

THE ROLE OF TONGUE TWISTERS IN THE PROCESS OF TEACHING PHONETICS

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Abstract

The aim of every foreigner is to acquire speaking skills of this or that foreign language, to become fluent speakers of the foreign language. Successful communication is impossible without good pronunciation skills. Therefore, teaching phonetics has a great importance. English is a global language and it is very popular in Georgia. English is taught from the very early age. Learning English starts at kindergartens and continues up to University level. In spite of such a long period, foreign language learners have difficulties in communication. A correct speech is essential to avoid misunderstanding while spreading the information. One of the reasons why Georgian students can't talk English fluently is poor pronunciation, differences in Georgian and English sound systems. Georgian students have difficulties in pronouncing certain sounds, especially in differentiating between [v] – [w], [ð] – [θ], [g] – [ŋ], [s] – [ʃ]. Tongue twisters that are combination of sounds are hard to pronounce but are very helpful to overcome speech difficulties, develop the ear and tongue and improve pronunciation.

Tongue twisters are implemented in pronunciation class from the first course at Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University. Students reported that most of them have never used English tongue twisters before; If they used tongue twisters at an early stage of studying English, they were very simple and short. Students found teaching process with tongue twisters useful and interesting. The class became active, fun and challenging. All levels and ages enjoyed them. Tongue twisters worked well as a warm up to get students speaking, and practice pronouncing difficult sounds in English.

The article is devoted to show all modern methods of teaching English with tongue twisters that are frequently used by English teachers in practical courses. The aim of the study is to investigate what problems the students faced while acquiring good pronunciation and speaking skills and how tongue twisters assisted.

Keywords: pronunciation, tongue twister, phonetics, university level, methods of teaching.

1. INTRODUCTION

The interest of pronunciation teachers and phonetics researchers towards teaching phonetics has grown recently. There are several reasons for it. One of the reasons is increased demand from second language pronunciation teachers and general phonetics researchers. Following this interest, the paper reviews modern methods of teaching phonetics. The paper focuses mainly on the role of tongue twisters in teaching phonetics.

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. According to Karker (2000:2) tongue

twister is a combination of sounds that are extremely difficult for the mouth and, of course, tongue to control. In simple words, tongue twister is a word, phrase, or sentence that is difficult to pronounce and it can twist the speakers' tongue. Gonzales (2009:3) states that, "Tongue twisters are used to repeat it as many times as possible, as quickly as possible, without mispronunciation." Tongue Twisters have many advantages, they are the following: 1) They can help students to focus on and tackle the problems which lead to quick improvement; 2) They can help students to build a new muscle memory; 3) Tongue twisters can help students in improving their listening skills; 4) Tongue twisters help in relieving the monotony of the lesson; 5) They can help students to practice the language without fear of making mistakes (Well-Smith, 2012).

Acquiring decent pronunciation is teacher and students' goal. Teachers spend time considering appropriate ways of teaching pronunciation and developing students' pronunciation skills. Majority of teachers use repetition technique to facilitate the acquisition of English pronunciation and help students to become more familiarized with the pronunciation more easily and quickly (Angel, 2013, Szyszka, 2016). Tongue twisters also involve repetition.

In this paper I will try to show what methods are used by me as an English pronunciation teacher at English classes during teaching phonetics, how often do I use tongue twisters in the process of teaching, how the process of teaching is conducted and how handy are tongue twisters.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION.

Pronunciation is one of the key elements in learning a foreign language. Learners of a foreign language might be good at lexis and grammar but have difficulties in pronunciation. A lot of studies have been conducted related to pronunciation problems, what difficulties are faced by English learners since they are influenced by their mother tongue. Most of these studies only focused on pronunciation problems made by learners. According to that problem,

teaching and learning English pronunciation in the very early level can help to overcome this problem. One of the effective methods to teach pronunciation is using tongue twister that is fun and challenging.

English is a global language so it is taught to Georgian children from kindergartens. From this period children get acquainted with tongue twisters. At this stage they are taught simple, short tongue twisters. Kindergarten children love tongue twisters and challenge their friends to try to say them fast several times in a row. Tongue twisters are rarely used at English classes by school teachers, so children lose touch with phonetics and develop only lexis and grammar of a foreign language. This is the main reason why Georgian youngsters have problems in pronunciation and there are too many misunderstandings in communication with foreigners.

Phonetics as a branch of linguistics is taught at different academic institutions. It is taught at Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University to foreign language students. Georgian pronunciation differs greatly from English one. Sound system is different. That is why a special attention is paid to teaching phonetics. Georgian students have difficulties in pronouncing certain sounds, especially in differentiating between [v] – [w], [ð] – [θ], [g] – [ŋ], [s] – [ʃ].

Phonetics is taught to future English philologists (first year students) three times a week during one semester. At university level students understand how to speak a foreign language properly comes in understanding how the muscles of the mouth are meant to move to elicit certain sounds and pronunciations - that's why tongue twisters are so handy in teaching students to speak English correctly and quickly.

