
TONGUE TWISTERS IN PRONUNCIATION CLASS

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Abstract: To be able to speak English fluently or native-like for foreign learners of this language becomes their expectation to achieve. One of important elements that support successful communication using English is pronunciation. Without sufficient pronunciation skills, the learners may have limit ability to communicate. The Indonesian language has different system from that of English including the sound system. Therefore, a teaching aid is needed to foster learners to improve their pronunciation skills. Tongue Twisters which consist of a combination of sounds that are hard for the mouth and tongue to manage especially for non-native learners are meaningful tools to improve pronunciation. In this case, tongue twisters are implemented in pronunciation class of the second semester of English Department Faculty of Teacher Training and Education Slamet Riyadi University. The students reported that they had never used tongue twisters before. They found the drills useful and interesting. The class became fun and active. However, some still found difficulty while using tongue twisters especially the speed and time consuming. Tongue Twisters are useful drills to improve motivation, class condition, and pronunciation skill of the second semester students of English Department Faculty of Teacher Training and Education Slamet Riyadi University.

Keywords: Tongue Twisters, Pronunciation, EFL Class

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication has been an essential part of human beings as they need to share their ideas, feelings, and information. Without communicating to others, one may live in isolation. Therefore, a means of communication is needed. That is language. Nowadays, communication across boarders is unavoidable. And the global language widely used is English. More and more people speak and learn English as it is stated by Naisbith (1990: 139) that English is a mother tongue for 400 million people in 12 countries,. 400 million people speak in English as their second language. The other hundred thousand people have knowledge of English. Naisbith gives addition that 1 billion people all over the world speak in English.

In Indonesia, English is learnt as a foreign language. It is used both in written and oral communication. To be able to speak fluently becomes one of the goals of English learners as fluency will effect on the success of communication. In speaking English, one of important elements is pronunciation. Pronunciation is defined as production of sounds that we use to make meaning (Yates, 2002). It is believed that as a sub-skill in speaking, good pronunciation is essential and contributes to the listener's understanding. (Fraser, 2000; Gilakjani, 2011). A good example of this is when someone is asking 'How old are you?' and the interlocutor answers

/sik/ instead of /siks/. This bad pronunciation may result in failure to pass one's intended meaning. Moreover, people are often impressed firstly by one's pronunciation when he is speaking.

However, each language has its own structure and system or *sui generis*. Consequently, the structure and system of English are different from those of the Indonesian language. The sound system of English is also different from that of the Indonesian Language. The sounds [dʒ] and [ʃ], for example, do not exist in the sound system of the Indonesian Language. Another example is vowel problem like in pronouncing 'ship' /ʃɪp/ and 'sheep' /ʃi:p/ which many learners can not differentiate. Moreover, English is a tonal language which has supra-segmental unit of the English sound system, the stress and intonation. This condition may result in learners' difficulty. Many English learners still underestimate the importance of pronunciation. They pay a very little attention to practising appropriate pronunciation. They focus more on grammar or vocabulary. Yet, while speaking proper pronunciation plays more important role to avoid misunderstanding rather than good grammar and sufficient vocabulary. A good illustration of this is when one of the students of english department teacher training and education Slamet Riyadi University was presenting her paper, she failed to response to the other student's question. She could not recognize the word 'buffallo' in the question as she usually

pronounced the word [bʊfʌlo] instead of [bʌf əlou]. Therefore, teaching pronunciation in EFL class is needed.

When being asked, most students of the second semester of English Department of Teacher Training and Education Slamet Riyadi University stated that they wanted to speak English fluently and native like. It is hard to achieve such expectation. In pronunciation teaching, the goal is neither to help learners to attain native-like accents nor to promote comfortable intelligibility to native speakers, but to ensure mutual intelligibility among non-native speakers of English (Jenkins, 2000; McKay, 2002 as quoted by Moedjito, 2008).

