

Extensive Speaking: Pair Audio Taping Outside of Class at Chukyo University

Mathew White

Abstract

Students in the College of World Englishes are currently completing a minimum of 10 minutes of recorded conversation in English each week outside of class as partial fulfillment of the requirements in their Oral Communication classes. This component is now commonly referred to within the department as "Extensive Speaking." During the 2001 academic year, Richard Morrison, Brian Herschler, and I piloted Extensive Speaking at Chukyo University and found it to be an effective vehicle for getting English majors to put their English language skills to work outside of class for real communication. Due to the success of our initial piloting of this component of the program, all first and second year students in oral communication classes are now required to participate in Extensive Speaking. In this paper, I will present the background and reasoning for introducing this component to the program, tools and suggestions for facilitating its implementation at the classroom level, and reflections drawn from our experiences with this valuable component of Oral Communication Courses.

Introduction

Language is successfully acquired only when it is available for spontaneous original personal use with other people...

Lewis, in Willis and Willis (1996: 12)

One of the aims of the World Englishes Department at Chukyo is to help our students achieve high levels of oral fluency in English. Limited exposure and opportunity for interaction in English are often cited as the main obstacles for Japanese learners not reaching

high levels of English proficiency. Educators in Japan and in other English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts claim that the severely limited amount of time allotted to weekly English lessons is unlikely to have much of an effect on the overall proficiency of their students. Developers of curriculum at Chukyo have answered some of these concerns by increasing the number of required and elective English classes, implementing more study abroad programs, and encouraging more learner accountability through the development of language labs, required weekly movie viewing in English with closed captions, and the implementation of Extensive Reading. However, the opportunities for learners to practice and learn from their individual encounters with the language both productively and receptively outside of the classroom have remained rather limited. Taking the assertion made by former U.S. Secretary of Education William J. Bennett (1994: 14) that "education is largely time on task" to heart, we have implemented Extensive Speaking as another means of significantly increasing our students' frequency of encounters with the target language, English.

Extensive Speaking Defined

Extensive Speaking at Chukyo draws largely from what Schneider (1993 and 1997) refers to as pair taping and Kluge and Taylor (2000) refer to as partner taping. Students are designated partners, and they are required to record their English conversations outside of class for a given amount of time each week. As with Extensive Reading, one of the aims is to improve fluency while also allowing for student autonomy in selecting the content. Thus, I encourage my students to select, initiate and negotiate their own topics. Leaving the topics open to the students helps address the concern noted by Brazil (1995: 134), that "...neither formal lessons nor the kinds of communicative activity we introduce into teaching offer much opportunity for spontaneous, on-line, topic change of the kind we find in conversation." Extensive Speaking at Chukyo is also similar to Extensive Reading from the standpoint that a key idea is that it should be fairly easy and result in students having many successful experiences in their use of English. Since students are interacting with peers, they have a more equal opportunity to initiate topics and hold the floor during conversations. Allowing students to determine topics should also result in a higher level of interest in the content of their discussions than if teachers predetermined the topic, which I would consider to be more of an Intensive English component.

Background

Schneider (1993 and 1997) used pair taping for developing fluency. He offered it as an option, to be conducted for an equivalent amount of time, to attending an actual class. Thus, students could receive credit in a fluency class without actually attending regularly. At Chukyo, the aim of Extensive Speaking is to provide students with encounters in English in

addition to those experienced in class in order to further facilitate fluency development. As for Schneider, while acknowledging other variables might be responsible for the results, he finds that those who choose the pair taping option report that speaking has become easier and more enjoyable over a year significantly more than those who attend classes. He also finds that both groups have an equal increase in listening comprehension.

In their use of pair tapings conducted outside of class as a required component of their course for first year English majors, Kluge and Taylor (2000) report the resulting increase in fluency, ability to maintain conversations in the target language, and sense of responsibility for learning attributed to pair taping to be an indispensable component to their language program, which requires students at their university to tape conversations (not rehearsed) for twenty-three minutes each week. (Heidi Vandevort, a colleague in Korea, requires students to record 90 minutes of English conversation with a partner each week.)

