

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE APPLICABILITY OF TRACKING METHOD
ON TAPESCRIPTS OF PRELIMINARY ENGLISH TEST AS SUPPLEMENTARY
MATERIALS FOR SPEECH TRAINING FOR FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF DA NANG

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Abstract - This study attempts to investigate the applicability of tapescripts through tracking method as supplementary materials for Speech Training for first year-students at English Department, University of Foreign Language Studies, University of Da Nang. From the pilot research, some findings about the effectiveness of employing tapescripts through tracking method to improve pronunciation performance and common pronunciation aspects of students that need improvements are revealed. Besides, some opinions of students and teachers are collected and discussed to lend support to the research result. Finally, there are some proposals for learning activities students can get involved in to enhance their pronunciation.

Key words: *applicability, tapescripts, tracking, pronunciation, learning activities.*

1. Introduction

Producing good speech has always been a challenge for most English learners especially freshmen of English Department, University of Foreign Language Studies, University of Da Nang. Therefore, during the first semester of the first year at university, Speech Training Course is introduced to students with comprehensive knowledge of phonetics including pronunciation, intonation, stress, linking etc. However, as the time allotted for this course is limited, training efficiency does not obtain expected results. One of the reasons for this is the lack of practice material sufficiently interesting to maintain students' motivation to self-practice their speech. With a view to helping students improve their speech, the author of this research proposes that one of the beneficial tools for students to improve their speech is the tapescript along with the audio of listening part in PET (Preliminary English Test) books which is both inexpensive and convenient. Regrettably, many a student has not realized the potential of this tool due to a presumption that tapescript along with audio is listening material. For this reason, this study attempts to clarify the efficiency of the use of tapescript along with audio as a speech training tool.

2. Main Contents

2.1 Literature review

2.1.1 Previous research

Gass, Mackey, Alvarez-Torres và Fernfindez-Garcia (1999) stated in their research that English learners with experience repeating or tracking scripts of film series had better fluency, more correct grammar and more complex vocabulary as compared to those inexperienced with the same task. Besides, Jensen and Vinther (2003) in their research on Spanish students pointed out that the repetition of recorded dialogues could help improve learners' sound identification ability. However, both above-mentioned investigations have yet to put emphasis on tracking method.

2.1.2 Theoretical background

a. Tapescript applicability

According to Ann Baker (1992), "when learners are encouraged to repeat and even learn by heart dialogues or other context-based practice exercises, they are highly likely to acquire better listening and speaking skills as compared to those practicing single sentences which focus on sounds without much practicality in daily conversation."

In addition, Joanne Kenworthy (1988) said: "tapescripts can be used in teaching weak forms of words, rhyme, intonation or coherence etc." He mentioned Marking Method with learners listening to recored text and marking phonetics features and Scripting with learners reading the written text to predict or find out phonetics features before listening to the recored one.

Furthermore, according to John Murphy (2003) one out of two pronunciation instruction principles is "increasing intelligibility through natural speech". The reason for this is that one's ability to produce individual sounds correctly does not neccessairily mean that he or she can produce them correctly in real speech.

b. Tracking method effectiveness

According to John Murphy (2003), tracking method requires learners to examine recorded texts of video or audio by native speakers (ESL/EFL materials or scripts of radio or television programs). After thorough examination, the video or audio is played and learners are required to track aloud. One of the unique features of tracking method is that learners are not allowed to repeat but to read simultaneously as the words appear.

c. When to use tapescript and tracking method

Tracking method starts with learners examining the tapescript (to notify special phonetics features). Therefore, learners should be well-equipped with basic solid theory. This is ensured on the completion of the Speech Training Course.

However, during the course of the study, the author concluded that learners should not be required to track the audio on their first listening as they were not yet familiarized with speed and intonation of the speech.

At this stage, repetition and slow-motion speaking may serve as preparatory steps to facilitate students' motivation.

Repetition is indeed common among English learners. However, slow-motion speaking sounds unfamiliar. In fact, it is repetition but in another form. In this method, teachers will make model a "problems-stricken word sequence" at an extremely slow speed in order for students to identify what their problems are and how to correct to pronounce exactly that word sequence. After repetition and slow-motion speaking, students can proceed with tracking.

