The Impact of Weekly Student Videoed and Evaluated Conversations

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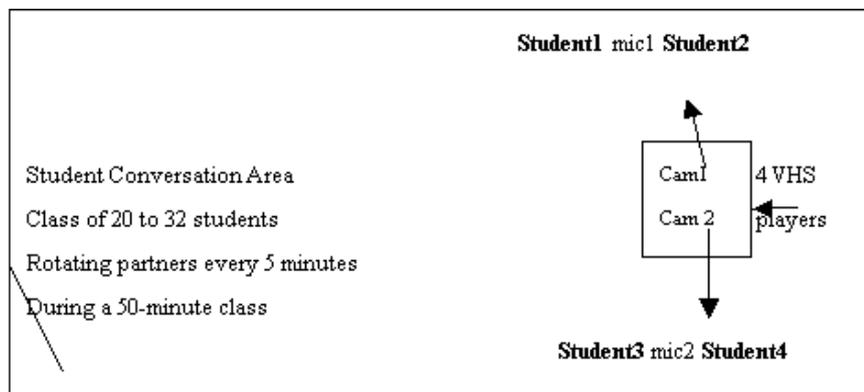
Abstract

Taiwanese university students in a semester-long course were regularly videoed having semi-spontaneous conversations. Students received copies of their conversations to critic each time. They compiled the conversations on their own video-cassettes and wrote papers at the end of the semester comparing the first and last conversations. The videoing not only allowed them to see themselves performing competently, but the procedure also allowed them to have multiple opportunities for extended discourse. These opportunities for extended discourse "pushed" their abilities and allowed them to construct themselves as speakers of English. The videoing and pair work scaffolded student learning through interaction within students' ZPDs and allowed for near peer role modeling. This research is explained through SLA studies in extended discourse opportunities, pushed output and negotiation, as well as pedagogically through Vygotskian scaffolding and collaborative learning. The opportunities to evaluate and correct themselves facilitated the students' movement toward more metacognition and autonomous learning.

Background

Previous research over a six-year period in Japan by the researcher and his collaborators has shown how a relatively new configuration of educational technology, Longitudinal Videoing of Student Conversations (LVSC), can potentially increase interaction, negotiation, noticing, output, reflection, and goal-setting, all of which SLA researchers propose facilitate second language acquisition. In brief, LVSC uses two video cameras and four VHS players (see Figure 1) that allows teachers, with as many as 32 students, to videotape students' short, five-minute conversations in about an hour-long class and immediately give students their video cassette copies to take home, view, and analyze. The teacher keeps the master tapes from inside the cameras (Hi8 before, more recently digital) for later viewing, evaluation, further lesson planning, or stockpiling for future research. When done weekly, students can have as many recorded conversations as weeks in a semester on one tape and view their progress over time. Below I describe what little research has been done to date, offer support from various fields, suggest the configuration's potential for SLA research in hopes that others will begin investigating its use, and describe the results from a semester of using LVSC at a university in Taiwan. Of special promise is the potential for the LVSC procedures to facilitate longitudinal research on students' language development.

LVSC procedures have mostly been followed with students in courses meeting three times a week in Japan, in which some preparations for the specific conversations were made in two classes and videoing done in the third. On video day, two pairs of students are semi-randomly selected to be videoed for five minutes in the two front corners of the room while the other students have similar conversations with partners in the rest of the class. Every five minutes, students change partners and have a new conversation (on the same topic, for example, their "ideal mate") with a different partner while four other people are called before the cameras. In each video class, students may speak with about six different partners and are videoed with one new video partner.

