RECORDING TECHNIQUE: POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING SPEAKING SKILLS FOR EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract. This article aims to introduce some ways of using Recording technique (RT) as an effective tool for error correction in teaching and learning speaking skills for EFL students, based on the improvement learners achieved from error correction executed with RT. From the pilot research, some findings have been revealed about the effectiveness of employing RT to correct speaking errors made by EFL (English as Foreign Languages) learners in speaking tasks. Clearly, RT has proven to be helpful to improve a lot of errors in different aspects of speaking skills. From those results, the author recognizes that RT, like other methods widely used in speaking classes so far in Vietnam, can be applied fruitfully either in the speaking classroom or in other kinds of practice in which speaking skills are required. Also, some advantages as well as disadvantages to enhance the effectiveness of using RT are also verified through the author’s observation and participants’ surveyed opinions.

Keywords: recording technique; error correction; teaching pronunciation; speaking skills.

1. Introduction

There have been plenty of methods normally used in the classroom (i.e. conventional methods) but quite a few learners and teachers still admit that there have existed a lot of mistakes in speakers’ performance and many of them have shaped as errors later. This has implied the fact that much more attention needs placing on teaching speaking skills, otherwise mistakes would get fixed for further utterances.

In many foreign countries, people have employed Recording Technique to teach and learn speaking skills and recently, some Asian countries like Korea, Japan or China have accessed this technique but it has not been used officially and become popular in Vietnamese users’ view yet. Therefore, its effectiveness has not been demonstrated in learning English speaking and not much appreciated by EFL teachers as well as learners. For that reason, a study was carried out to correct errors made in EFL freshmen’ speaking tasks. This research aims to represent the use of RT together with conventional methods in teaching speaking and highlight the idea that it does support other methods.
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as a tool both in teaching and learning speaking skill. Some striking features, which may not be possessed by conventional methods, have been recognized from using RT: evidence to assess learners’ ability; students’ irresponsibility in practicing speaking English in class and valuable recordings (kept as permanent-recall basis) on which speakers’ performance can be fragmented into pieces wherever errors come up, so both the teacher and students can identify, classify and correct them. Via the description of research procedures and outcomes, the author wishes to draw readers’ attention to some practice forms of speaking skills with RT recommended as teaching and learning activities, which is targeted in the title.

2. Literature review

2.1. Theoretical background

Richards and Lockharts (1996) define this process - error correction - as ‘a response either to the content of what a student has produced or to the form of the utterance’.

With regard to the classification of errors and the kinds of speaking errors worth correcting, a large number of educators agree on the view that teachers should not correct every error students have made when using English (Ancker, 2000). According to Salikin (2001), teachers need to concentrate on what will be the most productive for learners’ future communication. This perspective lies in all aspects of language correction: lexical, syntactic, phonological, etc. Nguyen Hien (2008) chooses linguistic competence by Celce-Murcia et al (1995) as the basis for error categorization and she prefers to adopt the following categories: phonological errors, lexical errors, grammatical errors and lexico-grammatical errors. However, Nguyen et al (2003) recommends, during practice stage, teachers insist on accuracy including pronunciation and form. Besides, Cathcart and Olsen (1976) find that students preferred pronunciation to be corrected when talking. In their findings, learners mispronounce certain words and therefore communication can be confusing.

Based on who engages in correction, Edge (1989) divides error correction into 3 types: teacher correction, peer correction and self-correction. In terms of the moment of correction, Richards (1998) suggests error correction can be postponed till the end of the activity (delayed correction) or can be done immediately when speaking is in progress (immediate correction).

2.2. Previous research on Recording Technique used in teaching speaking skills

Since in Vietnam there has been no official research related to the investigated area (i.e. related to the use of recording technique in teaching speaking skills), the author adopted perspectives by foreign researchers in their studies conducted in some
Western and Asian countries. Winter (1969) explored the use of the tape recorder to teach children English, especially the ability to use spoken English in daily conversation, pronunciation, rhythm and intonation through miming in “real-life” situations in classroom. He found out that recording their own voice had promoted learners’ active participation in the program and the recorder could be used as a valuable aid blended with other materials and devices to help teach children a living language. Radosevich and Kahn (2006) admit that integrating recording software into pedagogy enhances the learning environment and promotes a dynamic, student-centered learning atmosphere where the emphasis is on learning by doing rather than learning by note taking. As Schneider (1993) concluded, Recording Technique offers solutions to other related problems faced by teachers including students not feeling responsible for learning, not making enough efforts, not speaking English in class, or using the native language, which was also verified in the study by Kluge & Taylor (2000) on the same area (i.e. teaching speaking and communication skills). Employing the similar method, Washburn and Christianson (1996) implemented their research on a more particular area in speaking, i.e. effective communicative strategies, to reduce their students’ communication breakdowns marked by long pauses which, in turn, disjointed fluency. As a result, they claimed that the students had progressed in speaking compared with those who did not record.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Subject selection

