Chapter 12
Using Feedback in ESL and EFL Asynchronous Online Environments

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ABSTRACT

Researchers and practitioners' interest in finding more effective ways to provide instructional feedback in order to help second language learners in online environments has increased. The majority of studies found evidence about effectiveness of written and oral feedback to improve student's writing in a target language when they enroll in online courses taught in English. However, some studies also found limitations of both types of feedback when they provided for second language learners. Therefore, researchers and practitioners investigated benefits of other types of feedback and among them is audio feedback. The purpose of this chapter is to overview instructional capabilities of written, oral and audio feedback and how they can support ESL and EFL students in asynchronous online courses. This chapter also discusses when and how to provide different types of feedback when ESL and EFL students are enrolled in online courses taught in English.

INTRODUCTION

Enrollment trends of international students in U.S. colleges and universities indicate continuous growth (Institute of International Education, 2016). Current 2015/16 data indicate a 7.1% growth over the prior year with 5.2% of the total U.S. higher education population being international (Institute of International Education, 2016). The number of higher education students taking at least one online course in 2015 is up 3.9% from previous years. The steady growth of students taking online courses in U.S. higher education including English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students has changed instructional strategies and approaches in online courses and programs (Harrison & Shi,

2016). It is known that online courses and, specifically, asynchronous online courses with their flexibility, interaction, and open communication at any time and at any place can remove physical barriers and can also initiate meaningful conversation in cross-national settings (Tuzlukova & Hall, 2017). However, asynchronous online courses based on written communication may also bring up some challenges such as miscommunication or difficulties to enhance feelings of connectedness among students and course instructors (Cifuentes & Shih, 2001). These challenges can become a serious disadvantage for students for whom English is not a native language. This disadvantage can impact their participation and success in asynchronous written communication with those for whom English is a first language (Goodfellow, Lea, Gonzales, & Mason, 2001).

To overcome challenges of miscommunication in asynchronous online courses, research has shown the importance of the instructor's role for successful online learning outcomes (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2003). Indeed, the instructor's role in providing guided instruction and giving constructive feedback may help students to overcome difficulties of text-based online communication. Yet, to increase both the verbal and nonverbal cues of asynchronous interactions, studies have proposed using asynchronous audio, specifically, instructional audio feedback (Cavanaugh & Song, 2015; Ice, Curtis, Phillips, & Wells, 2007). In this chapter, following Brown (2006), the term *foreign language* refers to any language that is not a native language in a country. The term *English as a Foreign Language* (EFL) will be used to imply the use of English in a community where it is not the primary means of communication. This chapter will also use the term *English as a Second Language* (ESL) to refer to use of the English language as a medium of education, government, and business in countries where English is not a native language. In addition, we define audio feedback as a recorded instructional comment to enhance feelings of connectedness and to overcome miscommunication challenges in asynchronous online instruction.

BACKGROUND

Feedback is defined as "information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, and experience) regarding aspects of one's performance" (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 81). In teaching practice, feedback has been viewed as one of the core instructional principles in encouraging and consolidating the learning process (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). To encourage learning in asynchronous online environments, feedback has become a required instructional component in building connections between learners and course instructors. In asynchronous online courses, instructors usually provide feedback not only on traditional student writing, such as essays or research papers, but they also have to provide feedback on other student writing assignments, such as online discussions or blogs. However, when non-language instructors need to provide feedback for ESL/EFL students, they usually find it difficult. They provide feedback mostly on ESL/EFL students' language errors by pointing them out in their writing (Stern & Solomon, 2006). It seems that language accuracy has become the main criteria to assess ESL/EFL students' online writing performance. Consideration of language accuracy as the main assessment criteria of online learning performance might impact success in online courses among ESL/EFL students. Therefore, online instructors who work with ESL/EFL students, specifically in non-language courses, need to consider that ESL/EFL students require different treatment than first language students (de Oliveira, Maune, & Klassen, 2014). When providing feedback to ESL/EFL students, it is necessary not only to point out or correct an error, it is also helpful to elicit and explain the correct form for a better learning performance in online courses (Tsutsui, 2004). Instead of correcting language errors, ESL/

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