Moreover, the value of teaching pronunciation becomes a debatable issue. However, Pardede (2010) states that mastering a foreign language pronunciation is not something impossible as far as the students and the teacher participate together in the total learning process. Thus, a means to improve pronunciation is essential. One of motivating ways to teach pronunciation is by using tongue twisters. Karker (2000: 2) defines tongue twister as a text that features 1 or a combination of sounds that are extremely difficult for the mouth and, of course, tongue to control. Despite the difficulty, especially for foreign learners, tongue twisters are helpful to learn many minimal pairs. Practising '*She sells sea shells on the sea shore*', for example, can help students distinguish phonemes /ʃ/ and /s/. Some examples of tongue twisters can also be found in other languages. Javanese people are familiar with a tongue twister '*lor ril dul ril*'. When pronounced several times, one can produce distinct and accurate [l] and [r] sounds. Another tongue twister taken from the Indonesian language is '*pat gulipat pat gulipat*'. This drills us to produce sound [t]. Rahardi (2006:44) states that tongue twister is an alternative way of teaching pronunciation optimally to avoid conventional and boring way. This paper focuses on the use of tongue twisters in Pronunciation class of the second semester of English Department of Teacher Training and Education Slamet Riyadi University specifically on the implementation, advantage, and disadvantage.

2. THE IMPLEMENTATION

Before presenting in more detail about the implementation of tongue twisters in pronunciation class, it is necessary to describe the background of the second semester students of English Department of teacher training and education Slamet Riyadi University. There were 24 students attended pronunciation class. As new students, they were still shy and reluctant to actively participate during the lesson. Besides that, most of them did not have good self confidence and had

low motivation. There were only a few students who were willing to response to the lecturer's questions and instruction. Prior to the implementation of tongue twisters, the students were asked some questions about their past experience of pronunciation practice and their use of tongue twisters in learning English. Concerning about pronunciation practice, all of them stated that they rarely practised pronunciation. Their English teachers in high school mainly focused on grammar and vocabulary. Even when they were reading, they seldom practised reading aloud. Translating the English texts into the Indonesian ones was their routine. In relation to the use of tongue twisters, they reported that they never used them in their English class in high school. They did not have any ideas of tongue twisters. On the first meeting of pronunciation class, the students were asked to pronounce some minimal pairs like '*ship and sheep*', '*bed and bad*', and '*three and tree*'. The result was they produced the same sounds. They pronounced them /sIp/-sIp/, /bed/-bed/, and /tri/-tri/. They could not distinguish the different consonant and vowel sounds. Considering such condition, tongue twisters were chosen to improve their motivation, pronunciation, and self confidence. During the lecture tongue twisters were implemented in several ways: whispering game, video modelling, and warming up activity.

2.1 Whispering Game

Human beings are *homo-ludens*. They like playing games in every life. In this case, tongue twisters were used in whispering game. This activity was conducted in the first meeting of pronunciation class. This was aimed to introduce tongue twisters in more interesting and challenging way to the students who never knew them before. Here, the students were asked to make groups consisting of six persons. Then, each person in the team took turn to whisper a tongue twister to the other member of the team. Two groups competed to finish whispering tongue twister provided by the lecturer. The team who said the tongue twister quickest and most accurate won the game. One of the tongue twisters whispered was '*She sells sea shells on the sea shore*'. Unfortunately the result was far from the expectation. No team could pronounce it accurately. One of the result of the tongue twister pronounced by one of the team was '*sea sell sea sell on the floor*'. The students could not distinguish between [s] and [ʃ] sounds. In the end of the game the lecturer asked the teams to write their tongue twisters on the board. Then, corrected their mistakes and drilled them to pronounce the tongue twister three to five times.

By playing whispering game, students practice not only their pronunciation but also their listening skill. Nootboom as quoted by Pardede (2010) states that speech production is affected by speech perception; Listening is an important factor in communication discourse. Students learn pronunciation in more exciting and relax atmosphere. A good cooperation among the members of each group is necessary to win the game. Furthermore, competition can improve their motivation since each member is responsible to pronounce and to whisper the tongue twister quickly and accurately. All students have the same opportunity to actively participate in the game. However, this game needs longer time since each group spends different minutes to finish the game. Those who have not got the turn to play may feel bored to wait. Yet, the 24 students attending pronunciation class stated that they enjoyed whispering tongue twister.

2.2 Video Modelling

On the second meeting, video modeling was implemented in the pronunciation class. It is necessary to use tongue twister videos available in youtube since based on some studies it is found that some teachers teaching English to adult learners do not have training in teaching pronunciation (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Levis, 2005 as quoted by Schaetzel, 2009). These videos provide exposures of native speaker's pronunciation needed by the students. The students got the opportunity to listen to native speakers and to see how they move their mouth and tongue when using tongue twisters From the videos, the students learnt not only the accurate segmental aspects but also the supra-segmental ones. Besides that, the students learnt how to use technology especially youtube videos as valuable media for language learning.

