

Tri Wahyuni Floriasti is a lecturer in English Education Department of Yogyakarta State University, Indonesia. Her research interests are in teaching and researching listening and speaking and sociocultural in language teaching. Her recent publications are in ACLL International Conference Osaka-Japan 2012, Asia Tefl New Delhi-India 2012

Improving speaking skills through the use of integrated listening and speaking material for student teachers academic year 2012/2013

By

Tri Wahyuni Floriasti

Yogyakarta State University

triwahyunifloriasti@uny.ac.id

trifloriasti@yahoo.com

Introduction

Speaking was the most difficult skill based on some observations. Students faced some obstacles, which came from internal problems, such as anxiety, worried about making mistakes and lack of self confident, and external ones: lack of speaking practice and input from receptive materials – listening and reading. Their problems influence their listening and speaking performance that will be explained in the next sub chapter. However, in fact, most of activities and materials were not designed to support both speaking and listening. Listening and speaking influences each other as the more students get input from listening, the richer the knowledge they acquire then the more fluent they become.

In order to be able to demonstrate comprehensible meaning, students need to get relevant and meaningful input either from listening or reading so that they acquire not only full understanding of the messages being spoken but also the model to communicate them in the appropriate speaking context. Rivers (1996, 196) in Osada (2004, 55) says “Speaking does not of itself constitute communication unless what is being said is comprehended by another person”. One investigation from Dupuy (1999) in Nation (2009) about “narrow listening” – an approach based on Krashen’s idea, reported improvements in students listening comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary as well as increased confidence in French. The improvements were resulted from listening as many times as they wish to a range of 1 – 2 minute aural texts on a range of familiar and interesting topics. Hence, the points that should be taken into account are the integration of listening (meaning-focused input) and speaking (meaning-focused output) and *language-focused learning* such as the *language features: pronunciation, spelling, vocabularies, grammar and discourse* (Nation and Newton, 2009). Consequently, the design is not only focus on increasing the frequency of listening and speaking practice but also integrating the material and activities, both listening and speaking of the given texts.

Discussion

Rubin (1994, 78) states that text type has been noted as a factor affecting listening comprehension. It is assumed that since most written texts are more syntactically complex, less redundant, denser, and use fewer pauses than spoken texts, they are potentially more difficult to understand (i.e., cognitively taxing). Conversely, because conversational texts are less complex syntactically, more redundant, and have more pauses, they are potentially easier to understand. People communicate what they have in mind everyday, as it is a part of daily life. Even though words are always spoken daily and produced ten thousands for average people, it does not make speaking easier, especially for foreign learners (Thornbury, 2009: 1). Speaking is a skill, which deserves attention, as it is a foreign language. Thus, speaking is routine communication, which needs to be paid attention; in addition it should be had and developed (Luoma, 2009: 20). Due to these definitions, lecturers need to see factors that make speaking difficult, strategy to speak and develop it, types and characteristics of spoken language. Thus, teaching the comprehension of spoken speeches is therefore of primary importance if the communication aims is to be reached (River, 1966, 204 in Osada, 2004, 55)

As Osada (2004, 56) says that in order to understand spoken messages, students need to integrate information from a range of sources: phonetic, phonological prosodic, lexical, syntactic, semantics, and pragmatic. The difficulties come from both side speaking and listening. The fact that we achieve all this in real time as the message unfolds makes listening complex, dynamic, and fragile (Celce-Murcia, 1995, 366)

