



Utilizing Text-to-Speech Technology: Natural Reader in Teaching Pronunciation

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ABSTRACT

This research stimulates the use of Natural Reader Text-to-Speech (TTS) in teaching pronunciation. This research is descriptive qualitative. The analysis shows the steps of using Natural Readers. Teachers/lecturers can click <https://www.naturalreaders.com/>. They can log in or register into the account. If they have an account, they can continue or click "Continue with Google" or "Continue with Apple". They can type a word, sentence, or text in the column box, or click the + icon to upload documents in Word or Pdf. They can set the type of native speaker sound (male or female), volume, and speed of pronunciation before playing/listening to the pronunciation. When all the settings have been done, they click the play icon to hear the native speaker say that have been inputted. Teachers/lecturers can ask students to follow the native speakers to say the words or sentences so the students can pronounce English words correctly and fluently. They may quickly produce or export audio into MP3 files. The Natural reader app provides a text-to-speech converter solution for both websites and mobile apps. Natural Reader converts text into sound English with various accents such as British or American even other accents. This application has a free version, but the paid version has more complete features to be used in teaching and learning English pronunciation. This tool is capable of synthesizing the human voice from the previously entered text input. Natural Readers provide substantial text-to-speech support to meet a variety of student needs in English pronunciation.

INTRODUCTION

Language is essential to human life as it is acquired, learned, and used by a person as a tool of communication and as a social symbol of humanity. In addition, language allows one to make claims, communicate facts and knowledge, explain or report something, and maintain social relationships with other language users. Language further enables people to communicate their thoughts, emotions, and information through conversation.

Pronunciation is a way of pronouncing words in English. By studying pronunciation, we can easily do the pronunciation, especially in terms of communication. Thus, if we do not have good pronunciation, it will be difficult for other people to understand what we are going to say. The main obstacle that makes learning pronunciation difficult is because of the differences in pronunciation styles, accents, and also the sound system between Indonesian and English. The importance of pronunciation in speaking is because the wrong pronunciation of words in the language can be fatal because incorrectly pronouncing one consonant or just a vowel in a word can lead to different meanings.

There is a widespread idea that accurate pronunciation is an essential component of effective communication, which represents an important current trend in reaching out to foreign languages in schools (Levy et al., 2011). In most circumstances, the primary purpose of language acquisition is communication, both written and spoken. However, many language teachers frequently overlook or are compelled to overlook pronunciation during the teaching process. One of the causes for this is undoubtedly a shortage of time, which stems from an emphasis on grammar and lexical components of teaching English rather than pronunciation.

The number of English learning applications nowadays makes it easier for teachers to teach. Pronunciation is one of the important aspects of speaking in English. Pronunciation is one of the important components that must be known by a student who wants to master speaking skills in English. Pronunciation is how a language or word is spoken, and/or how someone says the words of a language. Before someone speaks in English, they must first know how to pronounce a certain word or expression. This means that pronunciation is the basis of speaking because it is the first element in speaking in English. Pronunciation is very important to learn because mistakes in pronouncing a word will affect the understanding of a word.

Good pronunciation takes a long time to awaken, which means that one has to see the process of the language itself as one has to hear someone whose native language is English say the word first. Further, they imitate and practice it so that they can pronounce the same sound as spoken by native speakers. Furthermore, they are only able to produce sounds or sounds of words in communication. Pronunciation errors can cause misunderstandings between speakers and listeners when they communicate with each other so that the content of the message to be conveyed cannot be received properly.

Hence, learning media is critical in learning pronunciation. From an educational standpoint, learning media is a rather strategic instrument in determining the success of the teaching and learning process. Since its existence can directly provide students with its dynamics. As a tool in the learning process, media is useful for making teaching more attractive to learners so that it can foster learning motivation. Teaching materials will have a clearer meaning so that students can understand them and allow students to master the learning objectives well. Varied learning methods, not just verbal communication in the form of lectures, will make students not easily bored and teachers will not run out of energy. In addition to that, students are also more active because there are many activities to observe, do, demonstrate, and others. The diversity of existing learning media makes teachers have to be more selective and pay attention to the criteria for choosing learning media so that teaching and learning activities are more effective.

