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# A Survey of Learner Expectations and Levels of Satisfaction with a University Intensive English Language Program

Stephen Russell

> When learners and teachers meet for the first time, they may bring with them different expectations concerning not only the learning process in general, but also concerning what will be learned in a particular course and how it will be learned. (Brindley, 1984, p. 95)

## Introduction

Differences between learner and teacher beliefs can often lead to a mismatch about what are considered useful classroom language learning activities. This exploratory classroom study stemmed from my desire to find out from the students themselves their preferred learning styles, reasons for joining the intensive English language program and, most importantly, to what extent the students felt their English had improved as a result of the course. The focus of my research begins with a needs analysis of students' classroom learning preferences and their expectations of the teaching methods for the course.

In this research project, I support the view that in any language program the learners are the key participants (Nunan, 1988, 1999, pp. 10-14; Richards, 2001, p. 101). Since learners have their own "agendas" in the classroom (Richards, 2001, p. 101), the "effectiveness of a language program will be dictated as much by the attitudes and expectations of the learners as by the specifications of the official curriculum" (Nunan, 1989, p. 176). For conducting an investigation into students' attitudes, beliefs, goals, and learning preferences, techniques of survey research seem ideally suited. According to Brown (2001), language surveys "gather data on the characteristics and views of informants about the nature of language or language learning through the use of oral interviews or written questionnaires" (p. 2).

My motivation for this study came after several years' experience of teaching and preparing materials for an Intensive English Program (IEP) at a university where I work. I often wondered how effective the classroom activities and materials were for this English program, and as a native English teacher, I was curious to find out about students' classroom learning preferences and expectations. Moving beyond this, I viewed the course as a whole, not as a syllabus designer, but as a teacher looking at the results obtained from this "fact-finding" investigation (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2001, pp. 191-200) may assist in shaping the content of future programs, tailoring them to the reported linguistic needs and stated goals of the students.

For several years, I have taken a communicative approach to my teaching with a preference for authentic language practice. The IEP referred to in this

study provides a communicative language teaching classroom environment taught by native speaker teachers using authentic video-based materials. Video has been recognized as a valuable resource for intensive language study because it can present a total communicative situation. A recent trend has been to use video materials to stimulate oral and written communication among students. Stempleski (1992) suggests that authentic video provides access to the target culture and is highly motivational as a living medium of communication (pp. 7-10).

The overall aim of this research project is to investigate the nature of language learning in this university IEP in relation to my own teaching practices, particularly to increase my understanding of learners' language needs in studying English. In this survey-based study, I first explore students' general feelings towards English and their preferred classroom language learning activities; then I present and report on their stated language needs and expectations of the IEP. Finally, I seek to statistically and qualitatively measure perceived levels of improvement and to what extent the course satisfied different learning expectations.

**Review of Literature**

Needs analysis is summarized by Richards (2001) as a process of collecting information that can be used to develop a profile of the language needs of a group of learners in order to make decisions about the goals and content of a language course (p. 52). Similarly, needs analysis as defined as defined by Brown (2001) is

"the systematic collection and analysis of all relevant professional information necessary to satisfy the language learning needs of the students within the context of the particular institutions involved in the learning/teaching situation"(p. 14). Needs analysis is an important component in program evaluation, which is usually conducted in the early stages of curriculum development and often depends on questionnaires, interviews, and linguistic analyses, as well as "conjecture, and a good deal of professional judgment" (Brown, 2001, p. 15).

An early form of needs analysis dates back to Tyler's (1949) work on curriculum development that outlined fundamental questions to be addressed in education. One key question in developing any curriculum was "How can we determine whether these [educational] purposes have been attained?" (p. 1). This question dealt with assessment and evaluation which could be measured by conducting learner needs analysis. The case for a learner-centered program is not a new one, as Tyler asserted, "If the school situations deal with matters of interest to the learner, [they] will actively participate in them and thus learn to deal effectively with the situation" (Tyler, 1949, p. 11). Tyler argued that educational objectives should describe learner behavior (not teachers), and should identify what changes come about in learners as a result of teaching.

Needs analysis procedures in language teaching grew out of the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Munby, 1978; Robinson, 1991; Wilkins, 1976). In developing ESP programs, Richterich (1972) and Richterich and Chancerel (1978) argued that learners, teachers and employers need to be involved in assessing learner needs, which is used as the initial process

for specifying behavioral objectives. They suggested that needs analysis should be ongoing throughout a program. Information should be collected about the different kinds of activities, functions and situations in which learners are engaged in. Richterich and Chancerel's (1980) suggested procedures for conducting needs analysis should include questionnaires, surveys and interviews.

Extensive work on needs analysis was conducted in the mid-1980s. Brindley (1984, 1990) developed the distinction drawn by Richterich and Chancerel (1972, 1978) between "objective" and "subjective" needs. From his research he found that:

> The "objective needs" are those which can be diagnosed by teachers on the basis of the analysis of personal data about learners along with information about their language proficiency and patterns of language use. Whereas the "subjective" needs (which are often "wants," "desires," "expectations" or other psychological manifestations) cannot be diagnosed as easily, or in many cases, even stated by learners themselves. (Brindley, 1984, p. 31)

Objective needs analyses result in content derived from an analysis of the target communicative situations in which learners engage, as well as an analysis of the kinds of spoken and written discourse they need to comprehend and produce. Such analyses were crucial tools in developing ESP syllabuses, but objective needs, being derived from an analysis of the target language situation, can be carried out in the *absence* of the learner. Subjective needs, however, take

into account the communicative needs, desires and "objectives" of the learner (Berwick, 1989). Collaboration between learners and teachers to establish what are considered needs is a matter for "agreement and judgement not discovery" (Lawson, cited in Brindley, 1989, p. 65).

