

VIDEOTAPED FEEDBACK IN PUBLIC SPEAKING COURSES: POTENTIAL APPLICATION TO VIETNAMESE PEDAGOGICAL SETTING

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Abstract. Giving feedback is an integral part of teachers' efforts to enhance students' learning. In the public arena, providing thoughtful feedback not only helps students reflect on their performance but also significantly influences their communication skills in the long term. Attempting to delve into a still-new type of feedback in Vietnamese classrooms, namely videotaped feedback, this article aims to (1) review the literature on the impacts of videotaped feedback technique in public speaking classrooms and (2) have a look at videotaped feedback as a process and its potential application to Vietnamese public speaking context. Results of the review indicate that the answer to the first question was affirmative, and with its variety of uses in public speaking classrooms, videotaped feedback proves to be potential for the application to Vietnamese context.

1. Introduction

Public speaking - “a way of making your ideas public” as implied in its name (Lucas, 2004, p. 4) - has been widely employed by several people all over the world with a view to influencing others with their ideas. In today's globalization age, public speaking tends to be a form of empowerment. Whether a college graduate is offered a good job, whether an employee has a bright pathway to promotion in his/her profession, there is no denial that communication skills, public speaking included, are of ultimate necessity. Regarding college students, public speaking plays an important role in laying foundations for their oral presentations which not only benefit their study but also their work in the future.

To train students to achieve competency in public speaking, it seems to be a must to offer effective and constructive feedback after their practice sessions. In the public arena, providing feedback, as put by Quigley and Nyquist (1992), serves the following purposes: (a) to inform the speaker about the audience's reaction to the speech, (b) to make suggestions for improvements on future speeches, (c) to motivate the speaker to speak again or to enjoy speaking, and (d) to encourage students to grow in self-understanding.

For long, written and oral feedback has been widely adopted in most classes.

With the ever-increasing integration of technology into classes over the last decades, another type of feedback, i.e., videotaped feedback, prevails, especially in communication classes. Videotaped feedback, or video feedback for short, refers to a structured process whereby students review their recorded communication with the benefit of some level of guidance and/or evaluative comments from an instructor or peers (Quigley & Nyquist, 1992). Videotape, considered as “a third eye as a tool for performance enhancement” (Glenn, 1996, p.1), proves to be a powerful instructional aid in public speaking courses thanks to its capacity to preserve the nonverbal and verbal elements of students’ performances for subsequent analysis and self-reflection.

2. Effects of videotaped feedback on students’ communication skills

2.1. Positive effects

Though not previously thoroughly examined (Hinton & Kramer, 1998), some potential benefits of videotaped feedback have been touched on. In this section, the benefits of videotaped feedback will be classified into two perspectives: benefits on teachers’ part and benefits on students’ part.

Positive effects on students

The use of videotape technology allows students to privately examine and refine their speaking style. Hinton & Kramer (1998) found that videotape feedback helps enhance students’ competence levels and simultaneously decrease their communication apprehension. The biggest areas of improvement include a reduction in communication apprehension, heightened motivation in terms of preparation, increased use of gestures, reduced use of the podium and other distracting barriers, and a marked improvement in their self-image as speakers (Glenn, 1996). These findings are firmly supported by several other researchers.

From the pedagogical standpoint of Quigley & Nyquist (1992) and Lucas (1995, cited in Glenn, 1996), video technology permits students in public speaking courses to review their performances, thus enable them to gain insights into what they look or sound like in the eyes and ears of their audience. Moreover, Quigley & Nyquist (1992) added three more benefits videotaped feedback offers students - that is students’ opportunity to receive feedback simultaneously with performance, students’ opportunity to identify or emphasize particular skills and students’ opportunities to compare different performances. Miles (1981) reported that students demonstrate significantly greater skill in oral communication as an outcome of viewing video replay of their performances. Michel & Valerie (2006) further stated that students can become more aware of weaknesses in their presentational and elocutional style, such as poor body posturing, excessive gesturing, and frequent use of ‘interrupters’ by viewing their speeches. In a similar sense, Bankston & Terlip (1994) have found that videotaped feedback does appear to have a positive impact on student perceptions. Students in the

experimental conditions (with the application of videotaped feedback) expressed a higher appreciation level for criteria and tended to predict their grades more precisely compared to the instructor's assessment.