Figure 1. LVSC Classroom Setup

Student Conversation Area
Class of 20 to 32 students
Rotating partners every 5 minutes
During a 50-minute class

Post-video (homework) activities usually have included students' word-for-word transcription of all or parts of their conversations and answering a set of questions that direct their attention toward noticing aspects of their own and their partner's language and communication skills. It is during this stage that much modeling of partners occurs and that students can notice details that they wish to emulate. Students are encouraged to notice what might be wrong (which they themselves can correct in the transcriptions) and to notice things their partners have said that they could use. They are frequently asked to view their videos with friends and family and to get comments. Periodically, students exchange their videos, view the last four or five conversations, and write letters to partners about how they think they have improved, giving advice and inadvertently modeling those things they like. At the end of a term, when they usually have eight to ten clips, we ask them to write a short paper comparing their first and last video conversation.

Previous research

Murphey & Kenny (1995, 1996a & b, 1998), Murphey & Woo (1998a), and Davies & Kindt (1999) and Murphey (2001a) have refined the procedures over a number of years and gathered mostly qualitative data through regular observations in class and on video, and through students' transcriptions, action logs, semester reports, and year-end feedback. While the videoing is the core activity, the procedures involve a flexible system of activities that revolve around the videoing and enhance it. To better understand what we were doing, we separated our activities into three time periods (before, during, and after videotaping), the student behaviors, and the corresponding theories, as in Figure 2 below.

The procedures seem to benefit students through (a) repeated negotiated practice, (b) multiple opportunities for the "noticing" of learnable material (linguistic items, communication strategies, beliefs, and attitudes) in their own and their classmates' output, and (c) control over the construction of extended discourse. Students overwhelmingly say that the videoing had a big impact upon their learning and that they would like to be able to do it in future classes.

We have found the LVSC procedures help us to create an acquisition-rich environment for students to focus on forms at certain moments in a learning cycle, e.g., while transcribing, which does not distract from the meaningful communication they are engaged in during the videoing. The procedures also offer opportunities to focus on form (Long, 1988, 1996; Long & Robinson 1998) i.e., notice forms within a meaningful, task-based activity, and to work with self-selected and created material that is roughly suited to their level, i.e. within their zone of proximal development (Lantolf & Appel, 1994). Students are led to make regular goals (Nunan, 1997) and to metacognitively plan and practice for future "performance events" (Murphey, 1996a).

Figure 2: The Three Periods of the LVSC Procedures

1. PRE-VIDEOING	Student Behaviors	Theoretical correlates
	present input / select input	learner training (Wenden, 1987; O'Malley, 1990)
	target items	performance events (Murphey, 1996b)

practice output	facilitative anxiety (Alpert&Haber,1960)
recycle	comprehensible input (Krashen1985)
	Noticing (Schmidt & Frota 1986 /Ellis1994)
	Awareness (Flavell1979)
	Making goals (Nunan1997)

2. VIDEO DAY	**Student Behaviors**	**Theoretical correlates**
	talk to lots of partners	pushed output (Swain1995)
	videotaped	collaborative learning
	with random partner	recycling
	notice and note items	facilitative anxiety
	from partners to learn	multiple performance events
	multiple conversations	Noticing, Awareness, Goal making
	repeated with different partners	

3. POST-VIDEOING	**Student Behaviors**	**Theoretical correlates**
	multiple viewing & pausing	intensifying Noticing, Awareness,
	transcriptions of conversations	Goal making
	focused observations	learner autonomy (Holec, 1981)
	& feedback with forms	reflection (CLL) (Curran, 1972)
	or logs or ...	action research loop
	take partner's video home	bottom up/top down
	write self-progress report	making input
	review partner's progress	comprehensible
	set goals for next time	"Grabbing the i+1 (Krashen, 1985)
	compile a "noticing list"	within the ZPD" (Vygotsky, 1962)

The passage below, from a student's action log (October 1999), richly shows how, in her view, her pre-videoing practice enhances her recorded performance. Even while in the midst of her performance, she finds she can focus-on-form and deepen her acquisition by pushing her output to include a partially acquired item. It also shows how asking students to triangulate perspectives of their performances (with partners and other viewers) can further enrich their understanding of what makes for effective communication.

Warming up is really useful way to prepare for videoing. I could know whether the expressions what I had used was correct or understood well, by seeing partner's face. Some of them corrected my mistakes by changing the expressions in shadowing. That was indeed great help.