2.2. Research questions and research methods

2.2.1 Research questions

- How tapescripts have been used among students and teachers in their speech training?
- Is using tapescripts through tracking method effective in correcting and improving pronunciation and intonation in first-year students' speech?

2.2.2 Research methods

This investigation employs both qualitative and quantitative methods to process data. The process is as follow:

Data collection methods used in this investigation:

Recording method

1. 100 students of English Department at PET level are randomly selected.
2. Selected students are recorded reading a dialogue (D1). (the dialogue contains 4 most common aspects of speech: pronunciation, stress, linking and intonation)
3. Author examines and finds out points that need improvement based on the 4 aspects. (assessment is made by Lesly Newman Ph.D, University of Arizona, the US)
4. 100 selected students are divided into two groups:

Group 1 (G1): this group will be taught the content of Speech Training course again.

Group 2 (G2): the same as G1 with additional practice with tapescripts through tracking method.

5. After one month, both groups are recorded reading another dialogue (D2) including the same aspects as the first one.

6. Author examines and finds out points that have improved and those that still need improvement based on the 4 aspects. (assessment is made by Lesly Newman Ph.D, University of Arizona, the US)

Questionnaire: 3 samples including one for teachers at English Department, University of Foreign Language Studies, University of Da Nang (20 copies), one for G1 (50 copies) and one for G2 (copies).

2.3. Research result and discussion

2.3.1. Data analysis

To demonstrate the effectiveness of using tapescript through tracking method, the author established a table of criteria to make assessment on students' speech with 4 aspects: pronunciation, stress, intonation and linking graded in 3 levels for each.

Assessment scale

	Pronunciation	Stress	Intonation	Linking
+	Good	Good	Good	Good
-	Need improvement	Inconsistent	Inconsistent	Unnatural
×	Need much improvement	Non-existent	Non-existent	Non-existent

To prove that using tapescript through tracking method is effective in improving students' speech, there have to be proofs demonstrating that G2 gained more improvement than G1.

Table 2.1 The percentage of the number of G1 students obtained (+, -, ×) before and after being instructed speech training course content again.

	Pronunciation		Stress		Intonation		Linking	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
+	30 %	40%	40 %	20%	50 %	20%	60 %	50%
-	50 %	50%	50 %	60%	30 %	50%	20 %	30%
×	20 %	10%	10%	20%	20%	30%	10 %	20%

As can be seen from table 2.1, there are fluctuations in the figures recorded and learners had the tendency not to pronounce as well as the first recording. The author assumed that in the first recording, students had just sit in the final speech training test, the knowledge was still fresh in their mind. In the second recording, despite the constant assistance from the author, it was unobligatory. Moreover, the repetition of the content of the course may not provide any further motivation for students. Therefore, there seems to be little improvement in the students' performance.

Table 2.2 The percentage of the number of G2students obtained (+, -, ×) before and after being instructed speech training course content again combined with using tapescript through tracking method.

	Pronunciation		Stress		Intonation		Linking	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After

+	20 %	30%	40 %	40%	20 %	50%	20 %	90%
-	50 %	60%	50 %	60%	60 %	40%	50 %	10%
×	30 %	10%	10 %	0%	20 %	10%	30 %	0%

By contrast, G2 showed considerable improvement. The general trend from the figures in table 2.2 reflects the progress students made. Noticeably, linking was the best improved aspects with 90% of G2 students achieving (+).

Table 2.2 reveals that intonation was better improved than stress. The reason for this may be that intonation is mostly regulated by general rules while stress, despite acquired rules, is local and specific to each word. Therefore, learners need to have time to further improve stress. However, the figures recorded are unsatisfactory. Intonation and stress had been expected to be improved most as learners benefited from listening to dialogues and imitating suprasegmental units in speech. The author believes that practice time limit and the shyness of learners were responsible for the unsatisfactory results.

It is encouraging that the number of students with **x** (need much improvement) decreased by 20%. However, to obtain correct pronunciation, regular and long-term practice is required to achieve better results.

2.3.2. The effectiveness of using tapescript through tracking method in speech training

Bảng 2.3 Students' opinions

<i>Aspects investigated</i>		<i>Students' responses</i>
Number of students using tapescript to practice speech		40%
Specific way of use	Listen only	12.5%
	Listen and repeat	50%
	Track	50%

Table 2.3 reveals that the use of tapescript to train speech is applied among students though not yet popular. Besides, popular methods are repetition and tracking.

