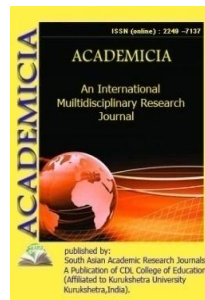




ACADEMICIA
**An International
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Research Journal**
(Double Blind Refereed & Peer Reviewed Journal)



DOI:10.5958/2249-7137.2021.00945.9

THE WAYS TO INCORPORATE TONGUE TWISTERS INTO ENGLISH CLASSROOM: IN THE CASE OF UZBEK STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Communicative skills, including pronunciation are not easy to teach. Considering the importance of incorporating pronunciation in English classroom, this paper attempts to find out the ways to use tongue twisters as a teaching means to improve pronunciation. This paper highlights the significance of tongue twisters in teaching pronunciation among Uzbek students. Controlled class observation method was conveyed. Research results showed that tongue twisters make the classroom activities more engaging, motivational and fun. Moreover, tongue twisters have the capacity to make the pronunciation rules much stickier was also discovered. Researches also showed that teachers are being required to more creative when using the tongue twisters to teach pronunciation to relieve the monotony which comes with overly using the same technique. Innovative practical strategies and techniques to use tongue twisters are provided as research suggestions.

KEYWORDS: *Tongue twisters, teaching pronunciation, fun activities, innovative techniques and strategies, repetition technique.*

INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is the way we pronounce sounds, and it is one of the key areas to improve communication skills of students. It is obvious that even if students have good grammar or vocabulary knowledge, without adequate pronunciation skills they are less likely to be understood by others. Good pronunciation shows the listeners the speaker has a good proficiency level even if there are slight errors with grammar and vocabulary in their speech. There are some factors that affect to the speakers' pronunciation abilities. They are listed by Brown and Lee as

the following: In priority, native language, following 5 other factors “are age, exposure, innate phonetic ability, identity, and agency, as well as motivation and concern for good pronunciation”. (Journal, Arab and Muin, Fatchul and Amrina, Rosyi and Amelia, Rizky, 2017) Dewi (Astutik, 2017) believes that pronunciation is the most important factors to study and teach. As Ali Abdullah (Ghani, 2018) states that overall competence of students cannot be improved without raising the awareness and building mutual intelligibility in pronunciation of sounds. Nevertheless, most teachers just ignore applying pronunciation into their classroom. The reason behind is that attempts made to teach pronunciation are sometimes unsuccessful. Or else, teachers themselves have lack of knowledge to teach this in this sphere. Especially, in teaching English to the Uzbek students, pronunciation is substantially important. Since the phonology of English language and Uzbek language quite differs from each other. Some English phonological sounds do not exist in Uzbek language. Gulnigor presents those phonics which do not exist in her paper called “Common pronunciation mistakes of Uzbek learners in speaking English” (Gulnigor, 2018) dividing into two groups: vowels [u, ou, ai, ue] and consonants [ð, θ, r, w, f, v]. Those omitting sounds make Uzbek students to struggle to pronounce English sounds. Therefore, teaching pronunciation to the Uzbek students is considerably crucial. In addition to that, pronunciation is not necessarily to teach in a separate classroom as particular pronunciation rules can be incorporated into any classroom topics. For example, while teaching past simple tense, teacher can arouse the awareness of students how to pronounce –ed in two existing forms such as, /t/ and /-d/. It depends on the creativity and competence of teacher.