There has been a tendency in needs analysis research to equate objective needs with curriculum/course content, and subjective needs with methods (Richards, 1984, 2001; Richards & Rodgers, 1986, pp. 64-70), but the two can be viewed as sometimes overlapping parts along a continuum. Nunan (1988) argues that:

> While objective needs analysis and content are commonly linked, as are subjective needs and methodology,…it is, in fact, also possible to have a content/subjective needs dimension (learners deciding what they want to learn) and a methodology/objective needs dimension (teacher deciding how content might best be learned). (p. 44)

Learners' objective needs have received a great deal of attention since the communicative era of the 1970s (Brumfit & Johnson, 1979; Munby, 1978), whereas subjective needs have been neglected, considered to be "unpredictable, therefore indefinable" (Brindley, 1984, pp. 31-32).

Brindley (1989) posits three different approaches to needs analysis: a language proficiency orientation, a psychological/humanistic orientation and a specific purpose orientation (pp. 67-68). The three approaches are differentiated according to their educational rationale, the type of information collected, the

method of data collection and the purposes for which data are collected. In the psychological/humanistic orientation, the rationale is that students learn more effectively if involved in the learning process, and the methods of data collection involve observation, interviews and surveys, with the purpose to help learners become involved in decision-making about their learning. Brindley (1984) lists objective needs as patterns of language use, personal resources (including time) in order for learners to be grouped according to needs and interests. Subjective needs include activity preferences, affective needs, pace of learning, and attitude towards correction, so that teachers may adapt activities to learner preferences and individual needs. In his work on adult English as a Second Language (ESL) learning styles, Willing (1988) groups learners according to: (1) language proficiency profile, (2) learning strategy profile, and (3) learning purpose. His strategy profile of classroom learning preferences includes four types of learners: concrete; analytical; communicative; and authority.

Nunan (1999, pp. 149-155) extends Brindley's (1984) distinction between objective and subjective needs to include content and process needs. Content needs include the selection and sequencing of topics, grammar, function and notions–traditionally syllabus design–while process needs refers to the selection and sequencing of learning tasks and experiences–traditionally methodology. Nunan (1999, pp. 147-151) further distinguishes between initial and ongoing needs analysis. Initial needs analysis is carried out *before* a course begins by curriculum designers (often beyond the control of the teacher)–while ongoing needs analysis can be conducted quite informally by teachers during the course of

a program. Brown (2001) recommends that for program evaluation projects, needs assessment should be an ongoing process of data gathering and analysis (p. 15). In terms of course content, ongoing data collection about learners can assist teachers in selecting materials and activities which accord with the needs and interests of the learners.

Brindley and Bagshaw (1984) conducted a major needs analysis with the purpose of investigating the "awareness of learners and the extent to which they are able to articulate their language learning needs." The main findings of the study were that learners were able to express long-term goals as well as instrumental reasons for taking language classes. Many had clear ideas about how to learn language and what were legitimate classroom activities. The study concluded that teachers and learners hold "differing views of needs," and also that learners vary widely in their ability to express course objectives.

Robinson (1991) provides a list of needs analysis techniques to obtain information from learners, and focus on the learners' target situations of language use. She argues that questionnaires and interviews are best conducted sequentially, the questionnaire providing basic information that can then be discussed in more depth in a one-to-one interview with the teacher. Another data elicitation technique Robinson refers to is "participatory needs analysis"(pp. 14-15), where learners engage in open-ended discussion of the needs and goals of their course of study, either one-to-one with the teacher or as part of a group discussion.

In New Zealand, a needs analysis of problems felt by ESL students attending university lectures found that students reported most difficulties with

speaking and listening skills (Gravett, Richards, & Lewis, 1997, pp. 64-65). The most common difficulties in English language use ranked in the following order: (1) large group discussion, (2) class discussion, and (3) interaction with native speakers. However, this ranking does not offer much information about the problems learners experienced with each activity. After conducting a needs analysis, Johns and Johns (1977) provided a list of problems students had with discussion. The most frequently reported difficulties involved (1) comprehension of spoken language, (2) the need to contribute quickly, and (3) shyness about making mistakes.

A criticism often made of needs-based courses is that they are often somewhat irrelevant in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings where learners have little immediate need to communicate orally. In the EFL setting of Japan, subjective needs relating to classroom learning preferences and language study goals would seem to be more relevant than objective needs. Widdowson (1978, 1984, pp. 10-11) has been the leading critic of needs-based courses which specify ends above learning processes. He argues that a narrow ESP approach tends to result in formulaic "phrase book" English because learners merely fulfill a language training function and do not develop communicative competence. Widdowson advocates general-purpose syllabuses which are process oriented and lead to greater general competence.

A needs-based philosophy clearly underpins the TESOL Commission on Accreditation (TCA) Standards for Intensive English Programs (Angelis et al., 1998). The TESOL report was commissioned to give clear guidance on

developing and evaluating IEPs in an ESL setting in the United States, with "the goal of the standards to help IEPs provide a quality educational experience for their students" (p. 7). A recurring theme throughout the TCA Standards is to provide a "quality educational experience," and to "meet the assessed needs of the students through a continuity of learning experiences" (p. 16). The TCA report advises that an IEP curriculum should use materials and methodologies "appropriate for teaching language skills to students of different backgrounds, abilities, ages, learning styles, goals, communicative needs and levels of achievement or proficiency" (p. 17).

The TCA Standards recommends periodic review (p. 39) to evaluate the effectiveness of an IEP making use of qualitative and quantitative measures from a variety of data sources such as observing classroom activities and levels of student participation, samples of students' assignments, classroom records and teachers' field notes. The TCA report is a framework for IEP designers and teachers on how to raise standards and provide a "quality educational experience" for learners. Although meeting learner needs is at the heart of the report, no advice is offered on how to conduct a learner needs analysis. Although in the ESL context of the United States, needs-based intensive English programs are quite common, they are still a rarity in EFL at Japanese universities.

Research into objective needs has focused on general parameters of language programs– obtaining background data on who the learners are and their general level of proficiency. Subjective needs analysis acknowledges that learner goals and expectations vary (Richterich, 1972; Brindley, 1984), and these

differences need to be taken into account in determining course content, methods, and materials. Perhaps one reason why researchers have neglected subjective needs is that information relating to methods, classroom learning style preferences and materials can generally be collected only once a learning arrangement or program has already started (Nunan, 1988, p. 43).

