Pair Taping Turns Twenty: A New Look at an Old Method

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[Abstract]
Recent MALL studies suggest that there are inherent motivational benefits from implementing MALL technologies in L2 oral communication classrooms, or as extracurricular L2 speaking assignments. In this paper I review current research in Pair Taping (Schneider 1993) and related methods of audio recording of second language (L2) speaking in ELT contexts. Citing Chinnery (2006) and Brenner (2008), I also discuss the shift occurring in the implementation of such methods, suggesting Web-based Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) systems teachers can use in lieu of outdated analog-based methods. Research into the efficacy of MALL-based methods of Pair Taping and similar techniques is yet to be done. This paper offers rationales for future action research in this area.

[Keywords] Pair Taping, audio journals, L2 speaking method, ELT, MALL, m-learning, Web. 2.0, Voice 2.0, Smartphone, voice recording, audio recording
Introduction

2013 marks the year ELT teachers and researchers can reflect on two decades of Pair Taping (henceforth called PT) (Schneider 1993, 1998, 2001; Washburn and Christianson 1996; Kluge and Taylor 1998, 2000; Kubo 2006, 2007, 2009; Nguyen 2012), a method typically used in non-English speaking countries. In using PT, EFL teachers have student pairs or small groups audio-record their L2 conversations for the purpose of increasing their opportunities to speak in the target language (English) as well as a host of other pedagogical reasons.

During this twenty-year period, much of the technology people use has shifted from analog to digital, a shift that has had a profound effect on what students and teachers do inside and outside the classroom. In terms of ELT methods in the last two decades, an increasing number of teachers have adopted group-centered learning models, such as cooperative learning (CL) (Slavin 1994), and with advancements in IT, have increasingly adopted constructivist pedagogy models (Cobb 2005).

It is time, therefore, to examine the advances made in PT, as well as look at ways recent digital technologies have spawned and continue to spawn new methods in EFL teaching and learning contexts, particularly in the field of m-learning, or mobile assisted language learning (MALL). Recent MALL studies suggest that there are inherent motivational benefits from implementing MALL technologies in L2 oral communication classrooms, or as extracurricular L2 speaking assignments (MALL Research Project Report, 2009). This paper, therefore, is twofold in its objective, looking at:

1) PT trends: methods and research within the last five years
2) integration of PT methods and MALL technologies
1. PT: A Literature Review

The literature reviewed in this paper is a continuation of a review I published in March, 2006 (Kubo 2006). The literature review section of this paper adheres to the format I used in 2006, a chronological overview of summaries and discussions related to substantive findings: methodological as well as theoretical contributions to PT methodologies and research.

The method originated by Schneider (1993) called Pair Taping (PT) has had an influence on the work of teacher-researchers the world over, particularly those teaching in countries in which English is not commonly spoken. Teacher-researchers in these countries have created similar techniques, some borrowing Schneider’s exact term, others using terms such as pair-taping (Washburn and Christianson 1996), outside taping (Kluge and Taylor 1998), partner taping (Kluge and Taylor 2000), recording technique (Nguyen 2012), and so on.

It is fair to note that, due to the fact that most audio recordings done these days are done so digitally, the term taping is passé. Nevertheless, I feel there is no harm in continuing its use. Frankly, if we can still carbon copy (Cc) people, we can tape them as well! That said, in this paper, I use the acronym PT when discussing this method and its variations.

Overview of Current Trends in Pair Taping and Similar Methods:

I conducted conventional searches of current research and methodologies related to PT, mainly focusing on studies published within the last five years. A search of online and traditional refereed journals (e.g., iteslj, tesl-ej, JALT Journal, Asian EFL Journal, TESOL Quarterly) revealed that two salient trends in PT are occurring:
1) Current use of PT and research in PT (and similar methods) are designed to have students (and teachers) notice (Swain 1995) L2 language production, particularly students’ accuracy of grammar and pronunciation.
2) Online and mobile technologies (namely Web 2.0 systems and Smartphone technologies) have allowed the development of new and creative approaches to PT and the sharing and analysis of audio recorded spoken discourse.