Relying on my teaching experience and the works done previously in the field, tongue twisters are precious sources to improve pronunciation. Tongue twister is a word, phrase or sentence, sometimes rhymes which are made of complex structures, super close-sounded words to each other. They are really difficult to pronounce and the purpose of creating them is improving articulation or pronunciation skills of students. Wikipedia defines the tongue twisters as “A **tongue-twister** is a phrase that is designed to be difficult to [articulate](#) properly, and can be used as a type of spoken (or sung) [word game](#). Additionally, they can be used as exercises to improve pronunciation and fluency.” (wikipedia, 2021) sometimes, they create warm and humorous sense when applied in the classroom. The faster the pupils articulate the tongue twister the better their speeches can be enhanced. They exist in any language and mostly used among younger ages. However, tongue twisters can be conveyed to learn a foreign language by adult language learner. Tongue twisters make the students more engaged into the classroom regardless of their behaviour. For example, some students are quite introvert to participate in the classroom activities where the tongue twisters give a hand. Teacher can make competitions among the students and these races accelerate the enthusiasm of students to engage. Furthermore, tongue twisters are not hard to get access not to mention their reasonable price. On the internet web pages, there is a wide scope of tongue twisters to apply in English classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Theories about the tongue twisters’ characteristics to improve pronunciation:

- 1) Vivi (Aulia, 2020) states that mother language’s interference leads to mispronouncing words among English learners since some English sounds do not exist in other languages. Moreover, students struggle to pronounce the phonics they have the similar sounds, such as /p/, /f/, /v/, /ð/, and /d/. Tongue twisters basically are made of similar sounds in a sentence.

They clearly states how these sounds should be pronounced differently. In order to optimize the implementation of tongue twister in the classroom, the author considers YouTube videos are extremely useful not to mention they require “maximal preparation” and special attention for each student by the teacher. (Aulia)

- 2) Dewi research states that English pronunciation is really challenging for language learners thanks to the different form of the language from spoken language. Another difficulty follows the similar sounded words, such as “to”, “two”, “too”. These three words have no difference in terms of their pronunciation. Obviously, identifying their difference while listening is hard for learner to comprehend it. The research highlights that main purpose of English learners is improving their communication skills owing to this, students tend to get silent concerning their pronunciation mistakes. Applying tongue twisters in the classroom is both fun and useful. Nevertheless, improvement in the students’ pronunciation skills comes with the amount of significant practice. The more students practice the tongue twisters; their ability to pronounce other English words gets better. As the learners feel the improvement in their skills, they get motivated to practice tongue twisters. (Dewi Lutfiani & Indri Astuti, 2017)
- 3) The research done by the group of UniversitasLambungMangkurat scientists (Journal, Arab and Muin, Fatchul and Amrina, Rosyi and Amelia, Rizky, 2017) compared the tongue twisters and repetition techniques among two types of learning styles, namely reflective and active. By the definition, students who chose the reflective learning styles are someone who is introvert, on the contrary, active learners learn by doing and engaging actively in classroom activities. Research claims that learning style of students do not significantly influence on the improvement of pronunciation skills. Two different teaching pronunciation techniques, repetition and tongue twisters also do not cause to distinguishably different results. Nevertheless, tongue twisters provide a meaningful practice environment for the students. So, students are more likely to feel engaged to tongue twister activities without feeling of obligation to learn the pronunciation. Moreover, tongue twisters encourage the students to be more active while learning.
- 4) Tongue twisters have been used in the classroom to improve pronunciation skills of students for centuries. Tongue twisters practice the muscles of the speech organs. Wells Smith Partners paper cited in this paper highlights the list of benefits which comes with using tongue twisters in the classroom. The researcher states that students got a positive effect using the tongue twisters to improve their pronunciation skills. The role of tongue twisters is substantially important especially in improving “in dental and palatoalveolar fricative consonants”. I provide those advantages as they were cited in (Asilfa paper (Wells-Smith 2012)):
 - a. Help to arouse the awareness of students their weaknesses in their pronunciation;
 - b. Help to correct their errors in their pronunciation quickly;
 - c. Help to enhance their muscles adaptability to pronounce unknown sounds by creating a muscle memory on the speech organs;
 - d. Enhances their listening comprehension skills;

- e. Helps to make the classroom atmosphere more enjoyable by relieving the monotony;
- f. As students see that their peers and even teacher make mistake while practicing with tongue twisters, students' confidence will be boosted to practice without the fear of making mistakes. (Asilfa, 2019)

