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Extensive Pair Taping for College Students in Japan: Action Research in Confidence and Fluency Building

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Introduction

In the fifteen years I've been teaching oral communication (OC) in Japan, I have realized that most of my students lack the extensive and routine exposure needed to gain the confidence and fluency they desire in spoken English.

At the start of every academic year, I ask students to complete a questionnaire regarding their individual needs, and year after year my primary belief is confirmed: students desire more opportunities to speak English. Further, students attribute their inability to speak English fluently and confidently to the lack of speaking experience and/or opportunities to engage in second language (L2) conversation outside the classroom. Students who are confident to engage in English conversation invariably report having experienced living or traveling abroad, or studying at private English conversation schools in Japan. Every year, I have a few students in each of my classes who have studied English abroad and/or attended private English conversation classes, usually taught by native English speakers, often one-on-one. Typically, such students have the ability to speak English more fluently and confidently than my average student. Their abilities quickly stand out, often in stark contrast to students who have not enjoyed the same opportunities.

As a result, I am particularly concerned with giving my students opportunities to speak English regularly, at length, and with confidence. Unfortunately, the typically large enrollment in English OC classes in Japan is counterproductive to the practice of L2



speaking (Norris, 1993). I have found it difficult to have students practice L2 speaking in large size classes (of over ten) because, unless constantly monitored, they invariably revert to their first language (L1). Moreover, I have found that many students do not appreciate in classroom speaking activities that draw attention to their inability to speak fluently or confidently. Even those who possess these abilities sometimes feel self-conscious when classmates quiet down to listen to them speak English, which in turn discourages lower level speakers from speaking in class. Most advanced students I have had either hid their actual ability by remaining silent, or took the role of spokesperson for the entire class. In short, conventional classroom speaking activities in my college can be unproductive and difficult to manage. My goal, therefore, was to establish a natural approach where students could develop L2 fluency and confidence more effectively than was occurring inside the classroom. I decided to introduce *pair taping* (Schneider, 1993, Kluge and Taylor, 1998), a method designed to engage students in extensive, natural, and meaningful conversation outside the classroom. I wanted the confidence and fluency-building experiences enjoyed by a handful to be enjoyed by all. Using pair taping (PT), I required pairs to meet regularly and outside of class to record all-English conversations, creating the need to converse in English, just as they would abroad or attending private conversation classes.

The year I first introduced PT, students reported enjoying it. Naturally, I was happy to know students had had fun taping weekly conversations, but I wanted to know whether the method helped them gain fluency and confidence. I decided to conduct a research project to investigate how PT influences students' fluency and confidence in speaking English. In this report, therefore, I aim to analyze whether extensive pair taping helps students gain fluency and confidence and how the method could be better geared to students' needs. With these considerations in mind, I formulated two research questions: I wanted to know if my students who practiced regular, extensive, pair taping became more fluent in English over the academic year. I also wanted to know whether my students who practiced regular, extensive, pair taping reported gains in confidence in speaking English.

In this paper, I report on the development of fluency and confidence of six pairs of first-year, female, English literature majors enrolled in the oral communication classes I taught. I examine findings in the fields of oral communication pedagogy, looking at how



other teacher-researchers have used pair taping. I describe PT procedures and how I collected and analyzed data for this project. In the findings section, I reveal three principal findings that suggest gains in fluency as well as confidence. In the discussion section, I discuss what I've learned by doing this project and how I have changed as a teacher. I also discuss how the knowledge of my students' feelings about PT is helpful in shaping my use of this method in the future.

Literature Review

This project is intended to contribute to the developing body of research in the area of pair taping (Schneider, 1993, 2002, Kluge and Taylor, 1998). Because the main purpose of this project is to determine the relationship between the use of this method and fluency and confidence building, I examine pertinent literature in two main areas: fluency and confidence, and discuss how these two areas relate to PT approaches. Due to the fact that "little empirical work exists on variations in L2 self-confidence" (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels, 1998, p. 547), I review the social psychological assumptions underlying the work done in L2 self-confidence within the frameworks of more encompassing bodies of research, such as motivation and willingness to communicate (WTC), particularly those studies that recognize the state/trait distinction within self-confidence and those specific to the Japanese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context.

Fluency and Pair Taping

Hartmann and Stork (1976) define fluency as the ability to use language structures accurately and with attention to content rather than form, in addition to using patterns and units spontaneously when needed. However, in the Japanese EFL context, much of the research pertaining to L2 spoken fluency and PT involves the need for students to be exposed to the target language regularly, and with a primary emphasis placed on content rather than form (Schneider, 1993, 1997, 2001, Washburn and Christianson, 1995, Kluge and Taylor, 1998, 2000). Gorsuch (1998) mentions that attention to form rather than content is the dominant method of language instruction in Japanese high schools. As a result, Japanese students entering college often display decreased levels of motivation or confidence to speak English (Gilfert and Croker, 1997). Brown (2003) believes that



teachers can help students become more fluent speakers by providing chances to practice speaking and then stepping aside, thus fostering the autonomy needed to explore their abilities. When teaching fluency, Brown (ibid.) argues, teachers must be prepared to give students more control and encourage them to communicate uninterruptedly by providing opportunities in which fluency can progress. Washburn and Christianson (1995) suggest students' understanding and use of conversation strategies results in greater spoken fluency. However, perhaps the main inhibitor to spoken fluency among Japanese learners of English is the lack of chances to speak. "One of the biggest obstacles to fluency in a foreign language situation," states Nation (cited in Kluge and Taylor, 1998, p. 27) "is the lack of opportunity outside the classroom to use the foreign language to communicate." Kluge and Taylor (1998) see not only the value of outside of classroom taping as a method of developing fluency but also as a means of putting learning in the hands of students, which had been the authors' rationale for introducing PT to their Japanese university students. Schneider (1993) claims that while his students were able to attain greater fluency through pair taping, the method cannot be credited entirely to autonomous learning, suggesting that PT students simply had had more opportunities to practice speaking English than those students not involved in pair taping. According to Schneider (1993), "the success with pair taping may have something to do with the fact that learner participation in decision making leads to increased productivity" (p. 59). In his original study involving 100 Japanese university sophomores, Schneider (1993) found that students opting to do frequent pair taping in lieu of attending weekly classes became noticeably more confident and open about speaking. In a more recent study, Schneider (2001) suggests a possible link between fluency and confidence, stating "allowing intermediate learners to focus on developing proficiency by doing a fluency practice may enhance their confidence to succeed in English..." (p. 6).