As Kluge and Taylor (*ibid.*) note, while the aforementioned discussion appeals to the need for an increase in fluency, more can be done to address the accuracy and quality (such as use of conversation fillers, evaluative comments and reactions) of the output. Skehan (1998: 19-20) asserts some time for reflection and consolidation is necessary for interlanguage development. These issues are partially addressed by Murphey and Woo (1998) and Murphey and Kenny (1998) in a technique referred to as "Video Conversations for Student Evaluation." The procedure involves providing students with video recordings of their conversations conducted in pairs during class and requiring them to transcribe and analyze segments (This video technique is now employed in classes at Chukyo, but the subject will be addressed in detail in a future article). Kindt (2000a, 2000b) incorporates a similar technique utilizing audio tape recorders in class and assigning various tasks requiring students to listen to and analyze their own language performances.

The somewhat natural evolution of pair taping resulting within the college of World Englishes at Chukyo has been to combine the aforementioned techniques used with various types of in class recordings with audio recordings conducted outside of class. As noted by Kluge and Taylor (2000), the use of small handheld recorders for recording conversations outside of class provides a simple, low-tech way to develop fluency. Introducing a few worksheets for encouraging students to notice aspects of their output may provide the needed attention for developing accuracy and reducing fossilization of errors as well emphasizing those features teachers are addressing in a particular course.

In addition to the ideas cited above for the innovation at Chukyo discussed in this paper, we were also aided by input or knowledge gleaned from the insights of teachers involved with similar projects at their own institutions, such as Bill Kumai, Jerry Talandis, Brad Deacon, and Robert Croker in Japan, as well as Heidi Vandevort in Korea.

Real-world Rationale Tasks

Nunan (1993) proposes that teachers should provide students with language tasks and activities approximate to the kinds of interactions required of them outside the classroom. The degree to which we can predict the specific contexts in which Chukyo students will use English in the future is severely limited and varies from one individual to the next. We can be sure that one type of English interaction will undoubtedly be in conversation, such as that experienced when sitting next to someone during a ride on a plane, train or bus. Tasks conducted in class can address the need of maximizing the amount of negotiation of meaning. Extensive Speaking undoubtedly meets Nunan's (ibid.) criteria for referencing a task to real world situations. Information gaps and the need to negotiate meaning will occur naturally, although most likely not as often as specific tasks might facilitate. While teachers are encouraged to experiment with the assignment of Extensive Speaking, allowing students to determine their own topics for discussion is highly recommended.

The College of World Englishes is also in the process of teaching students that there are many varieties of educated, internationally-intelligible English, not just those from native speakers, and that students are in the process of developing their own variety of English (D'Angelo and Morrison, 2002). It is important for our students to realize the value of interaction in English with non-native speakers, and that many future interactions they have in English will most likely involve non-native speakers. We see Extensive Speaking as a way to help break down the inhibitions, the affective filters students have, so they can experience English as a real tool for communication.

Piloting the Program

As noted in the abstract, the system was piloted at Chukyo University with English majors in 2001. In addition to homework assignments such as mandatory movie viewing, students were required to record 30 minutes of English conversation a week with their partners, who were determined at random in a hope to reduce the influence of social customs between friends, mainly referring to the habit of speaking to each other in Japanese when holding conversations outside of class. Initial purchases by the department of a sufficient number of handheld recorders were made to assure that they would be available to students when needed. Students were responsible for purchasing the cassette tapes on which they would record their conversations, with the exception of their first set of tapes (See Procedure Section). As suggested by Kluge and Taylor (2000) and Bill Kumai in an oral communication, students were instructed in no uncertain terms, as to what length of tapes to purchase. This was to ease the teachers' job of verifying completion of the tasks. Another reason for teachers to be adamant on the lengths of tapes is to eliminate the need for students to constantly check the time while making their recordings (See Procedure Section).

Students were instructed to use sixty-minute tapes that would be collected when they were filled. Teachers would spot-check them, check to see if students were continuing to speak as the tape ran out, note a few recurring errors to incorporate into a worksheet on accuracy (See Appendix 4), and return them so that students could use them in completing worksheets encouraging students to notice various aspects of their output (See Appendices 2 and 3).

