

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Listening is very important for communication. Listening is also an important aspect of interlanguage communication (Goh, 2009). In foreign language learning, the importance of listening is to provide knowledge to use the language. When someone builds up the knowledge, he or she can begin to communicate (Nation & Newton, 2009). Nevertheless, this skill is rarely particularly taught to the language learners. In Indonesia, a few teachers teach this skill. Some of them consider that students’ ability on listening will improve through practice of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Hedge, 2000).

There are some problems of listening difficulties for the learners. First, the learners cannot control the speed of the speaker’s speech. Then they are not able to repeat the utterance. Next, they also have a limited vocabulary. Although they have known the vocabulary, they fail to catch the signals of the words. They cannot interpret the meaning of the

utterance. The other problems are not able to focus and improve the learning habits (Underwood, 1989).

Another problem is that the students are not familiar with English stress. English language learning, recognizing stress is important. English people can comprehend the meaning from the stress. Besides, in English spoken language, there are many reduced forms (Brown, 2007) or weak stress. Brown added that it would be difficult since the English learners are taught full forms or strong stress.

Next, the students are not familiar with the elimination, elision, and links of words. It is common for English native speakers to speak with elimination, elision, and links of words. Few English teachers teach stresses and links of words (Yagang, 1994). In listening class, there are also many eliminations, elisions, and links of word.

This problem also occurs with the students of Al Hikmah Junior High School of Surabaya. Many students have difficulties in listening. They often could not recognize English sounds. Then, they often think that the recording is too fast to listen for them. Some of them also say that they do not catch the words. They could not often catch the word when the words were weakly pronounced. They also do not recognize

the sounds when the consonant sounds are linked with sounds although actually they have already been familiar with the words. They often ask the teacher to repeat the recordings because they do not know what the speaker means in the recording.

Therefore, in this research, the researcher needs to solve the problems. The researcher focused on the word recognition first to improve the students’ listening comprehension because it enables to do the research in a limited time for junior high school students. Since this research was conducted in semester two, the focus of this research was in accordance with the syllabus of the national curricular. In semester two, the materials are recount and narrative texts. Recount text is one to retell someone’s experience and narrative text is one to tell a story. The texts use past tense. In the previous semester, when the teacher was teaching recount text, the teacher found many errors in the pronunciation of verb 2. For instance, the learners pronounced *opened* /ɒpenəd/, *arrived* /əraivəd/, *bought* /boug/, *saw*/sau/ and so on. From these problems, the teacher thought that these errors would affect their ability to recognize verb 2 sounds in listening. Besides, the students need to recognize weak

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stresses, and linkage. These problems need to be solved because they would affect their comprehension as well.

To justify the problems, the researcher did a pre-test to the students of 8 B. The items of the pre-test were identifying verb 2 sounds, strong and weak stress, and linkage according to the eight listening materials that the teacher would teach.

The result of the test was not satisfactory. The average score of the pre-test was 47. When the teacher classified the students’ level, there were 4 (13%) students were in a “very good” level because their scores were between 80 and 99. Then 5 (17%) students were in a “good” level since their scores were between 60 and 79. Ten (33%) students were in the “fair” level since their scores were between 40 and 59. There were 8 (27%) students in a “poor” level as their scores were from 20 to 39 and three (10%) in a “very poor” level as their scores were from 0 to 19. When the researcher checked the students’ answers, the students cannot only identify verb 2 sounds but also fail to catch the words. Many students were ignorant to the words. Their answers were far from the words meant.

The result showed that the students needed to improve ability to recognize individual words, including strong and

weak stress (reduced form) and linkage. This problem will affect their comprehension and cause misunderstanding if they do not recognize them. Thus, the teacher should teach them to recognize “microskills” English sounds Brown (2007) i.e. verb 2 sounds, strong and weak stress, and linkage since ability in recognizing micro skills English sounds is very important..