Confidence and Pair Taping

Clément (1980) introduced a study that suggests that self-confidence resulting from previous pleasant and successful experiences with the target language outside the classroom is more relevant than self-confidence resulting from classroom success. However, Schneider (2001) states that with limited opportunities for



Japanese college students to practice speaking English, generally they do not possess the confidence to speak despite having studied the target language for six years or more. Gilfert and Croker (1997) suggest that Japanese college students typically have neither the confidence nor skills to produce proper English pronunciation and intonation as a result of six years of passive exposure to the language. Dörnyei (2001) contends that teachers can promote confidence by allowing students to experience repeated success with L2 use. However, according to Norris (1993), oversized classes at Japanese colleges limit oral communication practice time, and he recommends group and pair work as a solution. Pair taping is a type of pair work, and PT researchers suggest the method can give students much-needed and active exposure to English. Washburn and Christianson (1995) contend that developing activities which allow students to engage in negotiated interaction is the most efficacious approach a language teacher can adopt, in that pair taping gives students a “much-needed boost of self-confidence and lends legitimacy to the process of negotiating meaning with which learners must become comfortable” (p. 2). Oxford (1997) states that, “the L2 learning community can and should also extend beyond the classroom” (p. 448), emphasizing the various social contexts in which the L2 learning process is situated. Crooks and Schmidt (1991) add, “The possibility often exists for SL learning to continue beyond the classroom” (p. 494), and though such opportunities are rare in EFL countries (such as Japan), “learners do have each other” (ibid.). Washburn and Christianson (1995) advocate PT as a means for students to experience rare opportunities to feel successful speaking English, likening L2 conversation to playing tennis, adding that students who get “on the court” can “build up confidence to play those on the next level” (p. 9). Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, and Shimizu (2004) cite a study of Japanese high school students who traveled abroad to study English. Some students were not ready to communicate due to factors outlined in MacIntyre’s (1994) model of willingness to communicate (WTC), including lack of L2 confidence, and found themselves in an endless cycle: needing to communicate with native speakers to gain L2 confidence, but due to a lack of confidence, unable to initiate interactions. Through group and pair work, intermediate learners of English in non-English speaking countries (such as Japan) may in fact have more opportunities to expose themselves and others to comprehensible input and output than they would studying in an English speaking country. EFL students speaking with their peers in



the target language, according to Pica (1994), shows evidence that they are effective in teaching one another.

Confidence, Motivation and Willingness to Communicate: Empirical Studies

Benson (1991) asked over 300 Japanese university freshmen to self-rate their English skills, and found that students rated their speaking ability the lowest of all L2 skills. In the same study, Benson stated that students involved in his study had “the barest exposure to English outside the language classroom” (p. 44), adding “given the students’ minimal exposure to English, it is not surprising that they showed little confidence in their ability to handle...speaking skills” (ibid.). A recent study conducted by Burden (2004) shows that the situation in Japan has not changed, revealing that almost 70% of 289 Japanese university freshman surveyed felt unconfident speaking English. Burden (2004) suggests teachers use *cooperative* as opposed to *competitive* goal structures as a means of creating interdependencies between learners, which, according to Gilfert and Croker (1997), is the pedagogical objective of most Japanese university English OC teachers. However, most English university teachers in Japan complain that their students lack the positive attitudes and motivation needed to learn in an autonomous manner (Berwick and Ross, 1998). Junior high school and high school learners in Japan typically possess what Gardner (1985) in his socio-educational model referred to as *instrumental motivation*, characterized by the drive to attain concrete or practical goals, such as passing notoriously stringent Japanese university entrance examinations (Gilfert & Croker, 1997, Norris-Holt, 2001). Berwick and Ross (1998) surveyed 90 Japanese university freshmen, and found that their motivation peaked in the final year of high school in preparation for college entrance exams, but dropped dramatically once the students entered college. Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1994) suggest that many variables are related to motivation, but specifically produced adequate evidence to show that self-confidence is a powerful and major motivational process in multicultural as well as monocultural societies. The researchers concluded that classroom activities and atmosphere played a role in promoting self-confidence, but another type of self-confidence (or lack thereof) could be the product of extracurricular acquaintance (both positive or negative) with the L2. Yashima (2002) examined 297 Japanese university students and found that learners who possessed



international posture (i.e. positive attitudes toward the international community) were more willing to engage in English conversation, and more motivated to study English, in turn contributing to heightened confidence and proficiency in L2 communication compared to students who lacked international posture.

Willingness to communicate (WTC) is a relatively new area of research related to motivation research, and developed to account for individuals' L1 and L2 communication (Yashima, 2002). Borrowing from L1 WTC research, MacIntyre (1994) spearheaded L2 WTC research, which has been advancing in recent years (see MacIntyre & Charos, 1996, MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels, 1998, Yashima, 2002, Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, and Shimizu, 2004) and continues to energize the L2 motivation research agenda to date. L2 WTC researchers (e.g., MacIntyre, 1994, MacIntyre & Charos, 1996, MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels, 1998) realized that the L2 model of WTC was dissimilar to the L1 model of WTC, in that the linguistic and psychological variables (e.g., self-confidence, interpersonal motivation, attitudes, etc.) of L1 WTC were stable and assumptions of one's L1 performance could be determined relatively accurately and consistently. However, applying the WTC principles to L2 learners, researchers realized some variables were not stable and subject to change, depending on with whom, at what time, and in what situation the learner was to enter into discourse. The situated nature of L2 WTC models lend themselves to *action research*, in that teacher-researchers can examine specific EFL contexts based on them. For example, Yashima (2002) has successfully applied the WTC model when she researched the connections between L2 learning and L2 communication variables among Japanese L2 learners. In a later study, Yashima and associates (Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, and Shimizu, 2004) compared the WTC of two groups of Japanese L2 (English) learners: one group studying in Japan, the other abroad. The researchers learned that many of the exchange students gained competence, but due to the unfamiliar foreign setting produced situational anxiety (a.k.a. state anxiety), subsequently reducing the students' WTC. On the other hand, the second group of students studying in a familiar setting (i.e. Japan), reported increases in WTC. While these rules apply particularly to intermediate learners, what is learned from WTC studies is the importance of distinguishing state and trait variables (namely state and trait confidence and state and trait anxiety).

Yashima and associates (Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, and Shimizu, 2004)



hypothesized a variable unique to EFL contexts. They proposed that Japanese learners, though lacking the level of motivation L2 students in multicultural societies, processed a latent variable Yashima (2002) previously defined as “international posture” (p. 123), which predicted Japanese EFL students’ motivation. International posture is a term Yashima and associates (Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, and Shimizu, 2004) used to describe EFL learners’ need to identify with the target language’s culture and society and one which functions as a motivation to study that target language when other, more immediate motivational factors are rare or nonexistent. Yashima and associates (Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, and Shimizu, 2004), inspired by the WTC work of Clément and Kruidenier (1985), Gardner (1985), and MacIntyre (1994), combined their WTC models with the international posture variable in formulating a L2 WTC model specific to the Japanese EFL context. This model is currently being researched by Yashima and associates (Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, and Shimizu, 2004) who suggest that limitations be discussed and the relationship between L2 ability and L2 self-confidence be adequately addressed.

Confidence in Speaking Questionnaire

Griffiee (1997) designed the Confidence in Speaking Questionnaire for “typical Japanese university students in Japan” (p. 188), and is the only published questionnaire specific to L2 confidence. Griffiee’s confidence construct is the product of his in-depth inquiry into the self-confidence variables, which can be found in L2 WTC models (see MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels, 1998, Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, and Shimizu, 2004). Griffiee shows that his questionnaire has satisfactory validity and reliability; additionally, it fits my research inquiry well, in that it has allowed me to broadly examine my students’ sense of confidence. Griffiee hypothesized three aspects underlying confidence in speaking English: *ability*, *assurance*, and *willing engagement*. Griffiee defined ability as “a command of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation”, assurance as “a feeling of security and comfort in speaking English”, and willing engagement as one who is “glad to speak English with native speakers of English” (p. 187). Additionally, by focusing specifically on self-confidence, I am responding to a plea recently made by Dörnyei (2003), asking L2 teacher-researchers to “focus on specific learning behaviors rather than general learning outcomes” (p. 28).