The development of the world of technology and communication is very fast recently. One TTS technology that is also popular is Text-to-Speech. Bakken et al., (2012) claims that Text-to-speech is typically connected with computer or word processor software, and there are several free text-to-speech alternatives when considering computers (e.g., Natural Reader and Microsoft Reader). According to (Chapelle & Sauro, 2019), Text-to-Speech (TTS) is the process through which computer systems generate speech that sounds natural from the text. Since the 1960s, speech synthesis technology has existed, and its applications are now readily available. Many of them are accessible for free (e.g., Speak Selection, Screen Reader, Natural Reader), while others are offered for a fee (e.g., Text Reader, Voice Dream Reader). Google Chrome also offers free ITS tools for reading instruction and learning (e.g., Select and Speak, SpeakIt!, Reading & Write for Google). TTS is a voice synthesis tool that reads aloud digital and textual content. The program has multiple use cases and is utilized by all age groups, including professionals and students. Thus, Text-to-Speech applications are incredibly beneficial for the visually impaired and those with learning difficulties. The program also aids individuals in learning a new language and overcoming language barriers.

When we listen to speech sounds from the word input, that's when text-to-speech technology works to convert text into sound automatically. Thus, by using this text-to-speech software, you can change writing in the form of text into a sound that is quite natural like human pronunciation. Now, there are many language options that we can choose from, one of the best text-to-speech software is Google Translate and Natural Reader. But now text to speech tools have emerged that have advanced features. To check the pronunciation of words or sentences in English, we can use the Natural Reader application. Victor (2014) states that Natural Reader is a free text-to-speech program for Windows that, when used with Adobe Reader, enable our computer to read aloud PDF files. Utilize with a Web browser, and the Internet "speaks". Natural Reader



assists auditory learners, kids with learning difficulties, individuals with autism, and those for whom English is a second language. Natural Reader is a free choice for computer-based text-to-speech software (Rotatori et al., 2014). A free text-to-speech, Natural Reader, is available at <http://www.naturalreader.com/> (Sharp, 2008). Further, Text-to-speech (TTS) applications such as Natural Reader (<http://www.naturalreaders.com>) can be used to assist students to develop automaticity (Bao, 2018).

Several previous studies have been conducted related to the media in teaching English pronunciation. First, Gilakjani & Sabouri (2014) claim that "Pronunciation Power" software is one of the computer technologies for teaching English pronunciation. They believe it will give students more autonomy and greater opportunities in learning pronunciation. Second, Sufi & Shalmani (2018) state that the use of the TFlat can be used specifically by EFL teachers who are interested in improving their students' pronunciation ability. Third, Samad & Aminullah (2019) state that the students believe that ELSA talk is an excellent resource for pronunciation practice. They believe that this program's design in terms of content, assessment/flexibility, multimedia, and automated voice recognition is exceptional. It is also well-designed from a pedagogical perspective. Fourth, Roslaini & Komara (2020) that the use of Text Aloud Software as one technology application that can help English as Foreign Language (EFL) students to master English pronunciation in the classroom. Fifth, Ardini et al. (2020) assert that The English Pronunciation Application (EPA) can improve student pronunciation effectively. Therefore, it is suggested to teachers that the EPA application is significantly useful in teaching pronunciation but they should be creative in combining the application and students' interest in the media. Sixth, Rahmania & Mandasari (2021) said that most of the students are agreed that JOOX application helps them to get better pronunciation with the help of lyrics features. Seventh, Pratiwi et al., (2021) state that students had a positive attitude toward a TikTok application while learning English to help enhance literacy and pronunciation skills.