At the start of the new millennium, the distinction between mobile assisted language learning (MALL) became clearer (Belanger, 2005), and, as a result, current technology as it relates to ELT pedagogy and learning is currently changing faster than teachers/researchers can examine its efficacy. For that reason, I have excluded a full review of MALL-related methods that utilize audio recording functionality. There are, however, a few recent studies that capture not only current trends in PT (and similar methods), but effectively employ the latest digital audio recording applications as well. I have selected three articles to review for these reasons.

**2008: Oral Journals: A Journey From Analog to Digital**

2008 marked the year Kathy Brenner broached the topic of EFL/ESL teachers eschewing analog technology (e.g. tape cassette recorders), and embracing digital forms instead. I feel her stance sets the tone for a new direction for PT.

Citing Carlson (2005), Brenner stated that students today expect teachers to incorporate digital technology for they find using it motivational. Brenner’s short paper titled, *Oral Journals: A Journey From Analog to Digital* (Brenner 2008) – though addressing teachers using oral journals with their students – was perhaps a wakeup call for EFL teachers-researchers who incorporate the use of audio recorders as learning tools, particularly those continuing the use of analog devices. “Why not just stay with traditional audiotapes and recorder?” Brenner asks herself, and replies by saying,
“Because with today’s students, technology has become the modus operandi, and if you want them to be better engaged, utilize the tools that they relate to best.” It does appear that Brenner’s call is being heard. Most of the recent PT and audio journal methods and research involve the use of digital recording technology.

2010: The Effect of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) on Grammatical Accuracy of EFL Students

In 2010, Sasan Baleghizadeh and Elnaz Oladrostam wrote an article titled *The Effect of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) on Grammatical Accuracy of EFL Students*, shedding light on how a taping method lends itself to the use of MALL, and also demonstrating how EFL students’ grammar improves as a result.

**Aim and Procedures**

Baleghizadeh and Oladrostam (2010) sought to improve the grammatical understanding and usage of EFL students through the use of cell phones and a sociolinguistic approach (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986; Mackey 2007) achieved through collaborative learning and authentic tasks and projects (Prabhu 1987; Willis and Willis 2007). For their study, the researchers selected twenty pre-intermediate Iranian female college-aged students who, in addition to attending regular grammar classes, were asked to record their voices, using their cell phones. Another group of twenty pre-intermediate Iranian female college-aged students constituted the control group, and simply asked to attend the same grammar class as the experimental group, receiving inductive instruction only. The experimental group participants were asked to analyze their recordings as homework, and listen to and comment on erroneous content with the aim of having students focus on language and content at the same time. The experimental group participants were
asked to play their recordings to their classmates to help them identify errors they may have missed. The overall aim of this study was to determine whether or not the participants of the experimental group performed better on a multiple-choice grammar posttest. Noting that there has been a “full-scale shift in the use of technology in the classrooms” (pg. 2) and inspired by work of Warschauer and Miskill (Warschauer and Miskill 2000), the researchers chose to adopt the latest “instructional tools” for making audio data exchanges between teacher and student participants; they used their cell phones and mobile computers.

Results

The findings presented in this paper show that the participants of the experimental group experienced a boost in their grammatical accuracy, suggesting that the method of noticing resulted in a significantly greater command of the grammatical forms than members not offered the method.

Discussion

Baleghizadeh and Oladrostam’s study contains numerous implications for future research in PT, in that grammatical forms could just as easily be practiced, analyzed, and corrected in pairs or small groups (of 3 or 4 students). Doing so would add additional communicative and collaborative merits to Baleghizadeh and Oladrostam’s method, while maintaining its inherent cognitive and output (particularly the noticing function) attributes. In fact, in 2012, a study in Vietnam by Nguyen (2012), examines the potential of PT in achieving that goal.