Methodology

Overview of Taping and Research Methods

In this section, I describe the students involved, how they were paired, and the settings (both inside and outside of the classroom). I briefly describe the taping method and logistics involved in managing the project as well as classroom activities intended to foster confidence in speaking English for travel purposes.

I also define the two methods I used to collect beginning and end-of-year samples of students' conversations. I describe how word counts were quantified, charted and analyzed, and how questionnaire results were categorized in terms of salience, and how they were analyzed.

Students, Settings, and Basic Taping Procedures

Students involved in this project were 12 first-year English literature majors. All students were Japanese, attending a woman's junior college located in Tokyo. Based on one-on-one interviews with my students, I determined most were beginner-intermediate speakers of English. One student was upper-intermediate and had experience studying in an English speaking country. I felt all were able to handle the task of conversing for an extended period of time, and defined the PT objectives based on this initial assessment. I asked that students not pause for more than five seconds between utterances, ensuring there would be no extended periods of silence during the tapings. I felt that this stipulation would encourage students to keep their focus on content rather than form. Additionally, I asked students to adhere to a simple but strict policy prohibiting the use of L1 (Japanese) during taping, which on the whole, students complied. All recordings were unsupervised and done outside class at a time and location of students' choosing. During the first class, students engaged in short pair conversations with each and every member of the class with the goal of finding a compatible PT partner. In the following class session, students formed pairs in which I asked them to stay for the duration of the course. However, due to unavoidable circumstances, some pairs made changes. Four pairs changed partners and one student dropped the course, necessitating the formation of a group of three. Of the 24 enrolled, 12 stayed with their original partners, eight changed partners either due to schedule conflicts or personal reasons, one student dropped the course, leaving one to join an existing pair. In total, I had six pairs involved in this study.



By the second week, students were ready to record their first 23-minute conversation: side A of what I termed the *Time Capsule Tape* (TCT). The TCT is a record of student pairs' first and last conversations, the first recorded in mid April and the last in mid December. For both sessions, pairs were given full autonomy as to the time and place of recordings, but were not allowed to use their L1, to pause for longer than 5 seconds, or stop the tape. I gave students one week at the beginning and end of the year to complete these recordings.

By the beginning of the third week, students began recording weekly conversations outside the classroom, which they continued throughout the academic year on what I called *Free Talk Tapes* (FTT). I required students to record 23 minutes of conversation each week, following the same rules of the TCT. At the end of the academic year, each pair had completed a total of 22 FTT recordings.

Along with the FTTs, pairs submitted FTT forms, inviting them to reflect and write on the strong and weak points of their taped conversations. I reviewed the tapes for content and made sure the work was done in adherence to the guidelines. I returned the FTTs with written feedback having less to do with grammar than the fostering of fluency and confidence. If I felt students had been too hard on themselves, I emphasized the positive aspects of their taped conversations. If I noticed shortcomings, I suggested possible ways to overcome them. I made time in class to discuss my concerns face to face. I asked pairs to occasionally invite me to their FTT taping sessions, which most pairs did at least once during the year.

The Course, Materials and Medium

The course, titled Travel English, was designed to get students prepared for international travel and study. The class met for two 90-minute sessions a week for one academic year. A needs analysis revealed that my students had low confidence in speaking English, and lacked the ability to articulate proper English pronunciation and intonation, findings that concurred with those of Gilfert and Croker (1997). Lesson materials were developed by my colleague and myself and focused on the elements of prosody, using a visual code called *Prosodic Writing* (Rude, 2002). I felt the use of these materials would help students feel more confident to produce proper pronunciation and intonation. No textbook was used. I provided photocopies of all lesson materials. However, students



were each required to purchase a portable cassette tape recorder and two 46-minute cassette tapes within the first week of classes.

Data Collection

Data Set One: Excerpt Transcriptions and Word Counts

I used the TCT as a beginning and end measure of student fluency (word count). Near the conclusion of the academic year, all data had been collected and charted. Under my supervision, students transcribed six 30-second excerpts of their tapes, all at predetermined sections on both sides of their TCTs: the first 30, the middle 30, and last 30 seconds. I typed students' handwritten transcriptions and then listened to the tapes, checking for accuracy. If there was a discrepancy, students and I listened to their TCT together and negotiated a final interpretation.

Data Set Two: Questionnaire

In addition to data on fluency, I wanted to know if students experienced an increased sense of confidence in speaking English over the academic year. At the beginning of the year, I had students complete, with full anonymity, Griffie's (1997) Confidence in Speaking English as a Foreign Language Questionnaire v.3, which is based on a model hypothesizing three aspects of confidence: ability, assurance and willing engagement. I "re-administered" (Keim, Furuya, Doye, Carlson, 1996, p. 88) the questionnaire at the end of the academic year to see whether students' sense of confidence in speaking English had changed. The questionnaire consisted of 12 items (see Figure. 1), which elicited responses to statements, such as, "I like speaking English" and, "I can speak English easily." A 5-point Likert scale accompanied each item, requiring respondents to report degrees of agreement or disagreement. I assigned a numeric value for each item, ranging from 5 points for the strongest response (*strongly agree*) to 1 point for the weakest response (*strongly disagree*).

The 12 items, though randomly ordered on the actual questionnaire, can be evenly grouped into three aspects of confidence: ability, assurance, and willing engagement. Further, the distinction between state and trait confidence can be scrutinized; half of the questionnaire items relate to state confidence, and the other half trait confidence. Looking at the questionnaire reordered, Figure 2 reveals how the items are grouped for the purpose of conducting two separate analyses. The left column shows the 12 items and



actual questionnaire numeration, the middle column denotes the state/trait distinction of the items, and the right column shows which aspect of confidence each item elicits.

Figure 1: *Actual order of Confidence in Speaking Questionnaire items (1-12)*

1. I can be interviewed in English. strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree
2. I would like to study in an English speaking country. strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree
3. I like speaking English. strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree
4. I can discuss in English with native speakers. strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree
5. When I speak English I feel cheerful. strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree
6. I can speak English easily. strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree
7. I can show an English speaking visitor around the campus and answer questions. strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree
8. I say something to other people in English every day. strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree
9. I can give my opinion in English when talking to a native speaker. strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree
10. I look for chances to speak English. strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree
11. I will speak to a group of people in English. strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree
12. I am relaxed when speaking English. strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree

Figure 2: *Reordered confidence questionnaire items*

questionnaire items	state/trait distinction	confidence aspect
1. I can be interviewed in English.	state confidence	ability
4. I can discuss in English with native speakers.	state confidence	ability
7. I can show an English speaking visitor around campus and answer questions.	state confidence	ability
9. I can give my opinion in English when talking to a native speaker.	state confidence	ability
3. I like speaking English.	trait confidence	assurance
6. I can speak English easily.	trait confidence	assurance
11. I will speak to a group of people in English.	state confidence	assurance
12. I am relaxed when speaking English.	trait confidence	assurance
2. I would like to study in an English speaking country.	state confidence	willing engagement
5. When I speak English I feel cheerful.	trait confidence	willing engagement
8. I say something to other people in English every day.	trait confidence	willing engagement
10. I look for chances to speak English.	trait confidence	willing engagement



Data Set Three: Students' Written Assessments of Project

To gain insight as to how students felt about the project, I provided forms for students to write freely (in English or in Japanese) about specific feelings they had had about doing the taping project. On the last day of class, I invited all pairs to listen to both sides of their TCTs, comment on the pros and cons of the taping project. I asked two basic questions: 1) what students liked about the project and how it had been a good experience and, 2) what students disliked about the project and how it had been a bad experience. I cataloged all written comments made.