To guarantee the reliability and validity of this research, the participants were selected from both teachers and students of the college where the study was implemented. All of the teachers have taught speaking to first-year students as a separated skill or as integrated one in a particular course of English. Each has had at least one year of working with freshmen so that their reflection on students’ speaking errors would be reliable enough. Some of them may no longer teach first-year students now but had a lot of experiences working with them while the others have been still teaching first-year students, so the information would be updated enough. Besides, these teachers teach different classes, which increases the diversity of data collected. As for the learner participants, only a limited number of 138 first-year students from four classes at Danang College of Foreign Languages were asked to take part in this survey due to the limited time allowed for this research. They were randomly chosen from 4 classes major in teacher-training and bachelors of translation.

3.2. Research methods

To collect reliable data, two data collection instruments employed are Recording and Questionnaires. With the first research method, the author recorded and restored the selected first-year students’ performance for some pair-work speaking
activities (which are taken from some model lessons extracted from a college speaking). At the end of this two-month pilot process, the questionnaires designed by the author were given to both teachers and students for opinion survey.

3.3. Data analysis

The attained data were then analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. Consequently, they were categorized into Recording Data and Questionnaire Data. The first data category was compared and evaluated based on the researcher’s list of speaking criteria. In particular, the six listed sub-criteria were used to compare results achieved before and after the experiment to see whether the students have made any progress compared with their performance before the experiment. Consequently, the data were calculated and converted to percentage to find out how many errors by the students were improved (real progress they achieved) and what kind of errors they often made. In addition to this, the data from questionnaire were clarified to represent teachers and students’ opinions towards attainable advantages, underlying adversities of using RT to correct errors in teaching speaking and practical solutions for the question.

4. Research findings

Due to the constraint of time, the research was only piloted with four first-year classes in 2 months and on some lessons of Speaking 1. Seven chosen activities in seven lessons focus on some language functions commonly used in daily communication, namely Starting and Ending conversations (Unit 1), Asking for information (Unit 3), Invitations (Unit 8), Stating preferences (Unit 11), Suggestions (Unit 12), Apologizing (Unit 13) and Giving advice (Unit 14).

To accurately identify errors in participants’ performance, the author established a set of speaking criteria based on the IELTS speaking rubric because of its partial resemblance to this study, i.e. recorded conversation between a candidate and an examiner. Accordingly, 6 language categories in use are Logical response, Pronunciation, Grammar, Vocabulary, Fluency and Coherence, and Language Function, based on which students’ conversations were analyzed.

4.1. Result presentation (recording results)

To begin with, how the recording data was calculated and handled should be logically reflected. Participants had their first performance recorded then their recordings were played for themselves and the researcher to listen and correct every spotted error on the spot. During the correction process, students were required to take notes all of their errors and then practice their conversations again for some minutes. To see how much they improved, they were recorded for the second time. Therefore, the total number of errors they made in the first recording is equal to the errors were improved plus those which were unable to be improved in the second performance.
From observations, a table can be devised to illustrate the proportion of errors which were improved to those that remained unchanged.

### Table 4.1. Percentage of errors improved and not improved in students’ performance corrected with RT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of speaking errors</th>
<th>Percentage of errors made in students’ performance (spotted and corrected)</th>
<th>Percentage of errors made after correction (not improved yet)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Logical response</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coherence and Fluency</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language function</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Improved errors: 80%**

RT helped the researcher and the students recognize all the errors students had made in the first performance, which were shown in the second column, when all their recordings were being played. However, students may be somehow unable to follow exactly what had been adjusted despite being corrected, so the errors that were still left in the second performance are considered unimproved. From the data of the first and the second recorded performance, improvement of error correction can be inferred. Also, readers should be reminded that these unimproved mistakes were not missed but they were not handled successfully by the students.

In addition, the researcher wishes to clarify which types of errors may be corrected effectively with RT. Therefore, the below figure is drawn to illustrate how much was improved in each type of errors.

**Fig. 4.2. Improvement achieved by using RT for EC in each type of errors**
Obviously, 100% errors on Logical response, Function, Fluency and Coherence are improved. The data cannot be interpreted that RT helps learners improve the three error types most effectively because they only comprise of small proportions of the total so it is more likely to deal with them entirely and easily compared with others. Besides, students get much improvement in grammatical and lexical categories with more than 80% errors of the total.

As for Pronunciation, nearly one third of the errors made in this area have not been improved yet but it can be confirmed that participants do progress on this type due to their improvement of 69.3%.

4.2. Questionnaire results

To emphasize the supportive use of RT in teaching speaking skills, some merits brought about by this technique are highlighted by the researcher.