2012: Recording Technique: Possible Applications in Teaching and Learning Speaking Skills for EFL Learners

In 2012, Ngoc Nhat Minh Nguyen wrote an article titled Recording Tech-
nique: Possible Applications in Teaching and Learning Speaking Skills for EFL Learners (Nguyen 2012). Nguyen, addressing the need to place more attention on teaching (English) speaking skills in her home country (Vietnam), claims that her recording method helps students boost their speaking abilities. Nguyen also points out that recording techniques do not appear popular nor are they researched in Vietnam.

Aim and Procedures

Pointing out the need for teachers to correct L2 English speaking errors before they become fossilized, and to teach proper English pronunciation, Nguyen investigated a form of PT designed to achieve improvements in these two areas. Her two-month pilot study was conducted to assess the efficacy of her technique. She did so by selecting 138 first-year university students studying at Da Nang College of Foreign Languages in Da Nang, Vietnam. The students were enrolled in a course titled English Speaking 1, in which her recording technique (RT) was employed. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected: recorded data (student pair audio recordings), and questionnaires (administered to Speaking 1 teachers and students). After a two-month period, recorded data was analyzed on criteria similar to the IELTS speaking rubric, assessing six language categories: logical response, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and coherence, and language function. To qualitatively assess the technique, Nguyen gave both teachers and students an opinion survey.

Results

The overall findings of Nguyen’s pilot study showed that students were able to identify errors (either on their own or those pointed out by their teachers) in their performances, learn from their mistakes, and therefore were able to repeat their spoken performances with 80% average improve-
ment in the six language categories mentioned above.

Questionnaire results showed that nearly 90% of the students who took part in the survey were pleased with the fact that they were able to access a veritable library of recordings for future use. As for the teachers, they were able to keep records of erroneous L2 speech, which they in turn could use for future instruction, thereby benefiting from the use of RT as well. Nearly 30% of the student participants noted that RT’s strength was the fact that, when speaking, they could do so without being interrupted, resulting in increased motivation to practice speaking English.

Discussion

The fact that about 30% of Nguyen’s student participants felt this way supports Schneider’s (Schneider 1993, 2001) notion that PT is an effective method for motivating students to form their dormant speaking skills by offering them chances to converse at length in a supportive and relaxed setting. Marking a potential pitfall in the efficacy of RT, Nguyen claims that one-third of the student participants felt that their performances were hindered due to affective factors related to being recorded. Teachers involved in this study were concerned about this finding as well, suggesting that further research be done on the effects of students observed in this manner. In the field of sociolinguists, William Labov (1972) coined the term “observer’s paradox,” a term to describe a situation when researchers’ speech data collecting is undermined by the presence of the researchers themselves. It would appear that the challenge for teachers and researchers using and examining PT would be to somehow reduce the distractive presence of the recording device, by having students maintain their primary focus on the task of speaking, as opposed to the task of recording. Other teacher-researchers have noted such paradoxes, but have fallen short on suggesting ways to overcome them.
2. Integration of PT methods and MALL technologies

The pedagogical approach called Computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) is one that allows collaborative learning to take place via computer, in the form of m-learning, or mobile assisted language learning (MALL). CSCL can be used inside and outside the classroom; however, in both applications, CSCL encourages the sharing of ideas and knowledge. CSCL is not to be confused with e-learning, which was traditionally an autocratic teaching system designed to replicate teacher centered instruction. CSCL is therefore sometimes referred to as “e-learning 2.0”.