Bảng 2.4 G2 students' opinions (after the training process)

<i>Aspects investigated</i>	<i>Students' responses</i>
Pronunciation improved	70%
Stress improved	30%
Intonation improved	20%

Linking improved		90%
Word stress improved		30%
Other skills improved	Speaking	70%
	Listening	50%
Continue with this method		100%

Interestingly, 100% students involved in the research said that they would continue using tapescript through tracking method.

Noticeably, after being introduced to the use of tapescript through tracking method, 70% of the students said that it was a good way to practice speaking and to boost confidence. Meanwhile, about 50% said they could improve listening through constant exposure to and examining dialogues in spoken form.

Despite the fact that word stress is not included in Speech Training content, interestingly, 30% students of G2 mentioned this aspect in their responses as they experienced that content words were pronounced more strongly than function words.

Table 2.5 Teachers' opinions

<i>Aspects investigated</i>	<i>Teachers' responses</i>
Using tapescript to improve speech themselves	85%
Applying tracking method themselves	55%
Encourage students applying tracking method	90%
Introducing tracking to students in class	40%
Having no time to introduce tracking to students in class	50%
Acknowledge the effectiveness of tracking method	90%

Table 2.5 shows that 85% teachers surveyed used to use tapescripts to practice speech and about 65% apply tracking method. 90% of teachers surveyed said that using tapescript through tracking method is effective for students and 100% of them have recommended students to use tapescript and tracking method. Therefore, it can be said that the effectiveness of using tapescript through tracking method is well-proved by experience and the acknowledgement of advanced learners of English.

2.3.3. Problems and solutions

a. Problems

- To identify the points that need improvement at the same time with students' speech production is inefficient, recording technique is used. This may cause anxiety for some students which makes their speech less natural.

- The fact that students' levels are varied leads to the distraction of higher leveled students and pressure for lower-leveled ones.
- Despite the allotted time for text examination, confusion and loss of track may arise in case fast and linked speech occurs.
- Tracking takes a long time to prove its effectiveness which can make learners discouraged. Besides, using tapescripts through tracking method being included in class time is unpopular as cost and time entail.

b. Solutions

Solutions proposed to the above-mentioned problems:

- To minimize stress, students should be familiarized to recording technique both at home and at school. Regular recorded speaking activities supervised by teachers in class can make students more confident. In addition, self-recording at home with Sound Recorder software is also of good use.
- Pairs while tracking should be freely chosen by the students themselves to ensure their best comfort.
- Fast and linked speech in some recording should be practiced separately until students are accustomed to it. Teachers can use slow-motion speaking method to clarify such speech to remove difficulties and continue with the following speech.
- Only by regular and proper practice can produce good result. Therefore, home practice should constantly be stressed and emphasized as of great importance by teachers to maintain students' motivation.

However, it should be noticed that: tracking is a method not an aim to reach; therefore, tracking on tapescripts is to expose students to natural and fluent speech of native speakers to improve their own, absolutely exact imitation is unnecessary.

2.4. Recommendations for higher efficiency of using tapescripts through tracking method.

a. Home practice

The fact that tapescript material is abundant in quantity makes home practice among students feasible without costing much time and money. Fifteen to twenty minutes every day for tracking tapescripts is likely to make good speakers in terms of pronunciation.

b. Pair work

Speech training acts as a pre-step for speaking. Therefore, interaction in speech training is of importance. When using tapescripts, dialogues should be practiced in pairs. In doing so, the awareness of the importance of speech training for better speaking is

raised among learners, hence boosting the motivation. Besides, tracking activity should be followed by independent recording of the same speech done by learners which is later checked against the original recording to identify points that need improvements.

3. Ending

This study reflects the reality of the use of tapescripts through tracking method in speech training activities of PET-leveled students of English Department, University of Foreign Language Studies, University of Da Nang. It is shown that the use of tapescripts in general and the employment of tracking method in particular are limited. From the pilot research, the author proposes that the more exposure students have to spoken material, the more improvement they are likely to make naturally.

Meanwhile, the pilot research at the same time exposes limitations in employing this method. Besides, the author makes some proposals for both teachers and students with a view to helping students to enhance their speech. Good pronunciation serves as a facilitator for better speakers and listeners.

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