

Could this change the way we provide feedback?

Russel Stannard
University of Warwick, GB
russel.stannard@btinternet.com

1 Introduction

This paper looks at the area of feedback on written texts in education. It is based around an action research methodology and looks into the effectiveness of using Screen Capture Software (SCS) as a method of providing screen capture feedback (SC feedback) to students. SCS allows you to record the screen of your computer as if you had a camera pointing at your screen. Everything you do and say on your screen is recorded as a video. It is very common in computer training where trainers use the technology to record themselves using different technologies and then share their videos. An excellent example of the technology be used this way is <http://www.teachertrainingvideos.com>.

The same technology can be used to provide feedback to students on their written work. The students send their written work to their teacher as an electronic document. The teacher opens their work onto the screen, turns on the screen capture software and records themselves correcting the students work. Everything the teacher says or does is recorded in the video. The resulting video is then sent to the students. The research shows that the idea has real potential for providing multimodal feedback that is both visual and oral. Much more feedback can be provided in quite a short space of time and the students find the feedback more engaging and motivating. It is been very positively received by distance learning organisations.

Though this study deals with English Language Teaching (ELT) the actual ideas can be used in almost any area of the curriculum. Indeed there are currently studies looking into its use in design courses, history courses, science courses and more recently maths. It has already generated a large amount of publicity and interest in the press (Times Higher/Guardian)

2 What is screen capture?

SCS tools are very easy to use and most SCS works by simple marking what area of the screen you want to record and then clicking a button. Some SCS tools are free. Common free tools include Techsmith JING and Screencast-o-matic

SCS simply records your activities on the screen. So anything you highlight, mark, write, open or close will simply be recorded. It also records your voice too. If we open a student's work onto our screen and then turn on the SCS, we can record everything we say and do on the students written paper and then send the video to the student. Any highlights we make, words we underline or comments we write on the paper will all come out in the video. A simple example of the resulting feedback can be seen here where a student is receiving feedback on their written work in an English class.

<http://www.teachertrainingvideos.com/luFeedback/index.html>

3 The study

The study consisted of 2 cycles. Each cycle included a variety of data gathering methods. The videos themselves were analysed to look at the amount, type and quality of the feedback produced. Students were given questionnaires and each cycle included a focus group discussion with either the whole group or a subset of the group

The original group was 11 Chinese students of approximately 5.5 IELTS scores studying English. The second iteration was done with a group of 20 students from a mixture of backgrounds on a pre-sessional English course.

4 The study and the need for action

Within ELT, many people would argue that since the heightened interest in the writing process, feedback has an even greater role (Ashwell 2001). Kroll (Kroll 2001) believes that along with actually providing the students with the written assignment feedback is the most crucial component of any writing course.

My own interest in the area of feedback and subsequently my research into SC feedback was driven by 3 key factors, many that have been highlighted by the ELT research into the area.

1. Students don't often understand the feedback they receive or make very little use of it if they do.
2. Students want conferencing ie they feel that the most rewarding feedback comes from directly meeting with the teacher. Could a method or approach begin to bridge this gap through the use of technology?
3. In the wider area of education, there has been a constant interest in the area of multiple learning styles and the need to make learning more 'multimodal' but there has not been the same interest in the area of feedback which has remained largely text based.

5 Feedback is confusing

Numerous studies have suggested that it is often the case that students don't understand the feedback they are given or worse still it is largely ignored. Research has pointed to the fact that a lot of feedback is contradictory, vague and confusing Zamel (1985).Cohen (Cohen 1987) found that students take a mental note of only about half the mistakes the teacher corrected and used about only 10% of them in re-drafts. Students often ignore feedback because they simply don't understand it (Bartholomae 1980, Hyland, 2003). Fregeau (Fregeau 1999) found that many times the students simply guessed the corrections their teachers had made since they did not understand them. This might be in part due to the fact the teachers are not as affective in guessing what their students are actually trying to say (Hamid 2007).

Many researchers have looked at way of getting students to make greater use of the error corrections they receive. Several studies in ELT have pointed to the importance of conferencing. That is direct contact with teachers either as part of the correction process or after it. Fregeau (Fregeau 1999) found that written feedback coupled with conferencing was something that student's wanted and benefitted from. Lam and Lee (Lam & Lee 210) also found that students were appreciative of any conference time they got with their tutor when working on their portfolios.

6 Multimodal learning

We have seen a shift towards a more multi-modal way of teaching, in part in reaction to the learning styles and multiple intelligence debate. However the same cannot be said of feedback, which is still predominately text based. It has been suggested that a more multimodal approach to learning may lead to widening participation (Rotherham 2008, p. 4) . Some researchers have even suggested that current students may be more comfortable with visual or aural based input rather than text (Merry and Orsmond, 2008, p9).The research into ‘multi-modal’ forms of feedback is still fairly limited. McFarlane and Wakemen (McFarlane and Wakeman 2010) noted that audio feedback provided more detail, provided more examples to illustrate points made, and offered clear hints on how to improve. They emphasized the role that audio feedback might provide for feed forward. Interestingly Ribchester et al (cited in McFarlane and Wakeman 2010) found that audio feedback might actually result in an overload of information. An early piece of work on the use of screen capture feedback had also pointed to the same possible shortfall (Stannard 2008).