To improve students’ ability in recognizing verb 2 sounds, weak stress, and linkage, the students should often listen to the correct modeling of English pronunciation. Nevertheless, as the teacher is not an English native speaker, he finds it difficult to pronounce English naturally. He uses strong stress all and there will be no links of word in his pronunciation. Therefore, he used software to produce English sounds as a modeling of pronunciation of individual words, including weak stress form and linkage.

The development of science and technology now can assist the teacher in English teaching and learning, including pronunciation. Now there are several softwares which can produce human sounds in many languages, such as English dictionary on line, google translate, and Text-To-Speech (TTS). They are Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). In this study, the researcher used TTS as a medium

as modeling of the pronunciation. It is a conversion technology or engine. This software can convert the written text into a voice file. Then it has developed based on many purposes including for language learning (Harashima, 2006). It is a reason why the researcher uses the software to teach listening to individual words, strong and weak stress, and links of word.

In language learning, TTS has been used for teaching pronunciation and reading aloud. Kilickaya, Mitra, Tooley, Inamdar, and Dixon (2003) and González (2007) have employed TTS in teaching pronunciation. The results of their studies showed positive results. It is different from Meihami (2013), he used TTS in teaching reading. Then the results also showed positive results.

Although the studies above focused on pronunciation and reading aloud, the participants of the studies should be in the listening process first. Thus, the software can also be used in teaching listening. It can help students in improving listening and pronunciation. In this research, the researcher will employ TTS. The reason to select the software is because TTS could produce English pronunciation like native speakers segmentally and suprasegmentally. For suprasegmental sounds, TTS could produce weak stress forms, and links of

words. Nevertheless, in individual word, the software cannot distinguish stress on syllable to distinguish verb or non verb. Besides, TTS cannot demonstrate stress on word in a sentence.

Actually, there are many websites of TTS but the researcher selected one of websites. The reason to use the website is because the result of the voice in this website is clear. Then, the result of the conversion is downloadable by using Internet Download Manager (IDM). Therefore, he does need to worry about the problem of the internet connection. Besides, the teacher can use the result of the conversion as listening materials.

In the teaching process at Al Hikmah Junior High School, the teacher, as the researcher, often uses TTS when he teaches listening or pronunciation. When he uses the software, the students tend to imitate what they hear. Besides, the teacher often uses the software to make some materials for listening activities. The reason the teacher uses the software is because to find listening materials in accordance with Indonesian curriculum is not easy. Thus, by using the TTS, the teacher can create listening materials based on the students' needs.

So far, when the teacher uses TTS when he gives modeling pronunciation, the students tend to imitate the pronunciation, including the stress and intonation. The students can produce correct pronunciation after listening to the recordings produced by TTS. Nevertheless, the students forget the pronunciations of words on the next meeting. Therefore, the students need a review because they require listening to the modeling by using the software repeatedly.

This researcher conducted to the eighth graders where the teacher, as a researcher, taught. The researcher taught three classes in this academic year i.e. 8A, 8B, and 8C. All of the students of the classes are male. The students of the classes were divided based on their intelligence. Most of the students of class 8A are already good at English but at the class 8B and 8C, some students are good but some are not. Nevertheless, the students’ scores of class 8C were better than those of class 8B. For that reason, this study was conducted at class 8B. Practically, the result of this research improved his students’ ability in recognizing “microskills” English sounds.

To solve this problem, the researcher employed Classroom Action Research (CAR). He considered that this method could be an appropriate to solve this problem since the

objective of CAR is to improve the current classroom condition. This method consists of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. If necessary, the researcher can continue to the next cycle. In the cycles, the researcher would teach according to the improvement of the students’ ability in recognizing “microskills” English sounds. The students would learn to recognize verb 2 sounds, weak stress, and linkages. By using TTS, the researcher expected that the students’ ability in recognizing “microskill” English improved after posttest in the next cycle.

