

BOOSTING STUDENTS' PRONUNCIATION THROUGH SONG DICTATION

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ABSTRACT

Most of EFL students argue that pronunciation is one of English components that is quite difficult to be learned. It is proven by most students of English that the writer taught at College of Teacher Training and education (STKIP) PGRI West Sumatera. They get some difficulties in pronouncing particular words like the sounds of vowels, consonants, and diphthongs. It happened because most of sounds in English are not found in Indonesian contexts. To overcome this problem, the writer promotes an alternative way so that the students' pronunciation can be better and improved. The way that the writer means is using song dictation.

Key Words: Pronunciation, Song Dictation

ABSTRAK

Pada umumnya pelajar Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing berpendapat bahwa pronunciation (pengucapan) merupakan salah satu komponen bahasa Inggris yang susah untuk dipelajari. Hal ini terbukti pada mahasiswa jurusan Bahasa Inggris yang penulis ajar di STKIP PGRI Sumatera Barat. Mereka merasa kesulitan dalam mengucapkan kata kata tertentu seperti mengucapkan bunyi vowels, consonants, dan diphthongs. Hal ini disebabkan karena kebanyakan bunyi dalam pengucapan bahasa Inggris tidak ditemukan di dalam bahasa Indonesia. Untuk mengatasi masalah tersebut, penulis mengemukakan sebuah teknik pengajaran sebagai salah satu cara alternatif untuk meningkatkan pengucapan mahasiswa agar lebih baik, yaitu dengan menggunakan teknik song dictation.

Kata Kunci: Pronunciation, Song Dictation

Introduction

As English becomes increasingly important in various fields such as business, finance, industry and education, most students hope that they can speak English fluently. However, some students can speak English but a bit worst with their pronunciation. This can be caused by several reasons. First, some teachers make a little attempt to teach pronunciation in any overt way and give attention to it in passing (Harmer, 2001). It is possible that they feel they have too much to do already and pronunciation teaching will only make things worse. Second, the teachers

sometimes lack confidence in their ability to teach pronunciation. Third, both teachers and students feel comfortable teaching and studying reading, writing, listening and general oral skills. As a result, they often lack the basic knowledge of articulatory phonetics to offer to our students anything more than unhelpful advise such as "it sounds like this; uuuh" (Dalton, 2006). Fourth, the students may have the actual sounds right, but have not learnt the stress patterns of the word or group of words or they are using an intonation from their mother tongue which is inappropriate to target language. The

result is a foreign-sounding accent and possibly misunderstanding.

Although, English pronunciation involves too many complexities for the students to strive for a complete elimination of accent but improving pronunciation will boost self esteem, facilitate communication and possibly lead to a better job or at least more respect in the workplace (Rolf, 2007). Harmer (2001) also states that being aware of pronunciation will be immense benefit not only to their production, but also to their own understanding of spoken English. Moreover, pronunciation teaching not only makes students aware of different sounds and sound features but can also improve their speaking immeasurably. Concentrating on sounds, showing where they are made in the mouth, making students aware of where words should be stressed – all of these things give them extra information about spoken English and help them achieve the goal of improved comprehension and intelligibility.

Therefore, pronunciation should be taught in effective ways which provides a non-threatening atmosphere for the students, who usually have a great tension when speaking English in a formal classroom setting. One of the effective ways in teaching pronunciation is by using songs. Besides, songs offer a change from routine procedures in the classroom; they are also hide the nature of exercise making them look like fun when in reality they are working with the language. Imagine a song that contains repetitive lyrics – chorus and the like, are not we disguising a repetition drill in a highly effective way?

Discussion

1. Pronunciation

Most people think of pronunciation as the sounds they make while speaking. As speakers of a language, they need to be able to understand each other with relative ease. Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics

emphasizes as “the way sounds are perceived by the hearer”. An emphasis on hearer’s perception is especially relevant (Nunan, 2003). How they pronounce words, phrases, and sentences communicates to others considerable information about who they are, and what they are like, as people.

The concept of pronunciation, according to Ur (1991) includes the sounds of the language or phonology, stress and rhythm, and intonation. For the former, it is useful to list and define the sounds or phonemes of the language by writing them down using phonetic representation. English speech rhythm is characterized by tone-units; a word or group of word which carries one central stressed syllable and stress can also be indicated in writing the stressed syllable in capital letters. The later, intonation, the rises and the falls in tone that make the “tune” of an utterance, is an important aspect of the pronunciation of English. The different kinds of intonation are most simply shown by certain symbols.