Moving away from objective needs, my study concerns learner needs as they relate to classroom teaching methods and materials. This project is the first subjective needs analysis of learner expectations and attempt to evaluate the program (through reported levels of learner satisfaction) in English at the university where I teach. Through collecting and analyzing learner data, I examine students' self-perceptions of prior language learning experiences and preferred learning styles. In this study, I asked students to self-monitor and assess their own perceived levels of improvement during and as a result of an intensive English language program. The methods and results of this needs analysis have been carefully recorded and presented so that they may be replicated and reviewed by future researchers interested in conducting learner needs analysis in an EFL setting.

## Methods

### *Setting and the Participants*

The setting for my study was a short Intensive English Program (IEP) at a major private university where I teach in Tokyo. This course ran for two weeks during the summer vacation in September and was primarily designed to promote

communicative English skills. Non-English major students at Japanese universities have, on average, one 90-minute communicative English class per week over an academic year of typically 28 weeks, which totals a mere 42 hours of class time. In this IEP, students received 60 hours of class time from native speakers (NS) of English. There were 109 participating students (49 men, 60 women) and all were non-English majors who ranged from freshmen to graduate students. On successful completion of the course, students received 2 graduation credits. Initial level placement was determined by students' scores on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) institutional test (grammar and listening sections), the average score being 440; the highest was 448, and the lowest 368. Students were divided into 8 classes ranging from Intermediate A, B, C, D to Elementary A, B, C, D. Teaching was done by 8 native speakers. I taught the Intermediate B and Intermediate C classes and the focus of my more qualitative research (classroom observation, learner diaries, interviews) was on these students.

The rationale for the course and the official expectations were that students would practice their speaking and listening skills and by the end of the course would have developed more willingness and greater confidence to communicate in English. In view of these broad official goals, final assessment was largely attendance and effort-based rather than dependant on passing achievement tests.

*Survey Instruments*

In conducting the learner needs analysis, I administered survey research instruments to elicit and gather data from the students. All 109 students who joined the IEP formed the target population for the initial and final questionnaires in the survey. In addition to the questionnaires, data for this study included copies of students' diaries and e-mail assignments; audiotape-recorded interviews; and video recordings of some of my morning and afternoon classes. The students' presentations/performances in the final class sessions were also videotaped. In addition, I kept a detailed set of my classroom field notes; attendance records; and audiotape-recorded all my classes. This "triangulation" of data sources (Allwright & Bailey, 1991, p. 73) was an important part in collecting an accurately rounded and detailed picture of my two classes. Survey research techniques in the form of questionnaires and interviews were used at the very start, middle and end of the program as I wanted to "tap into the knowledge, opinions, ideas and experiences of [the] learners" (Wallace, 1998, p. 124).

**Data Collection and Analysis**

In this project, I support the view expressed in Merriam (1988) and Marshall and Rossman (1989) who contend that data collection and analysis should be a simultaneous process in qualitative research (Creswell, 1994, pp. 166-167). From the framing of the research questions, data collection and analysis is an ongoing process of classifying, coding, and categorizing raw data in order to look for tendencies and patterns.

In this study I used a combination of quantitative and qualitative data gathering and measurement techniques. Surveys and statistics go hand in hand, but given the individual, personal nature of this exploratory study, I needed to employ interpretative measures which are central to qualitative approaches to data analysis. Hubbard and Power (1993) describe careful data analysis as a way of "seeing and then seeing again. It is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the data, to discover what is underneath the surface of the classroom" (p. 65).

*Initial Questionnaire*

I gave out the initial questionnaire to all of the students just before the first class. I asked them to become participants in this research in order to make the current and future programs better in terms of being more responsive to students' needs and preferences, and improving the overall quality of the intensive course being provided by the university. I asked each teacher to briefly explain to the students how to complete the questionnaire in English. The students were given 40 minutes to complete and return it. The semantic level of the questionnaire (Behling & Law, 2000, p. 8) was fairly basic and clear so that all of the participants could understand the questions, and all 109 of the respondents completed the sections in English.

I chose to make the survey questionnaires identifiable by having students provide personal bio-data at the top. I felt that the students would answer more truthfully this way and by having identifiable questionnaires would allow for

selected follow-up interviews and analysis of learner diaries. As well as focusing students' attention on their learning processes and goals, the initial questionnaire also served to provide the IEP teachers with learner profiles of the students. I coded each student from #1 to #109 in order to facilitate accurate data analysis.

The closed-response questions were organized into three categories using a five-point Likert scale to elicit: 1) students' general attitudes towards studying English; 2) students' preferred classroom learning activities; and 3) students' expectations of the teachers, based on their previous language learning experiences. Responses ranged from (1) *not much* to (5) *very much* with the option of (3) *neutral*. To facilitate descriptive statistical analysis, I coded the closed responses to the questions and used the EXCEL spreadsheet to organize the results.

The nine closed-response questions were followed by open-ended questions to elicit statements about course goals, language learning needs and expectations of the course, as well as preferences for classroom activities. Open-ended responses are "not particularly amenable to statistical analysis" (Brown, 2001, p. 11) so I kept written records of the responses. To "clean up" (Rea & Parker, 1997, pp. 13-14) and manage the raw questionnaire data, I first summarized students' responses, then listed clear categories and tallied the answers to measure frequency. I made notes and kept tallies by hand, then ranked the most commonly occurring answers such as students' reported need to "improve listening skills" and "conversation skills," in order to look for patterns in the range of open-ended responses.

*Learner Diaries/E-mail*

In the first class period, students were provided with a notebook and asked to keep a personal diary of their language learning experiences for each day of the course. The first task for students was to write their individual learning goals and expectations for the course in the diaries. The rationale was twofold: to have learners think about their immediate language goals, and to get the learners to reflect on their learning–to think metacognitively about their own learning styles (Oxford, cited in Reid, 1995, p. 219). Bailey (1990) argues that a language learning diary should be a personal account which can be analyzed "for recurring patterns or salient events" (p. 215). I obtained diary data from Intermediate C and my Intermediate B class. In the diaries from these two classes, most students stated that they expected to improve their overall English skills, while several expressed the desire to speak more English in class.