Based on the previous above, it shows similarities and differences with this research. Those previous studies and this research focus on creating and making listening by using software and application but are different in the object of research. The first study focuses on the use of Listening Media apps, while the second study focuses on the use of a tool called Longtion Autorun. Further, the third study focuses on the use of Adobe Flash, the fourth study focuses on the use of Android software, and the fifth study focuses on the use of Adobe Animate CC 2019 for Android. Last but not least, the sixth study focuses on the use of YouTube for video editing. However, there is no research has been conducted related to the use of Text-to-Speech in designing or developing English learning materials. Therefore, this research focuses on the use of Text-to-Speech applications in creating, making, or designing listening materials, especially iSpeech. As stated above, one of the TTS apps is iSpeech Text to Speech. Therefore, the objective of this research is to stimulate the use of Text-to-Speech (iSpeech) in designing English listening materials for English Language Teaching.

METHOD

This research is qualitative and descriptive. Instead of numbers and statistics, the qualitative researcher is concerned with data offered in the form of words, pictures, and other visuals and artifacts (Ary et al., 2018). This descriptive research aims to produce a factually correct description, image, or painting of the examined facts. The outcome analysis is detailed descriptively in this study. Observation will be used to collect data for this study. Wibowo & Cholifah (2018) states that observation is a strategy that is methodical, rational, objective, and reasonable for witnessing and documenting various events in both natural and artificial settings to achieve certain goals. As for listening materials, the researcher observes the application

of Text-to-Speech (Natural Reader) which can be accessed on <https://www.naturalreaders.com/in> pronouncing text to speech (audio).

The analysis of data in this study employs qualitative methods, including data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion, as stated by Miles et al. (2013); Miles & Huberman (1994). During the data reduction phase, the researcher selects and decreases the data to be used. Therefore, the researchers utilized only a handful of example texts connected to listening learning resources. At the data display step, the researcher exhibits or displays the data results as pictures. Here, the researcher uses pictures of Natural Reader Text-to-Speech. In addition, the researchers determined that the outcomes of the analysis were then explained.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research is to stimulate the use of Natural Reader one of the Text-to-Speech (TTS) Technology in teaching pronunciation to students. The simulation of Natural Reader in teaching pronunciation can be seen below:

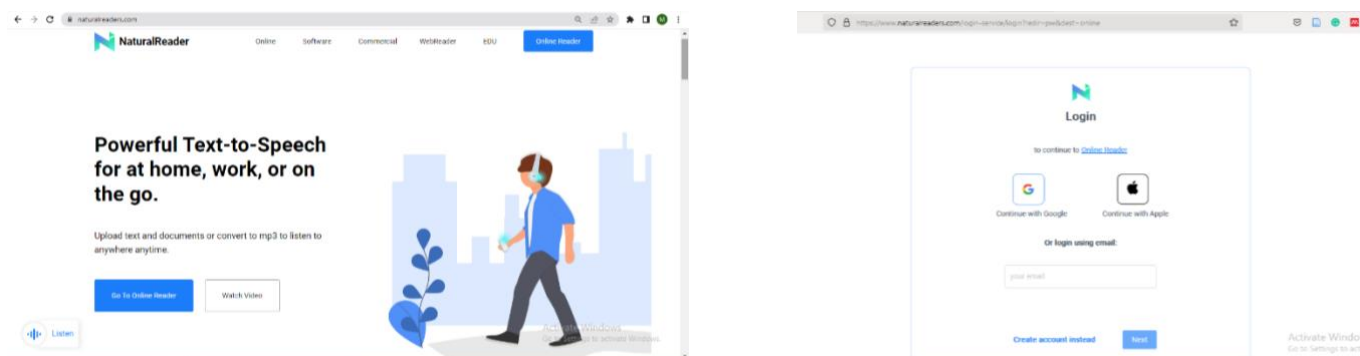


Figure 1. The Homepage of Natural Reader Software

Based on the figure above, the first step to using Natural Reader is clicking the <https://www.naturalreaders.com/> or <https://www.naturalreaders.com/online/>. The view of Natural Reader Software is written 'Powerful Text-to-Speech for at home, work, or on the go. Upload text and documents or convert to mp3 to listen to anywhere anytime'. We can directly use Natural with log in or register into the account. If we have a Natural Reader account, we can continue or click "Continue with Google" or "Continue with Apple".