A “fashionable channel for language study”

In 2006, George Chinnery (Chinnery 2006) stated that we are “headed for a world where m-learning is a fashionable channel for language study” (pg. 14). In that same year, according to Yamaguchi (Yamaguchi 2005), some Japanese college students did not own personal computers (p. 57). However, by contrast, in the same year Thornton and Houser (Thornton & Houser 2005), having polled 333 Japanese university students, reported that 100% percent owned a cell phone. At the start of my English II (Listening) class this year, I asked the class of 32 to raise their hands if they owned a Smartphone; all but three students raised their hands. When asked how many owned personal computers, less than one third of the students raised their hands. It would appear that – given the information I have about my Japanese university student’s digital accoutrements – assigning them CALL-based homework would be an exercise in futility. Most would simply not have the tools (i.e. a computer) at home to complete the homework! It stands to reason, therefore, should I assign MALL-based homework, my students
would demonstrate a higher rate of completion than if it were CALL-based. Given what we know about Japanese university students and how they relate to their cell phones and Smartphones, can m-learning prove to be an effective tool and possibly a “fashionable channel” for language study? How might PT find its place in the m-learning channel? In this section, I will attempt to shed light on these unanswered questions by suggesting ways MALL and PT can be implemented in the EFL context.

**Web 2.0 and Voice 2.0**

Web 2.0 is simply an Internet meme, one coined by Tim O’Reilly in 1999 that has come to describe the second generation of the World Wide Web (WWW), a new system that focuses on users’ abilities to collaborate and exchange information via the Internet. Essentially, Web 2.0 is more dynamic than the original WWW (Web 1.0) in that it is based on a community of users, including a more open exchange of information.

Voice 2.0 is commonly described as a subset of Web 2.0. Voice 2.0 is a term used to describe Web 2.0-based technologies that utilize Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology that forms the platform of voice-enabled applications. Skype is one example of Voice 2.0.

**Voice 2.0 and EFL**

Voice 2.0 services and applications have successfully permeated the global village in the last decade, starting with the release of Skype in 2003. More recent examples of Voice 2.0 applications are Japan-based LINE, similar to popular Cyprus-based VoIP telephone application called Viber. There are many Voice 2.0 systems geared for educational contexts (e.g. VoiceThread), and show promise for the implementation of PT. Below is a list of them and a brief description of each.
PT: A Journey From Analog to Digital: Rationale for Change

This section offers a rationale for transitioning Pair Taping (PT) from its analog roots to the latest Voice 2.0 technologies. Pair Taping, as the name suggests, was developed when most voice recordings were done with portable analog devices, namely compact cassette tape recorders. These now antiquated devices allowed student pairs and small groups (3 to 4 students) to practice and record their spoken L2, literally anywhere. Though these devices were convenient, economical and effective for the purpose of capturing students’ authentic use of spoken L2, teachers were challenged to find ways to manage numerous recorders and cassette tapes. For the student pairs or small groups, one compact recording device and single cassette tape was easy to manage; however, for teachers teaching larger classes, sometimes managing upwards of 10 recorders and 10 cassette tapes was laborious, requiring a system of management and strict PT recording rules. For example, if a student pair or group would fail to rewind to the beginning of their tape, the teacher would have to. If a number of pairs or groups forgot to rewind their tapes, the teacher would be burdened further. Analog cassette tape recorders were also fraught with mechanical failure, and would occasionally “eat” a tape, resulting in lost data, necessitating replacement of the tape and sometimes the device itself. Additionally, batteries had to be constantly checked and frequently replaced. To complicate matters further, as digital technology advanced and proliferated, younger students showed little or no knowledge of how to operate “old fashioned” tape recorders. Teachers wanting to use PT in their ESL/EFL classes found themselves having to spend valuable class time just to explain how to use the old machines!

In response to Brenner’s (2008) call for teachers to take the journey from analog to digital, I suggest that PT teacher-researchers do the same. Doing
so will help create a new path for PT practitioners, students, and researchers. In the next section, I examine three Voice 2.0-based systems that utilize voice recording as a main function. Incorporating analog PT methods and research findings, the hope is to establish workable classroom and extracurricular activities using Voice 2.0-based systems. The three viable systems reviewed were selected for a variety of reasons (e.g. ease of use, multiplatform support, and mobility). They were also selected because of their popularity, history, and staying power in the fast changing Voice 2.0-based systems market.

