Talking about students’ writing: a closer look at teacher and student response to audio feedback

Research summary

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Pilot study

- Centre for Applied Language Studies (CALS)
- Pre-sessional course
- 4 EAP (English for Academic Purposes) writing teachers
- 4 writing classes
- 55 students:
  - Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Libya
  - China, Taiwan, Korea, Thailand, Japan
  - IELTS 4.5 – 6.0+
Why audio feedback?

Claims about audio feedback in:

- **EFL/EAP**
  (Hyland, 1990; Boswood & Dwyer, 1995; Gardner, 2004)

- **Wider HE sector**
  (Ribchester et al., 2007; Rotherham, 2008; Merry & Orsmond, 2007; Ice et al. (2007); Middleton & Nortcliffe, 2009)
Why audio feedback?

- Potential of digital audio to:
  - personalise the feedback process
  - provide better quality, more detailed feedback
  - be more engaging and helpful for learners
  - be more efficient for tutors
Why audio feedback for EAP writing?

- Challenges to the ‘process approach’ to writing in EAP
- Accommodating learning/cultural preferences
- Motivating learners to return to their texts
- Enhancing existing written feedback systems
Research questions 1

Teacher experience, perceptions and descriptions of practice:

• What are teacher perceptions about providing audio feedback?
• What are teacher preferences influenced by?
• How do teachers use audio feedback, and what are the differences between written and spoken feedback?
Research questions 2

Learner experience, perceptions and descriptions of practice:

- What are learner perceptions about receiving audio feedback?
- What are learner preferences influenced by?
- How do learners exploit audio feedback?
Approach

reduced written commentary
+
audio for detail

Audacity® → MP3
Approach

- Blackboard
- MP3
- E-mail

- generic ‘whole class’ feedback, 2 – 3 mins
- individual feedback, 5 – 7 mins each
Methodology: capturing responses

- Students:
  - online student survey - following generic audio feedback
  - online survey - following individual audio feedback
  - two focus groups - end of term
Methodology: capturing responses

• Teachers:
  – meetings, informal one-to-one discussion
  – online survey - end of term
  – follow-up meeting
Teachers’ thoughts 😊

Audio can:

- engage and motivate
- vary feedback approaches
- provide more detail
- reinforce learning
- personalise feedback
- allow greater sense of space to comment
- acknowledge effort learners invest in writing
Teachers’ thoughts 😞

Audio is:

- Easy-tech, but... time-consuming
- tiring
- intense
- different thought process to composing text
- ... steep learning curve?
Teacher thoughts 😞

I did find it more time-consuming which surprised me... I don’t know if this would change if it became more part of a teacher’s routine. The other thing was that I found it totally exhausting because it was like giving 12 tutorials in one day!

Teacher survey comment
How teachers used audio feedback

• Pointing learners in helpful directions rather than correcting mistakes – ‘task’ comments
• Offering possible examples rather than definitive answers – ‘elaboration’ comments
• Using names, refs to class work – highly personalised
How teachers used audio feedback

- Use of questions and question tags – involves learners
- Positive nature of feedback - high incidence of praise – motivating?
- Signposting comments – need for clarity in audio mode
- Conversational, unscripted approach: ‘um’
How teachers used audio feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generic audio feedback content</th>
<th>Generic audio feedback approach</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Code indicates a comment referring to...</strong></td>
<td><strong>Code indicates a comment which...</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L Language (cohesion/grammar/punctuation/spelling/vocabulary/style)</td>
<td>T Gives task/action/instruction for learners following feedback</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O Organisation</td>
<td>E Elaborates/give examples</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Format</td>
<td>S Uses signposting to aid clarity</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Content/ideas/meaning</td>
<td>P Praises</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA Task Achievement</td>
<td>SU Makes suggestions</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LC Links to work in class (including other classes)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data analysis - example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corpus Files</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Freq</th>
<th>Word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deborah_generic1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deborah_generic2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily_generic2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily_generic1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret_generic1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret_generic2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>um</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah_generic1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>your</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Audio feedback – 100 most frequent words

(Individual audio feedback)
Generic audio feedback

...it forced me to be more focused in identifying general trends in the writing of the class as a whole and therefore seeing how effective particular lessons/exercises were.

Teacher survey comment
Individual audio feedback

I really liked having the ‘space’ to say more. I feel that I gave fuller feedback than if I was writing, i.e. more praise, more suggestions for re-phrasing, more advice in general

Teacher survey comment
Students’ thoughts 😊

Audio:
- provides helpful detail
- is comfortable to listen to
- is motivating and friendly
- has greater impact - personal nature resonates
## Student survey comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories for free comments: learner individual audio FB survey</th>
<th>Total comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helpfulness of audio e.g. detail provided</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for listening practice/can listen again</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/miscellaneous comments</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendliness of audio/personal/motivating/enjoyable</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference for both written and audio feedback</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thanks/project is useful</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference for written feedback</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity/helpfulness/depends on the teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Helpfulness of audio

My teacher asked me what do I want to say... or ...?
So, I was able to think both meaning then I could show what I mean clearly.

If I feel good with the feedback, I will be more ambitious.

Student survey comments - individual audio feedback
Personalised feedback

The teacher made audio feedback for only me, so I feel I should listen carefully. It encourages me to rewrite essays.

I think that it directly impact on myself... so about me, it impacted on myself, more than written... because it was directly for my situation.

Student survey/focus group comments
Accommodating learner preferences

Feedback not only useful for the level I think... it's useful for the person... some persons who remember by ear – yes, like me. I remember all (teacher’s) spoken comments, but sometimes I forget when I see it.

Student focus group comment
Listening v. reading

- Happy to listen again – and again
- Control over the process
- Authentic listening practice – teacher’s voice as model for non-native speakers

I listened more than three times: because I enjoyed my teacher’s comments

Student survey comment – generic audio feedback
Student thoughts about audio 😞

But some...

- Like to hold paper version
- Still want ‘something’ written down
- Have weak listening skills
- Find delivery too personal – feel shy
- Can’t scan audio file for revision
- Acknowledgment of novelty factor
Caution because...

But I also do prefer the normal feedback.

I like to have it in my hands. That is more comfortable for me.

I think spoken feedback it is not enough we need beside that write the feedback.

Student survey/focus group comments
Caution because...

Sometime if your teacher talks to fast, it might hard to follow.

I prefer the writing feedback because if I don’t have a good skill in listening I will listen more than two times.

Some students feel shy when the teacher talk with them directly.

Student survey/focus group comments
Conclusions

• A ‘judicious mixture’ of feedback modes advised (Ferris, 2008)

• Teachers should adopt feedback methods which motivate learners to re-visit texts after assessment (Hyland, 1990)

• Importance of understanding the role of local, individual context (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Goldstein, 2005)
Conclusions

“thanks a lot. go a head. perfect work.”

“I think it is a great project that you work on it and it is really important and very useful for improve our writing ability. thank you.”

“thanks very u too. cos the individual spoken feedback just great and helps me a lot, I would like to continue if it is possible in the future. thanks again.”

Student survey/focus group comments
Acknowledgements 😊

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References


References


Resources


- **Olympus digital voice recorder** with USB interface

- **VoiceWalker** - transcription tool

- **Bristol Online Surveys (BOS)** software

- **AntConc** - concordance programme
  [http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/antconc_index.html](http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/antconc_index.html)