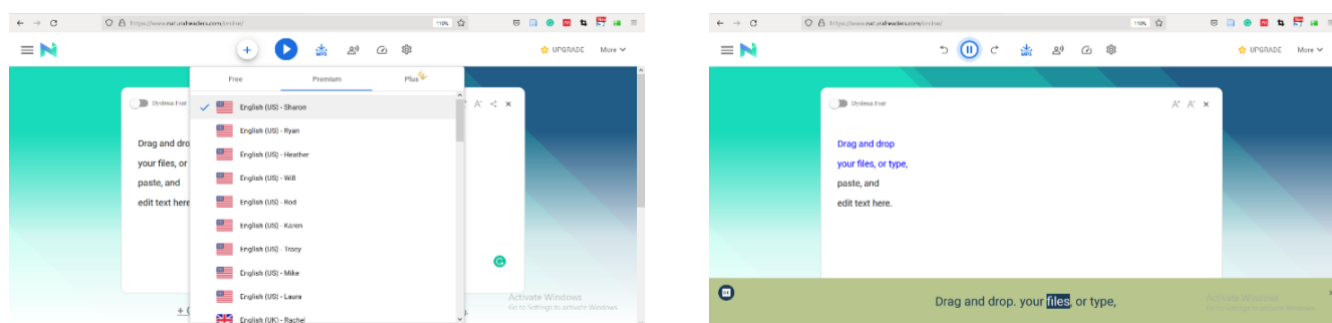


Figure 2. The View of Natural Reader Software

Based on the figure above, the next step to using Natural Reader The Open the Natural Reader application is to click the + icon to enter the word or sentence we want to hear how it is pronounced. Set the type of native speaker sound, volume, and speed of pronunciation in the application before playing or listening to the pronunciation of the native speaker in the Natural Reader application. When all the settings have been done, click the play icon to hear the native speaker say the difficult words that have been inputted. We listen to how the word is pronounced as much as we want. Then follow the native speakers to say the words or sentences that have been inputted into the application so the students can pronounce English words fluently and confidently. There are two voices available both male and female for personal use with the versions of the Natural Reader program (Personal, Professional, and Ultimate). We may also set the speed to listen to a selection of these voices from the homepage demo. We can export the audio output as an MP3, WAV, or OGG audio file; we also may quickly produce electronic copies of MP3 files and listen to the sound.

Using correct pronunciation may be essential to effective communication, which represents an important trend in the teaching of foreign languages in schools. In most situations, oral and written communication is the ultimate aim of language acquisition; nonetheless, many language teachers overlook or are compelled to disregard pronunciation throughout the whole teaching process. As a consequence of a greater emphasis on the grammatical and lexical components of teaching English as opposed to its pronunciation, lack of time is unquestionably one of the causes. Also, it is possible that less-experienced teachers with a strong interest in this topic would emphasize grammar and vocabulary over all else. Consequently, although pronunciation is of importance to both teachers and students, it is frequently overlooked for the reasons outlined. In addition to that, it is undeniable that teachers lack of preparation for teaching pronunciation and make little effort to obtain additional training in this sort of field. Pronunciation is crucial not just for effectively communicating ideas but also for comprehending other speakers (Eksi & Yesilçinar, 2016).

Natural Reader Text-to-Speech (TTS) is a chrome add-on that turns web text into audio that sounds natural. Simply hit the play button to hear our Emails, Websites, PDFs, Google Docs, and Kindle books read aloud!. Natural Reader reads aloud material using voices that seem natural. The text-to-speech program supports Microsoft Word, PDF, and electronic books. The free version includes basic text-to-speech, PDF, Word, and eBook compatibility, a floating bar with customizable settings, and PC and Mac compatibility. Natural Reader is a free text to speech online app with natural voices, that convert text to audio and mp3, for personal and commercial use. Natural Reader is a professional text-to-speech tool capable of converting any written material into spoken languages. Not only in English but this application can also be used in many languages. Natural Reader also has several accents such as US (American), UK (British), French, German, Italian, Spanish, Swedish, Arabic, Dutch, Chinese, Japanese, and Portuguese. Voices that show on the homepage demo but are not included here are exclusively accessible for personal web apps (Web, Web Premium). There are two voices available for personal use with the versions of the Natural Reader program (Personal, Professional, and Ultimate) both male and female. The paid editions of Natural Reader provide several more features. Natural Reader is a text-to-speech desktop application available for personal use. This user-friendly program with natural-sounding voices can read any text to you, including Microsoft Word files, websites, PDF files, and emails. A perpetual license is available with a one-time purchase.