Data Set Four: Students' Self-assessment of English Speaking Ability

Twice, I asked students a basic open-ended question, asking them to comment on their English speaking ability. I wanted to get a general idea of how students felt, comparing their perceptions coming into the course and leaving.

Analysis

An accepted measure of spoken fluency is word count (Higgs & Clifford, quoted in Schneider, 1993, p. 57). For transcribed data (word counts), I conducted a quantitative analysis to gauge fluency. Based on the partial TCT transcriptions of sides A and B, I calculated words per minute (WPM) for individuals and pairs (April/December word count \div 90 seconds (the three 30-second excerpts) = words per second \times 60 = WPM). I collated the figures for April and December, showing absolute and relative increases or decreases in WPM, as well as percentage of increase or decrease in spoken word production. I looked for improvement in individual student and pair fluency (WPM) as well as percentage of improvement.

My quantitative analysis involved collating questionnaire results from April and December, showing percentages of increases or decreases in confidence by mapping the Likert scale onto a percentage scale, such that the Likert values: 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 corresponded to the percentages: 0%, 25%, 50%, 75%, and 100%. I formed three groups of questionnaire items based on Griffie's (1997) confidence model: ability, assurance and willing engagement. I analyzed these three aspects in various ways, interested in knowing which aspects of confidence were affected. I also analyzed the



questionnaire items based on state/trait variables of confidence, looking for changes in students' perceptions of these two types of confidence.

I cataloged responses to the open-ended questionnaire that asked students to comment on the taping project. I grouped responses into five, based on types and frequencies of responses: 1) fluency/confidence, 2) temporal, 3) emotional and social, 4) opportunity/spatial or other restrictions, and 5) feedback/error correction. I considered the most frequent comments, both good and bad, but also considered uncommon remarks I found salient and therefore pertinent to the discussion.

Finally, I conducted a qualitative analysis of the separate open-ended questionnaire I gave to my students at the beginning and end of the academic year that asked them to briefly define their English speaking ability. Again, I looked for commonalities among the student responses, with special attention to the less common, but no less interesting remarks.

Findings

Results of Word Count Analysis

Of the six pairs, five spoke more words per minute (WPM) in December than in April (see Table 1). On side A of the TCT, student pairs together averaged 55 WPM. On side B of the TCT, student pairs together averaged 67.8 WPM, indicating that pairs produced an average of 12.8 more WPM in December than in April. On average, pairs improved their fluency by 22.98%. In Table 1, I listed WPM spoken by pairs on both sides of the TCTs and ordered the pairs according to increase/decrease in WPM spoken, pair one showing the greatest increase in WPM and pair six showing a decrease of eight WPM. The percentage of improvement (or lack thereof) is listed in parentheses to the right column. It helped me to examine the data in this manner, because percentage of improvement (see Table 1, far right column) reveals a slightly different interpretation of progress:



Table 1: *Words per minute (WTC) of student pairs*

pairs 1 to 6	TCT Side A words per minute (WPM) per pair April	TCT Side B words per minute (WPM) per pair December	increase (+) or decrease (-) in words per minute (WPM) April/ December	percentage of improvement April/ December
pair 1	70 WPM	106 WPM	+36 WPM	51.4%
pair 2	56 WPM	74 WPM	+18 WPM	32.1%
pair 3	57 WPM	70 WPM	+13 WPM	22.8%
pair 4	40 WPM	52 WPM	+12 WPM	30%
pair 5	55 WPM	61 WPM	+6 WPM	10.9%
pair 6	52 WPM	44 WPM	-8 WPM	-15.3%
pair averages →	55 WPM	67.8 WPM	12.8 WPM	21.98 %

For example, pair 4, although showing slightly less increase in WPM (+12 WPM) than pair 3 (+13 WPM) improved more in terms of percentage (30%) when compared with pair 3 (22.8%). Most pairs improved in fluency in absolute terms, but in relative terms, pair 4 showed greater improvement than pair 3.

I found that, on average, individuals' fluency also generally improved (see Table 2). Average WPM for individuals was 27.5 WPM on side A, and 33.9 WPM on side B, an average improvement of 6.4 WPM. Of the 12 students, seven showed increases in fluency, ranging from 14% to 133%. One student showed no increase, and three students showed a decrease of between 10 and 37 percent. In Table 2, the pairs are ordered in the same manner as in Table 1, but shows WPM for members of each dyad. Percentage of conversation spoken for members of each pair is shown in parentheses. I compared WPM spoken in December with WPM spoken in April, and reported absolute and relative increases or decreases in fluency. Again, the calculated percentage provided a different perspective on improvement. For example, while student A of pair 1 produced the highest WPM by all measures, student A of pair 3, percentage-wise, improved the most at 133%. This improvement is due, in part, by the fact that her partner's WPM in December dropped by 11 WPM.



Table 2: Words per minute (WPM) of individuals

pairs 1 to 6/ students A & B	TCT Side A words per minute (WPM) per member of each pair April (percentage of pair conversa- tion spoken in April)	TCT Side B words per minute (WPM) per member of each pair December (percentage of pair conversa- tion spoken in December)	increase(+) or decrease(-) in words per min. (WPM) per student April/ December	percentage of increase in words per minute (WPM) per student April/ December
pair 1 student A	48 WPM (69%)	74 WPM (70%)	+26 WPM	54%
pair 1 student B	22 WPM (31%)	32 WPM (30%)	+10 WPM	45%
pair 2 student A	23 WPM (41%)	36 WPM (49%)	+13 WPM	56%
pair 2 student B	33 WPM (59%)	38 WPM (51%)	+5 WPM	15%
pair 3 student A	15 WPM (26%)	35 WPM (50%)	+20 WPM	133%
pair 3 student B	42 WPM (74%)	35 WPM (50%)	-7 WPM	-16%
pair 4 student A	14 WPM (35%)	22 WPM (42%)	+8 WPM	57%
pair 4 student B	26 WPM (65%)	30 WPM (58%)	+4 WPM	15%
pair 5 student A	25 WPM (45%)	34 WPM (56%)	+9 WPM	36%
pair 5 student B	30 WPM (55%)	27 WPM (44%)	-3 WPM	-10%
pair 6 student A	30 WPM (58%)	30 WPM (68%)	0 WPM	0%
pair 6 student B	22 WPM (42%)	14 WPM (32%)	-8 WPM	-37%
student averages →	27.5 WPM	33.9 WPM	+6.4 WPM	+29%

However, in terms of percentage, students A and B of pair 3 shared the task of speaking equally in December, whereas student B spoke nearly 3/4 of the conversation in April. It also appears that while student A of pair 6 showed no increase in fluency, percentage-wise she spoke more than her partner, suggesting she “carried” more of the conversation in both April and December. In such cases, fluency cannot simply be defined in terms of WPM.

