process of speaking class. Acting was done by conducting teaching learning processes of speaking class by using lesson plans, materials, and technique that had been made in the planning stage. The Procedures of using tongue twister were; 1) Give a variety of tongue twisters, 2) Ask the students to read the tongue twister, 3) Ask the students to repeat a variety of tongue twister, 4) Ask the students to increase their speed or to make up some original verses, 5) Ask the students to practice tongue twister in pair, 6) Ask the students to say the tongue twister. Observing was done by a collaborator that observed the running of the teaching learning processes. And reflecting was done at the end of the stages to find the results of the action that had been done.

There were two criteria of success proposed in the research. First, if the students who got score of ≥ 75 reached 75%. Second, if 75% or more of the total student were active during the teaching learning process. To achieve the criteria of success, the research used two main instruments. Pronunciation

test was used to get the data of pronunciation scores while observation checklist was used to get the data of students’ active participation.

Results and Discussion

The result of the pronunciation test in Cycle 1 showed the percentage of students who got scores ≥ 75 was 65.71%. The percentage suggests that there were 23 of 35 students got ≥ 75 as their pronunciation scores. Meanwhile, the percentage of the students’ active participation in the teaching learning process was 51.42%. It was got from the students’ active participation in the first meeting which reached 42.85% and 60% in the second meeting, as seen in Table 1.

The results indicate that there were some improvements in the percentage of the students’ pronunciation scores and the students’ active participation, but the percentage of both criteria of success had not been achieved yet. In other words, the action of using tongue twisters in Cycle 1 was not successful in improving students’ pronunciation and active participation.

Based on the reflecting, the failure was caused by some reasons. First, a lot of students were passive during the teaching learning process. They had difficulty in pronouncing the tongue twisters selected because they were new for them. They needed a lot of practices, so that they would be used to reading and saying the tongue twisters given. Second, they had fun and enjoyed the activities, but a lot of them liked to watch their friends to read and say the tongue twisters without any attempt to force themselves to try.

In Cycle 2, the results revealed 77.14% of the students got scores of ≥ 75 for their pronunciation test. It indicates that there

Table 1. The percentage of student’s active participation in Cycle 1

First Meeting	42.85%
Second Meeting	60%
Mean	51.42%

Table 2. The Percentage of student's active participation in Cycle 2

First Meeting	71.42%
Second Meeting	82.85%
Mean	77.13%

were 27 of 35 students met the target. On the other hand, the percentage of students' active participation was 77.13% of the students were active during the teaching learning process. The students' active participation in the first meeting reached 71.42% and 82.85% in the second meeting, which is shown in Table 2.

Based on the results, the action in Cycle 2 was successful because the criteria of success were reached. In other words, Tongue Twisters were able to improve students' pronunciation and active participation.

The improvements of the percentage of students' scores and active participation are presented in Table 3 and Table 4.

The table showed the improvements on the percentages of the students' pronunciation scores from 28.57% in the preliminary study to 65.71% in Cycle 1 and to 77.14% in Cycle 2. There were sharp improvements of 37.14 points in the first step and 11.43 points in the latter action.

The chart indicated the improvement of 25.71 points on the students' active participation from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2. It suggests that tongue twisters could improve students' active participation in the teaching and learning process.

Table 3. Recapitulation of student's pronunciation scores

	Preliminary Study	Cycle 1	Cycle 2
Mean Score	51.37	68.92	72.14
Percentage	28.57%	65.71%	77.14%

Table 4. Recapitulation of student's active participation

	Cycle 1	Cycle 2
Percentage	51.42%	77.13%

Tongue Twisters are effective for improving students' active participation because Tongue Twisters require students to practice a lot. As stated by Gonzales (2009:3) tongue twisters are used to repeat it as many times as possible, as quickly as possible, without mispronunciation. The idea indicates that to be good and fluent in reading and saying the tongue twisters, students need to say the tongue twisters again and again. It is not an instant step that ends in one trial. By trying again and again, it means that students become more active during the teaching learning process. It is also supported by Ruth and Steve (1991: 326) who state the tongue twister activities start from ask children to repeat a variety of tongue twisters, encourage children to increase their speed or to make up some original verses.

Like other games, Tongue Twisters are also fun and enjoyable activities. The students enjoy the Tongue Twisters without any fear of making mistakes because slipped-tongue is almost impossible to avoid and students feel free to practice. When they make a slipped-tongue, the mistake is considered as a funny thing, and they enjoy it. Then, they try harder to avoid making a slipped-tongue Gonzales (2009:4) states that tongue twister is a fun activity in any language classroom. By having fun, they participate actively in the teaching and learning process.

In improving students' pronunciation, Tongue twisters are intended to help students to memorize the words and improve their speaking skill. As Gonzales, (2009:4) says that practicing tongue twisters allows people who are learning English to strengthen their speech skills. Further, NCDC (2008:7) Tongue twisters are characterized by repetition of certain sounds and words or phrases with emphasis on pronunciation, stress, intonation, speed and speech. In other words, the focus of Tongue Twisters is pronunciation and other

speaking aspects.

Conclusions

The findings of this research suggest that Tongue Twisters helped students in improving their pronunciation by repeatedly practicing to pronounce the words or phrases. Repetition also indicated an attempt to memorize the words or phrase, and it was intended to improve the fluency of the pronunciation. The percentage of students reaching the target score improved from 65.71% in Cycle 1 to 77.14% in Cycle 2. Tongue twisters were also able to improve students' active participation. The activities of Tongue Twisters induced the students to practice again and again. It was indicated by the percentage of students' active participation that improved from 51.42% in Cycle 1 to 77.13% in Cycle 2. To sum up, Tongue Twisters could improve the students' pronunciation scores and students' active participation in the teaching learning process.

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