7 Methodology

The initial cycle included a group of 11 Chinese students studying English in the UK. The students were provided with SC feedback as an alternative to written feedback on their assignments. The students sent their work to the teacher, who opened their work onto the screen and then created a screen capture as they recorded both their voice and all the screen actions that took place. The resulting video was then sent to the student. The students could then play back the videos and listen and watch as their papers were corrected. Students were asked to watch the video and re-submit their essays. The students were then given questionnaires regarding their reaction to this form of feedback and 5 of the students were interviewed in a focus group. The videos were also analysed to see how much feedback had been provided by counting the number of words in a minute. They were also analysed to see the balance between surface error corrections and those that focused on organisation and content.

The second iteration attempted to solve some of the problems that had emerged from the first round of action research. The students were on an pre-sessional English course. Students were again given questionnaires and a focus group was arranged with 7 of the students. This time only one video was provided to all the students which gave them SC feedback on the overall class performance on a series of presentations that had taken place.

7.1 Cycle 1

The feedback from the questionnaire brought up some interesting results. The students were overwhelmingly positive about the feedback. Here are the key points that emerged from the questionnaires and interviews

- Students like the visual and oral form of the SC feedback. Some commented that it made it more memorable.
- They felt it was almost like having the teacher next to them. Several students commented. A typical comment was “It was like having the teacher sit next to me”
- Students felt the voice was important. Some of them commented that it softened some of the criticism and helped them to understand what was important.
- Students felt the feedback was very clear. In fact all 11 students made this point.

- Students felt they were given more feedback than they usually got. In fact they did. Speaking at about 150 words a minute (though this did vary a lot) students were getting about 700 words of feedback plus the visual clues.
- Two students felt that they had been given ‘too much’ feedback. They felt a bit overwhelmed by the approach and felt I should have only focused on a limited number of key points.
- Several students commented that they liked the SC feedback as it provided ‘authentic listening material.’
- The students liked the fact the videos could be played back time and time again. They felt it was useful reference material.
- Portability was a big problem. You can’t go over your essay sitting on a train or bus in the same way as you can with written feedback.

7.2 What emerged from the first cycle?

Creating 11 short videos as an alternative to written feedback was not especially time-consuming. The papers were first read, highlights were made on the paper where the tutor wanted to make comments and then the SCS was turned on. Once the videos were created, they were uploaded onto a server and the links to the videos were sent to the students. There is a time cost to this as the videos have to be uploaded before the links can be shared. This of course meant that the videos did not have to be sent to the students. The students were simply sent a link to their feedback video rather like if someone sends you a link to a YouTube video. One thing the tutor had noticed was how often all the students made similar mistakes and this resulted in the tutor repeating many of the same things in each of the feedback videos. It was this that influenced the approach of the second cycle.

7.3 Cycle 2

The second group was made up of 20 students. The approach in this cycle was to provide one feedback video to the whole class. Students were provided with feedback on a PowerPoint presentations which they did in pairs. This particular module was chosen because the students would be expected to give 3 presentations through the year and so any feedback provides would feed forward into their next presentation.

During the presentations, the teacher took notes, then after the lesson, opened up a Word processor and wrote out a series of key points that had emerged from the presentations. The tutor then turned on the SCS and talked through the key points, highlighting and writing on the screen at the same time. A single feedback video was then sent to all the students. Several issues emerged from the questionnaire and interviews.

- Students felt the feedback videos would be very useful since they would be doing presentations in the future and could refer back to them
- Students felt a lot of information was being provided. One student used the term ‘full of information’ to refer to the amount of feedback in the video.
- Students again brought up the tone of voice. They felt it helped them to understand how the feedback was being given.
- Students didn’t like the fact that they didn’t get personal feedback on their own presentations. This was an overall feedback video providing information on the general points that had emerged from their presentations.

- Students liked the fact they could play and replay the feedback videos.
- Some students complained that the speech on the videos was too fast.
- Some students felt that the visual feedback (ie what was done on the screen could have been more exploited).
- Again students felt that the feedback was more memorable

7.4 What emerged from the second cycle?

From the teachers point of view, producing the video and uploading it was much easier since only one video had to be made. It also meant that typical time in the classroom given up to general classroom feedback was covered by the videos and this saved lecture time. It also provided a lot of detail, since the teacher was able to elaborate on the key points. It came over even more clearly in the second cycle just how much information can be provided to students in such a short space of time, though the speed of delivery has to be considered and some students also felt there was not enough use of the screen (ie the balance of feedback tended towards the aural rather than visual).

