

Teaching Listening by Using Text-to-speech Media Technology for Students at Senior High School.

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Abstract

In rapid of a wide use of technology in education, a computer is an important one used by English teacher. It should be an assistant of the teachers in teaching English, especially in teaching listening skill. The teachers can explore and manage their way in teaching listening by using computer, especially to make a media in teaching listening skill for students. This paper aims at discussing about teaching listening by using text-to-speech media technology for students at Senior high school. The teachers should try to use attractive and innovative media to attract the students' interest in teaching listening skill effectively. One of the media that can be used by the teacher in teaching learning process, especially in listening process is Text-to-speech media technology. Text-to-speech is an easy and user-friendly program of PC (Personal Computer) or laptop that downloads and installs in minutes. The main function of Text-to-speech is to convert a text to be an audio file. Its can help the teachers to introduce and present their material electronically.

Key Words : Teaching listening, Media technology, Computer, Text-to-speech

A. INTRODUCTION

When we were a child, we learned language automatically, especially our language from mother tongue. We learned the language by listening to what mother said, then we tried to pronounce the word by word firstly. If informations were not listened carefully, it influenced to the words or sentences we said. Those were naturally process we passed. When we were a child

before, we have spoken up clearly and fluency.

According to Howatt and Dakin in Saricoban's articles (1999), listening is the ability to identify and understand what other say. This involves the understanding a speaker's accent or pronunciation, his grammar and his vocabulary, and grasping his meaning. So, listening is not only an activity that hears something when the

speaker speaks. We should pay attention and listen to the speaker carefully to get clearly information.

As we know that English has four skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) that should be mastered in learning English. In Indonesia, English as foreign language has been taught at school from junior high school until senior high school. Moreover, it has been studied and developed in university.

There are some problems faced by teachers and students in teaching and learning activities. The problems are such as using unsuitable methods and media by the teachers and lack of motivation from the students.

Based on the writer's experiences, when the writer was teaching listening as an apprentice teacher in the senior high school (SMA 9 Padang), the students were sometimes bored because the teacher just read the text loudly without clear and fluency pronunciation. Whereas, in the national final examination (UN), as we know that the students face the listening test by listening to oral questions test from the native speaker. It will be a problem for the students and will make the students feel worry to face National Final Examination later. On the other hand, the hard work of as a teacher here is to find the appropriate method and media to motivate the students'

interest in learning and mastering English. So, the goal of teaching and learning English should be reached, especially in listening skill.

The teachers must be smart to choose method and media in teaching learning process. They also have to be able to make the best use of wide developing technology in education. Actually, there are some ironies happened in our country based on rapid development of technology today.

According to Septy (2007: 2), there are many English teachers in Indonesia who still choose and apply the method and media in English teaching undertaken in traditional process. He also explains that computer assisted language learning (CALL) is still a myth for many English teachers in Indonesia. This may be due to the fact that the teachers are still computer-illiterate. Furthermore, he has argued that "beside the teacher' lacks in using computer, it is also an expensive technology for schools. Consequently, teaching is still undertaken traditionally by the others teacher. This could also affect their students' lack of English proficiency".

Traditional word above refers to media or visual aid which has been chosen by the other teachers in teaching English effectively, especially in teaching listening skill. So, in this case the writer will expose teaching listening by using media

technology, especially with media that is called “Text to speech” media Technology. The writer found it at online English teacher forum in the internet (www.prweb.com), also the writer applied this media in the Senior high School 9th Padang. The writer hoped that using text-to-speech media technology would be the best alternative solution to solve the problem and can grow student’s motivation and interest in learning listening activity.

Text-to-speech media technology is a kind of good (Audio) media, especially in teaching listening skill. In teaching listening by using text-to-speech media technology, the teacher can be easier to teach listening with clear and fluent pronunciations, especially when teacher will teach text material (narrative, descriptive, expository and spoof text). Using text-to-speech media technology will convert the text to be an audio with clearly and fluency pronunciations and vocalization.

The use of media technology can make the teaching process become effective, attractive and innovative more. So, the students will feel interested in learning and can get teeth into listening to native speaker pronunciations to prepare their self for Nation Final Examination, especially in listening oral test section.

1. Definition of Listening

As defined by Oxford dictionary (2000), listening is a complex problem solving skill and it is more than just perception of the sounds. Listening includes comprehension of meaning words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and connected discourse. Wipf (1984) have explained that listening is an invisible mental process, making it difficult to describe. Listeners must discriminate between sounds, understand vocabulary and grammatical structures, interpret stress and intention, retain and interpret this within the immediate as well as the larger socio-cultural context of the utterance.