Reflecting the major theme of the selected movie *You've Got Mail*, I encouraged students to do short e-mail assignments in English involving self-introductions and movie scene summaries, which they e-mailed to their classmates and me so I could monitor their work and provide feedback. These language e-mail activities were a novelty for most of the students who seemed excited at trying this mode of communication in English. This successful first-time experience using e-mail in English greatly developed the learners' levels of confidence during the course. Some Intermediate C students sent diary entries by e-mail to me, and I replied to each one individually, while I received post-course e-mail as learners' feedback from some of my Intermediate B

students:

> I experienced a very good time in this summer course. Because I thought and spoke many things in English. (Student #22)

> Speaking English and discussing in English were very difficult for me. Sometimes I was very confused. But I think they are precious experiences. (Student #27)

*Interviews*

After collecting and reading all the initial questionnaires at the end of the first day, I arranged an interview schedule with a sample of students. Since I was teaching the Intermediate B and C groups, these students formed a "convenience sample" (Weiss, 1994) for interviews and allowed me to move from quantitative to qualitative personal data collection and analysis. Given that I intended to conduct interviews in English, I gave the students the four structured interview questions two days prior to their scheduled interview. This allowed them time to think about their progress and consider how to articulate their responses in English in the interview situation. The interviews gave students an opportunity to talk about their learning as well as providing oral data to supplement the initial written questionnaire. The responses to the open-ended and follow-up interview questions yielded varied data about students' feelings and reactions to the course content and activities. I audiotaped each five-minute interview so that I could transcribe the responses (Seidman, 1998). In survey research interviews are often

conducted sequentially after administering a questionnaire and can act as a "validity check" on the responses to questionnaire items (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 64). My purpose, however, was to use interviews as a follow-up instrument to give students an opportunity to freely answer specific questions about their own perceived progress and levels of satisfaction with the course. During these one-to-one structured interviews, I observed body language and facial expressions in reaction to some of the questions that accompanied their verbal responses. An essential characteristic of a good interview is "not good conversation but good data" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 81), which is why I stuck very closely to the following questions:

1. Is the movie *You've Got Mail* helping you learn English? In what ways?
2. What parts of this course are you enjoying the most?
3. What parts of this course don't you like?
4. Would you like to change anything about the course? If so, which parts?

In contrast to the questionnaires, the range of interview responses was not easily amenable to clear categorization. I listened to the audiotaped recordings, transcribed the variety of answers, and then organized them into a qualitative matrix to highlight the range of individual answers elicited in a structured interview situation.

*Final Questionnaire*

At the end of the course, I gave out the final questionnaire and students were given 40 minutes to complete and return it. The fact that 101 students completed the final survey meant that eight students had dropped out of the program. The closed-responses to Q1 on both questionnaires were collected, and then presented (see Figure 1). Likert scale questions Q2 to Q8 invited students to evaluate their levels of satisfaction with the course content and class activities. I categorized the responses to the ten open-ended questions to show the most commonly occurring answers. This questionnaire formed the final part of the data collection procedures and there were five open-ended questions which were designed to be paired with the initial questionnaire to qualitatively measure how much each student felt they had improved, and how effective the IEP was from the students' various language learning perspectives.

**Results and Discussion**

By conducting this survey, I found that students had differing learning styles, different learning expectations and different language goals in the IEP. At the start of the course, most students had high expectations of learning communicative English through movie-based materials. By the end of the course, however, this number had fallen. Half of the IEP students stated that they wanted to improve *speaking* skills and felt they had been successful by the end of the course. In the final questionnaire, 80% of the students expressed a high level of satisfaction with the program. Reasons for this high satisfaction rating were that

(1) 89 students (out of 101) said they liked learning by listening to the NS teachers talk; (2) the number of students who felt their listening skills had improved rose dramatically from 22 to 43; and (3) group discussions (75 students) and class discussions (67 students) were both rated highly by the end of the course. Speaking, discussions, role-plays, and listening were all highly valued activities which support the communicative nature of the program. The course movie *You've Got Mail* introduced students to the e-mail medium in English, and the results of the final survey show a dramatic increase from 21 to 79 students expressing an interest in using e-mail in English.

Students' responses on a scale from (1) not much to (5) very much to the general questions of how much they enjoy/enjoyed studying English *before* and *after* the course are presented in Figure 1. There is a dramatic rise on the positive end of the scale (5), with almost 80% of the students surveyed expressing strong positive feelings towards learning English at the end of the course. In the final questionnaire and interviews, many students said they "enjoyed" movie related activities in class. Other valued activities were role-plays, group and class discussions, and "conversation with classmates," thus supporting the view that communicative teaching methods for the IEP were successful.

Figure1: *Feelings towards English*

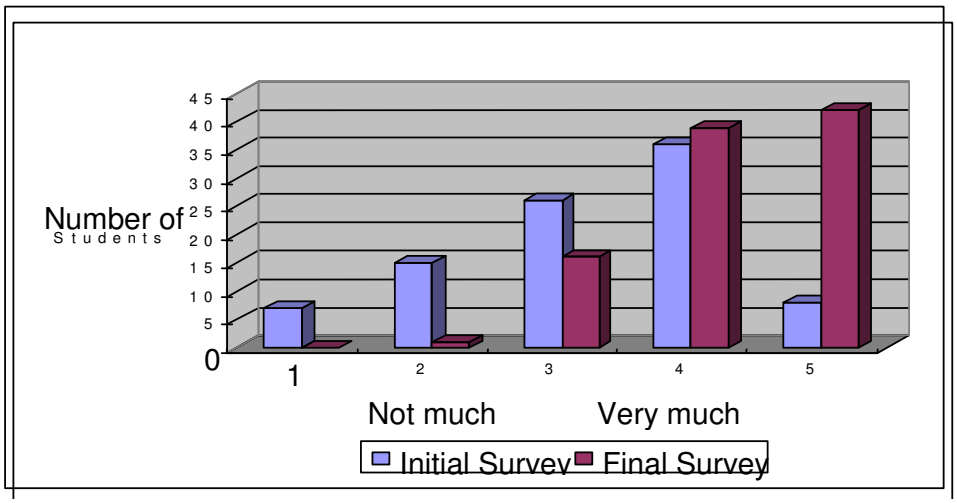


Table 1 focuses on the students' learning preferences based on previous language learning experiences. This video-based course was at first pedagogically appropriate as 43 students said they liked learning by watching video movies in class. An early surprise for me as a teacher-researcher was that 83 out of 109 students answered that they liked to study by listening to the teachers talk. This response arguably reveals students' preference for a passive style of learning by listening to spoken models of English provided by their teachers in high school and university classes.

