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Practice Article

Text-Based Corrective Feedback for Improving Speaking Skills

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Abstract

Traditional oral corrective feedback (CF), although effective, can disrupt communication and may not be fully processed by language learners, particularly during real-time speech activities. By leveraging the familiarity and immediacy of texting, this teaching practice aims to improve learner awareness of tense errors. This study explores the use of texting as an innovative teaching practice for providing CF in language learning, specifically focusing on its application in improving speaking accuracy among learners at the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) A2 to B2 levels. This study outlines the implementation process, evaluates the outcomes, and reflects on the benefits and challenges of this approach. The results show that texting serves as a valuable tool for delivering focused CF, providing a less intimidating alternative to oral interactions. The study concludes with recommendations for educators and further research on the broader applications of texting in language education.

本論文は、文字によるテキストチャットを利用して、スピーキング時の修正フィードバック（CF）の提供を試みた実践研究である。従来の口頭によるCFは効果的ではあるものの、コミュニケーションを妨げたり、特にリアルタイムのスピーチ活動中には言語学習者に十分に理解されなかったりすることがある。この教育手法は、テキストメッセージの親しみやすさと即時性を活用することで、文字によって注意を向け、時制の誤りを意識し、修正することを目的としている。本実践では、特にCEFR　A2からB2レベルの学習者におけるスピーキングの正確さ向上に焦点を当てている。本実践は、テキストメッセージがCFを提供するための貴重なツールとなり、口頭でのCFの代替手段となることを示す。

Corrective feedback (CF) is a key aspect of second language acquisition, with research demonstrating its importance in helping learners notice and correct linguistic errors (Kobayashi, 2018; Shintani et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2022). Although immediate feedback, especially on grammar, is often effective, it can interrupt communication. Some studies argue that CF should occur after the learner's utterance is complete to avoid this issue, while others believe that CF should be abandoned altogether, as it may hinder natural language acquisition (Truscott, 1996, 1999). Recent empirical studies have demonstrated that CF plays a role in enhancing learners' accuracy and supporting language learning (Kobayashi, 2018; Shintani et al., 2014; Zhang, et al.,2022).

Despite teachers' best efforts to provide feedback in the classroom, learners often fail to notice or fully comprehend the provided guidance, leaving it unprocessed, particularly for learners at the basic and intermediate stages of language learning. This issue is particularly evident in speaking, where feedback typically occurs immediately after a learner makes an error, potentially interrupting the flow of communication or diverting attention from content. This study addresses this gap by exploring the alternative approach of using texting to provide CF and improve speaking skills.

Texting is a common communication method used daily by teachers and learners. It combines the immediacy of spoken communication with the clarity and readability of written text. We propose that providing CF through texts can enhance understanding and help learners correct their errors more effectively.

This paper discusses a practice implemented in a Japanese university language course with learners at Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) levels A2 to B2. The target proficiency level was chosen to enable a comparison with Kobayashi's (2018) study on Japanese English learners and their use of CF. To this end, it outlines the teaching strategy, covering its implementation, resources employed, and reflections on its impact. It also provides educators with useful perspectives on alternative ways to deliver CF and incorporate technology into their instruction.

The native language of the students was Japanese. The course emphasized communication skills and aims to prepare students for real-world English-speaking environments relevant to their future careers. The activities were task-based and followed a meaning-focused approach, including oral CF when necessary. The class was conducted once a week for 15 weeks and the activity was conducted once every week.

Some students felt less confident when speaking English because they worried about making mistakes. For learners at the CEFR A2 to B2 levels, while there may be some significant errors in their speech, most mistakes

do not hinder communication. However, to improve speaking skills, it is essential to provide them with clear and understandable feedback that they can use to achieve mastery. This teaching practice focuses on providing feedback, specifically on tense errors. Although tenses are taught in the early stages of the English curriculum in Japan, achieving full mastery is challenging due to differences in linguistic structures (Shirahata, 2015). This difficulty may be partly due to the differences between tense and aspect in Japanese.