Based on the explanation and opinions above, it can be concluded that listening is the ability to identify and understand, also comprehend what others are saying. It is also a complex activity, and we can help students comprehend what they hear by activating their prior knowledge.

2. Teaching Listening

There are four sections in listening skill strategy. Each section can help students develop a range of skill and strategies (Rost, 1991: 10- 11):

- Section I: *Attentive listening* is designed to give students practice with listening and with supplying short responses to the speaker, either verbally or non-verbally (through

action). This kind of ‘responsive’ listening involves immediately processing of information and quick decision about how to respond the activities.

- Section II: *Intensive Listening* will focus the students’ attention on language form. The aim of this section is to raise the learner’ awareness of how differences in sound, structure, and lexical choice can affect meaning.
- Section III: *Selective Listening* will help enable students to identify a purpose for listening. By providing focused information – based tasks, the activities in section III help direct the student’ attention on key words, discourse sequence cues, or ‘information structures’ (exchanges in which factual information is given).
- Section IV: *Interactive Listening* is designed to help learners assume active role in shaping and controlling an interaction, even when they are in the ‘listener’s role’. Because it is important for learners to take an active role as listeners, each activity in this section need for information or clarification questions by the listener (students). Listening skill developed in the context of interaction – mainly through information gap pair work.

3. The Text-to-speech Media Technology

There are kinds of media technology that will support English teaching and learning, especially in teaching learning Listening skill. They are text-to-speech media technology, songs and movies. In this paper the writer will mention and discuss which one of them, it is Text to Speech Media Technology. TTS refers to a Text-to-Speech conversion technology or engine that converts written text into a voice file. Speech synthesis technology has a rather long history.

According to (Aoki, 2009: 1), “the first text-to- speech system was completed at Bell Laboratories as early as 1968. It was implemented in the Speak and Spell handheld electronic learning aid by Texas Instruments in 1978.” Until recent years, machine-made voices were of poor quality and were often ridiculed as “robot voices”. She also argued that “Among teachers and researchers of EFL (English as a foreign language), synthetic speech has been evaluated poorly. However, today the corpus-based speech synthesis technology has developed so rapidly in recent years that it can now be considered a valid replacement for human voices for various purposes, including language learning.

a text-to-speech (TTS) synthesis system is a computer-based system where

the input is text and the output is a simulated vocalization of that text. (R. Syed, Chakrobartty & Bignall, 2005). In other word, Text-to-speech will change the text or convert to an audio file, such as MP3, WAV, WMA, etc. Those all can play and would be a media in teaching listening activity.

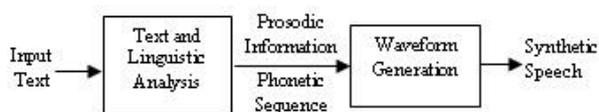


Figure 1. A two-step representation of a text-to-speech system (R. Syed, Chakrobartty & Bignall, 2005)

4. Advantages of Using TTS Media Technology

According to Hall (2012: 1), the benefits of a TTS application can assist in expanding reading coverage, allowing a different frame of reference when reviewing and editing their own writing, and enhancing listening skills (that promotes focus during class lectures, discussion, and general communication). Furthermore, she also states that “focus—a skill developed through listening—is a key component in effective comprehension of course materials”

In teaching and learning English activity especially in listening process, text-

to-speech media technology can helps the teachers to give attractive listening material and innovative media technology. It also can grow students’ motivation and interest in learning listening skill activities.

Text-to-speech is easy, efficient, and friendly software of PC (Personal Computer) & PDA (Personal Digital Assistant) program utility. According to Clemmons (2008), Text Aloud (the one of kind of TTS) is an easy and affordable PC program that downloads and installs in minutes, and enables computer users everywhere to easily listen to their favourite reading, study material, or even language lessons as natural (and non-robotic) human-sounding speech.

B. PROCEDURE OF TEACHING LISTENING BY USING “TEXT-TO-SPEECH” MEDIA TECHNOLOGY

1. Preparation

The writer will discuss about how to prepare before teaching listening by using text-to-speech media technology. As we know that, the teachers have to prepare appropriate material and media in teaching listening activity later. The teachers have to connect material to syllabus and relevant curriculum. Furthermore, the teachers have to make interesting media before they get in to listening activity in the classroom.

In preparing material especially in making interesting media, the writer will explain and discuss steps by steps of using text-to-speech media technology. In this case, the writer uses a kind of text-to-speech media technology that called "TextAloud". The step by step will explain in several points as follows:

- 1) Firstly, install the program of TextAloud software in your PC or laptop. (available to download at www.nextup.com)
- 2) After installing processed have done. Run the TextAloud program.
- 3) Copy and paste the material (Such as Narrative text, spoof text, Hortatory text, etc.) to main window of TextAloud and write the title of project above in the toolbar.
- 4) Then, choose a voice and set speed and pitch of TextAloud program in main toolbar.
- 5) After that, click the "speak" button in the toolbar or press (Ctrl +F3) in your keyboard to convert text to be an audio.
- 6) Finally, if the steps above have done we are going to save the file into audio file (MP3, WAV & WMA) formats. Click "to file" button in the toolbar of

TextAloud and choose destination of folder to save file.