8 Conclusions and further discussion

SCS is a very simple tool to use and would be accessible to almost all teachers. The fact that many good examples of the software are free is also encouraging. There is no doubt about the feasibility of this approach and the fact that it was well received by the students. Especially important was the fact the feedback was both visual and oral and provided a more multimodal approach to feedback. However many issues are raised by this work and have emerged from subsequent work that has been done.

1. What is the best approach to this method? Is there a danger of providing too much feedback? Would it be a good idea for example to focus on say 5 key points rather than correct the whole piece? Would it work better if the focus was around one type of error or focused on only correcting the content or organisation?
2. One of the most powerful things about this approach is the amount of elaboration and detail one can provide. However, we may have problems with lower level students who cannot follow the feedback provided if they are learning English. Could it be possible to provide the feedback in their L1?
3. In the first experiment the focus was mainly on the students surface errors (grammar mistakes) though there were examples of feedback around content. Correcting student's surface errors in many cases is quite simplistic and requires little elaboration or detail. Perhaps this approach is better when we focus on the content or organisation of a written piece of comment on the content.
4. It is clear that the idea could be used for many areas of the curriculum. It doesn't have to be ELT. In fact recent studies suggest it may work better outside the realm of ELT (Mattisen 2012)
5. What is it about the approach that students find so motivating? Is this simply because this is a novel idea or is there something of value in an approach that provides both visual and oral information?
6. How can we make sure there is a balance between the visual and oral inputs of this approach? There is a temptation to end up speaking and not really make use of highlighting, underlining or writing on the screen which makes this approach hardly different to a podcast.

7. My own interest has now shifted to using SCS with the students. Instead of providing SCS recordings for the students, I am now looking at getting the students to use the tool to reflect and evaluate their own work.
8. One very interesting observation, that has emerged with further studies and which initially was not noticed is a stylistic feature. It is quite common in written feedback for the tutor to simply leave a tick and write 'Well Done'. This is almost non-existent in SC feedback. The tutor always goes on to explain why something is good or why there is a problem. The elaboration seems to be an almost natural feature of this way of giving feedback. It may be this that adds the clarity that the students emphasised so much.

References

- Ashwell, T. (2000), Patterns of teacher response to student writing in a multiple-draft composition classroom: Is content feedback followed by form feedback the best method?, *Journal of Second Language Writing* 9 (2000):227–257.
- Barholomae, D. (1980) The study of error *College Composition and Communication* 31:253-69
- Cohen, A. (1987) Student processing of feedback on their compositions. In A. Wenden and J Rubins *Learner strategies in language learning* (pp 55-69)
- Fregeau ,L.A. (1999). Preparing ESL students for college writing: Two case studies. *The Internet TESL Journal* [on-line]5 (10). Available from <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Fregeau-CollegeWriting.html> [assessed 17/01/2013]
- Hamid, Md Obaaidul (2007) Identifying second language errors: how plausible are plausible reconstructions? *The ELT Journal* Volume 61/2:107-116
- Hyland, D(2003) Focusing on form: Student engagement with teacher feedback, *System* 21 (2003) : 217–230
- Kroll B. (2001) Considerations for teaching an ESL/EFL writing course. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as a foreign language* (3rd Ed.) (pp.233-348). Boston, MA: Heinle and Heinle.
- Lam, R & Lee, I. (2001) Balancing the dual functions of portfolio assessment. *ELT-J* 64/1 :1-12
- Matthisen, P 2012 Video Feedback in Higher Education-A contribution to improving the quality of written feedback. Idunn.no. Available from http://www.idunn.no/ts/dk/2012/02/video_feedback_in_higher_education_-_a_contribution_to_impr?languageId=2 [accessed 2/07/2013]
- McFarlane and Wakemen (2010) *Audio Feedback Innovation Practice in Higher Education* Vol 1 (1) Available from: <http://journals.staffs.ac.uk/index.php/ipihe/article/viewFile/1/2> [accessed 17/01/2013]
- Merry, S. and Orsmond, P. (2007), Students' responses to academic feedback provided via mp3 audio files. . Available from: <http://www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/ftp/events/sltc07/papers/o18merry.pdf> [accessed 17.01.20130].
- Rotherham, R. (2008), *Sounds Good: Quicker, better assessment using audio feedback*. Available from: <http://sites.google.com/site/soundsgooduk/Home> [accessed 17.01.20130].
- Stannard, R (2008) A new direction in feedback. *Humansing language teaching*. Available from <http://www.hltmag.co.uk/dec08/mart04.htm> [accessed 15/01/2013]
- Times Higher/Guardian/Guardian
- <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/207117.article>
- <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/jan/10/esl-video-feedback>
- Zamel, V (1985) Responding to student writing. *TESOL Quarterly*, 19, pg 79-101