This practice can be integrated with other learning tools such as voice recording and multimedia resources to enhance the visual saliency of texting. Variations and applications would further extend the utility of texting-based CF and could be tested in different contexts to explore their effectiveness in improving language learning outcomes and allowing learners to practice in authentic contexts

Background

The impact of corrective feedback (CF) has been widely studied. Research suggests that direct CF can have a longer-lasting effect on learners compared to metalinguistic explanations, depending on the grammatical item targeted (Shintani et al., 2014). Another key aspect of CF is its scope, or the number of items addressed. Truscott (1996, 1999) argued that addressing multiple items simultaneously may hinder learners from effectively recognizing and internalizing the feedback. In contrast, Sheen (2007) advocated for a more focused approach to CF, emphasizing that concentrating on specific items tends to yield better results. Supporting this view, Li (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of 34 intervention studies on CF and morphosyntactic learning. The results revealed that CF had a moderate positive impact on learners' performance, especially when it consistently targeted specific grammatical errors.

Focused and unfocused CF have also been compared in studies involving Japanese learners. For instance, Kobayashi (2018) examined the effectiveness of focused CF using transcribed texts to enhance speaking accuracy. The study involved 48 Japanese university students divided into three groups: one received CF on past tense errors, another on various items without restriction, and the third received no CF. Pre- and post-speaking tests were conducted to assess accuracy. While the groups receiving CF showed a reduction in errors, the differences were not statistically significant. Kobayashi noted that the time lag between learners' speech and the delivery of written CF may have reduced its effectiveness, as learners struggled to link the feedback to their original utterances. Nonetheless, the study highlighted the potential of focused CF in improving speaking accuracy when targeting specific errors, such as past tense usage.

The current study builds on Kobayashi's findings by hypothesizing that texting-based CF can overcome the limitations of delayed written feedback. Texting offers immediate, focused, and visible corrections, enabling learners to connect the feedback to their errors and better retain the information.

Timing is another critical factor in CF. Shintani and Aubrey (2016) found that learners who received immediate CF during writing tasks—via Google Docs—improved their accuracy more than those who received delayed feedback after task completion. Interviews revealed that immediate feedback helped learners identify and understand their errors more clearly. Their study demonstrated the benefits of delivering CF immediately, as it enhances learners' ability to notice and process mistakes. Applying this principle to a speaking context, the current study hypothesizes that texting-based CF, similar to written feedback in timing and clarity, can offer similar benefits for improving speaking accuracy. By providing instant, visible feedback, texting enables learners to review and internalize corrections effectively.

Drawing from Kobayashi (2018) and Shintani and Aubrey (2016), the current study hypothesizes that immediate texting-based CF will be more effective than traditional oral CF in improving speaking accuracy. This approach addresses the challenge of delayed feedback highlighted by Kobayashi and utilizes the advantages of immediacy demonstrated by Shintani and Aubrey.

This foundation underscores the rationale for exploring texting as a novel medium for CF delivery in language learning. By addressing gaps in CF timing and modality, the study aims to enhance speaking skills and contribute to innovative teaching practices for second language learners.

Benefits of Texting

Based on the findings of Kobayashi (2018) and Shintani and Aubrey (2016), we hypothesize that providing immediate CF through texting would be more effective than oral feedback. The effectiveness of texting depends on its visibility. While it can be delivered as quickly as spoken feedback, the text is visible, eliminating issues with inaudibility and allowing learners to review the feedback later. Texting can also enhance recognition of target language features (Smith, 2004). In a study by Kawaguchi (2016), Japanese and Australian students communicated online in their second language, discussing specific topics and providing feedback on each other's writing. This method improved grammar and vocabulary. Based on previous findings, this teaching method uses text to provide instant CF, making it an effective tool for teaching speaking skills.