Table 1*: Classroom Learning Preferences before IEP*

Do you like to study English in class by…?

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | mean | sd |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Watching video movies | 3 | 7 | 20 | 35 | 43 | 4 | 1.05 |
| Group and class discussions | 4 | 16 | 34 | 38 | 17 | 3.4 | 1.04 |
| Role-play activities | 4 | 17 | 36 | 35 | 17 | 3.4 | 1.04 |
| Listening to teachers talk | 1 | 3 | 22 | 48 | 35 | 4 | 0.85 |

Notes: n = 109

1)Not much 3)Neutral 5)Very much

Table 2 was designed to be paired with Table 1 for analysis. As revealed in some of the interviews, some students grew tired of the same movie each day, and perhaps movie related activities were repetitious which explains why the mean score for watching video_movies in class fell slightly to 3.7 for *You've Got Mail*. Some of the students interviewed simply did not like the plot of *You've Got Mail*. Group and class discussions about the movie were clearly enjoyed by students. Pair work activities such as Q&A, information exchanges, quizzes had a high mean score of 4, which means these were considered enjoyable language practice exercises. My analysis reveals an interesting contradiction: even though group and class discussions were rated highly in the responses to the final questionnaire, 89 students still answered that they liked listening to the teachers talk, indicating a preference for a passive classroom learning style.

Table 2: *Classroom Learning Preferences after IEP*

Did you like studying English in class by…?

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | mean | sd |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Watching *You've Got Mail* | 2 | 12 | 25 | 36 | 26 | 3.7 | 1.04 |
| Group discussions | 0 | 1 | 24 | 37 | 38 | 4.1 | 0.8 |
| Class discussions | 0 | 2 | 30 | 36 | 31 | 4 | 0.83 |
| Worksheets about movie | 8 | 17 | 39 | 25 | 12 | 3.2 | 1.09 |
| Pair work activities | 0 | 5 | 25 | 32 | 39 | 4 | 0.91 |
| Role-play activities | 2 | 3 | 30 | 30 | 35 | 3.9 | 0.97 |
| Listening to teachers talk | 0 | 2 | 10 | 36 | 53 | 4.4 | 0.74 |

Notes: n = 101

In Table 3, 45 students gave a neutral response to the need for the teachers to *explain grammar*. In this language program, students expected to be taught by native speakers following a communicative approach rather than a traditional grammar-based method. A high number of students (87) said they wanted their teachers to *correct* [their] *pronunciation*, which indicates that students felt they really needed to improve their speaking skills.

Table 3: *Learner Needs and Expectations*

I would like my teachers to…

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | mean | Sd |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Correct my pronunciation | 0 | 4 | 18 | 44 | 43 | 4.2 | 0.83 |
| Explain grammar | 3 | 13 | 45 | 26 | 22 | 3.5 | 1.03 |
| Game-style activities | 2 | 7 | 28 | 37 | 38 | 3.9 | 0.99 |
| Talk freely to students | 4 | 7 | 35 | 32 | 31 | 3.7 | 1.06 |

Notes: n = 109

1)Not much 3)Neutral 5)Very much

Table 4 shows different skills students felt they had improved as a result of the IEP. Most of the students stated that they joined the program to improve their *speaking* and *listening* skills, which matches the university's official expectations. Also, 53 out of 101 students felt satisfied that their speaking ability had improved by the end of the course. At the beginning of the course, 22 students reported they wanted to improve their listening, and 43 students said they felt they had, which was a significant increase. This perceived improvement in listening can be attributed to the intensive nature of the course, which exposed students to communicative English methods by native speaker teachers (speaking only English) using authentic video materials. Feelings of improvement in *grammar* usage and *understanding* did not feature prominently in the responses to the final

survey.

Table 4:

| What English skills do you need to improve the most? | | What English skills do you think you improved the most? | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Speaking | 55 | Speaking | 53 |
| Listening | 22 | Listening | 43 |
| Pronunciation | 13 | Pronunciation | 5 |
| Vocabulary | 10 | Vocabulary | 2 |
| Grammar | 6 | | |
| Understanding | 5 | | |
| Overall skills | 5 | Overall skills | 3 |

The survey results presented in Table 5 show that students' main expectation was to practice *speaking* in class. To improve listening was the expectation of 15 students, 12 students expected to enjoy English, while 11 expected to develop their English in general. However, by the end of the course, there was a clearer understanding among learners of language areas that they felt they had improved. Therefore, 30 students felt they had adequately learned speaking skills. A high number of 33 students said they enjoyed English during the program, which was a significant increase from 12 students at the start. In the final questionnaire, 14 students felt they had developed more confidence in using English. *English all day* was valued by 7 students, who felt they had benefited

from intensive English practice for 6 hours a day. Only 30 students (out of 101) in the final survey felt they had adequately practiced speaking during the course. A number of explanations for this were revealed to me in the interviews: “Project work. We speak Japanese most of the time” (Student #30), and “Change project work. I don’t like the group work” (Student #36). Some students said they wanted smaller classes, and others expressed a desire for more situational and conversational style activities.

Table 5: *General Expectations and Overall Satisfaction*

| What do you expect to learn from this summer course? | | What did you learn from this summer course? | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Speaking | 62 | Speaking | 30 |
| Listening | 15 | Listening | 19 |
| Enjoy English | 12 | Enjoy English | 33 |
| English in general | 11 | English in general | 10 |
| Communication | 5 | Communication | 2 |
| Grammar | 4 | Confidence | 14 |
| Pronunciation | 3 | English all day | 7 |
| Making friends | 3 | Making friends | 5 |

Table 6 shows students’ use of e-mail. In the initial questionnaire, students were asked “How often do you use English for e-mail?” Only 21 students said they were regularly using e-mail in English, and 85 students said they were not

using e-mail in English at the start of the course. The final questionnaire asked students, "As a result of this course, are you interested in using e-mail in English?" There was a high positive response as 79 out of 101 students said they were interested, compared with 22 students who said they were not. The decision to use the authentic video material *You've Got Mail* and related e-mail activities clearly changed learners' attitudes and sparked an interest in using this medium in English.