Results of Confidence Questionnaire

Findings of three sets of four questionnaire items are outlined below. The three sets are: ability, assurance, and willing engagement, (again, aspects constituting Griffie’s (1997) confidence construct). I first looked at the sets independently, comparing questionnaire results of April and December, and defining the most salient items in each set. I then looked collectively at the three sets to define which group of specific aspects of confidence

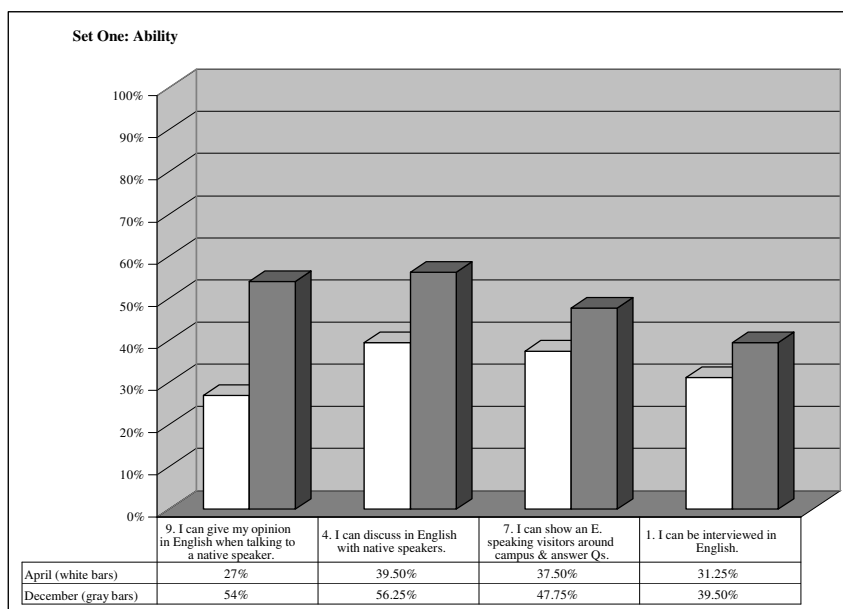


had been most strengthened over the academic year. Additionally, I conducted an independent examination of questionnaire items related to either state confidence or trait confidence, determining to what degree pair taping had affected the two types of confidence.

Set One: Ability

In general, students reported feeling greater ability to speak English in December than in April (see Chart 1). Comparing the questionnaire results of December with those of April, the average increase for the four items in this set was 15.56%. In response to questionnaire item 9 (I can give my opinion in English when talking to a native speaker), students reported a 27% increase in confidence.

Chart 1 Set One: *Ability*



This particular finding suggests that regular, extensive pair taping gave students the opportunity to voice their opinions with increased confidence. It also suggests that repeated success in giving opinions to nonnative English speaking peers led to gains in confidence in giving opinions to native English speakers as well. Further, questionnaire item 4 (I can discuss in English with native speakers) supports this idea, as it reflected the third highest increase in confidence (16.75%). Griffiee (1997) defined ability as having “a

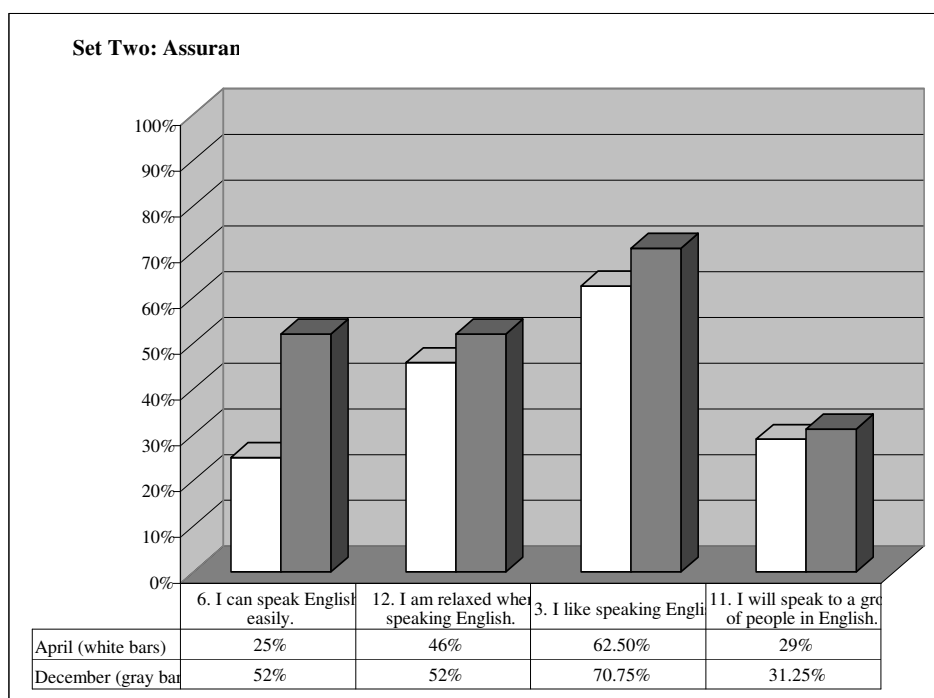


command of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation” (p. 187). Most of the in-class activities were designed to raise students’ confidence in their ability to properly pronounce and intonate English words and expressions. I argue that having provided regular opportunities to practice proper pronunciation and intonation, and to converse freely, students experienced a greater sense of ability and confidence to speak English.

Set Two: Assurance

Generally, students reported a modest increase in assurance when speaking English. Comparing questionnaire results of April with December, students reported a 10.87% average increase in assurance (see Chart 2), the lowest of all three sets. The most salient item in this set was item 6 (I can speak English easily). Results for this item indicate that students’ felt English was easier to speak by an average of 27%.

Chart 2 Set Two: Assurance



However results indicate that students generally felt only slightly more relaxed when speaking English, reporting a mere 6% increase in confidence for item 12 (I am relaxed

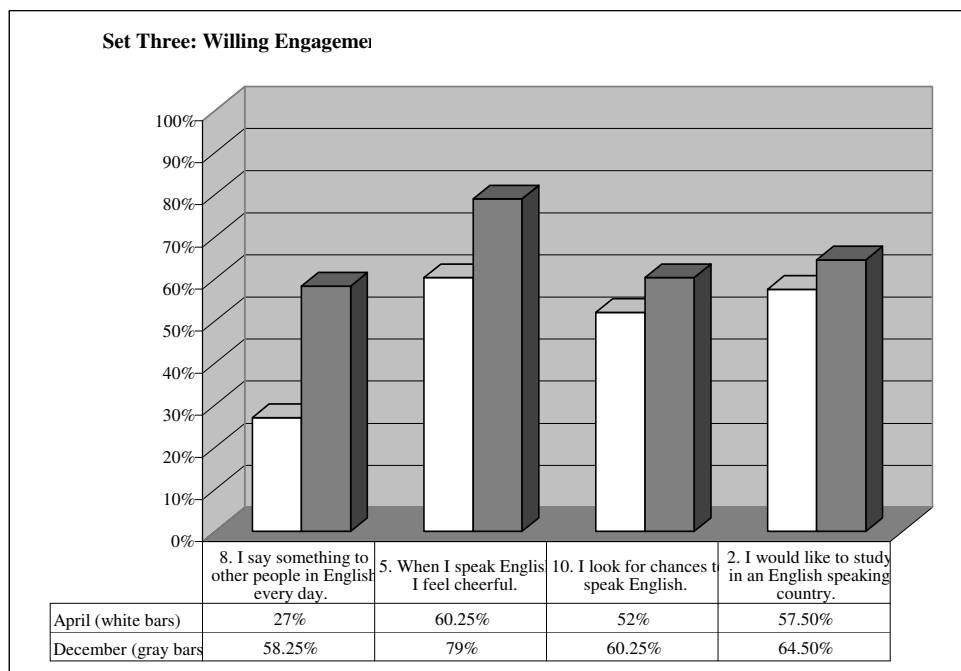


when speaking English), and an increase of 8.25% for item 3 (I like speaking English). Item 11 (I will speak to a group of people in English) revealed the lowest increase (2.25%) in confidence of all 12 items in the survey, which is understandable given the intimate nature of the taping project.