Description of the Teaching Practice

In this teaching practice, 31 English learners participated in a 10-minute speaking activity. The main activity was receiving CF through texting while the learners described a cartoon strip. After the first speech, the learners were asked to describe the cartoon strip again and modify their speech, if necessary. The duration was determined

based on a pilot test. Initially, this was a 5-minute activity, but some students needed more time to understand the picture prompts. The time spent speaking varied slightly between learners. However, the maximum duration for each speaking activity was 90 seconds. Providing CF via text took only a few seconds and did not significantly affect the overall duration of the activity. In addition to the teacher, a native English-speaking teaching assistant also provided feedback. To ensure consistency with the teacher, the teaching assistant was instructed on how to provide CF beforehand.

Implementation

The process began with the selection of appropriate materials for the task. In this teaching practice, the learning objective focuses on the past tense. To facilitate practice in terms of both tense and aspect, a sequence of box cartoons was chosen to narrate the story, which encouraged narrative development. Before the actual practice session, it was recommended that the level of difficulty of the learners be assessed. The speaking section of the Eiken test, a widely used practical English language test in Japan, provided valuable resources for creating this material. The sample topic card from the second stage of Grade 2 was used for the current practice (Eiken Foundation of Japan, 2024).

It was necessary to arrange the space and set up an activity space. This teaching practice was conducted in one-on-one sessions rather than in groups or classes. The teacher and learner could be in the same room but seated in such a way that they do not face each other. This may be less intimidating for the learner. Both participants logged into Zoom on their computers and set up a meeting room. The CF provided through chat was reviewed later.

The next step was to invite the learner to the room and provide instructions to the learner. Table 1 describes the procedures. Before speaking, the learners were allowed time to understand the picture and organize their thoughts before speaking. Then, an introductory sentence was provided to help them start speaking. As they described the picture, CF is given as needed. The students were instructed to pay attention to the feedback. Sufficient time was allowed for reading the feedback—usually 1.5 to 2 times longer than an oral session. After completing the speaking task with feedback, a short break (30 seconds) was taken. During this time, the learner could review the feedback. In the second speaking practice, no CF was provided, allowing the learner to notice and self-correct errors.

Table 1

Procedures

Steps	Chat CF group	Oral CF group	No CF group	Time on task(s)
1	Instructions			120
2	Read the cartoon strip silently			90
3	Narrate the story while receiving chat CF	Narrate the story while receiving oral CF	Narrate the story without any CF	90
4	Break			30
5	Narrate the same story without any CF			90

Materials and Resources Needed

- Images/pictures to assist in speaking content: Find resources that help students generate content ideas. The current study used the speaking section of the Eiken test.
- Computer with a texting application installed: Any type of synchronous texting application can be used, ensuring minimal lag time for receiving messages. The current study used the chat feature of the Zoom application.

Outcomes and Observations

To measure the effectiveness of the teaching practice, traditional oral CF was implemented, as well as a method without providing any CF. To compare the results for each group, 11 out of the 31 participants who received CF via texting were randomly selected, and their first speaking recordings and second speaking recordings were analyzed. Additionally, to determine the effectiveness of this teaching practice, new groups with oral CF (Oral CF group) and without CF (No CF group) were formed. Different learners at the CEFR A2 to B2 levels were recruited for the comparison groups. The verb tense errors for the 11 randomly selected participants and each of the other groups were counted. The results indicated that the group that participated in the teaching practice via texting made fewer tense errors than the other two groups. Moreover, despite performing the same task, the total word count differed between groups. Word count reflects how feedback influenced engagement with the task, with increased word count indicating more participation or elaboration, and decreased word count suggesting hesitation or avoidance. The resulting word counts increased during the second task for the text group and the no-CF group but slightly decreased for the oral CF group, suggesting differences in task engagement or feedback processing.