Spoken language has its own features, which are different from written language. Buck (2001, 4) in Osada (2004) points out that there are three characteristics of speech that are particularly important in the listening comprehension construct: (a) speech is encoded in the form of sound; (b) it is linear and takes place in real time, with no chance of review; and (c) it is linguistically different from written language. Brown (2001: pp. 270-271) suggests some characteristics of spoken language, which can make oral performance easy as well as, in some cases, difficult. First, clustering deals with the way of the speakers organize their output both cognitively and physically (in breath groups) through such clustering. Second, redundancy deals with the way the speaker has opportunity to make meaning clearer

through the redundancy of language by capitalizing on this feature of spoken language. Third, reduced forms refer to contractions, elisions, reduced vowels, etc; all form special problems in teaching spoken English. Fourth, performance variables deal with a certain number of performance hesitations, pauses, backtracking and corrections, which appear during the process of thinking as the speaker speaks. Fifth, the teacher should also make sure that the students are well acquainted with the words, idioms, and phrases of colloquial language and that the students get practice in producing these forms. Sixth, rate of delivery refers to an acceptable speed along with other attributes of fluency should be achieved by students. Seventh, stress, rhythm, and intonation, which are the most important characteristics of English pronunciation, convey important messages. The last characteristic is interaction.

Therefore, ideally, students get input from listening skill how to speak accurately and fluently. It can be stated that students need more practical activities, which provide them with more listening practice and input from listening material and audio-visual media that contain good model of accuracy, fluency, pronunciation, rhythm, intonation, grammar and standard rate of delivery. As Dunckel (1991, 437) says that although it has become generally accepted practice to provide beginning-level learners with a considerable amount of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1981), Rickerson (1984) stresses the need to provide foreign/second language students with opportunity to produce the language to enhance the motivation during language learning. Thus, it is expected that the result of more input and listening practice, their speaking skills improve to the upper level. It is a good starting point for them since they will play as model for their future students. Hence, it meets the teaching competence of current PBI curriculum that graduated student teachers should acquire four competencies such as pedagogic, interpersonal, academic, and social competence.

Research problems

In identifying the problems, I carried out some observations in three speaking classes. Based on the observations, there were many errors done by the students when speaking. There were errors in the accuracy, pronunciation, spelling, stress, rhythm, intonation and grammar. Beside that, most of the students viewed speaking as difficult skill. They encountered some problems when speaking English, such as how to start a conversation, how to connect from idea to another one, anxiety, nervous, and

worried about making mistakes. These problems hindered them from having a fluency in speaking, thus made them think that it was not easy to speak.

The activities and the materials that were given to the students did not give a chance to practice speaking. Most of the activities in the classroom were dominated by doing some exercises in their modules that did not enrich students' speaking skills. Their activities were reading some dialogues in book and it happened most of the time. Therefore, students' production were not sound natural which was based on real conversations.

Furthermore, students only got input from the teachers who read the dialogues and they followed her/his without having other input from audio-visual or movies which contain native sounds in real communication. Sometimes students did not know certain natural expression in real life, for instance: how's life? Are you heading somewhere? Thus, students' speaking ability ended up in low accuracy, fluency, pronunciation, stressing, rhythm and grammar. Due to the lack input of listening, consequently, students had difficulties in understanding clustering, reduced forms; colloquial language and translating phrase and idiom so that they cannot give expected response.

Due to the lack of using other media but English book or printed materials, students did not get a chance to develop what they got. Students needed to get more input not only from the printed book the had but also from other media such as audio-visual material that can be herd to scaffold their knowledge so that students have good model how to speak naturally. Nowadays, we find that gadget is about young generation. They put their life - recent activities, personal pictures, favourite movies and music, agendas in their gadget such as tablet, Smartphone, notepad, MP3 player, ipod, etc. This habitual situation is a challenge for educators to put English closer to students in their daily life. Then, gadget is a part of their life. The soft file of English material and the media can be saved in their gadget such as audio – visual PowerPoint, Vodcat, Podcast, movies and music. Once students have them in their gadget, they can learn the material anytime and anywhere. It means that they have the control how and when to learn which is can be matched with their learning style and habit.

In contrast, this advantage could not be found in the class where printed material and conventional media, such as flash cards that were displayed in the class and in limited time. When the class was over, so did the material and the media, then

students needed a space and sometimes to learn these printed material and the media. Therefore, audio-visual materials play important roles in putting English closer to students' life and breaks the barrier of the use of classroom only material and the media as well.