**PT: A Journey From Analog to Digital: 3 Viable Voice 2.0 Systems**

Lindsay Warwick writes a blog named Voice Recording in EFL, and she writes, “Voice 2.0 tools are abundant, free and easy to use and allow students to maximize their time outside the classroom.” Warwick goes on to say, “Any student with a smart phone has a microphone tool and can record a message and email it off. Simple as that.” I have listed three such systems below, touching on the merits of each.

**VoiceThread (voicethread.com)**

VoiceThread, according to their website, is a web-based multimedia slideshow that “holds images, documents and videos and allows people to navigate slides and leave comments in 5 ways,” one of which is through the use of audio files. It is popular with students and teachers because VoiceThreads (slideshows with student voiceovers) can be shared publically, or kept private, allowing only members of a group or class to view. When students post their VoiceTreads, they are not only inviting their teacher and classmates to view and listen to them, but to leave spoken comments as well. VoiceThread, therefore, is a good example of a computer-supported collaborative learning
based system.

**Voki Classroom (voki.com)**

Voki Classroom is used as a classroom management system, allowing teachers to create and manage what are called Voki class accounts. Students are not required to register. It has been noted by EFL educators that Voki has gained popularity in part due to the fact it allows students the option of using a speaking avatar instead of their real faces. One teacher writes, “Although some initially find tools such as Voki of little educational value, upon closer inspection, teachers quickly realize that Voki allows students to express themselves (verbally) on the internet in safety and confidently, as their real identities are hidden behind the avatars. Suddenly, with Voki, the shy become outspoken and the reticent assured.” Like VoiceThread, Voki Classroom is a good example of a computer-supported collaborative learning based tool.

**Vocaroo (vocaroo.com)**

For any teachers wanting to try PT using a Voice 2.0 service, Vocaroo might be the simplest way. Vocaroo allows teachers and students to exchange voice recording via email as well as post audio files to various SNS. The very simple interface is one-touch, making it easy to explain and get working on a PT assignment quickly. Using Vocaroo is free, and for those without an account, audio messages are automatically deleted after one year. Should one choose to open an account, doing is free and recordings can be kept or deleted, leaving the choice up to the user. Vocaroo’s format is more linear than Voki Classroom and VoiceThread; therefore, while an adequate and economical substitute for audiocassette recorders, it cannot be considered a good example of a computer-supported collaborative learning based tool.
3. Implications

Web. 2.0, and in particular Voice 2.0 systems are constantly evolving to form learning tools designed to satiate the needs of our digitally savvy students. Today, to give our students analog tape recorders and ask them to record their L2 conversations will do less to inspire and motivate them than offering them the opportunity to use Voice 2.0 technology. EFL teachers stand poised to initiate inspiring new methods of cooperative learning through the use of MALL and via the Smartphones most, if not all of our students carry on their person daily. Fundamentally, research in PT and similar methods has brought us far in our understanding of how to get EFL students to speak English more fluently, confidently and accurately. Put simply, PT works. However, PT has its limitations. It also has a lot of potential. The hope for Web 2.0 is to create an even more open exchange of information. The hope for PT is that it too will develop. At the beginning of the millennium, Warschauer and Meskill (2000) stated that learners are involved “in shaping the learning process and [construct] their own understanding of language and content through access to electronic tools and resources.” In 2013, this statement could not be truer. In fact, given the advances made in mobile devices in the last decade or so, EFL students and teachers can embrace the language learning potential they possess. MALL studies highlight the inherent motivational benefits from implementing MALL technologies inside and outside of L2 Speaking classrooms (MALL Research Project Report, 2009); therefore, teacher-researchers still using traditional PT, but wanting to explore MALL have an opportunity to design and research new m-learning based PT methods.
References


http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Kluge-PartnerTaping.html