Table 6: *Use of E-mail in English*

| E-mail 1 | | E-mail 2 | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Initial | | Final | |
| Using | 21 | Interested | 79 |
| Not using | 85 | Not interested | 22 |

**Conclusion and Implications for Further Research**

In this research project, I sought to examine the students' attitudes, previous learning experiences, and expectations of their university's Intensive English Program (IEP). Nunan (1990) argues that the effectiveness of a program depends on the expectations of the learners, and if their language needs and perceptions of the learning process are not taken into account, there can be a "mismatch" of ideas between teachers and learners. By conducting this survey, I was able to monitor and then report on students' attitudes towards learning English, their

expectations, goals and linguistic performance. This study has shown that it is possible to conduct a meaningful survey in the target language without relying on translation, at variance with Nunan's (1989, p. 62; 1996, pp. 23-25) long-held view that questionnaires in surveys should be in the participants' native language.

Administering survey instruments in English from the very start of the course gave the learners the opportunity to think about their learning and to focus themselves in English, thereby raising learners' metacognitive awareness. Finding out students' needs and expectations, then conducting interviews and the final questionnaire provided me as a teacher-researcher with rich data to measure, through summative evaluation techniques, how effectively this particular IEP satisfied learner expectations. One of the main goals of this study was to measure and interpret levels of student satisfaction by combining statistical and qualitative approaches. An understanding of learners' beliefs about their learning is needed not just by teachers but by learners themselves. As Wenden (1986) puts it: "It is important that the students themselves be given opportunities to think about their learning process, so that they can become aware of their own beliefs and how these beliefs can influence what they do to learn" (pp. 3-19). By first conducting an ongoing subjective learner needs analysis and then a final questionnaire to elicit "effectiveness data" (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, pp. 163-164), this survey gave all the IEP students ample opportunities to self-evaluate their own learning process, and then to finally evaluate and measure the success of the language program.

Brindley (1984) suggests that if programs are to be truly learner-centered,

teachers “need to canvass learners’ expectations [even if they conflict with the wishes of the teacher] and be able to interpret their statements of need” (p. 95). An important outcome of involving learners in ongoing course development is that it increases the likelihood that the course will be perceived as relevant, and learners will gain a heightened awareness of their own linguistic preferences, strengths, and weaknesses. They will become more aware of what it is to be a learner and develop skills in "learning how to learn" (Nunan, 1988, p. 53).

With implications for future course design, the initial and final questionnaires present convenient means of focusing students' attention on their learning process as part of their overall language learning experience from the beginning to the end of the course. An initial needs analysis provides teachers with learner profiles, giving them information about learners’ preferences which teachers can try to accommodate when selecting materials and classroom activities. Questionnaires and interviews also give program teachers feedback on students' progress and whether changes in classroom activities and course content need to be made. Therefore, the intensive English program’s *process* and *product* should be viewed along a continuum as integrated parts of an educational whole.

This study has shown that in the absence of final achievement tests, measuring the effectiveness of a language program from the clients’ perspectives can lie in summative evaluation, comparing students' comments in the initial and final questionnaires as to how they participated in it, their perceptions of it, and what they felt they learned most from the program (Weir and Roberts, 1994, p. 5 cited in Richards, 2001, p. 287). Clearly a variety of objective and subjective

factors overlap in designing and teaching an educational program. The results of this exploratory survey offer evidence to support the belief that “learning is enhanced when students are actively involved in selecting content, learning tasks, and evaluation” (Heath, 1992, pp. 40-55).

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

Michael Kubo

## 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 contex. 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*

Griffee (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. Griffee'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). Griffee 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. Griffee hypothesized three aspects underlying confidence in speaking English: *ability*, *assurance*, and *willing engagement*. Griffee 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, Griffee'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 "readministered" (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.<br>strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree |
| 2. I would like to study in an English speaking country.<br>strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree |
| 3. I like speaking English.<br>strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree |
| 4. I can discuss in English with native speakers.<br>strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree |
| 5. When I speak English I feel cheerful.<br>strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree |
| 6. I can speak English easily.<br>strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree |
| 7. I can show an English speaking visitor around the campus and answer questions.<br>strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree |
| 8. I say something to other people in English every day.<br>strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree |
| 9. I can give my opinion in English when talking to a native speaker.<br>strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree |
| 10. I look for chances to speak English.<br>strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree |
| 11. I will speak to a group of people in English.<br>strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree |
| 12. I am relaxed when speaking English.<br>strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree |

Figure 2: *Reordered confidence questionnaire items*

| **questionnaire items** | **state/trait distiction** | **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 ÷ 90 seconds (the three 30-second excerpts) = words per second x 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 Griffee'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<br>**April** | TCT Side B words per minute (WPM) per pair<br>**December** | increase (+) or decrease (–) in words per minute (WPM)<br>**April/ December** | percentage of improvement<br>**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<br>**April**<br>(percentage of pair conversa-tion spoken in April) | TCT Side B words per minute (WPM) per member of each pair<br>**December**<br>(percentage of pair conversa-tion spoken in December) | increase(+) or decrease(−) in words per min. (WPM) per student<br>**April/ December** | percentage of increase in words per minute (WPM) per student<br>**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*