When I asked Norie which she prefers living in Japan or living in foreign countries, she answered, "It doesn't matter for me." Though I had known that expression, that easy expression didn't come to my mind at that time. I thought that was exactly [what] I had wanted to say, and used it in videoing at once.

I watched the video with my mother. She seemed to be glad to watch it after a long interval, and gave me strict but proper comment. According to her, it is true that smiling is a good way to make conversation better, however, I have a tendency to smile things away in talking with someone in English. So I should pay attention to this point. I thank her frank comment and it would be much help to me from now on. (Mari)

The fact that there is a performance on tape, an artifact, means that multiple instances of metacognition and potential noticing can take place: (a) when the participants watch; (b) when friends, classmates, and family watch with students and comment; (c) when doing the transcriptions and answering the focus questions; (d) when writing class comments in action logs (as above and below); (e) and when receiving feedback on recordings and transcriptions from teachers or classmates. In fact, there can be even pre-performance metacognition and noticing in the acts of planning and goal-making, as students recall past performances and make goals for improvement. Another student's reflection below, from her action log, also clearly shows how her awareness of what Krashen (1985) might call over-monitoring and how focusing too much on forms can be detrimental to her communications on video-day:

I wondered why the videoing these days does not go well. Maybe the quality of practice for conversation was not good. I focused on memorizing sentences rather than self-talking. So I could not deal with unexpected development of conversations or put them to short silence. My head was full of plots and memorized sentences, but conversations will not go as I have expected . . . For practicing video, it may be useful to enjoy by giving full scope to my imagination, rather than to practice perfectly sticking to one imaginary plot. (Sachiko, Oct. 1999)

Supporting theory from diverse perspectives

The background support for the LVSC procedures comes from a variety of areas: video-use in therapy, interaction studies in SLA, and classroom-based research on CLT. In psychology, Bandura's (1977) popular *Social Learning Theory* contends that most of our learning occurs as we observe "models." More recently it has been stressed that peers, more than parents and teachers, are the main models for learners (Youniss, 1980; Harris, 1995). These *near peer role models* (Murphey, 1998, 1999a, Murphey & Arao, 2001; Murphey & Murakami, 2001) may be near in age, ethnic origin, gender, interests, and/or, most usually, in proximity. This nearness facilitates learners' identification with the models and permits "up close" and frequent viewing. Students' classmates and immediate seniors are the most obvious and powerful near peer role models and regularly have an impact, good or bad, on students' attitudes, beliefs, and strategies. Dowrick and Biggs (1983) have found that choosing appropriately positive models to show to students on video has great promise for accelerating learning.

Therapeutically, there has also been reported success with *self-modeling* (Dowrick, 1983), i.e., recording subjects doing desired behaviors and having them view these recordings often to reinforce a positive self-model, much as athletes do with repeated viewings of exemplary performances on video. The LVSC procedures offer both the viewing of peers and of self that are usually within the learners' capacity for replication. Adult models for children, or native speakers for language learners, are often performing far beyond the present possibilities of learners.

The LVSC procedures align themselves with much mainstream SLA research in that they encourage negotiation (Pica, 1996) for the construction of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985) through great amounts of interaction (Long, 1983). This "pushed" output (Swain, 1995) may allow students to "increase in control over forms that have already been internalized" (Nobuyoshi & Ellis, 1993, p. 210).

The degree of control that learners exercise over the direction of discourse is also important (Ellis, 1994, p. 594). Cathcart (1986) found that student-controlled discourse was characterized by a wide variety of communicative acts and syntactic structures, whereas teacher-controlled situations produced single-word utterances, short phrases, and formulaic chunks. As will be discussed later, extended discourse in which students have the chance to actually exercise their control beyond short chunks may be crucial to more intensive development.