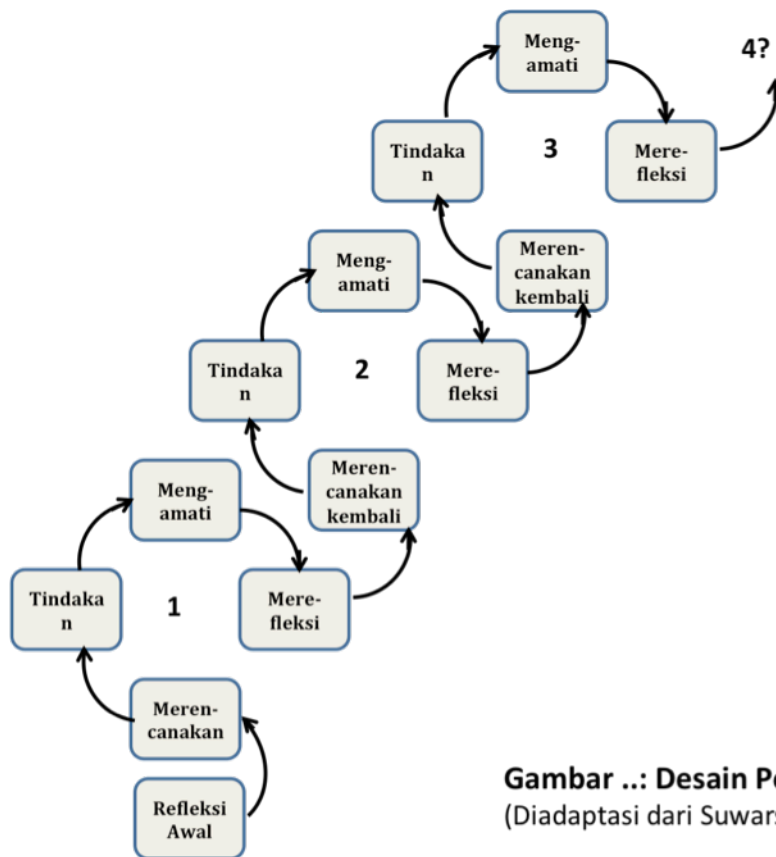
Students got surprise when the first time they listen to the audio material. It was hard for them to catch the messages from the conversations due to the native speaking speed, vocabulary, unfamiliar accent, pronunciation and prosodic features: stress and intonation.

Research methodology

This research was a collaborative action research study. This research tried to improve speaking skills through integrated listening and speaking material for student teachers of PBI academic year 2012/2013. I played as a researcher and worked with two lecturers who run the listening and speaking classes.

This research was run in English Education Department. It had been conducted from March to November 2012. This action research was conducted in semester I class A and G, which each class consisted of 18 females and two males. One lecturer got two classes listening 1A and speaking 1A and the other one conducted listening 1G and speaking 1G.

The design was adopted from Suwarsih Madya (2006) since it matched with the problems, purpose and research characteristics. The design can be seen in figure 2 below.



Gambar ...: Desain Penelitian
(Diadaptasi dari Suwarsih Madya, 2006)

From the figure 2, it can be seen that the action research procedures form a cycle, which cover four main steps.

Research result

The result from two cycles is discussed below. It will be explored in listening and speaking part. There will be score of two activities in cycle 1 and cycle 2.

Listening and speaking

Listening Material – in general, the material was good based on students' interview. The material were introduction yourself, friends, family in informal and formal situations with various accent, which was one of the students problems. Burns, Gollin, and Joyce (1997) suggest that if learners are involved in spoken text analysis, it should be directly applicable to the speaking task (McCarthy and O'Keeffe; 2004, 33). Besides, students were introduced with various voices from male and female. They failed to catch the speakers as they faced difficulties in differentiating male voices. Therefore, they got lost in listening this audio material.