Nunan (2003) states that there some principles for teaching pronunciation. First, foster intelligibility during spontaneous speech. Traditionally, a serious flaw of pronunciation teaching was the tendency to teach speech sounds isolated from meaningful content. Nowadays, lessons should engage the students in using sounds in more personalized ways and through more spontaneous ways of speaking. Second, keep affective considerations firmly in mind. Emotions can run high whenever language learners are asked to develop new pronunciation habits. It is essential to realize that pronunciation practice normally takes place in front teacher and other students. Whenever they receive rejection from other friends, teacher needs to provide them with

generous degrees of affective support. Third, avoid the teaching of individual sounds in isolation. When the teacher may introduce a specific pronunciation point for the first time, it is almost always more effective to illustrate and practice sounds within contexts of whole phrases, short sentences, and interactive classroom tasks. This activity provides opportunities for students to communicate meaningfully with each other are more interesting, enjoyable and memorable. In the long run, such activities have more of an impact on enhancing speech intelligibly. Fourth, provide feedback on learners' progress. Teachers need to support learner's efforts, guide them, and provide cues for improvement. Otherwise, learners may be unaware where they need to place their energies. Fifth, realize that ultimately it is the learner who is in control of changes in pronunciation. It means that teachers only provide guidance and practice opportunities but learners are the ones who are in charge of making any changes that may ultimately take place.

Moreover, the teacher should include pronunciation teaching into lesson sequences. Harmer (2001) lists a number of alternatives to choose from:

- a. Whole lessons
Some teachers devote whole lesson sequences to pronunciation and some schools timetable pronunciation lessons at the various stages during the week. Although it would be difficult to spend a whole class period working on one or two sounds, it can make sense to work on connected speech concentrating on stress and intonation over some forty-five minutes.
- b. Discrete slots
Some teachers insert short, separate bits of pronunciation work into lesson sequences. Over a period of weeks they work on all the

individual phonemes either separately or in contrasting pairs. At other times they spend a few minutes on a particular aspect of intonation, at least on the contrast between two or more sounds. This can be extremely useful and provide a welcome change of pace and activity during a lesson. Many students enjoy them and they succeed precisely because it does not spend too long on any one issue.

- c. Integrated phase
Many teachers get the students to focus on pronunciation issues as an integral part of a lesson. When students listen to a tape, for example, one of the things which the teacher can do is draw their attention to pronunciation features on the tape. Pronunciation teaching forms a part of many sequences where students study language form.
- d. Opportunistic teaching
It means that the teacher should teach pronunciation opportunistically just like grammar or vocabulary.

2. Song

As stated earlier, teachers are always looking for an ultimate activity that will make their students use the language in a natural way while enjoying it, that will make their class a land of learning and fun, that will make them feel the thrills of seeing their students actually working in English. Teachers and students alike find singing a song entertaining and relaxing. A little song will make them relax and have fun, get away from the exercises in the textbook, close them and sit down to listen the song. Songs show English in real use. Some teachers may argue that most pop songs bring many grammatical and vocabulary problems since they are not specifically prepared for the EFL class. That is true, but then it is the teachers'

job to choose a song suits the needs and level of their class. Kristen (2001) gives some suggestions in choosing the songs. First, song lyrics should be clear and loud, not submerged in the instrumental music. Second, the vocabulary load for the song should be appropriate to the proficiency level. Third, songs should be pre-screened for potentially problematic content, such as explicit language. Griffie in Kristen (2001) also recommends using short, slow songs for beginning level students and discusses activities such as creating song word puzzles, drawing a song, or showing related pictures. With higher levels he suggests using songs that tell stories, moving toward short, fast songs and finally longer, fast songs that have fewer high frequency vocabulary items.

Songs can be used to teach not only the English language but also the culture of the singer's country. In other words, songs can be used in discussions of culture. They are a rich mine of information about human relations, ethics, customs, history, humor and regional and cultural differences. A song can be part of a unit that also contains poems, video footage, or still photographs.

The use of songs must be accompanied by clear teaching strategies. These must include activities to maximize student talking time through the use of pair or group work every time it is possible. Here are some suggestions offers by Kristen (2001):

- a. Before presenting a song, challenge students to guess vocabulary that might come in the lyrics, topic of the song, etc.
- b. Before giving answers to questions and exercises, ask pairs and /or small groups to exchange ideas and discuss about their views and opinions.