Student Feedback

A post-survey was conducted with learners who provided first- and second-speaking data, revealing interesting findings in the groups that received CF via text and orally. When asked whether they believed CF was more effective through texting or orally, 7 out of 18 learners in the texting group and 11 in the oral group indicated that they thought texting feedback would be more effective. Interestingly, fewer learners in the text group believed that CF was ineffective, while more learners in the oral group agreed with this view. Although it is difficult to make direct comparisons because the learners did not experience the other mode, many, despite showing reductions in their errors, did not find texting to be an effective method for delivering CF.

On one hand, in terms of feedback on the texting method, learners offered positive comments such as, "It was helpful to receive feedback in proper English for what I wanted to say," "I noticed grammatical mistakes," and "I realized I needed to use the past tense." However, there were also some critical remarks such as "Receiving written feedback suddenly during speech made it hard to concentrate," "It was difficult to read while speaking," and "It was hard to notice the feedback." Additionally, some learners mentioned emotional aspects, stating: "I didn't feel nervous, but the time seemed to pass slowly" and "I was able to calmly understand the feedback."

On the other hand, regarding oral CF, some learners found oral feedback to be effective, with comments such as: "I appreciated being able to notice mistakes immediately" and "I was able to remember the mistakes that I made, so I could correct them properly the second time." However, other learners pointed out issues they had not noticed despite regularly receiving oral CF in class. For example, "I heard the feedback, but I felt a bit anxious while speaking" and "There were too many corrections, so I could only remember a few." Among the learners who preferred oral feedback, some mentioned: "If the feedback is repeated, it seems easier to remember orally" and "I can just speak as I hear it." Although some learners had never received written CF before, they commented on its potential advantages: "Those who aren't very good at English might not catch the feedback if it's only spoken" and "I could only remember the important words and sometimes forgot the grammar." The issue of speed also emerged, with comments such as: "The rapid pace made it hard to prepare myself mentally."

Teacher's Observations and Reflections

From the teacher's perspective, students seemed more relaxed when receiving CF through texts. The teacher and students maintained a comfortable distance while speaking, which may have contributed to a noticeable increase in errors. By contrast, during the oral feedback, although students were able to identify areas that required correction, they often continued to speak without fully understanding the feedback, resulting in inaccuracies. Therefore, delivering CF orally and directly to students might add pressure to the challenge of speaking in English.

In classroom settings, CF is often provided in front of other students, which can increase pressure. However, I suspect that individual feedback, as in this teaching practice, may reduce student stress.

Discussion

Three advantages are highlighted when using texting for corrective feedback. The first advantage is that texting allows learners to focus on specific parts of their speech by emphasizing them through written text. Even if learners do not notice the feedback during their speech, they can review it immediately after pausing or completing it. Additionally, because feedback is provided through text rather than orally, it offers a sense of security for learners who may feel nervous, allowing them to continue speaking with confidence.

In this teaching practice, CF was applied only to tense errors. As noted by Shirahata (2015), many errors were observed in all three groups during the first speech task. However, when CF was presented through texting, the number of tense errors decreased. This suggests that, if learners become aware of how to correct tense errors, they are more likely to make the necessary corrections. As Shintani and Aubrey (2016) pointed out, the timing of the CF is also crucial. Presenting the feedback in text form at the moment speech is made, and the learner's linguistic awareness is focused has proven to be more effective, as demonstrated by this teaching practice. Moreover, presenting feedback in written form, rather than orally, contributed to better comprehension. However, providing oral feedback might not always be effective for all proficiencies, as this teaching practice only investigates learners at the basic level.

The second advantage is that CF provided by texting creates a record for the learner. With oral CF, if the learner does not understand the feedback or if there is a lot of it, they may become confused. Being able to review the feedback after pausing or completing a speech is particularly helpful for learners who struggle with auditory feedback. If oral CF is presented but the participants cannot understand whether the mistake was in grammar, pronunciation, or something else, the effectiveness of the feedback may be diminished. This approach may thus be particularly effective for learners with difficulties in listening comprehension.

The third advantage is the emotional impact of using texting for CF. When feedback is given orally, it can cause learners to be hesitant or anxious about speaking. As texting allows feedback to be communicated from a distance, learners are less likely to feel nervous during their speech. This was also reflected in learners' comments.