Results from Initial Piloting

Both teacher and student feedback from the piloting of Extensive Speaking was extremely positive. Students reported that making the tapes was fun. Some students even said they had begun talking with girlfriends and boyfriends on their cell phones in English. The main issue for students was finding times in their schedules to meet for thirty minutes each week. A lesson learned while piloting was that teachers should not be expected to listen to the entire tapes. Teachers noted that they learned a lot about their students from listening to the tapes. Their main concern was spending too much time listening to them. The tapes were so interesting that they often found it hard to turn them off.

Current Length and Frequency Requirements

As mentioned in the Piloting section, third year Oral Communication (OC3) students were required to complete 30 minutes of recorded conversations each week. These students were also completing the required weekly movie viewing. Teachers collected the completed 60-minute tapes from students every other week. In 2002, we introduced Extensive Reading at a program-wide level while maintaining the Required Movie-viewing program. Students study load increased considerably. Taking this into consideration and realizing students require time to listen to their tapes and complete worksheets, teachers now require students to complete a *minimum* of 10 minutes of recorded conversations each week. This is the only program-wide homework activity that requires allocating time for meeting with a peer, so students should be able to find some time, when both they and their partners are free. The word *minimum* is emphasized, as students should be encouraged to complete as many recordings as they wish and for longer durations if they like. (One student in the piloting phase was a partner for three other students, thus tripling the amount of her Extensive Speaking).

Current Procedure

It is important for students to be aware of why they are completing a task, especially when it is one they will be completing on a regular basis. At the first class, along with a course description, students are given a form explaining the rationale behind the assignment

(Appendix 1) and time to read it. I then read through it with them and allow them some time for questions. Next, students are paired together randomly, and each pair is given a small handheld cassette recorder and a 20-minute cassette tape (10 minutes on each side). To avoid confusion, the length of tape used in the demonstration should be the same as what the teacher will be requiring students to purchase and use for the class.

Pairs are instructed to write their names on the cassette labels and insert them into the recorders. Students are told that they will be making weekly recordings in English with their partners. The teacher can demonstrate this with a student by conducting a brief conversation with one of the more confident looking students, all the time recording. Teachers should carry out a practice run in class for five or more minutes (adjust to the level of the students). Although the background noise may make these demonstration recordings unintelligible at times, it allows students to become familiar with the process and the recording devices, including noting speed controls that they must be instructed to keep set at normal when recording. Recording in class and attempting to listen to the results also makes students more aware of the need to consider background noise when recording on their own.

After completing a demonstration, it's effective to have students complete, discuss, and answer questions or complete a worksheet evaluating their abilities. Teachers might direct them to evaluate their abilities to maintain a conversation in English for the given amount of time, the length of silences in their conversations, their ability to understand their partner's English, the degree of naturalness in the way they started the conversation, their pronunciation or any other target items. Murphey and Kenny (1998) encourage them to identify their weaknesses and write down specific items they wish to improve upon in their next conversation.

Stressing the Value

As with all components of the program, it is important that teachers stress the value of Extensive Speaking in order to assist in its success. When assigning Extensive Speaking, it is recommended that students be asked to bring recordings to class the week following the introduction to the assignment in order to assure the task is completed successfully. In class, using the small audio tape recorders available from the Learning Support Wing, students can be asked to transcribe the first one hundred words or so of their conversation and complete worksheets evaluating their output and noticing various features of their discourse. A few students may realize that they have recorded their initial conversations at high speed. It is better they realize this after their first attempt at recording than after investing a month or more of time recording.

Utilizing the Recordings

The more often the students are provided with tasks or worksheets to complete with their tapes, the more they will be able to notice features of their output and hopefully consolidate what they have learned. Transcribing segments of their conversations can help students remember vocabulary they may have been introduced to by their peers. A form for requiring students to write a transcription of their recordings has not been included. However, it is highly suggested that a transcription sheet require students to write a minimal number of words (instead of requiring them to transcribe the first minute or two). Providing a specific word count assures teachers that students who had long silences will be writing just as much as students who kept the conversation going. Another useful tip is to instruct students to skip lines when they are writing. This provides space for evaluative notes comments, self-corrections and fillers to be written later. Furthermore, once a transcription is written, additional worksheets or tasks can be introduced to analyze the students' output.