Schmidt & Frota's (1986) seminal article on *noticing* and the research in developing learners' metacognition, i.e., their ability to think about how they learn (Flavell, 1979), call for more involvement of the conscious mind in support of second language acquisition (Schmidt, 1990, 1995). At appropriate times, the LVSC procedures encourage form-focused communicative interaction (Celce-Murcia et al., 1997; Williams, 1995, 1997), for example, when students compare transcripts. At other times language items become more marked and more deeply acquired through input flooding (Trahey & White, 1993) and output flooding (Goto & Murphey, 1997), which are ongoing in the multiple interactions with many partners during the preparation, videoing, and post-videoing activities centered on one topic. When noticing and metacognition are encouraged within this context, there is even greater potential for learners to "push" one another's development as they interact within and expand one another's zones of proximal development, or ZPD (Murphey, 1996b; Vygotsky, 1934/1962).

CLT pedagogical support for the LVSC procedures come from Kumaravadivelu's (1993) five communicative language teaching macro-strategies to help the CLT teacher create a genuinely communicative class. The LVSC procedures do indeed allow teachers to (a) create a great amount of learning opportunities (LOs) in class, (b) utilize student LOs and create more LOs, (c) facilitate interaction, (d) activate student metacognition, and (e) contextualize all input into short semi-spontaneous conversations repeated meaningfully with different partners many times. All this further increases participation and identification with the language (Murphey, 1998).

Possible SLA and teacher research

It is usually difficult to get a large group of recordings of students doing one task in a relatively short space of time. Any one day of LVSC recordings is a huge synchronic slice of performance data that can allow researchers to study specific phenomena in more detail than in previous research formats. For example, researchers wanting information on the ability of a group of learners to handle the future conditional could ask a teacher to have a class discuss the conversation topic of "What would you like to be doing in 10 years time?" and then send in the tapes for analysis.

However, the most valuable aspect of the LVSC procedures is that they allow for longitudinal data collection of spontaneous or semi-spontaneous conversation. It is difficult to find longitudinal data for interlanguage studies for obvious reasons. As a result, researchers end up using grammaticality-judgement pre- and posttests, which are unable to capture interlanguage development. Long & Robinson (1998) argue that

> Effects for instruction of any kind may be, and probably almost always are, gradual and cumulative rather than instantaneous and categorical . . . . Ideally, future studies should allow for longer periods of exposure than has often been the case to date, despite the difficulty of controlling extraneous variables that longer exposure causes. (pp. 40-41)

Several students have allowed us to copy their tapes at the end of a one or two-year cycle of LVSC classes (20 to 40 conversations) for eventual study.

An additional problem with more specific elicitation studies is that they often generate student monitoring, too much monitoring as viewed by some researchers (Doughty & Williams, 1998). Spontaneous data, or quasi-spontaneous, is preferable. This spontaneity is critical to developing skills in dealing with the incredible complexity and the perpetual novelty of natural languages (Larson-Freeman, 1997; Kindt et al, 1999). In the LVSC conversations, students can prepare and plan somewhat. However, they do not know exactly who their partner will be, what their partner will say, nor what their partners'

reactions will be to what they say.

Pedagogically speaking, we can see how our teaching works or does not from watching students' performances on tape. Shadowing and summarizing (Murphey, 2000, 2001a & b), for example, have been shown to be effective procedures that allow students to use a minimum of vocabulary repeatedly and yet meaningfully and to maintain a continuous flow of conversation. Without the videoing, teachers and students would not have this vivid evidence of progress that can stimulate further effort.

Present study

A group of 50 third-year Taiwanese university students majoring in English and Japanese took a two-hour course in Communication Techniques with the researcher in which the LVSC procedure was used. Videoing was done in approximately 14 of the 18 classes during the fall semester from September 2001 to January 2002. Special attention was given early in the semester to teach and exercise shadowing, summarizing, rejoinders, questioning skills, and signs of empathy. Feedback was collected and read weekly in students' action logs (Murphey, 1993) and students wrote a short term paper at the end of the course comparing one of their first two recordings with one of their last two. Papers were collected from 45 students and read through several times to gather the qualitative data and quotes provided below.