Comparison with Existing Teaching Methods or Practices

Drawing on previous research (Smith, 2004; Kawaguchi, 2016), this teaching practice focused on providing CF for grammatical items, particularly tense use, and found that texting was especially effective in improving accuracy. Unlike Kobayashi's (2018) approach, which aims to provide CF after a speech, this practice allows learners to receive immediate feedback through texting, which may have influenced the results. However, because this study did not include unfocused CF, it remains unclear whether texting is more effective than unfocused CF. Given the challenges associated with mastering tense use, it is possible that CF might be more effective for other grammatical aspects, or that certain elements may be more easily learned through oral feedback. Future research should explore this issue further.

Text-based Corrective Feedback and its Impact

While the overall number of tense errors decreased with the use of texting compared to the oral group and the group that did not receive feedback, it is still unclear how often tense errors occurred compared to other errors throughout speech. Further analyses are thus needed to assess the effectiveness of CF by considering factors such as word and sentence complexity and speech fluency.

Individual differences among learners should also be considered when providing CF through texting. Texting might be particularly effective for students who struggle to understand spoken language due to their lower proficiency levels. However, some may find it easier to understand feedback when presented orally. Conversely, for more advanced learners, written feedback may be unnecessary, and oral feedback may prove more beneficial.

Moreover, reading a text during speech can potentially lead to a high cognitive load. Depending on how CF is presented, it is likely that when learners focus on speaking, incorporating simple text into their speech can be challenging.

Familiarity with texting also plays a significant role. Although many students regularly use texting in their daily lives, its use in learning environments is limited. Because these learners may not have experienced CF through texting, they may have struggled to use it effectively.

Conclusion

In conclusion, integrating texting as a method for providing CF in language learning is a promising alternative to traditional oral feedback methods. This practice offers distinct advantages, including the ability to reduce tense errors, maintain a feedback record that students can review at their own pace, and create a less intimidating environment for learners who may feel anxious during oral interactions. The results of this practice show that texting can be particularly effective for learners at the basic and intermediate proficiency levels (CEFR A2 to B2), who may struggle with both the immediacy of oral feedback and the cognitive load associated with processing spoken corrections.

This approach not only addresses the limitations of oral feedback, such as the potential for miscommunication or speech flow interruptions but also leverages the familiarity of many students with texting in their daily lives. Despite these advantages, it is important to acknowledge that texting-based CF may not be equally effective for all learners. For instance, more advanced students may not require written feedback and might benefit more from oral feedback, which allows for real-time corrections and adjustments during speech.

Educators considering the implementation of texting for CF should consider the diverse needs and learning styles of students. It is thus advisable to introduce this method in conjunction with traditional feedback strategies to assess its impact on different aspects of language acquisition gradually. This blended approach allows for a more personalized and adaptable learning experience that addresses the unique challenges faced by each learner.

To further enhance the effectiveness of texting-based CF, educators should consider conducting preliminary assessments to identify the grammatical structures or language features most responsive to this method. Additionally, training learners to efficiently manage and respond to feedback received via texting can help mitigate the potential cognitive load and ensure that feedback is effectively integrated into their language practice.

Future research should focus on expanding the scope of this teaching practice to include a broader range of linguistic features, such as complex sentence structures, pronunciation, and vocabulary usage. Investigating the long-term effects of texting-based feedback on language fluency and accuracy will provide valuable insights into its sustainability as a CF method. Moreover, comparative studies examining the efficacy of texting versus oral feedback across different learner proficiency levels and educational contexts are crucial for determining the most effective strategies for various learning environments.

In conclusion, while texting-based CF shows significant potential as a language development tool, it is essential to continue exploring its applications and refine its implementation to maximize the benefits for learners. In doing so, educators can create a more inclusive and supportive language-learning experience that accommodates the evolving needs of students in the digital age.

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