Research Questions

The study is an attempt to improve the ability in recognizing “microskills” English sounds by using TTS. Therefore, the central questions of the study are:

1. How are the teaching learning processes conducted by using TTS?
2. To what extent can TTS improve the students’ ability in recognizing “microskills” English sounds?

The sub questions of the study are:

- a. To what extent can TTS improve the students’ listening comprehension of verb 2 sounds?

- b. To what extent can TTS improve the students’ listening comprehension of weak stress form and linkage?
3. How can TTS be used to improve the students’ ability in recognizing “microskills” English sounds?

The Purposes of the Study

From the questions above, the purposes of the study are to:

1. describe the listening teaching and learning processes by using TTS,
2. find out whether TTS improve the students’ ability in recognizing “microskills” English sounds, and
3. find out how TTS can be used to improve the students’ ability in recognizing micro skills of English sounds.

Theoretical Framework

This study is intended to find out whether TTS could improve the students’ ability to recognize “microskill” English sounds. TTS has been used in language teaching (Harashima, 2006). For instance, it is used as pronunciation exercise (Kilickaya, 2006). In this study, TTS is used to teach “microskills” English sounds. The theory of “microskills” English sounds is based on Brown (2007). In listening

technique from beginner to advanced, Brown (2007) mentioned three techniques of teaching listening comprehension i.e. bottom up exercise, top down exercise, and interactive exercise. This study only focused on bottom up exercise such as recognizing sounds, stress and intonation, links of word (liaison) (Yagang, 1994). Those elements are important to be taught because the recording contains the elements. When the students are able to recognize “microskills” English sounds very well, it is expected that they will be able to identify the English sounds, stress and links of word in phrases and sentences. Thus, using TTS is expected to improve the students’ ability in recognizing “microskills” English sounds.

Significance of the Study

Practically, the study provided information that TTS has improved students’ ability in recognizing “microskills” English sounds. Then, theoretically, the results supported the importance of TTS in improving the students’ ability in recognizing “microskills” English sounds.

Assumptions of the Study

This study is based on the following assumptions:

1. Students can distinguish verb 1 and verb 2 sounds.
2. Students can distinguish strong and weak stress sounds.
3. Students know the distinctions between consonant and vowel sounds.

Scope and Limitation

This study is a collaborative action research. It was conducted in class 8B of Al Hikmah Junior High school. As this research was done in a limited time, the researcher conducted this research on the eighth graders year 2013-2014. The study was held for 14 meetings around March to May. The 14 meeting included orientation, pre- test, 8 teaching and learning processes, 3 tests, and posttest. The research was conducted in semester two. This study was delimited to teaching ability in recognizing micro skills English sounds. The teacher taught verb 2 sounds, weak and stress forms and linkage by using TTS. The reason to teach the second verb sounds is that, in semester two, the materials for eight graders are recount text that tells someone’s experience and narrative text. Therefore, the scope of this study only covered the

pronunciation of verb two sounds i.e. some regular and irregular verb two sounds, weak stress forms, and linkage.

Definition of Key Terms

Text-To-Speech

Text-To-Speech is software to convert written English words to voice file. This software will produce English sounds like English native speakers. TTS is employed to produce verb 2 sounds, weak stresses, and linkage in listening exercises and tests.

“Microskills” English Sounds

“Microskills” English Sounds are listening materials produced by TTS. The listening materials provide the pronunciation of verb 2 sounds i.e. the past forms of regular and irregular verb sounds, strong and weak stress, and linkage.

Collaborative Classroom Action Research

A classroom action research is a research accompanied by another English teacher as a collaborator. The researcher acted as a teacher and another English teacher recorded the data from the teaching and learning processes in the checklist and

field notes. The collaborator also helped the researcher in the reflection steps.

Improvement

Improvement is average scores obtained by comparing the students’ posttest and pre-test results. The ability of the students’ ability in “microskills” English sounds recognition improves when the students’ posttest results are higher than pre-test results.