At the back of this paper, Appendix 2 provides a sample of a student record. This record sheet provides teachers with a quick reference of which students have been completing the assignment. Students should document each recording they make, and use the record sheet to note items about their learning. In 2002, students were using the textbook *Nice Talking With You* (Kenny and Woo, 2000), which focuses on conversation strategies. As can be seen by the student record sheet, students are encouraged to note the strategies they used in their conversations. This emphasizes the importance teachers place on the employment of the strategies and reminds students to actively try to use them.

Appendix 3 may be given as a homework assignment, or completed by pairs in class. As in any type of peer or self-editing, it is often most beneficial if the worksheets explicitly state what items the students should be looking for. For example, Item 4 pinpoints students' use of adjectives and how they are used with nouns. This should help teachers and students discover problem utterances such as "The movie was excited" or "I was boring."

Appendix 4 addresses a common concern voiced about the unsupervised practice of English. Many educators fear that inaccurate utterances by learners during conversations with peers that do not impede comprehension will most likely go uncorrected. This might lead to fossilization. Furthermore, students may pick up improper grammatical forms when practicing conversation with other learners. To address this concern, errors noticed by teachers during spot-checking of tapes should be collected and printed out onto a handout as a grammar clinic, which can either be completed in class or given as homework. Since, there are many options in making corrections, I always provide an answer key with my suggestions as to how the utterances might be improved.

A Further Note on Learner Error Transfer

The previous section referred to the possibility of learner's picking up each other's inaccurate utterances. Research such as Fillenbaum (1966), Sachs (1967), Wanner (1974) and Brewer (1975) suggests that listeners lose the exact wording of sentences after an extremely short interval (a matter of seconds), or in Wanner's case after 16 syllables, but memory of meaning is retained much longer. Pedagogically speaking, this suggests that improper sentence structures heard from non-native speaking partners are likely to be forgotten, especially as the students main focus will be on conveying meaning. In addition, because the students focus on meaning, when an inaccurate utterance impedes comprehension, it will most likely be checked (not avoided) by the speaker's interlocutor.

Variations in Instruction

One consideration put forward by Brian Herschler was to instruct students on what topics to discuss when completing the Extensive Speaking assignments or at least provide them with a list of suggestions. Initially, this may be helpful, and first year students seem particularly eager to be pointed in some direction. The value of providing students with scaffolding is recognized and is provided during in-class instruction. Because I believe conversations are often spontaneous, and that the parties involved in the conversation should determine for themselves what is worthy of discussion, I personally favor providing only suggestions. However, teachers are encouraged to experiment with the process.

Tips for Implementation at Chukyo

All World Englishes first year students should be oriented to the process of Extensive Speaking in class. Unfortunately, not all students received the orientation or opportunity to engage in English conversation outside of class due to miscommunication and misunderstandings between some teachers and teacher administrators. From April 2003, all first and second year students and their teachers began to work together in this process of Extensive Speaking. Kluge and Taylor (2000) provide some useful tips in making the management of this project run smoothly. They suggest you demand, with no exceptions that:

1. Students purchase the exact length of tape required.
2. All tapes are correctly labeled or are not accepted.
3. Students must always submit the required length.
4. Tapes must always be rewound when submitted. (It saves teachers time.)
5. Teachers keep students' first recordings for comparison with final recordings of the semester or year.

Kluge and Taylor also suggest that the use of L1, long pauses, and obvious reading on to tapes be scolded heavily. It is fairly obvious when students are reading their written scripts (Occasionally you can hear the turning of pages!). Teachers should remind students that one of the aims of Extensive Speaking is increasing practice for students in spontaneous interaction with lots of the naturally flowing topic changes found in everyday conversations.