1.2. Activities to implement tongue twisters in the EFL classroom to improve pronunciation:

Tongue twisters are precious authentic materials to apply in the classroom. As long as the teacher is creative enough unlimited activities can be hold in the classroom to make the real English learning atmosphere. Kate Joyce, from British Council suggested a practical activity as a warm-up exercise in the following procedure:

- a. At the first stage, teacher writes down some famous tongue twisters on the board, or distributing the cards is also favourable;
- b. Students read the tongue twister loudly making interference to other to read;
- c. Students are encouraged to create their own tongue twisters as writing answers to the following questions in the type of gap filling activity;
- d. Write your first name; what did he/she do?; where; when; why; because
- e. Students will be divided into 5 groups and write down the answers by words starting the first letter of the name. Consequently, tongue twisters get back to the person who started.
- f. As in the example, following tongue twister can be created:

“Laura laughed in the laundrette at lunchtime because she lost her laundry”.(Joyce)

Warming-up activities, tongue twister game suggested by Nomor, follows the stages given below:

- a. Students choose a tongue twister from the website which is connected to the course of study;
- b. Ss try to read it out loud. As long as they make any mistakes, they are encouraged to correct their mistakes by looking up the dictionary or asking for help from the peers.

This activity helps to get improved any English teaching classroom as it helps to shift from teacher-centred approach to student-centred approach. in the classroom. Students do not get unmotivated as they work in a group with different tongue twisters. Another activity suggested by Moron is “whispering game”. It is really new concept for students to whisper the tongue twister in each other's ears in a small group. The game follows the two stages. First, teacher makes the students group of 6 people. Then, students whisper the tongue twister conducted by the teacher. At the end, the last student tells the tongue twister out loud. This game does not fulfil the expectations of a teacher. That is, the tongue twister will be misunderstood by its meaning and structure. The teacher should provide the correct tongue twister itself at the end, and make the students distinguish similar sounds in words. Practicing and drilling the accurate version of tongue twister five or more times is much more preferable. Even if those above-mentioned games are exciting and fun, they are both time-consuming. (Sitoresmi, 2015)

The following list of factors is suggested to take into consideration while teaching English pronunciation by the teacher:

- a. Helping the students perceive new categories of sounds which were unknown before;
- b. Giving feedbacks for the students' performance;
- c. Pointing out what is going on while explaining;
- d. Establishing a prior plans before starting the teaching;
- e. Devising activities;
- f. Assessing the students' progress to motivate them.

English teachers can make variations to the classroom using extra-curricular activities. Dialogue and role-play techniques are also preferable to apply using tongue twisters. This allows the students to express their personal opinions and let their potential revealed in enriching their skills. (Fatriana, 2017) Every language has tongue twisters and these are difficult to pronounce even for the native speakers themselves. The teacher explains the tongue twister by making students repeat after him. At the first part of the video, sounds are explained, and then repeating collaboratively with a tutor. At the end, independent practice is provided (Alex) Another effective method to practice tongue twisters is explain a particular sound by splitting the tongue twister in smaller units. After that making the students follow the teacher till the students' muscles are comfortable with pronouncing the sounds is also highly effective. For example, the teacher explains the difference between "ch" and "sh" sounds. Then, distributes the tongue twister cards "*If Stu chews shoes, should Stu choose the shoes he chews?*" The teacher reads and students repeat after her. (Gomez, 2021)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Hypothesis and Questions:

The following null hypothesis and research questions were formulated to undertake this research:

Research Hypothesis:

- Tongue twisters are useful to improve the pronunciation of Uzbek students.

Research Questions:

- Do tongue twisters make the pronunciation rules stickier?
- Is learning English pronunciation through tongue twisters funnier?

3.2 Research Population and the Location:

The 45 students from the Samarkand regional branch of IT Park, which is Technological Park of Software and Information Technology, were chosen to a control group to teach the English language incorporating tongue twisters. Students were selected according to their age, and English proficiency level. All the students had the same level of English competence, that is, A2 according to the national CEFR standards. Students were aged from 16 to 20 years old with the same level of English proficiency. Some of the students had no competency to write in English alphabet. To check their proficiency level, they were tested by the help of this placement test.