It was expected that students could recognize various sounds when they listened to similar ones. In addition, they should be able to place *contractions* ('m, 's, 're). Identifying the responses in formal and informal conversations for instance, "What's your name?" "It's Kyle Jones."

The frequencies of listening practices were increasing from meeting one to other meetings. They were also equipped with listening strategies, which gave them extra help in comprehending the messages, grammar form, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Training the use of listening strategies facilitates L2 listening comprehension and L2 learners can and should be taught how to use listening strategies. Students did skimming and scanning in pre-listening part. In the meeting one, it took 30 minutes, as it was their first meeting. They were not familiar with listening activity. They started with understanding the instructions "what do they mean?" how? When? Etc. In addition, trying to develop a topic from the given pictures was one of the helping steps for them. The aim was to bring the listening closer to them, after having comfortable with it then they could do the rest steps without fear. As Berne in Osada (2004, 56) points out that one of facts about L2 listening comprehension – the use of prelistening activities, particularly those that provide short synopsis of the listening passage or allow listeners to preview the comprehension questions, facilitate L2 listening comprehension.

Matching the picture with the clues could be a way out while listening to difficult expressions. Due to pictures gave hints and it worked for beginners as they grabbed the messages. It built their confidence that they had listening ability, as they never experienced listening in SMA.

In post-listening, students answered all the questions and produced short sentences using some words from what they heard in audio material. Then, they were discussing the answers with the class and practiced pronoun difficult and some vocabularies that they thought odd-accent words. After getting input and full understanding the context of the words, some expressions, and idioms, then they start performing in activities such as role-play, individual performance, small group discussions, and story telling.

Shumin (2002) in McCarthy and O'Keeffe (2004) stresses the need for learners to be able to engage in small talk in the target language (i.e., inconsequential talk about weather, traffic, and so on). At first, one of students' speaking strategies was copycatting exactly what they got from listening. Cunningham Florez (1999)

suggests that speaking lessons can follow a classic pattern of preparation, presentation, practice, evaluation, and extension. In preparation phase, learners are shown visuals of people in formal settings and brainstorm on what they might be saying (McCarthy and O’Keeffe, 2004). It seemed like they were playing safe, but that was fine as it was their first experience in speaking. However, it changed as the topics were varied and the frequencies were getting higher, while students’ confidences were increasing. Therefore, they had created their own role-play and start speaking in small group and class discussion without fear and hesitation. Should there any hesitation, it decreased in every meeting.

Here are the score for listening and speaking for role-play and individual performance in cycle 1 and 2. It can be seen below in table 1 and table 2.