Besides, students using videotape can identify distracting and anxiety signaling nuances within their diversity style. As reported in Glenn's (1996) and Hirschfeld's (1968) research, upon viewing their own performance, students can discover things about themselves that they really want to start changing or maybe things that are better than they thought. Similarly, two studies, one of Bush, Bittner & Brook (1972, cited in Hinton & Kramer, 1998) and the other of Lake & Adams (1984, *ibid*) concluded that the presence of video equipment did not significantly increase anxiety levels. Additionally, Hinton & Kramer (1998) found that students who had watched videotapes reported decreases in apprehension about speaking in meetings, while those who had not watched videotapes reported increases in apprehension (cited in Michel et al., 2006). Likewise, a study by Cronin, Grice and Olsen (1994, cited in Michel et al., 2006) revealed that students exposed to a videotape-embedded class experienced greater reduction in speech fright than students having no chance to go through this.

Videotape feedback is beneficial as a tool for students not only to improve their overall competence but also to obtain their own self-appraisal. Bankston and Terlip (1994, cited in Hinton & Kramer, 1998) and Mallard and Quintanilla (2008) share similar findings that videotape feedback appears to have positive effects on students' perceptions of the quality of their speeches. Speakers with high communication apprehension levels have more negative thoughts than speakers with low apprehension levels (Booth – Butterfield & Booth – Butterfield, 1990, cited in Hinton & Kramer, 1998). Therefore, self-directed viewing of successfully completed speeches might result in students reporting more positive perceptions of themselves as capable communicators and reduce the number of negative thoughts (Hinton & Kramer, 1998). Moreover, other studies suggest that viewing successfully completed speeches could enhance speakers' ability to engage in positive visualization and viewing their speeches might cause speakers to focus more on communication skills resulting in more practice and less apprehension during presentations (Hinton & Kramer, 1998).

Glenn (1996), through his research titled "Using video to enhance content and delivery skills in the basic oral communication course: summarizing the uses and benefits", has reached a conclusion that the use of videotaping not only helps greatly enhance the quality of student presentations in public speaking classes but also helps improve the classroom climate and produce positive educational outcomes in the areas of delivery style, structural development, and research.

Positive effects on teachers

While the benefits students can reap from videotaped feedback are varied, what

teachers can gain is just insubstantial. For one thing, instructors do not have to rely on their memory to evaluate, as stated by Bunz (2002). Other than that, Bunz (ibid.) found that videotaping helped him “give more precise and individually targeted feedback that help students to understand better which parts of the speech need improvement in which way” (p.2). By this way, the teacher’s feedback based on videotaping application is also beneficial to the students as well since “motivation to improve is thus transferred to the student himself” (Hirschfeld, 1968, p.116). Besides, as put by Quigley & Nyquist (1992), in the effort of focusing both on the overall performance that students must achieve and on the specific skills relevant to that performance in public speaking courses, teachers would find it valuable to be able to identify and demonstrate particular delivery skills, such as use of gestures or strength of voice projection, as well as content skills, such as use of logical argument or presentation of evidence.

What is more, the added visual dimension permits the students to see the effect of his projected personality, thereby relieving the teacher difficulty of pointing it out to him (Hirschfeld, 1968). In this sense, videotaped feedback also proves to be a highly effective pedagogical tool for busy teachers who are unable to arrange feedback sessions outside of class or for those dealing with large classes (Bankston & Terlip, 1994).

2.2. Major drawbacks

Besides the good side of videotaped feedback, some of its drawbacks should not be overlooked.