Another group of approximately 60 first-year students did the videoing less intensively about once every two weeks, recording seven to 10 times during the semester. They also wrote papers comparing their first and last video conversations. These first year students achieved similar results as those noted below however somewhat less intensively due to the fewer times they videoed. This paper will concentrate on the results mainly of the third year students in the more intensive weekly recording situation.

Results

Results will be reported in six different areas: 1. communication strategies, 2. self-confidence, 3. self-correction and metacognition, 4. speed of speech, 5. EQ beyond language, and 6. importance of extended discourse.

1. Communication Strategies

Forty-five students completed the course and wrote comparison papers, comparing one of their first recordings with one of their last. Virtually all students reported that they had improved their communication skills, especially in terms of shadowing and rejoinders. They reported that generally they had found summarizing useful but had had trouble finding the time to do it.

2. Self-confidence

About two thirds of the students reported that they had increased their self-confidence to speak more English mainly due to the increase in communication strategies but, as several mentioned, also due to our work on |"making friends with mistakes" and allowing ourselves to reframe them as normal and even helpful. We had also worked on speaking mostly English in class and they were encouraged to speak it outside of class as well, which a dozen reported doing occasionally.

3. Self-correction and metacognition

Throughout the semester, students were requested to write their transcripts verbatim and then correct them with a different color pen. In their final paper, they were able to report specifically many of the mistakes they made in the early transcriptions and notice that they had not made the same or as many mistakes in the later recordings (see sample report further below). The fact that students were able to correct so much on their own without teacher assistance shows a degree of metacognitive maturity and needs further study. But it is apparent to this researcher that there is no way a teacher could have enough time to teach and correct so much alone, nor even know what each student saw as relevant to be corrected. Students noticing their own mistakes and correcting them by themselves assuredly produces more meaningful learning than corrections by another person. This metacognitive activity, I contend, also greatly strengthens their ability to notice and become aware of linguistic and paralinguistic features in their communications.

4. Speed of Speech

There were several intermediate and advanced students who had the habit at the beginning of the semester of speaking English quite rapidly, often too fast for their peers to understand, and too fast to construct fluent and correct phrases. While this speed may have been due to a desire to sound fluent or nervousness, several of these students noticed this clearly on their video recordings and by the end of the semester had slowed down and become better communicators for their peers.

While reviewing the complete video of Barbara, a fast speaker, Don, an intermediate speaker, noticed Barbara's change over the semester. His observation below relates how shadowing can help even advanced fluent speakers slow down, attend to the speaker and their message, and reap more quality from conversations. It also shows how shadowing can lead to better questioning.

In the first and second parts [conversations], she always suddenly interrupted others' talking and didn't use shadowing, which made the conversation unfluently even though she could ask others a lot questions to make a whole conversation. In the last two parts of video [conversations], she could use good skills to make a better talking. She used shadowing to let others know she's really listening to what others said and enrich their topics. Moreover, she got a good talent at asking others good questions appropriately from others' saying.

5. EQ beyond language

About half of the students also noted in their action logs that one of the great advantages to the videoing procedure was that it allowed them to talk and get to know many different people. Although these were third-year students in a small cohort of 60, many of them admitted not knowing each other's name. However, speaking in English might have kept them further apart if they had not also learned the communication techniques of shadowing and giving rejoinders and been instructed that mistakes were OK. These techniques and ideas led them to be "good listeners," as reported by several, and to build a supportive community.