Advantages of using Recording technique for error correction

The first and foremost benefit targeted by the researcher is that speakers have more errors spotted and corrected when their recordings are being played, which motivates them more in the classroom (33.3% students; 60% teachers). Another 33.3% of students and 30% teachers believe that learners feel more excited to learn English and get involved in more actively in the lesson since the technique is new and challenging. Furthermore, a vast majority of learner participants, 86.7%, are content that they can store an array of recordings for later use, which is shared by up to half of the teachers opinioned. Particularly, learners can catch up with their progress if they listen to themselves at home. As for teachers, they keep a record of erroneous speech and can form a set of common pronunciation errors made by first-year students and notify them from early days at university. One more strong point featuring this technique, which is recognized by 26.7% of the students, is that speakers’ performance will not encounter any interruption, which helps to increase their motivation in practice speaking English. Teachers, on the other hand, hold no idea about this aspect. Last but not least, as inferred during the author’s observation, speakers are aware of being recorded so they try to limit Vietnamese and pause as less as possible in their recorded conversations, which boosts their fluency in the long run.

However, like other methods, RT encounters some problems that need to be specified so that users can aware to make the most of its application.

Disadvantages of using RT for error correction and solutions

One-third of the students reveal that their discomfort emerged during being recorded triggers poorer performance than usual and this matter is also concerning to many teachers (60%), especially those who have gained little access to using technology in teaching. Besides, 23.5% of the students and 20% of the teachers notify that
surrounding noise may distract the speakers and therefore interfere with their recordings. On top of that, technical problems may emerge during the correction process, which is agreed by over 30% of the learners and less than 10% of the teachers.

5. Implications for teaching and learning activities to enhance students’ pronunciation

5.1. In the classroom

5.1.1. Group work (more than 2 students)

Teachers can ask students to work in groups of 3-4 students. Group-work activities bear some resemblance with pair-work ones since speakers need to interact with one another to express opinions on the given topic and in fact, the requirements for interaction among group members are stricter and higher than those for pair working. Hence it is suggested that groups take turns to record after discussing and arranging ideas within limited amount of time. All students need to stop group discussion for a clear recording of the group who are speaking. Recording by groups enables saving more time for speaking practice since more students are recorded at the same time.

5.1.2. Individual presentation

Teachers can ask students to present their opinions on a particular topic and allot some time for them to discuss with nearby friends and then allow several volunteers to present the topic in front of the class. For this activity, students need to use vocabulary, structures, intonation and ideas appropriate for the topic in use. Also, the coherence between the ideas is quite important to make the speech intelligible. Likewise, the speakers will be recorded when they are presenting information to the audience. This is actually challenging to first-year students since they are highly likely to be distracted by RT, speaking not well as expected, especially for the first times. To help relieve stress, speakers should be allowed to sit on a chair in an optional position rather than standing and getting embarrassed at how to use body language in the middle of the class. A mobile phone installed with a recorder is favorable for recording because it is familiar to young people and its small size reduces the speakers’ attention to being recorded.

5.2. Outside the classroom or at home

There are some activities that can be done with RT outside the class, mainly for the correction stage. As we know, using RT can grant learners more time to practice speaking skills without the teacher’ presence, observation and assessment as recordings can be saved and played for their makers to discover what remains problematic in their ability. Obviously, it is associated with self-study activities which require more students’ autonomy than the formers.
5.3. Free conversation

Learners can record a daily conversation at home or anywhere that they can make a recording clear enough. They can choose any topic they are interested in, talk freely as they are having everyday chats with their partner or record on their own. Following such a kind of activities, students are likely to gain more fluency, confidence and give more natural performance as expected, which was confirmed by some prior research before. Nowadays, most young people own an inexpensive mobile phone that can function as a mini personal computer, so Recorder is always available. Yet, they can have it installed with a high-quality recorder if they want their recordings to be as clear as possible.

5.4. Pronunciation practice

We all know that recording voice is a good way to learn to enunciate words. It is suggested that learners seek an audio recording of a conversation or a lecture given by native speakers enclosed a transcript on the Internet. Then they record their own reading of that performance to compare with natives’. In such a way, they can see many differences in pronunciation aspects between the two recordings, from which they can gain much experience and adjust their pronunciation to be more accurate and natural like the native.

5.5. Practice the model of speaking test in TOEFL IBT and IELTS exam

Recently, TOEFL (international) has been transformed into TOEFL IBT. The new form apparently challenges candidates when it requires many changes in their former learning habits, especially recorded speaking test. There is no doubt that EFL learners must encounter more difficulties not only because they may make many errors as non-natives but also they are not familiar with recording in such a strictly allotted amount of time for preparation and performance, totally from 60 seconds as the least to 100 at the most. In other words, speakers must be sweating buckets under the pressure of quick responsiveness and of being recorded with a microphone. As a result, candidates need to seek an effective way to get used to and practice the presence of Recording Technique for TOEFL IBT assessment of test-takers’ ability to communicate well.