A natural reader is an application that can be used to find out how to pronounce words in English. Natural Reader (<http://www.naturalreaders.com/>) is a text reader of the next generation, which implies that it reads any machine-readable text using synthesized speech without the need to copy and paste the text into the Natural Reader application window (Flood, 2007). Natural reader software is one of the resources that



can assist users to improve their writing and second language acquisition. The program will read the text, and the user may listen to the material read by the software at any pace. Natural Reader software contains some intriguing features: a) high-quality, human-sounding voices; the ability for users to download or select their preferred speaker sounds; b) it is user-friendly; the users may use it on their own.

Several actions are required to operate the software: First, choose the Natural Reader software icon. Second, input the set of words whose pronunciation we like to hear, and then click the play icon. The program will finally read or pronounce the words or sentences. c) Natural Reader is easy to use; if a user does not know how to pronounce a sentence, they can convert it from Microsoft Word to Natural Reader and the software will read the text. Therefore, they listen to the pronunciation of the locals. d) Powerful Audio Output; this means it can export the audio output as an MP3, WAV, or OGG audio file; users may quickly produce electronic copies of MP3 files and listen to the sound. Based on the above explanations, it is possible to conclude that the Natural Reader program might assist students in learning pronunciation to gain confidence in their public speaking performances since it has features that benefit students in understanding the English sounds.

The use of Natural Reader gives an advantage to students, especially in pronunciation and speaking skills. As state by Drew (2012) asserts that Natural Readers are available from websites and provide substantial text-to-speech support to meet a variety of student needs. Further, Andriani (2020) states that Natural Reader can enhance students' pronunciation and speaking abilities. The study discovered that students' pronunciation and speaking abilities improved. Before the researcher conducted the study, the English instructor at SMP Islam Terpadu Dhuafa stated that practically all students in VIIB could not speak English properly and that the KKM was 75. Therefore, the researcher conducted the study to enhance their pronunciation and speaking abilities.

Furthermore, Munggaran (2012) states that there is a substantial difference in pronunciation skill before and after using Natural Reader Software. the effect of using Natural Software on improving SMP 1 Bandung students' native accent pronunciation as a measure of being an effective language instructor in improving learners' pronunciation Furthermore, Natural Reader software, according to Saiful (2016), could considerably demonstrate that students were able to read more accurately and at a more appropriate pace employing instruction using natural reader software. The learner could easily have frequent opportunities to listen to the words read by the native speakers as a reader model at normal speed and repeat the copied reading text until they were able to read fluently as the reader model read the text by using natural reader software.

The steps in teaching pronunciation using the Natural Reader Application are as follows: Inventory of some vocabulary related to learning topics that are difficult to pronounce; Open the Natural Reader application, then click the + icon to enter the word or sentence we want to hear how it is pronounced. Set the type of native speaker sound, volume, and speed of pronunciation in the application before playing or listening to the pronunciation of the native speaker in the Natural Reader application. When all the settings have been done, click the play icon to hear the native speaker say the difficult words that have been inputted. Listen to how the word is pronounced as much as you want. Then follow the native speakers to say the words or sentences that have been inputted into the application so that students can pronounce English words fluently and confidently.

Some strategies that teachers can use in teaching pronunciation are: 1) instilling a positive attitude; where the teacher or lecturer must create a favorable atmosphere in the classroom so that students can practice pronunciation; 2) identifying the pronunciation of particular words that become difficulties for students The teacher can create a list of difficult terms that pupils frequently mispronounce; 3) help students grasp the



features of the language they are learning; teachers might instruct students to pay attention to good stress and intonation when native speakers speak, 4) focus on enhancing students' communication skills in which the teacher should emphasize pronunciation aspects (consonants, diphthongs, vowels, stress, and intonation).