Set Three: Willing Engagement

Overall, students felt more confident to participate in English speaking in December than in April (see Chart 3), reporting a 16.31% average increase in willingness to engage in English conversation, the highest of all three sets. Results show that most students say something to other people in English every day (item 8). In fact, the percentage of increase for this item (31.25%) is the highest in the survey, indicating that most students are willing to say something to other people in English, even when not engaged in course related activities. Pair taping was typically done weekly, in one 23-minute sitting, and our class met twice a week. Still, most students found opportunities to speak English every day, which suggests PT gave them increased confidence to do just that.

Set Three: Willing Engagement



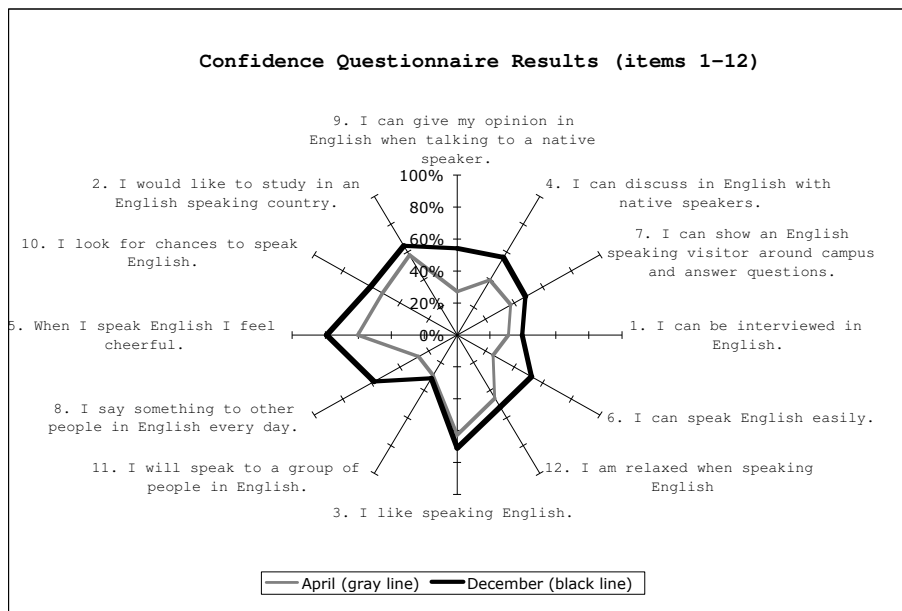
Students, on average, reported feeling 18.75% more cheerful when speaking English (item 5), suggesting students associated PT with pleasantness. In support of this finding, I have noted that since introducing PT, my students' willingness to speak with me in English outside of the classroom has increased. I found that by having students do PT, the general outside of classroom atmosphere has improved greatly. I am certain PT sessions attracted the attention of other teachers and students as well, because when I reviewed student tapes, I could hear some pair tapers engaging in English conversations with passersby, initially excusing themselves for not being allowed to use L1, and then exchanging some words in English with the third party. It is not uncommon to find students taping in various places around campus, and sometimes off campus. For example, one pair, while taping in a nearby park, by chance met a foreign sightseer and shared a few moments of conversation with her. The students informed me (via FTT form) of their successful encounter with the native English speaker. Students who I saw recording in hallways and empty classrooms, often beckoned me to join their PT sessions. Occasionally, my colleagues would inform me of friendly encounters they had had with my PT students, some showing interest in trying PT with their students.

Overall Questionnaire Results

In all three aspects: ability, assurance and willing engagement, students reported feeling an average of 14.24% more confident at the end of the academic year than the beginning. Chart 4 depicts results of all questionnaire items, both April and December. I plotted results, using two concentric lines: a gray line for April and a black line for December. Where the two lines are closest indicate the least amount of increase in confidence. Likewise, the further apart the lines, the greater reported gain in confidence.



Chart 4: *Collective results of questionnaire*



From each of the three sets, I selected one most salient item. From Set 1 (Ability), I selected item 9 (I can give my opinion in English when talking to a native speaker), and from Set 2 (Assurance), I chose item 6 (I can speak English easily), and from Set 3 (Willing Engagement), I selected item 8 (I say something to other people in English every day). These three items, given their high average percentage (28.41%) of increased confidence suggest that due to regular use of spoken English, students found English easier to speak one-on-one.

In a similar way, I selected three of the least salient items, two belonging to Set 2 (Assurance), and one belonging to Set 3 (Willing Engagement). The three items combined reflect a modest 5.16% average increase in confidence. Students reported the least amount of increase in confidence (2.25%) for item 11 (I will speak to a group of people in English). For item 3 (I feel relaxed when speaking English), students reported a 6.25% increase. For item 2, (I would like to study in an English speaking country) students reported a 7% average increase in confidence. These findings suggest that PT did little to foster increased confidence in speaking to a group of people in English, nor did PT stimulate a significant increase in confidence to study abroad. Additionally, the results indicate that PT did little to reduce students' anxiety in speaking English in general. I'm particularly concerned with the results of item 3 (I like speaking English), because this figure seems to contradict the results of item 5 (When I speak English I feel cheerful), which students reported feeling 18.75% happier



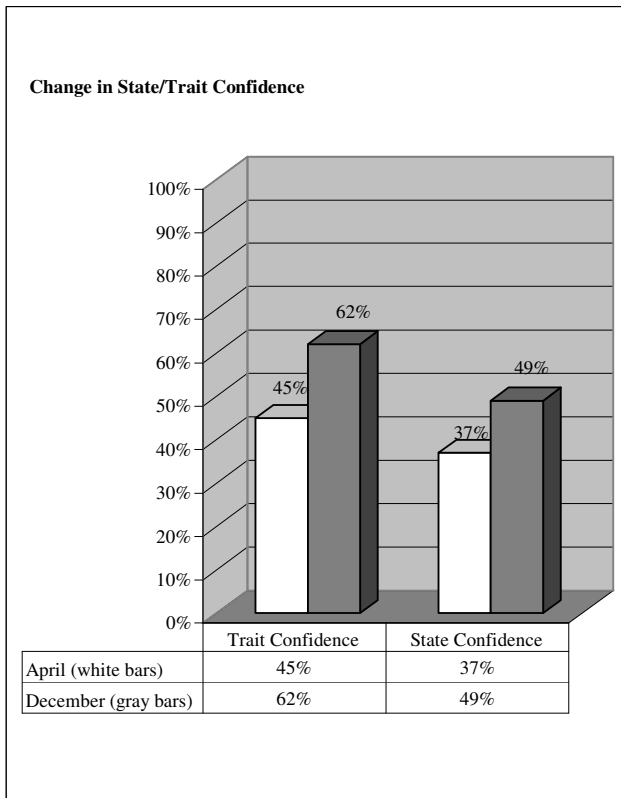
when speaking English in December than in April. However, looking at the results of the April questionnaire, items 3 (I like speaking English) and item 2 (I would like to study in an English speaking country) received two of the three* highest averages (3.5 and 3.3, respectively, out of 5.0 Likert-scale points) of all the 12 questionnaire items, suggesting that the higher the initial average, the lesser likelihood the average would change significantly over a year. Via this perspective, the slight increase reported for item 11 (I will speak to a group of people in English) is understandable, because the April average for this item was low (2.16 out of 5.0 Likert-scale points) and only increased .09 on the Likert-scale. Clearly, having students tape in pairs did not significantly result in an increase of confidence to speak English before a group. Had presentation skills been the focus of the course, this low figure would concern me more. Nevertheless, this finding suggests the need to expose students of my future classes to a wider variety of situations requiring spoken English, such as speaking before groups, and in doing so, possibly broadening their state and trait confidence repertoire.