6. Extended Discourse

Since our students major in both English and Japanese, in mid December I decided to experiment and have students video a conversation in Japanese. They knew about it two weeks beforehand and could prepare interview questions and pretended that they didn't know each other and were meeting for the first time. After the recordings, I was very surprised to get comments from about two thirds of the students to the effect that they had not known that they could speak for a full five minutes in Japanese. Their confidence in their Japanese ability sky-rocketed along with their desire. It seems that most had never had the opportunity to have an extended conversation in Japanese and thus they had never really known what they could do with it. This was probably also true for their English as well before this course. Perhaps their improvement in English was partially due to the multiple extended discourse opportunities (EDOs) that I had been structuring in my course. In another class I was teaching Extensive Reading and had just read a lot of the related literature. Perhaps extended discourse was working for many of the same reasons that extensive reading works. I began to suspect that one of the reasons students don't progress more is that they seldom have EDOs with adjusted material.

The argument for EDOs is further supported by SLA research on the output hypothesis (Merrill Swain). For example, from the ERIC database http://ericae.net/ericdb/ED390284.htm "Integrating Language and Content: Lessons from Immersion" under the subheading "Opportunities to use the target language" it states that:

> The second lesson to emerge from research on immersion is that approaches that provide opportunities for extended student discourse, especially discourse associated with activities selected by individual students, can be particularly beneficial for second language learning. [my underlining]

The final report below, representative of the group, clearly shows how they noticed the importance of and changes in communication strategies, correctness, fluency, speed, self-confidence and EQ.

Bobby's final paper report comparing an early video with late video, turned in January 2002.

First Videotaping on Sep. 21ˢᵗ (names changed)

1. I made several mistakes when I was supposed to use past tense. From line 42 to 50, that's terrible. There are 10 mistakes here. From line 59 to 71, that's even worse. 11 past-tense problems appear. I didn't realize that when I talked with Gary.

2. There were two inappropriate word usages appearing more than once. On line 61 and 68, I should use "chemistry" instead of "chemics." The other work I misused is "learn." On line 36, 38, 40, 44, 64, I am supposed to use "study" here. That's because I haven't learned everything about English. I just study it.

3. I always spoke fast. That enabled my partner, Gary to usually say, "Excuse me?" "Uh?" and "What?" during our conversation.

4. I talked about my own things too long. You can see from line 42 to 50, line 59 to 71, and line 81 to 87. Three times I spent a long time talking about myself only.

My Videotaping on Dec. 28ᵗʰ [Bobby's paper continued]

1. I paid more attention to past-tense using, and that worked. On line 61 and 67, I totally made 2 mistakes. On Sep.21ˢᵗ, I made more than 20 mistakes about past tense. I think I improved.

2. I've been working on speaking fluency and speed. That's better now. You can see from my tape. I tried to slow down my speaking and talk to Harry with clearer pronunciation. After I watched my tape, it reached my expectation. Harry seemed to understand all the words I said, seldom asking me to say again.

Some things happened in both of the videotaping

3. Smiles frequently appearing on my face, and I seldom felt stressed. I looked natural on screen.

4. I always concentrated on the words my partners said.

5. Sometimes, I would do something to release my tension. For example, I would adjust the position of glasses or scratch my face. However, I don't think it's a big deal. For one thing, that makes me feel easier to talk to someone I'm not so familiar with. For another, I didn't do that too often.

Conclusion

The uniqueness of the videoing process is such that it offers opportunities for fluency and accuracy episodes in the regular learning life of students—students can concentrate on fluency while recording and more easily notice what needs work through viewing their conversations and appreciate their progress overtime, longitudinally. LVSC also involves students in Participatory Action Research (Auerbach, 1994), giving them control over much more than simply what they talk about, but also how they talk and how they learn to use language. The parallels of extended oral discourse with extensive reading needs more attention, as does the way that speaking involves identity construction. We hope to look at these more carefully in the future in our research.

Much of my belief in the LVSC procedures lies in Hatch's suggestion, via Long, that "rather than grammatical knowledge developing in order to be put to use in conversations at some later date, 'language learning evolves out of learning how to carry on conversations' (Hatch, 1978, p. 404)," (cited in Long, 1996, p. 445). Or in Bateson's (1994) words, "participation precedes learning" (p. 41). Creating suitable environments conducive to intense and safe participation in foreign language interaction would seem to me to be one of the main jobs of language teachers.

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