The learning steps using Natural Reader include 1. Determine the text to be read (dialogue or monologue) from any basic competence. We recommend that the text is not too long, a range of 100-150 words. 2. Determine the number of words in the text. The number of words is to determine the student's score using the number of incorrect utterances per whole word times the specified value, then inform the students. This is to provide a sense of fairness and certainty about the assessment of their abilities. 3. It is better to share the text in printed form to make it easier to implement when opening the web or application. 4. Ask students to read the text by pausing, waiting for the written text to appear, and then continue, to do so until the entire text is finished. 5. Ask students to record the wrong pronunciation and then repeat only the wrong words. 6. Ask students to calculate their scores. When repeating, it turns out that what is written in the application is correct, then the value is considered perfect. This is to give appreciation for their efforts and increase students' confidence in pronouncing words.

There are some of the features of the Natural Reader App, they are: 1) Voice and Language Setting Features. In this feature, we can make sound settings in terms of the available sounds for the voice. In addition, we can also select or set the language you want to use. 2) Speed Setting Features. In addition to being able to convert text into sound, of course, other features are needed that support this, such as the speed control feature. With this feature, we can adjust by making edits to the speed of Google voice that we need. 3) New File Input Feature. This feature is presented in various modes. One of them is the OCR feature which is required to read from image files and scanned documents, and OCR which cannot be accessed or captured on the screen. 4) Change the Text to Voice feature. This feature can turn text into a natural and professional-sounding robotic voice. We can check out our article on Google voice to find out the text-to-speech technology behind this artificial natural voice. 5) OCR Feature with Printed Documents. This OCR feature can convert printed characters into digital text. So, it allows us to listen to the printed file or edit it in the supplied word processing program. 6) Text to Audio File Feature. In addition, there are other features such as the text to video file feature. Wherewith this feature we can convert text into mp3 files for Windows and Mac. 7) Mini Board Features. This feature will appear if we use the Natural Reader App to convert text into sound. So this mini board offers a simple way to read text directly from the page. 8) Pronunciation Editor Features. We can use this application to find out how to pronounce but speak in English.

Apart from the features that are available as a compliment, of course, there are several advantages of the Natural Reader App that we can feel: 1) There is a Commercial Voice. We can do this commercial voice-over in just a few minutes using converted text to speech. We can immediately download audio that is licensed for use on e-Learning platforms, YouTube, or the public for redistribution. 2) OCR with e-Books. We can use this OCR to convert taxi screenshots from eBook design applications. 3) There are various document formats. Apart from the OCR system, of course, this Natural Reader App provides various document support such as PDF, Docs, and text. 4) There is an OCR Feature for Printed Documents. Another advantage can be seen from the OCR feature that functions to convert printed characters into digital text. Thus, it allows us to listen to the printed file or edit it in the supplied word processing program. As already discussed a little bit in the previous point. Therefore, Natural Reader App is a terrible two choices between the free version and the paid version. Where if it is free of course some features are limited or not allowed to be used before we pay to become a customer.



CONCLUSION

Learning English cannot be separated from the pronunciation aspect since that mastery of pronunciation is significant in communication. The reason is that not a few in English when spoken with the wrong pronunciation will produce a different meaning from the intended meaning. Therefore, it is so critical for us to acquire the improvement of pronunciation. Thus, it should also be noted that in Indonesia there are still many people who are good at speaking English, but only a few who might master the pronunciation. Pronunciation is the way of pronouncing a word or sentence. In English, the pronunciation of a word is often slightly different from how it is written. Equally important, pronunciation is influenced by pronunciation accents. For instance, British English has a different accent from American English. The way to practice pronunciation in using English is by frequently reciting every word, reading, or dialogue. If we or our partner do not have friends to talk to or still feel less confident, we can try using an app to improve our pronunciation by using Natural Reader. Converting typing into sound can be done with the help of certain software or applications. We can find software/applications for converting text into voice on any device, whether on a PC or cellphone. Natural Reader provides female and male voices that can be used for free and for a fee. This software can convert text into sound in several languages, one of which is English with various accents, such as British or American.

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