According to the findings in one of Hinton & Kramer’s (1998) studies, video evaluation did not improve or even had a negative impact on performance of students with moderate to high levels of apprehension and therefore do more harm than good. Another study conducted by Hallmark, Hanson, Padwich and Abel (1993, cited in Hinton & Kramer, 1998) found that self-directed videotape feedback of students’ own speeches on either unedited tapes, or tapes edited to eliminate mistakes, did not significantly reduce students’ apprehension levels in comparison to those not exposed to videotape feedback, although all of them reported diminished apprehension levels.

It is worth further stressing that as for some experienced teachers who feel capable of grading a speech on their preliminary observation, the use of videotape can be a nuisance as it takes them a considerable amount of time to review each individualized student performance (Bunz, 2002).

3. Videotaped feedback as a process

Given the opportunities for learning that videotaped feedback can create, videotaped feedback has been embedded into public speaking courses with various methods as well as with differing amounts of student exposure. Several communication

courses, including public speaking courses, have offered their students quite similar opportunities to experience with videotaped feedback. Basically, with this technique, students' performances are recorded and can be played back for self-critique. This pedagogical feedback tool is often used in combination with oral/ written feedback or rating instrument from peers and instructors. In such a course, students are on average videotaped twice – one for practice and one for grading. Usually, the first video recording is done early enough in the course so that students can apply what they learn from their critique to their later speech performance.

However, there are still variations in videotaped feedback application. In the experimental study of Bradley (1970), videotaped feedback was conducted in two ways. One group of students had their speaking assignments video-recorded and played back during the class period with criticism and class discussion. The other group had their performances video-recorded in class and played back in an individual conference with the instructor at a time other than the regular class period, which allowed the instructor to follow regular course schedule.

Another researcher, Glenn (1996), implemented videotaped feedback more meticulously. In order for students to enhance content and delivery skills, he put his camcorder available for student presentation practice not only in oral communication class time but also in other regular classes. Additionally, students were asked to seriously record themselves in specific assignments (e.g. informative speeches) and then viewed it in learning lab as well as complete a self-critique form which required listing 10 positive elements and no more than 3 points needed improvement. Upon completion of their self evaluation, students came to meet the instructor to review their progress and make plans for their next presentation.

In a classroom setting at Cerritos College, a “voice over” is engrafted in video recordings with the purpose of heightening the instructor's ability to provide feedback. Hassan (1992, cited in Quigley & Nyquist, 1992) gave a concrete example of a public speaking class in which the student speaks with the observation of the instructor from a separate control booth adjoining the classroom. The instructor records his/her immediate responses onto the videotape of the presentation using a separate microphone. When the student-speaker has finished the speech, he/she receives a videotape with the instructor's voice-over comments at the very moment the performance is occurring. This method helps increase precision in instructor's giving feedback and thereby enables students to obtain greater understanding of what the instructor means by particular comments.

Apart from being used to provide feedback subsequently as in the aforementioned situations, videotape is also applied in a way to provide the speaker some type of “course correction” in the midst of a presentation. As commented by

Quigley & Nyquist (1992), intervention at critical times or at the “teachable moments” would concentrate on promoting changes and allow students to make necessary adjustments in the natural settings and, therefore, experience success (p. 328). This type of simultaneous feedback was tried out by Nyquist and Staton-Spicer (1987, cited in Quigley & Nyquist, 1992) in their communication classes with the application of an innovative technique called “bug-in-the-ear”. The technique uses a portable radio communication system that allows the instructor to stimulate necessary modification through verbal prompting via a small transistorized earplug. A videotape including the whole process of the presenter’s behaviours and responses to the instructor’s feedback is then also available for the presenter for review and self-reflection. Another emerging possibility of this simultaneous feedback technique is also appropriate for teaching public speaking. As described by Quigley & Nyquist (1992), students can have more practices and improve their presentation before their final classroom performance by doing a “draft” performance while being “coached” by a peer coach. The application of this technique is advantageous in its capability to help students experience success at the moment and on the site without waiting for a next opportunity to apply the feedback given them.