Incompletely the same as TOEFL IBT, IELTS, still, employs Recording Technique in its speaking test to keep the evidence for grading candidates. Therefore, practicing speaking using RT should be weighed since it is a better solution to this question than plain timed practicing (i.e. rehearse one’s speech in 45-60 seconds without recording themselves) and as a result, stammering or even becoming speechless right in the first encounter with the recording device in a real exam.

To practice these speaking test models on their own, EFL learners should self-
study with RT at home. With the timer, learners can allot accurately an amount of time for preparation and for a performance to guarantee the strict testing procedures. Firstly, they choose a topic and adjust the timer to spare some seconds before the recording is executed automatically. The speakers can observe time passing and try to finish their task in time. Repeatedly, they form a habit of preparing and speaking in very strictly allotted time. More importantly, they can replay their recording to discover what problem still lies in their previous performance, improve the errors and get on with the next more perfectly.

It should be reminded that spoken language is a factor involved in IELTS grading process. EFL learners may render the formal language into informal conversations with the examiner, making a minus for their supposed-to-be-good performance. Informal speaking style can be acquired but it is not easy to become learners’ “property” or habit unless it is put into practice often when learners speak English. Consequently, recorded practice help speakers check their effort and ability to repeat and use spoken language flexibly in daily situations.

5.6. Practice interpretation skill

Interpretation is divided into 2 types that are simultaneous and consecutive. In simultaneous interpretation, the interpreter has to interpret the speech as it unfolds while listening to the speaker through headphones, i.e. simultaneously, into the microphone placed in front of them. Less requiring, consecutive interpretation allows more time for the interpreter to interpret the speech into the required language once the speaker has finished speaking.

Owning certain advantages, Recording Technique can be applied suitably to practice these interpretation skills, especially the spontaneous. About consecutive interpretation, learners can seek an audio or video of native speakers which is appropriate for interpreting (i.e. moderate speed and divided chunks of speech) and after listening one complete idea of the speaker (marked by a pause as and end of a sentence), they will interpret the idea and record their own voice. Finishing the interpretation, learners can play the recording and spot errors if any or aware of some problems which linger in their skills. In addition, RT can provide Vietnamese academic environment with a more effective evaluation of EFL student’s ability when they take their interpretation examination. Normally, each student takes turn, listens to a native speaker and interprets his speech on the spot, then is remarked and graded by a nearby teacher who listened to them beforehand. Still, the teacher cannot take notes of all errors students made during their performance, according to which assessment may not be objective enough. Recording helps to keep the evidence of the moment at which students interpret so it can be used as a basis not only for examiners to grade performances accurately but also for learners to be unable to talk back.
Using RT to hone spontaneous interpretation skill, learners can listen to a native’s voice through headphones plugged into a cassette player and at the same time, interpret into the microphone to record their performance. Before this practice, they also seek an audio executed by a native and somehow transfer it into the tape. They stop recording when the sample unit in the tape ends. In this way, they either become more familiar, responsive to real situations or check their drawbacks. Regular practice with this simulated form of genuine spontaneous interpretation, learners will be able to progress, especially shorten the responsive time and alleviate the work pressure.

5.7. Recorded performance for online assessment / learning

Making use of RT for effective assessment is partial mentioned in the previous part. However, in many countries all over the world, the traditional form of teaching and learning has been alternated as much as possible thanks to changes brought by breakthroughs in technological area. In particular, neither teachers nor students come to the class to teach and learn a lesson any more. They interact through the Internet, which means that learners can send their homework, assignments or even can be tested online and then teachers are likely to measure their ability. This fact promotes the employment of RT to make recordings related to the subjects involving speaking skills. Doing that, students can send their recorded products via email to be marked and receive online feedback from teachers for corrected recordings.

E-learning and e-training entail the requirement of online assessment, which enables Recording Technique to develop its advantages, to support effectively the learning and teaching process.

6. Conclusion

Like every other way in teaching speaking, RT has its own pros and cons. Some positive outcomes yielded from the pilot research reveal that the technique is well worth considering. EFL users may encounter some inconvenience during its application in classroom environment, but the benefits have been weighed to recognize the effective use of this technique beside the other ones. The rapid development of technology and technology-assisted education allows Recording Technique to be more accessible and to prove its potentialities. Therefore, the technique is expected to be applied more widely and creatively in different kinds of speaking skill practices both in our teaching environment and learning styles. Above-mentioned teaching and learning activities are merely very first examples of using RT to improve speaking skills and users themselves may come up with even more initiatives to utilize this supporting tool very soon in the future, particularly to study English and generally to learn other languages that are acquired as foreign languages.
References