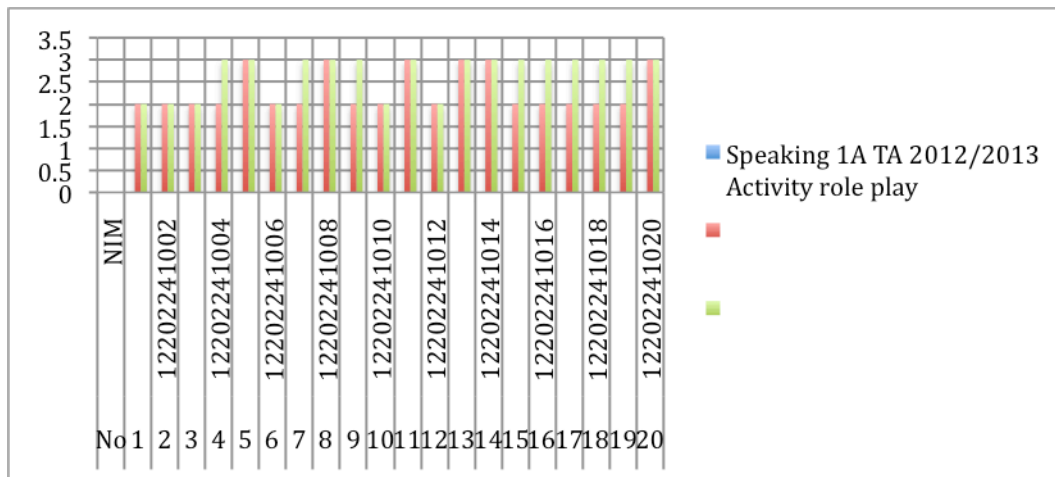


Table 1. Score for listening and speaking for role-play in cycle 1 and 2

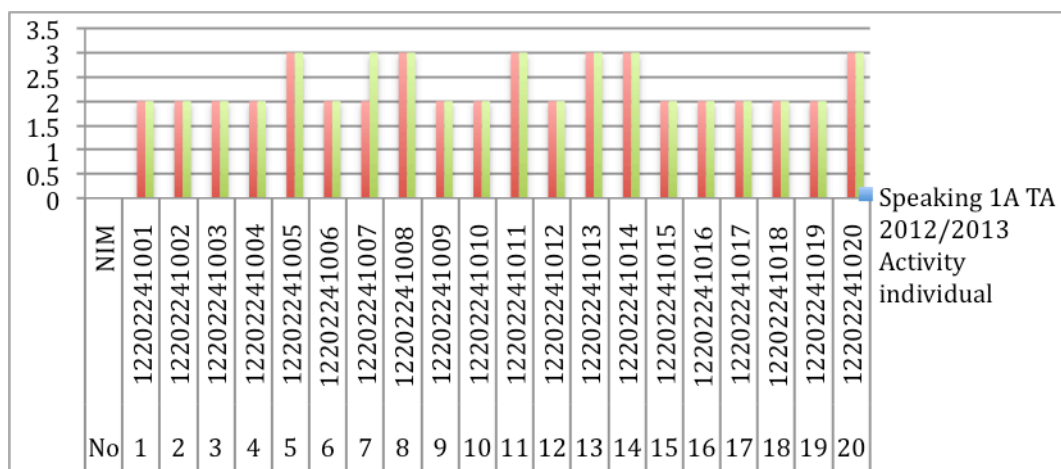


Table 2. Score for listening and speaking for individual performance in cycle 1 and 2

It is admitted that they were different between score of role-play and individual performance. Some students were not moving from level 2 for individual performance however the number increased from level 2 to level 3. The possible explanation for that is the type of activity that might influence students' performance in speaking. For instance, students felt anxious if they spoke alone so they made few errors. However it did not appear when they were in role-play.

Types of activity, numbers of students who get involve in the activity influence the performance so far. It might be concluded that their speaking is not stable yet as it is still up and down.

Conclusion and recommendations

I expect that the result of this study will provide students with adequate knowledge in mastering speaking as it gives students individual opportunities to practice and improve speaking skills. Furthermore, students have confident to speak and not worried about making mistake and error, then give them good model how to speak naturally in daily context and formal situation as well. In the future, their abilities will be a potential factor that can be used in the upper level of study, university level.

- a. The result of this study can be used for students to get knowledge through listening audio-visual materials and media so that they have opportunity to learn the way native speaker speak in real life. It is expected that students get beneficial input from listening. Therefore, audio-visual materials play important roles in putting English closer to students' life and breaks the barrier of the use of classroom only material and the media as well.
- b. For English teachers, it is expected that it can give some inspiration and motivation to design material, use appropriate approaches and give suitable media in teaching learning process. Teachers can used this as an inspirational way in teaching speaking, which gives opportunities for students to practice listening and speaking independently.
- c. For material developers, this research can be used as a pattern to develop listening and speaking material in the future. In addition, the audio-visual media

will give a significant way to give input for students in enriching speaking skills and improving listening skills.

- d. For other researchers, this research is expected to give some inspiration and idea to conduct other studies relevant to the problem.
- e. For PBI board, the result of more input and listening practice, their speaking skills improve to the upper level. It is a good starting point for them since they will play as model for their future students. Hence, it meets the teaching competence of future PBI curriculum that graduated student teachers should acquire four competencies such as pedagogic, interpersonal, academic, and social competence.

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