As noted by Item 5 in the list above, keeping initial recordings intact allows students to realize their progress by comparing recordings made at the beginning of the course with recordings made towards the end. Kluge and Taylor reported having students conduct rough word-per-minute calculations and comparisons of initial and final recordings. The same could be done for counting the number of conversation strategies employed, etc. Tapes can also be collected during the last day of regularly scheduled classes and returned during exam time.

Listening to the tapes is important in that it at least lets the students know that they are not just doing busy work. We hope teachers can find the time to listen to some parts of the recordings and make comments in class, regarding some of the dialogs as well as creating the aforementioned grammar worksheets. When a teacher makes a comment about a student's life based on something heard on the tape, it confirms for students that the tapes are being heard. A few minutes spent listening to tapes in the Learning Support Wing attracts attention, and students are often impressed by the short performance of their peers they overhear while they are studying in the Wing. Those teachers who have already implemented Extensive Speaking note that they learn some very interesting things about their students' lives and perceptions about their educational experiences.

Student Perceptions on the Value of Extensive Speaking

In addition to looking at the value teachers place on the Extensive Speaking component, it is important to take into consideration the value of Extensive Speaking as perceived by our students. Figure 1 below illustrates the anonymous responses to an initial survey by percentage from two groups of first year students at the end of the spring term 2003 (N = 22).

Figure 1: Survey to First Year Student on Extensive Speaking: Weekly Recordings

	Yes	No
1. Do you think recording conversations outside of class helps your English?	100%	0%
2. Do you listen to your recordings?	36%*	64%*
3. Do you think recording conversations helps your pronunciation?	91%	9%
4. Do you think recording conversations helps your vocabulary?	77%	23%
5. Do you think recording conversations makes you a more fluent speaker?	100%	0%
6. Do you think recording conversations helps your grammar?	59%	41%
7. Do you notice anything you say incorrectly on the recordings?	91%	9%
8. Do you notice anything about your English you want to improve?	91%	9%
9. Do you think recording conversations is interesting?	82%	18%
10. Do you think recording conversations is boring?	14%	86%
11. Do you think you learn any English from your partner?	86%	14%
12. Do you think your partner(s) learn(s) any English from you?	55%**	41%**
13. Do you think 10 minutes of recording a week is too much?	27%	73%
14. Do you think 10 minutes of recording a week is too little?	18%	82%
15. Do you think listening to your recorded conversations helps your English?	91%	9%

*Students may have interpreted Item 2 to mean listening in addition to the listening they did in order to complete the worksheets.

**The sum of the percentages here does not total 100% because a student marked on the line between yes and no (sat the fence).

According to results from those who responded to the survey, students unanimously believed Extensive Speaking was beneficial to their English (Item 1) and that it improved their fluency (Item 5). Ninety-one percent of respondents believed that Extensive Speaking helped their pronunciation (Item 3), that they noticed their own inaccuracies or weaknesses (Items 7 and 8), and that listening to their recordings helped their English (Item 15). Unfortunately, only 34% responded that they actually listened to their recordings (Item 2). However, students may have interpreted the question as meaning in addition to the listening they must do to complete the worksheets. It may also be partially due to the fact that I am collecting tapes every other week, and I have not returned them to students.

It is also important to note that 82% of the respondents reported that they found

Extensive Speaking interesting (Item 9). 14% responded that it was boring (Item 10). It remains to be seen what portion of the 14% who found the component boring may have felt so due to personality clashes with their taping partners.

Another interesting observation from the survey results is that while 86% of respondents believe they learn from their partners (Item 11), only 55% believe their partners learn from them.

The survey also asked students to write any additional comment on the back. All who chose to write additional comments had positive remarks to make. Here are a few:

I think recording conversations is very useful.

At first, I used to become nervous when we record our conversations, but I don't now. I think recording conversation is very important and useful to study English.

I think recording conversations is good practice. I like conversations in English because they make me a good English speaker. If I don't have homework of recording conversations, I don't talk to my friends in English.

Every week my partner and I are recording. When we recorded, we talked a lot. We enjoy it. Maybe English conversation will improve our English skill (vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar.)