<https://www.centrolinguebenaco.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/test-inglese.pdf>The test contains 55 multiple-choice questions. Ss found around 15-18 correct answers which labelled their knowledge as A1/A2 elementary levelled students. Their pronunciation proficiency levels were checked by reciting the alphabet, spelling their names, and reading the given text out loud. They had the basic competence in terms of their pronunciation skills. They were divided into three groups, two of them were aimed at being taught with tongue twisters, and the other group were taught with conventional repetition techniques.

3.3. Research Procedure and Methodology:

Controlled class observation method was chosen as the best strategy to conduct this research. The observation lasted 3 months. The research materials, such as textbooks, tongue twisters related to the proficiency level of students, classrooms were set beforehand. The grammar and pronunciation topics were selected according to the Navigate books' (Jane, 2016) content and enriched with tongue twisters. The researcher took notes during the observation about the changes in the student's ability to pronounce certain English sounds, engagement in the classroom activities. The tongue twisters were selected appropriate to the focused grammar or pronunciation topic. Such as, when the topic was the past simple tense with the simple state verbs, the following tongue twister was applied:

"Betty bought some butter, but the butter was bitter, so Betty bought some better butter to make the bitter butter better."

The two groups were continually introduced with a tongue twister once in two classes. Teacher introduced the tongue twister by splitting it several parts. For example, distributing the tongue twisters cards, explaining the focused pronunciation rules and translating the pronunciation all together, and lastly, the ss were given the tongue twister to learn by heart as a home task. Three classes in a week were held. The other one group taught with the repetition technique. The Navigate Oxford press A1 level books' course book(Dummett Paul, Hughes Jake. , 2016) And work book (Jane, 2016) were used including with their CDs and YouTube videos, reports for all groups. The teacher used repetition techniques to help students get aware of the pronunciation skills. While the two controlled groups got learning the tongue by heart as a home task, the third group learnt the dialogues by heart. By the end of the months, all of the students' pronunciation skills were tested through reading the text, and giving a presentation on the topic of my hobby. The spelling bee competition was held, and their pronunciation skills were tested (Lingua.com, 2018). During the competition, 5 basic levelled English words were pronounced by a teacher and the students got one mark for each correct spelling.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Observations showed that tongue twisters and conventional drilling, repetitions techniques led to almost the same pronunciation results. Students from the controlled group could apply the pronunciation rules slightly better than the other group. However, teaching with pronunciation was more fun and more engaging. Even at the beginning of the learning procedure, students were reluctant to learn the tongue twisters by heart, as they practiced their muscles to pronounce those difficult words, learning the tongue twisters seemed as getting easier for them. Consequently, the student engagement rate was boosted. However, the results from those students were not considerable. Some students apply the pronunciation rules for only particular words which were

taught by the teacher by repeating several times and did not apply this technique to other words. For example, teacher explained two /ee/ letters are pronounced as /i:/ sound as in the words “beef” /bi:f/, “week” /wi:k/ etc. However, when students come across such words in the context, they could not apply it for unknown words. Even they learnt it with the context of tongue twisters, it continued happening. When the tongue twister ‘Peter Piper’ was introduced,

“**Peter Piper** picked a peck of pickled peppers.

A peck of pickled peppers **Peter Piper** picked.”(Library, 2021)