State and Trait Variables of Confidence Related Findings

Students reported increases in both state and trait confidence. Chart 5 shows that, by the end of the academic year, students' sense of trait confidence increased by 17%, and their state confidence by 12%, indicating that PT is an affective method of fostering both types of confidence. The most salient item for each of the two variables was item 8 (I say something to other people in English every day) and item 9 (I can give my opinion in English when talking to a native speaker). By the end of the academic year, students' confidence to speak English daily rose by 31.25%, indicating PT facilitated the increase of trait confidence by stimulating students' willingness to engage in English conversation beyond the demands of the educational setting. Further, certain state confidence measures reflect a significant increase, particularly in students' ability to give their opinions in English, which increased 27% by the end of the academic year. It appears that the confidence my students gained by regularly exchanging views with their PT partners was transferable to similar experiences with native English speakers.



Chart 5: *Change in state/trait confidence*



Results of Student Criticisms

Generally, students thought PT helped them improve their fluency and confidence; however, most students complained that PT was difficult to manage due to time constraints. I asked students to comment on the pros and cons of the taping project, and in what ways had it been a good/bad experience. Students gave a total of 67 written responses (see Diagram A), 35 (52%) of which were positive and 32 (48%) negative. Of the positive responses, exactly 50% related to fluency and confidence (see Diagram B) and of the negative responses, almost half (48%) pertained to temporal matters (see Diagram C).



Diagrams A, B, & C: *Student Criticisms*

Diagram A: Student Criticisms Pros & Cons of Doing PT Method (All 67 Responses)

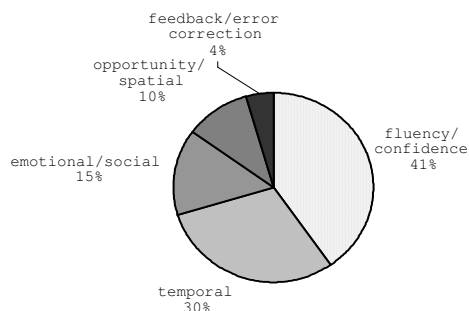


Diagram B: Student Criticisms Pros of Doing PT Method (52% of all responses)

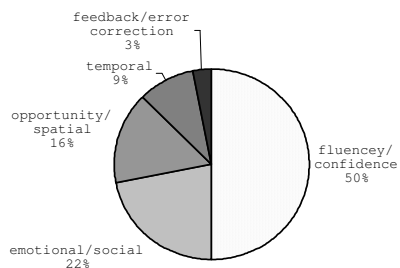
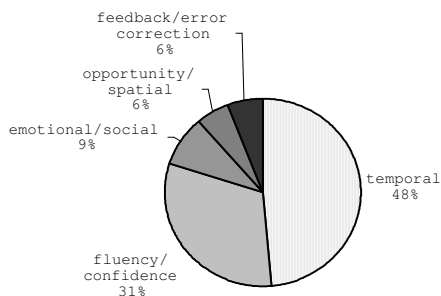


Diagram C: Student Criticisms Cons of Doing PT Method (48% of all Responses)



Students wrote various comments, which I grouped into five, based on types and frequencies of responses: 1) fluency/confidence (41% of all responses), 2) temporal (30% of all responses), 3) emotional/social (15% of all responses), 4) opportunity/spatial or other restrictions



(10% of all responses), and 5) feedback/error correction (4% of all. responses). In the following subsections, I report the findings in each group of responses.

Group One: Fluency and Confidence Related Responses

Most student comments were related to fluency and confidence (41% of all responses). Of the 27 comments in this group, 16 were positive. Most students reported gains in ability to speak at length and/or with confidence. Common responses were, “We were glad when we keep conversation (going)” and, “You can gain confidence when you could talk very well” and, “We are not ashamed to talk in English now.” One student wrote, for example, “We were glad when we keep conversation (going)” and another student wrote, “You can gain confidence when you could talk very well.” Three students commented that through PT, their vocabulary improved. One student wrote, for example, “You can learn new vocabularies from your partner. I think my partner can speak English well, because I can learn many things by her.” Another student said PT helped her improve her pronunciation. These findings suggest that some students engaged in extensive pair taping felt increasingly confident as their ability to speak at length increased. Further, it appears that some students were able to learn from their partners, which supports Pica’s (1994) assertion. However, PT was a situation in which some students reported experiencing a loss for word and/or topics to discuss. The most frequent of the negative comments regarding fluency and confidence related to students’ perceived lack of vocabulary and occasional use of the L1. One student said, for example, “We occasionally shot out Japanese words...” and another said, “We were stuck for an answer.” Three students complained about not having enough topics to discuss. These findings suggest that some students felt certain inadequacies in relation to the autonomous nature of the project, evidently lacking the ability, assurance or willingness to advance the level or variance of discourse. Therefore, some of my students would have possibly performed better, and felt more confident speaking English had I given them more structure.

Group Two: Temporal Related Responses

Students’ second most frequent responses were related to time (30% of all responses), most of which were negative (17 of the 20). The most common complaint was that taping sessions were too long. One student said, for example, “We can’t keep talking because tape is too long.” Complaints regarding general time constraints were written as well. For example, one student wrote, “Once a week recording is hard because we have a lot of



homework”, another said, “We don’t have same rest time and free time.” Seven complaints related to the length of tape show that many students found the PT sessions too long. Most of these comments were general complaints, for example, “23 minutes are very long.” However, one student specified the reason for her criticism, saying, “We have to tape for 23 minutes so when we are busy it’s really hard to make time for it.” Contrary to these statements, two students felt that 23 minutes was a reasonable length. Notwithstanding, the general findings in this group suggest that, for many students, the stipulated 23 minutes of nonstop weekly conversation was difficult for them manage.

Group Three: Emotional and Social Related Responses

The third most common types of responses were related to emotions and social matters (15% of all responses). I combined the two types because the expression of emotion in the context of taping is a social matter; whether happy or sad while taping, laughing or commiserating, pair taping is a social activity. Of the ten comments in this group, seven were positive, most pertaining to the enjoyment felt while taping. Students wrote comments, such as, “When we were walking and speaking, it was interesting and we laughed” and, “(We could) improve our friendship.” However, one student complained, “I wanted to do FTT not only with my partner. For example, high school friends or American friends.” In all, the findings in this group indicate that most students enjoyed PT, and associated it with either fun or friendship building.

Group Four: Opportunity and Spatial Related Responses

Students were generally positive about the increased speaking opportunities PT sessions provided. The fourth most common types of responses (10% of all responses) were related to the opportunities (or the lack thereof) with regard to pair taping. Of the seven responses, five were positive, such as, “There are opportunity to speak English” and, “We have more chances to speak English.” Two students criticized the spatial restrictions involved in doing PT. For example, one student wrote, “It is difficult for (my partner and I) to find a quiet place (to record).” The findings in this group suggest that for most, doing PT gave students opportunities to speak English regularly and freely. However, for two students, a quiet place to record was desired.