2.3 Warming-up Tongue Twisters

Warming-up tongue twisters are tongue twisters prepared by the students that are used in the beginning of the lesson. After joining whispering game and video modeling, the second semester students were assigned to search a tongue twister available in the internet and to select a tongue twister which was appropriate with the course plan.

Here, the students were actively involved in the teaching learning process. Firstly, they selected a tongue twister which had to be consulted to the lecturer. Then, they learnt how to pronounce it individually by consulting the dictionary or if they got problems they could consult to the lecturer. In pronunciation class, starting from the third week until the end of the course, the students took turn to lead the other students pronouncing the selected

tongue twister. Here, tongue twisters were used as a warming-up activities. It worked well to drill the students' muscle, mouth, and tongue. As it is described above, in the beginning of pronunciation class, many students were shy and reluctant to practise pronouncing words. They paid only a very little attention to pronunciation. By peer group learning, the students were more motivated to follow the course. As a result, class atmosphere improved. The students practised pronunciation in more exciting way. This activity is chosen as nowadays there is a shift in teaching learning paradigm from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning.

3.THE ADVANTAGE AND DIS-ADVANTAGE

Using tongue twisters in pronunciation class gives both advantages and disadvantages to the students of English Department of Teacher Training and Education Slamet Riyadi University. Firstly, tongue twisters improve their motivation as a result of various activities conducted during the course like whispering game, watching videos, and peer teaching. They become more self confident as they are actively involved in the learning process. Their awareness of using accurate pronunciation also improves. It was indicated when one of the students, spontaneously, told us that so far he made mistake when pronouncing the word 'sweater'. He used to pronounce /swi:te(r)/ 'sweeter' instead of pronouncing the correct one /swetə/.

Secondly, the class condition also improves. The students learnt in more exciting and relax atmosphere. They were willing to actively response to the lecturer's questions and instruction. They also enjoyed the pleasant sounds the tongue twisters made. It made the class more alive. Whispering game was one of valuable techniques to improve class condition.

Finally, their pronunciation improves. Since they got models from native speakers by watching youtube videos specifically concerning tongue twisters and routine drills using tongue twister before starting the class, they could minimize mistakes. The improvement was observed during course and the result of the test. Moreover, their muscles became relax when pronouncing words.

On the other hand, there are some disadvantages of using tongue twister in pronunciation class. The 24 students were questioned in the end of the course about the use of tongue twisters. They reported that they still found it difficult to pronounce tongue twisters several times fast. It was still hard for them to move their mouth and tongue appropriately since they did not get enough exposure on pronunciation in their

previous studies. The students got more drills on grammar and vocabulary building. Even when they were in reading class, they did not practise pronunciation nor reading aloud. What they did were translating texts and answering questions written in their worksheet.

Besides that, using tongue twisters need more time and energy both of the students and the lecturer. Each students should get the same opportunity to practise the tongue twisters. Since they have to pronounce them several times normally three times fast, more time is needed. The students should also be patient to wait their friends practising tongue twisters. The lecturer also needs more time and energy while assisting the students practising tongue twisters. Each students may have different pronunciation problems. Therefore, the lecturer needs more effort to observe the problems and find the best ways out.

According to some experts, ideally when teaching pronunciation both segmentals and suprasegmentals need to be focused. And pronunciation class should be meaningful to foster students' communicative skill. Unfortunately due to the limited time and the students' condition the pronunciation class here still focused more on segmentals and improving students' motivation and awareness. Suprasegmentals were also learnt although they were still limited

4. CONCLUSION.

Although the value of teaching pronunciation still becomes a debatable issue among some experts, in this case teaching pronunciation specifically using tongue twisters still works well and is needed by the second semester students of English Department Slamet Riyadi University. Tongue twisters are implemented in various activities such as whispering game, video modeling, and warming-up. The advantages of using tongue twisters are improvement of students' motivation, class condition, and pronunciation. However, there are also disadvantages of using tongue twisters due to the speed constraint and time consuming.

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