Student were taught to pronounce -ed past tense suffix (picked, pickled) with /d/ after voiced letters (b, d, g, j, l, m, n, ng, r, sz, th, v, w, y, z), and when the -ed suffix comes after voiceless consonants (ch, f, k, p, s, sh, t, th) it is pronounced as /t/. (Beare, 2019) Piper is pronounced as /paɪ.pər/ with a /ai/ in it. Nearly all students failed to apply the latter pronunciation concept to other similar words, such as writer, bright. Surprisingly, they were good at conveying the -ed rule in their speech. In the meantime, quite opposite situation was also recorded. After learning the particular pronunciation rules, some students are reluctant to accept the exceptional phonological cases to those sounds. For instance, when the teacher explained the /ea/ vowels are pronounced as /i:/ as in the words “weak” /wi:k/, please /pli:z/, as well as /ea/ vowels are pronounced as /e/ short sound as in the words “head” /hed/, “spread” /spred/. Almost in any case, students get confused and made mistakes when they came across with these words in another context. Another finding is that mastering the pronunciation skills not only depend on the technique or materials used to teach, individual’s self-motivation was more important to be good at any target language skills including pronunciation. In both groups, students lost their motivations when they got any critical feedback. They kept silent after the correction. After that, teacher changed the style of teaching to the collaborative group work. In the group work, students practiced the tongue twister together rather than repeating it individually in front of the public. That reduced the affective filter and boosted their confidence to pronounce the certain words. Another notable feature to take into consideration was the second research question was accepted with affirmative results. That is, tongue twisters could make the pronunciation rules stickier. It is supposed that once the tongue twister is learnt by heart by making the right amount of efforts, students are never going to forget these rules.

RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

1.3. Research showed that perfect preparation keeping the proper strategy in mind, is the best way to achieve the desired results from the students. The research suggests to the teachers to use the following strategy in applying the tongue twisters in the classes:

The first stage is prior to practicing. :

- a) **Selection:** Teacher should choose the proper tongue twister in terms of the students’ proficiency level, lexical resource and focused pronunciation concept. If the tongue twister is too hard to understand its meaning or to pronounce, students feel discouraged. On the contrary, if the tongue twister is too easy, students are less likely to take it seriously. Sometimes unless the teacher can find a suitable tongue twister to the classroom, creating the one is also preferable.

- b) **Preparation:** Teacher should have clear goals on her mind before the class. What is being expected by applying this into classroom? How many tongue twister cards are needed? Teacher should be ready for all unexpected situations such as; students can be bored with learning pronunciation, and no longer want to practice. Or else, students can overestimate their skills and do not do their homework (do not learn the tongue twister by heart). Therefore, teacher should be creative, and apply different techniques, methods (whispering, video modelling, and gaming) in the classroom.
- c) **Instruction:** Teacher should clearly state what students are going to do. How they will practice, and what they will learn should be clearly interpreted to the students. Otherwise, students can get lost in some many rules, and instructions.

The second stage happens during the practice.

- d) **Introduction:** New pronunciation topic should be clearly explained. How to pronounce the target sound should be taught with interactive repetition. For example, if the teacher is introducing schwa sound, first she should write down schwa sounds' mark on the black board. Then, teacher explains it with examples such as from, a, family, support etc. and write down their transcriptions if needed. Teacher should link the new topic to the previous pronunciation topics. It makes the classroom more meaningful and the materials easier to comprehend.
- e) **Explanation:** Straight going to the tongue twister itself, and splitting the tongue twister into the phonological parts, such as weak forms, or certain focused pronunciation rules.
- f) **Translation:** Teacher should encourage the students to translate it into their native language. Sometimes, tongue twisters do not make any sense, and make some humour among them. as long as students are aware of the meaning of tongue twister, they learn it faster. Along the way, they can learn new vocabulary.
- g) **Practice:** Initially, students repeat after the teacher chorus. Then, Teacher encourages the students to read 5 or 6 times individually. It makes the classroom really noisy. Students should be encouraged to interfere to each other while reading, and read loudly. It makes the learning process fascinating and encouraging.

The third stage is the final step where the students demonstrate their pronunciation skills.

- h) **Competition.** Dividing the students into 4 or 5 groups with 4 or 5 students in each and making a competition is also great technique. Students come to the blackboard and recite the tongue twister with their group. It makes the classroom more fun. This activity also strengthens their friendship bonds. They learn group working, as even a student fails to recite the tongue twister; it causes the whole group to fail. That is why, they teach each other, and it leads to better results
- i) **Evaluation:** Rather than getting feedback from the teacher, peer review is more preferable. Using evaluation cards with assessment rubrics on it is also useful. Students should be introduced with assessment rubrics, and evaluate each other's performance. Following rubrics can be used as a sample.
- How fast was the student? (Fast, moderate, slow)

- How did the student pronounce the tongue twister? (students will mark the mispronounced word from the tongue twister)
- How many times did the student pause while pronouncing? (0, 1,2,3,4...)
- How many times could the student tell the tongue twister? (1,2,3,4,5...)