Group Five: Feedback and Error Correction Related Responses

The last group of comments regarded feedback and error correction (4% of all responses). Of the three responses, two were negative, concerning the likelihood of making mistakes, uttered unknowingly and going uncorrected. One student commented on the positive feedback I had given her after reviewing her and her partner's recorded conversations. These findings suggest that, while one student was content with my feedback, two felt it was insufficient for their particular language learning needs.

Results of Students' Self-assessment of English Speaking Ability

Students generally reported improved ability to speak English. At the beginning and end of the academic year, students briefly commented on their English speaking ability. In April, ten students reported having little or no ability to speak English, and two used the word "so-so" to describe their L2 speaking ability. In contrast, in December, ten students reported having more positive opinions regarding their speaking ability, one claimed indifference, and one reiterated negatively about her ability. Some positive remarks students made in December were, for example: "I feel (my speaking ability) better if I compare with me in April", "I am not ashamed to talk in English now", and "I can speak freely."

Discussion

I conducted this study, wanting to know whether students who practiced regular, extensive pair taping would become more fluent in English over an academic year. I also wanted to know whether students who practiced regular, extensive pair taping would report gains in confidence in speaking English. In this paper, I have shown that my students spoke more fluently in December than in April. Qualitative results presented in this paper support this claim, in that most students reported favorably of the fluency-building attributes of the method employed. Additionally, the qualitative and quantitative findings show that most students reported increases in all measures of confidence, lending legitimacy to my claim that extensive pair taping typically results in students' heightened sense of confidence in L2 speaking, particularly in one-on-one situations. This method, however, is not without faults, and these matters will be discussed in the following subsection.



Content

Regarding fluency, results of my quantitative analysis indicate that most students' spoken fluency increased over the academic year, providing evidence to support the effectiveness of pair taping as a fluency building system. Qualitative data collected in this report compliments this finding, as the majority of my students praised PT for its fluency-building qualities. Some students, however, expressed concern over the inability to keep their conversations going, citing a lack of vocabulary and/or topics as the most common obstruction to fluency.

Regarding confidence, the results of the 12-item questionnaire indicate that, on average, my students experienced increases in all aspects of confidence in speaking English: ability, assurance, and willing engagement. Pair taping also led to an increase in students' trait confidence, and to a lesser degree, state confidence. According to the questionnaire results, the most pronounced improvement was in students' willingness to speak English more often. The second most pronounced improvements were in students' ability to speak with ease, and the ability to express opinions in English. Most of the responses to the open-ended questionnaires support these findings, in that the most frequent response was related to students' reported increase in ability to speak English for extended periods while enjoying a heightened sense of confidence. State confidence levels generally improved as well; however, most students reported an only slight average increase in confidence speaking to a group in English. Additionally, students, on average, reported a modest decrease in anxiety, feeling only slightly more relaxed when speaking English.

Future Use of Pair Taping

As a researcher, I gained insight into the effects of extensive pair taping with regard to fluency and confidence in spoken English, and found the results of this project insightful and practical, thus inspiring me to contribute more to this line of research. As a teacher-researcher, my ultimate goal, put simply, was to find evidence that the method works. In short, I believe it does. My findings, however, are not without limitations, as I am almost certain the English literature students involved in this study were able to draw from knowledge and language experiences gained in other English language courses (e.g., grammar, writing, and reading) in which they were concurrently enrolled. Still, some results of this research suggest PT directly contributed to increases in fluency and confidence, as illustrated in many of my students'



responses to open-ended questions. Additionally, there is some indication students' increased confidence was the direct result of their increased fluency; however, this assumption calls for further and more controlled research.

As a teacher, my goal was to find a natural method that my students could use to improve their L2 fluency and confidence more effectively than was occurring inside the classroom. I have found a method that I believe addresses most of my pedagogical concerns with regard to teaching oral communication. More importantly, I believe pair taping has given my OC students the opportunities they have expressed wanting most: more chances to speak English. By listening to and learning from my students, I have become more aware of their perceptions of PT. Subsequently, I am more informed as to how I can tailor the method to suit their specific learner needs. The positive and negative comments students wrote about pair taping are instrumental in defining future parameters for this method.

Based on student criticisms and other observations, I'm looking at three principle modifications to my PT methodology, starting with making pair taping a more relaxing experience for students. The fact that students reported feeling only slightly more relaxed when speaking English concerns me most, because increased anxiety is inversely related to increased self-confidence (Gardner, 1995); therefore, measures taken to allow students to feel more relaxed when speaking English could result in their increased self-confidence. I found that for most of my students, their concerns and possible anxiety regarding grades remained undisclosed to me until they were asked to complete a department mandated, end-of-term teacher/course evaluation. It was not until then I learned that my grading policy was unclear to most of my students. Burden (2004) states that teachers should inform students of which "aspects of their performance is being evaluated" (p. 16), and in doing so, students are clearly informed of teachers' expectations and can make personal goals based on a given grading criterion. With this in mind, I am currently modifying my PT evaluation system. Similarly, my concern for the future development of pair taping also lays in how my students might include self-evaluation in their pair taping regimen, and will be the subject of my future research.

In response to my students' negative criticisms concerning fluency, error correction, and feedback, one procedure I should probably introduce is Lynch's (2001) *reflective noticing* and self-correction activities, which he claims helps students focus on form in a natural way, defining the role of the teacher as a facilitator in helping students overcome communication barriers encountered while speaking, particularly in the area of vocabulary. According to Burden



(2004), a teacher adopting an “advisor” (p. 16) role can help students build their confidence. Additionally, in response to many complaints regarding the time required to do weekly recordings, I will allow students to record in more manageable lengths of time in an effort to alleviate the time constraints reported by the students of this project. Still, I believe that if students are able to relax and enjoy their L2 conversations more, 23-minutes will seem short, especially if they are given the tools to keep the conversations going. As a means of fostering more natural and fluent speaking, I have considered introducing some of Washburn and Christianson’s (1995) conversation strategies, such as, English *aizuchi* (fillers) (a term borrowed from LoCastro, 1987) that may offer students a simple strategy to keep their conversations fluent. Kluge and Taylor (1993) provided a list of topics and conversational strategies for students to explore, which could possibly help my students as well, especially those at a loss for words or topics. Offering more support to students in class, and helping them with individualized problems may result in their improved ability and confidence to speak English outside the classroom and throughout their lives. Wayne Sumida (1998), graduate of Teachers College, Columbia University (Japan), in the conclusion of his Master’s project wrote:

For human beings, learning occurs as we experience life. We never stop learning because for most of us, we never stop experiencing life. Affective variables can not be ignored when considering the process of language learning because they are a part of how we experience life. They color everything that is processed by the brain. What we learn is dependent on the basic information processing capabilities of our brain, the emotions and feelings that make us human, and the environments that we encounter” (p. 35).

Schneider (2001), appealing to both student and teacher, stated “Being motivated to continue studying speaking English is especially important for those in their last conversation course” (p.13). Schneider’s sentiment resonates with my own. As a college EFL oral communication teacher, my goal is to not only help my students achieve greater fluency, but more importantly, a sense of self-confidence that will allow them to continue learning from others in their natural surroundings, long after graduation day.



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