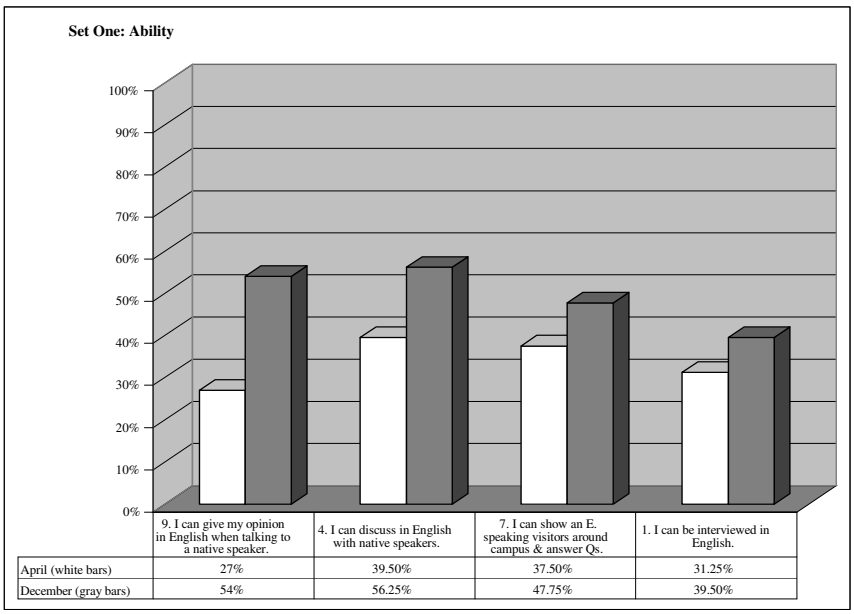
Findings of three sets of four questionnaire items are outlined below. The three sets are: ability, assurance, and willing engagement, (again, aspects constituting Griffee's (1997) confidence construct). I first looked at the sets independently, comparing questionnaire results of April and December, 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*




| | 9. I can give my opinion in English when talking to a native speaker. | 4. I can discuss in English with native speakers. | 7. I can show an E. speaking visitors around campus & answer Qs. | 1. I can be interviewed in English. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| April (white bars) | 27% | 39.50% | 37.50% | 31.25% |
| December (gray bars) | 54% | 56.25% | 47.75% | 39.50% |

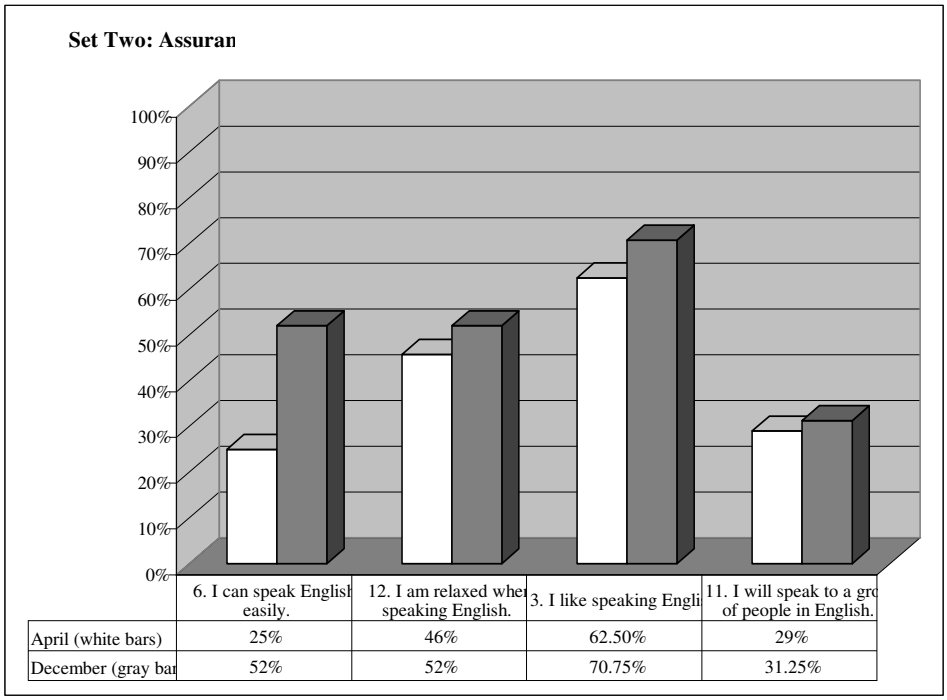
This particular finding suggests that regular, extensive pair taping gave students the opportunity to voice their opinions with increased confidence. It also suggests that repeated success in giving opinions to nonnative English speaking peers led to gains in confidence in giving opinions to native English 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%). Griffee (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*



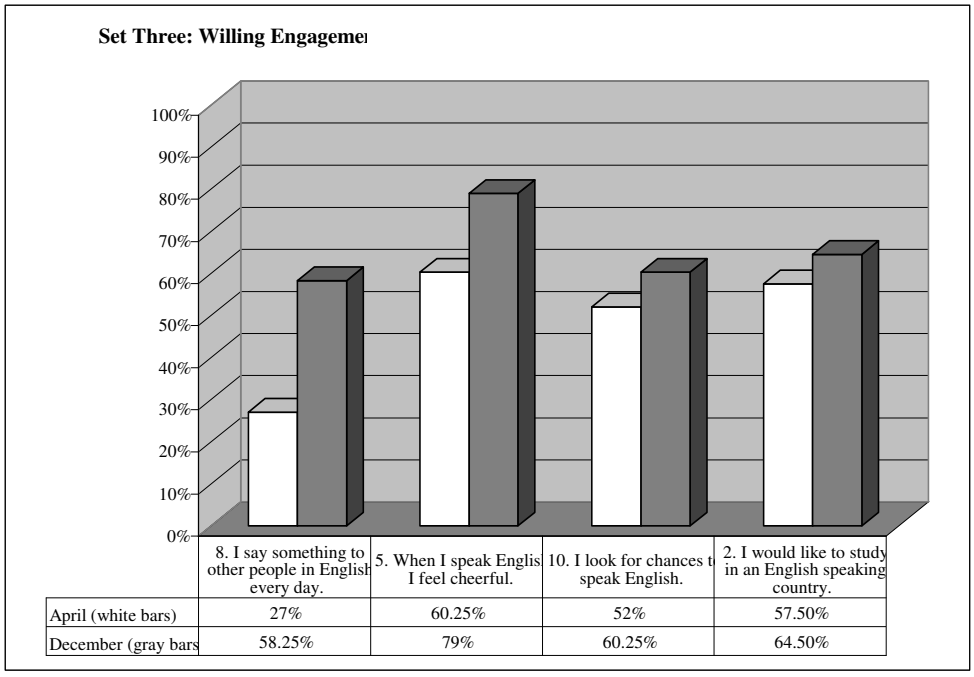

However results indicate that students generally felt only slightly more relaxed when