3. TEACHING METHODS USED IN THE LEARNING PROCESS

A teacher of phonetics should bear into consideration the following things: 1) a teacher should choose tongue twisters carefully to serve a purpose; 2) a teacher should put the tongue twister in writing. Native speakers may be able to repeat a tongue twister just from hearing it, but ESL students may not have the same experience. 3) Only one tongue twister should be selected by teachers for the phonetic exercises for a lesson; 4) a teacher should not put much emphasis on meaning of the tongue twister; 5) a teacher should use tongue twister as part of a game; 6) a teacher should take a few minutes before he/she drops the tongue twister bomb on the class to practice saying them herself/himself.

I use tongue twisters as warmers, fillers and coolers during my pronunciation classes. While teaching with

tongue twisters I pay attention to dominant sounds. Students should mainly concentrate on how to pronounce sounds correctly. Speed is of minor importance.

As Georgian students have problems in differentiating with [v] – [w], [ð] – [θ], [g] – [ŋ], [s] – [ʃ], I mainly choose tongue twisters that are based on opposition of the sounds: [r] – [l] (A really leery Larry rolls readily to the road; Rory's lawn rake rarely rakes really right; Lucky rabbits like to cause a ruckus), [s] – [ʃ] (She sells seashells by the seashore of Seychelles; "Surely Sylvia swims!" shrieked Sammy surprised. "Someone should show Sylvia some strokes so she shall not sink."), [ð] – [θ] (The thirty-three thieves thought that they thrilled the throne throughout Thursday).

One of the methods used by me at pronunciation classes helps students in developing listening and pronunciation skills. I make students listen to audio recorded tongue twister (If two witches were watching two watches, which witch would watch which watch?) and later write the jumbled tongue twister on the board. Students try to unjumble the tongue twister and then work on its correct pronunciation. Time after time they develop the speed. As soon as the students say the tongue twister correctly, they record it. The first part of the activity develops the ear, the second one develops memory; As for the third part, it strengthens the muscles associated with speech and clear pronunciation.

A very productive activity is when I pronounce the tongue twister (A tricky frisky snake with sixty super scaly stripes) three times and ask students to do the same. In order to check students' memory, I write on the board the tongue twister and omit some of the words from it. Students fill the gaps with suitable words. This activity develops students' memory and pronunciation.

Activity "Chinese Whisper" is popular with my students. 5-6 students are in two rows standing at the board. One student whispers "She sells seashells on the sea shore," to another. Next students in the row memorize the tongue twister and whisper to the other. The last students in the row write the tongue twister on the board. First students of the groups correct mistakes. The group that pronounces the tongue twister correctly wins the game.

In order to increase creativity in students, I use the following activity. I write on the board a specific sound, for example [b] and ask students to write down words containing the same sound. With the help of these words they create their own tongue twisters.. Second activity that is close to the previous one is like this: I write on the board the sample which can be used by students. The sample is such:

Write your first name (Susan)

Where? (at the seaside)

When? (on the 6th of September)

Why? (because she saw sunshine)

In this way we get a new tongue twister (Teona taught Turkish in Turkey on Tuesdays because Turkish students could not tolerate being taught by teachers from Texas).

In my classes I often hold a competition to see who can say a series of tricky tongue twisters the fastest. I basically

use classic tongue twisters such as 'Red lorry, yellow lorry', 'Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers' and 'she sells sea shells by the sea shore' with my students.

In most cases I ask students to write their own tongue twisters and read books by Dr. Seuss ("Fox in sox" and "Oh say can you say") which are full of terrific tongue twisters.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research suggest that tongue twisters helped students in improving their pronunciation by repeatedly practicing to pronounce the words or phrases. They also improved their confidence in spoken skills. The exam results showed that 80% of students improved the pronunciation, fluency and accents.

I conducted the questionnaire with 66 students. The questionnaire showed: 1) 57 students have never worked on tongue twisters neither at kindergarten, nor at school; 5 students replied that they have worked at native tongue twisters at school; only 4 students worked on English tongue twisters at kindergartens; 2) 59 students

were content with developing clear pronunciation with the help of tongue twisters. They replied that teaching with tongue twisters was tricky and fabulous. Only 7 students disliked this method, mentioning that it was difficult for them to repeat tongue twisters several types and quickly. Besides it was like a play with language and they could not improve their pronunciation with fun phrases and confusing combinations of words.

CONCLUSION

Tongue-twisters are language games used in order to help students develop clear speech and practice the pronunciation of difficult words. They can also help to improve accents by using alliteration, which is the repetition of one sound. I believe that five to ten minutes during the lesson spent reviewing recently learned tongue twisters and practicing new ones will soon lead to audible progress in pronunciation and it can easily be turned into a genre or a comparison as well as a drill.

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