- c. Encourage singing. Just like in a choral repetition activity, the fact that everybody is speaking at the same time, will not expose shy students to the rest of the class so they should feel freer to speak up.
- d. Avoid playing songs as time fillers.
- e. Use good quality recordings. Also, be sure to use a good and sufficiently powerful cassette or CD player.
- f. If you are using a certain type/ make of cassette or CD player for the first time, make sure you know how to operate it before the class.
- g. Set the cassette at the exact point where the song starts, avoid looking for the track beginning in class.

3. Teaching Pronunciation through Song Dictation

As clearly stated above, a song is a great tool to teach pronunciation. The right choice of song is important. The teachers may call students attention to certain special words and how they are pronounced. The teachers can also call their attention to the different accents and to rhyming sounds in the lyrics.

Songs contextually introduce the features of supra-segmental (how rhythm, stress, and intonation affect the pronunciation of English in context). Through songs, students discover the natural stretching and compacting of the stream of English speech. For example, the reduction of the auxiliary have to the sound /uv/ can be heard in the song by Toni Braxton "You've Been Wrong for So Long" (2000). Similarly, the change of word final t + word initial y to /ch/ can be heard in a line from the Tracy Chapman Song "All that You Have Is Your Soul" (1989), where the singer says, "Don't you eat of a bitter fruit." Moriya in Kristen (2001) points out the value of using songs for pronunciation practice with Asian learners because of the

many phonemic differences between Asian languages and English. However, students from any language background can benefit from a choral or individual reading of the lyrics of the songs mentioned above, practicing the natural reductions that occur in spoken English.

There are several ways to precede, depending on the students' proficiency levels, the amount of time available, and any other constraints. The following is one set of steps:

1. Have the song playing as students enter the class and/or play it through once as a warm-up before beginning the activity.
2. Distribute the lyrics with the missing lyrics to the students. They are asked to go through the lyrics and try to guess the words in the blanks.
3. Explain the difficult words and let the students read the lyrics. This is followed by the teacher asking simple questions to check the students' overall comprehension of the song.
4. Have students, working in pairs or small groups, mark features. For example, the teacher teaches segmental feature - the flapped /d/. "I've Got You under My Skin" by Frank Sinatra is one of the best songs to teach flapped /d/ since it had many wonderful examples of linking and flapped /d/: my skin, deep in, give in, this affair, go so well, heart of me, part of me, reality, that I do, thought of you mentality and so forth. The inclusion of this last word is especially fortuitous, with one /t/ pronounceable as flapped /d/ and one not. Circulate to guide and answer questions as the students work. Another song that the teacher uses can be "Home" by Michael Buble to teach linking and flapped /d/. Other example, the teacher teaches long and short vowels (/i/ and /I:/). She can use "Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Old Oak Tree".
5. Discuss the answer with the students and practice pronouncing the words with them through further listening and singing with the tape.
6. Have students practice some of the words and phrases and put them into longer phrases and sentences.
7. Play the song one more time, asking the class to speak along, and try to match the singer in the practical features.
8. Have the students create their own short dialogues and conversations using words and expression from the song that have practiced features. If desired this step can be done after step 9.
9. Bring the grammar into the activity by using a cloze exercise. In the song "I've Got You under My Skin", the lyrics are useful for studying and reviewing prepositions and phrasal verbs. Listening to the tape again, and focusing on the prepositions helps students recognize that these little words are easy to miss because they are so reduced. The focus on listening for something that is not obvious and not stressed helps students remember that "not obvious" does not mean "not necessary" and that including these little words is necessary not only grammatically but rhythmically.
10. Engage them through creative writing tasks which involve placing them into different roles related to the characters in the song.

Songs in general are well suited to work on recognizing and practicing stress and reduction. The songs individual teachers choose will depend

on which features they wish to practice.

Conclusion

As most teacher finds out, students love listening to the song in the classroom. It can also be a teaching tool to develop students' language abilities in listening, speaking, reading and writing and can be used to teach a variety of language items such as sentence patterns, vocabulary, pronunciation, rhythms, adjectives and adverbs. As a tool for teaching pronunciation, teachers can address students' needs and desires to improve their listening proficiency and pronunciation in four ways. First, they expose students to hearing prosodic elements in connected speech in an entertaining and useful manner. Second, they help students learn how to listen to connected speech. Third, by listening then comparing what they hear with a script, they improve both their aural and visual modalities. Fourth, they learn to listen for meaningful word groups and phrases instead of continuing the word-for-word listening many of them have learned. Moreover, songs that have been chosen by teachers have a relation to features they wish to practice and should be based on the students' needs and level of proficiency.

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