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*



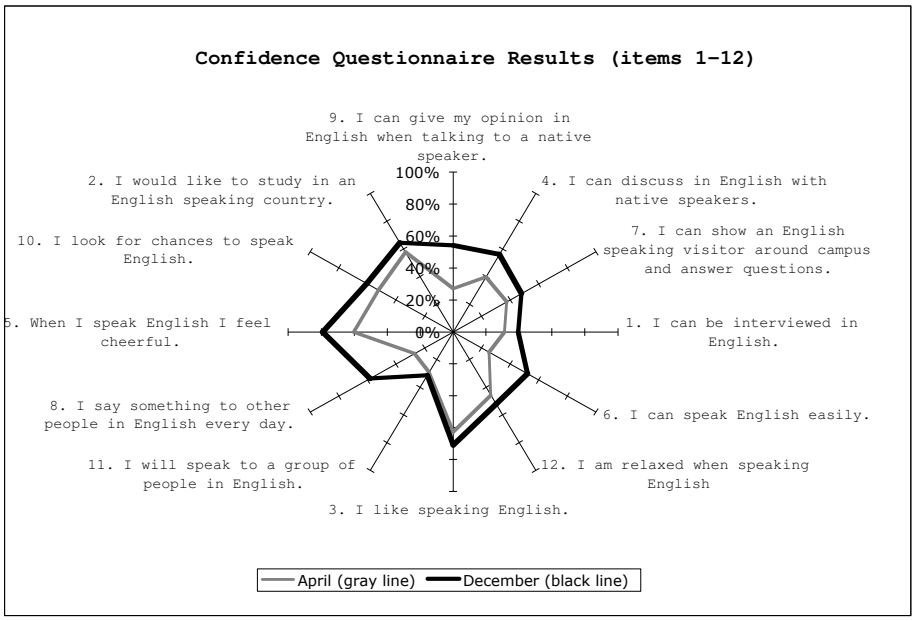

| | 8. I say something to other people in English every day. | 5. When I speak Englis I feel cheerful. | 10. I look for chances t speak English. | 2. I would like to study in an English speaking country. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| April (white bars) | 27% | 60.25% | 52% | 57.50% |
| December (gray bars | 58.25% | 79% | 60.25% | 64.50% |

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.

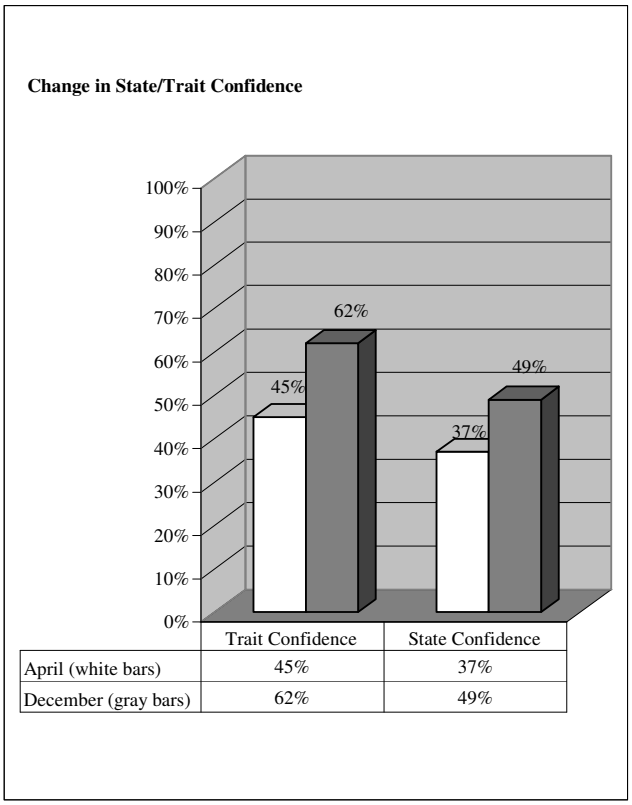
In a similar way, I selected three of the least salient items, two belonging to Set 2 (Assurance), and one belonging to Set 3 (Willing Engagement). The three items combined reflect a modest 5.16% average increase in confidence. Students reported the least amount of increase in confidence (2.25%) for 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*




| | Trait Confidence | State Confidence |
|---|---|---|
| April (white bars) | 45% | 37% |
| December (gray bars) | 62% | 49% |

*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)**

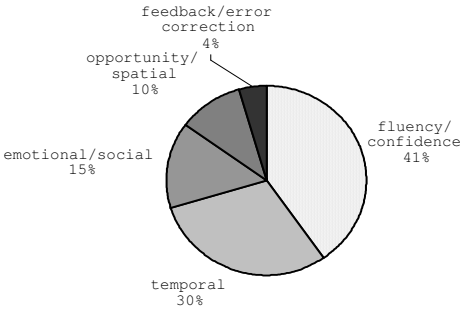



**Diagram B: Student Criticisms Pros of Doing PT Method (52% of all responses)**

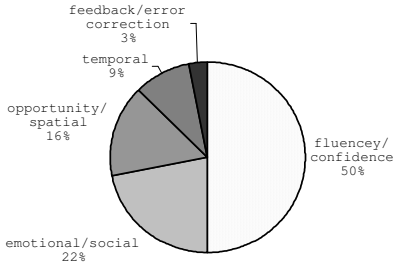
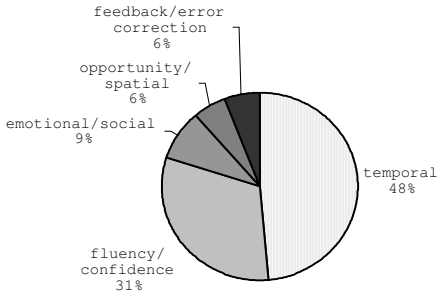



**Diagram C: Student Criticisms Cons of Doing PT Method (48% of all Responses)**




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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