4. Potential application of videotaped feedback to Vietnamese public speaking classrooms

4.1. Public speaking and the current Vietnamese pedagogical setting

In the current trend of language learning, specifically in Vietnam, there has been a shifting focus to the autonomy and activeness of learners. New teaching and learning methods have required learners to have more self-study time, do research on their subject matters, and frequently involve in classroom presentations and discussion about many of the subjects. As a matter of fact, one of the skills that learners are strongly expected to possess or acquire for the success of their study is communication skill. Public speaking skill, a communication skill at a high level (Lucas, 2004), has also become no longer an unfamiliar requirement to most of the students since public speaking has been designed as a course in the undergraduate language program of many universities in Vietnam (Ho Chi Minh University of Social Sciences & Humanities, Department of English Linguistics and Literature, 2001).

In public speaking course, apart from using English fluently, the learners are required to master the delivery techniques such as meeting all the essential preparation requirements, attending to listeners’ psychology, focussing on the topic and mastering major communications methods, and so on. Moreover, Duong (2009) notes in her article that public speaking classes aim at guiding students how to prepare and present a speech in an efficient, suitable way for various purposes and in different situations. These courses also help students develop presentation skills in other subjects, providing them

with necessary skills for doing oral examinations, preparing them for job interviews, or helping them develop suitable communication skills for their future job.

However, through the current studies on students' oral presentation skills (Nguyen, 2007; Nguyen & Tran, 2008; Vo, 2005), it is worth noticing that a great number of English majors in Vietnam face many difficulties in oral presentations, which hinder them from delivering good performance. Those difficulties mainly relate to

1. Language competence and language use
2. Technology support
3. Confidence
4. Nonverbal language
5. Activities engaging audience

4.2. Potential application

As far as the importance of public speaking is concerned, teaching public speaking in particular is very important. One vital factor in teaching speaking is giving feedback to students on their performance. Forseth et al. (1995, pp.162-163, cited in Public speaking 101) lists the purposes and emphasizes on the importance of feedback as follows:

1. Feedback shows the teacher how the students are progressing.
2. Feedback motivates students to study.
3. Feedback guides the students' progress.
4. Feedback shows students their own progress.

More specifically, in his article entitled "*Suggestions for Teaching Public Speaking and Evaluating Speeches*", Kaur (2005) points out that giving meaningful feedback on students' work is always "a commitment in any teaching-learning situation". He further asserts that giving feedback to students in spoken English of non-native students is more difficult as "most students have added dimensions of fear, insecurity and anxiety when it involves speaking in front of their peers" (p.1). However, this issue is still not seriously investigated, specifically in Vietnam pedagogical public speaking context. According to Duong (2003), feedback is not a part of common practice in Vietnamese Oral Presentation classroom setting though more and more teachers and even students recognize its importance for the establishment and development of an effective EFL course and program. She suggests that further explorations of the beliefs of teachers and students and practices of feedback are worth undertaking (Duong, 2003).

So far, to our best knowledge, the published research on feedback in public

speaking courses in Vietnam has revealed the use of oral and written feedback from teachers, peer and self-evaluation, not yet with any application of videotape. With the current development and investment of technology to the academic setting, and given its variety of benefits, videotape feedback should be integrated into the teaching and learning of public speaking. Since videotape feedback is a still-new type of feedback in Vietnamese classrooms, it is also worth carrying out research on its effects and relating issues so as to improve the feedback practice among teachers and students and consequently improve the teaching and learning of public speaking in particular.

5. Conclusion

This review of the published studies of videotape feedback in public speaking has suggested that videotape feedback can be employed as an effective pedagogical tool to improve the overall performance of students enrolled in sections of public speaking courses. These uses and benefits in the classroom include a wide range of features such as practice feedback, identification of style inhibitors, analysis of structural-content issues, suggestions for improvement of speaking style, suggestions for improvement of presentational content and structure and so on. Overall, incorporating video feedback in public speaking is an effective pedagogical strategy and its application to Vietnamese classrooms should be encouraged.

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