2. Application

After preparation of the material, we are going to apply (present) the material in the classroom. In teaching listening the material is presented in systematically. So, teacher will be easier to present the material and manage time effectively. In general, there are three sections of teaching activities. They are pre listening activities, whilst-listening activities and post listening activities.

1) Pre-Teaching Activities

In the pre listening activities, the teacher should do several actions. They are as follows:

- a. *Teacher opens the class by greeting the students necessary.* Its purpose to give the student good impression and grow their religion behaviour characteristic.
- b. *Teacher asks the students some questions.* That purpose to brainstorm the students and remind the topic. Also memorizing things, event, and action which ever occurred or heard before.
- c. *After that, teacher should pay attentions to the students that can answer the several questions above and gives appreciation to them.* The appreciation (reward)

would like giving applause, giving star to the students, and giving plaudits (excellent, great, marvellous, etc).

2) Whilst Teaching Activities

In whilst listening activity, the teacher should take the actions that:

- a. *Teacher plays an audio format (MP3, WAV, WMA) that will be a media in teaching listening activity* and let the students learn the text material by using media. It purposes to replace teacher's old method in teaching listening activity.
- b. Next, *the teacher explains difficult words in the text material that they heard by the students*. It head for give the students more information about the text material that they hear from media.
- c. Then, *the teacher writes some questions on the whiteboard*. If necessary, ask the students to copy them on their exercise book. It purpose to know as far as students get information and understand from hear the text materia also ask the students whether they have already understood about the questions.

- d. Now, *the teacher's turn to reads the text material loudly and clearly*. If necessary, teacher may read the text twice. In first time, ask the students to pay attention to and listen to the teacher carefully.
- e. After that, *the teacher discusses the answers together and asks the students to write down the answers on the whiteboard*. Whereas, the teacher should gives appreciation to the students if they can answer the questions.
- f. Finally, *the teacher can explains to the students more detail about the text material*. Such as, explain about pronunciation of words or sentences, generic structure of the material, component and concept the material, etc.

3) Whilst Teaching Activities

In the post listening activities, teacher needs to evaluate the students to know as far as student's ability in listening activity. To evaluate the students, teacher can give the students several tasks or assignments.

- a. *The teacher gives the students a new audio format from text-to-speech media technology that*

will be a task for the students.

The teacher tells to students that they are going to do an exercise.

- b. After that, *Teacher writes some questions related the text material on the whiteboard* and asks to the students to copy those questions on their exercise book. Before the students answer the questions, teacher needs to explain several questions to the students and make the students really understand about those questions.
- c. Then, *Teacher plays a new audio format (TTS Media Technology) for the students about text material on the device and asks the students to listen carefully.* Teacher can tell to the students that the media will play in twice time only. It purposes to make the students making the best use of time. After that, teacher tells to the students that they may answer the questions or do the exercises in 10 – 15 minutes.
- d. Finally, if the students finish their work, *teacher asks to the students to exchange their work with their pairs.* Tell the students that they will correct the exercises together.

C. CONCLUSIONS

Listening is one of the four language skills that need to be taught to the students in learning and mastery English. In teaching listening, media technology is very important. One of them is text-to-speech media technology. Text-to-speech is suitable media technology that can be used in teaching listening because the text-to-speech is a good (audio) media and interesting for the students. Text-to-speech media technology can help the students develop and improve their ability in listening, also it can grow students' motivate in learning listening skill activity.

Using the text-to-speech media technology is one of an audio media for improving the listening skills of the students to learning English as a foreign language. It can play important role, also use for continuous time in language teaching, which can help the teacher in giving material in learning skill activities.

In this case, there are several advantages of using text-to-speech media technology. The first one, the text-to-speech media technology is an effective, attractive and innovative media especially in teaching and learning process. Second, It can help the teachers who are lack in pronunciations or get are doubt how to pronounce some words when teaching listening skill. Third, students hoped not feel bored while learning

listening activity by using text-to-speech media technology, etc.

To get better result of teaching listening, English teacher should get some classroom procedures (lesson plans) dealing with the activity of presentation in teaching and learning listening skill. First step in procedures is preparation. it explains about how to prepare the media before presenting in the classroom. Then, teacher can apply the media in classroom related to three activities, they are pre-teaching, whilst-teaching and post-teaching activities.

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