Conclusion

The intent of this article has been to orient teachers to Extensive Speaking and provide a clear rationale for its development and implementation at Chukyo University. In addition, it hopefully provides some useful tools and suggestions to aid teachers in implementing the component in their classes. I hope readers are convinced of the potential contribution to our learners' language acquisition Extensive Speaking can make. The students appear to realize its value. As teachers, we can continue to spread enthusiasm for the use of English outside of class and help students achieve their full potential.

Notes

1. I thank Richard Morrison and Brian Herschler for making Extensive Speaking a reality at Chukyo University.

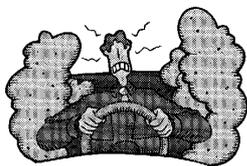
2. A second thank you to Richard Morrison for his collaboration with me in the compilation of this article.
3. The first tapes for Extensive Speaking were provided at the expense of the teacher.

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Appendix 1: Out of Class Audio Taping Rationale Sheet

Each week you need to record 10 minutes of conversation with the partner (s) you are assigned in class. This paper explains why we are asking you to do this.



Learning how to communicate in English is very similar to learning how to ride a bicycle or drive a car. The more time you spend actually doing it, the easier and more automatic, or natural, it will become for you. Experienced drivers do what they need to automatically. The same is true of experienced English speakers. Now is your chance (opportunity) to become more experienced.



You may not have realized it yet, but the ideal people to speak English with in Japan are your classmates, other people learning English! Research has shown learners benefit from other learners for several reasons:



1. You will get more speaking time- Native English speakers usually do most of the talking. This is because speaking English is automatic for them, so they can fill silences easily. Talking in English with your classmates will allow you to get more speaking practice. You will learn how to fill the silences yourselves!

2. You will ask for explanations more when something is unclear- Research has shown that even when something is unclear, learners of English often don't ask native speakers to explain. With your classmates you'll feel more comfortable saying, "Sorry, I don't understand." This is because you and your classmates share the same goal-to improve your English, so it's important to interrupt each other when something is not understood.

3. You will feel more comfortable correcting each other- If your partner says, "I go to the beach last weekend," you can feel comfortable saying, "You went to the beach last weekend." This is because you both want to improve your English, so catching each other's mistakes will help you both. Native speakers may not correct you because they can understand what you mean, but you want to improve your English, so correcting each other's mistakes is good, even if you understand what your partner means.

Appendix 3: Tape Worksheet

Tape Worksheet (Due on _____)

Listen to the tape you recorded with a partner. Complete the following questions.

1. What topics did you talk about? Write them below. Example: Vacation/Work/Driving

2. Write down words or expressions you used to begin and end conversations on different topics here. Example: Hi Junko, How's it going? (or) So, what's new?

3. Write down the words or expressions you or your partner shadowed (repeated when partner said). Example: A: I like hip-hop. B: Hip-hop. Like who?

4. Write down 10 adjectives that were used in your conversation. Write the things they described next to them. Examples: relaxing music/ scary movies/ interesting class

5. Write down any words that you said with a "Kata-kana" pronunciation. For example:
taaru = tall or *raiku* = like

Make an effort to say the words you listed above with English pronunciation next time! This will make it easier for English speakers from other countries to understand you when you say them and easier for you to understand the words when you hear them!

Appendix 4: Addressing & Improving Accuracy

Learning English is a lot like learning a sport. You have to practice in order to improve. Making mistakes is part of any learning process. The important this is to learn from them. Improve your English by making the statements made by you and your classmates more accurate.

1. She can't into her house because she forgot her keys.
2. I have to get up early on Tuesday because I have one period.
3. My driving is very bad, so I can't ride my friend.
4. I watched *Beautiful Mind*. It was very impressed.
5. I always delivery pizza. They come to my home.
6. When I first came to Japan, I can't speak Japanese.
7. Where shop do you go?
8. I like Dutour's food than Starbuck's.
9. I catch a cold.
10. I like Ayumi Hamasaki. Her eyes is very big.
11. I want buy accessory.
12. Do you friendly with your father?
13. I ate *ikasumi*. It was tasted bad.
14. If I have free times, I play with my friends.
15. I like go shopping very much.
16. I will almost work during Golden Week.