In evaluating, students should be encouraging as much as possible.

- j) **Rewarding:** Students should be rewarded in any case. If it does not happen, they easily lose their motivation. There are several ways to get this done. Announcing the winners and boasting them among the group boosts their motivation. Or, boasting them with just clapping is also highly recommended technique. Marking them with higher scores is another way. Teacher should take every student into consideration while rewarding. Even the least successful students should be motivated with some amount of warm words.

Using tongue twisters is time-consuming, and it can discourage students from engaging into activities. Explaining this situation beforehand is also crucial. One way doing this is bringing a tongue twister in the students' mother tongue, and having the students to practice it in initial stage. Eventually, Students understand that tongue twisters are hard to pronounce, and learn it by heart. Whenever they come across with challenges with learning the tongue twister, they are less likely feel discouraged.

TBL (Task Based Approach) Activities: Tongue twister technique can be blended with task based approach. By the definition TBL approach is “focuses on the use of authentic language and on asking students to do meaningful tasks using the target language.”(Wikipedia, 2021) Students can make their own tongue twisters based on the social situations. Using this approach is effective when it is used as a home task assignment. Students should create the tongue twisters from their real life first-hand experiences. This strategy can be used after making the students totally familiarized with the tongue twisters. That is, students will have enough experience to create one after learning the several tongue twisters by heart. This makes the tongue twister stickier. For example, teacher tells to the students to create a tongue twister based on the following rubrics as sample to create a tongue twister:

- 1) Events (Birthday, family dinner, working out, shopping, wedding, at the hospital.)
- 2) How many words were started with the same letter? (Students should be informed that they should start almost all the words with the same letter)
- 3) Names of characters (They should be chosen according to the focused pronunciation sound)
- 4) Places' names (They should be chosen according to the focused pronunciation sound)

For Example,

Brighton became bitter boy in his birthday, because his brother beat Brighton.

As long as the teacher is creative, only sky is the limit. There are enough situations and events to create a tongue twister. This technique boosts students' comprehension skills in general not just pronunciation skills. This encourages the students to be more creative, and use other language skills, such as writing, critical thinking etc. If the students make silly meaningless tongue

twisters, that is normal. Because the nature of tongue twisters does not require to be a deeply meaningful from the tongue twisters' context.

Suggestions for further Researches: Realizing the significance of tongue twister in improving the pronunciation, conducting the research among larger population would be preferable since this research was conducted in a relatively short period of time, and among a smaller scope of students. Moreover, making the list of tongue twisters with appropriate grammar, and pronunciation topics in mind is also required in teaching. Because, using the tongue twisters in a meaningful context makes the learning procedure more effective. In addition to that conducting a research about the importance of motivation in acquiring the pronunciation skills would be beneficial.

CONCLUSION

Pronunciation is one of the most important skills in enhancing the one's communication and comprehension skills. Student's native language causes obstacles in learning the second language. For example, some English sounds do not exist in the learners' native language. Teachers are integrating different methods to improve the students' overall competency including pronunciation skills. Songs, tongue twisters, rhymes and other authentic sources have been used to teach pronunciation. The importance of tongue twisters to use in teaching pronunciation has been recognized by many researchers and being conveyed to make the pronunciation classes funnier, and more effective. Although the benefits of tongue twisters do not outweigh the traditional repetition techniques' benefits, tongue twisters are more enjoyable and encouraging technique to use in the classroom. Pronunciation rules are more memorable when they absorbed by the help of tongue twisters. Teachers are required to be creative when they use the tongue twisters as students can be fed up with the same practice regularly. Using task based approach techniques, or following the three staged strategy to incorporate the tongue twisters into classroom is highly recommended.

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