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How to Provide Oral Corrective Feedback in the Zoomscape

by James Hunter

Corrective feedback (CF) in oral production has been thoroughly investigated over the past 20 years, and current thinking suggests that it is useful for restructuring interlanguage (Han, 2001; Sheen, 2010), providing incidental focus on form(s) (Ellis & Sheen, 2006; Sheen, 2010) and increasing accuracy (Goo & Mackey, 2013; Li, 2010). More recent research suggests that the timing of the CF has a measurable impact on its effectiveness (Li, 2010; Li et al., 2016), with immediate feedback showing some advantage over “delayed” feedback (defined as taking place “after the oral activity that served as the context for the correction was completed” (Li et al., 2016, p. 277).

However, the principal challenge of immediate corrective feedback in the realm of video conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Teams, or Skype is that audio and video latency and the resulting distortions of in-person discourse structure can make immediate CF quite disruptive (Shirani, 2020, pp. 75-76), in whatever form it is delivered: recast, clarification, repetition, or metalinguistic feedback (Lyster & Ranta, 1997).

Examples:

recast:

S: ...and then I watching movie.
T: OK, you watched a movie.

clarification:

S: ...and then I watching movie.
T: You did what?

repetition:

S: ...and then I watching movie.
T: You **watching** a movie?

metalinguistic feedback:

S: ...and then I watching movie.
T: PAST tense...

In online teaching, interruptions of a learner’s output are more disruptive, more pragmatically awkward, and may consequently be less likely to result in uptake.

Although extensive research on CF in the “Zoomscape” has yet to be conducted, synchronous (real-time) computer-mediated communication has become a necessity, while the value of CF has not diminished. Now more than ever, the need for a systematic approach to CF that can transcend variations in the timing and modality of teaching

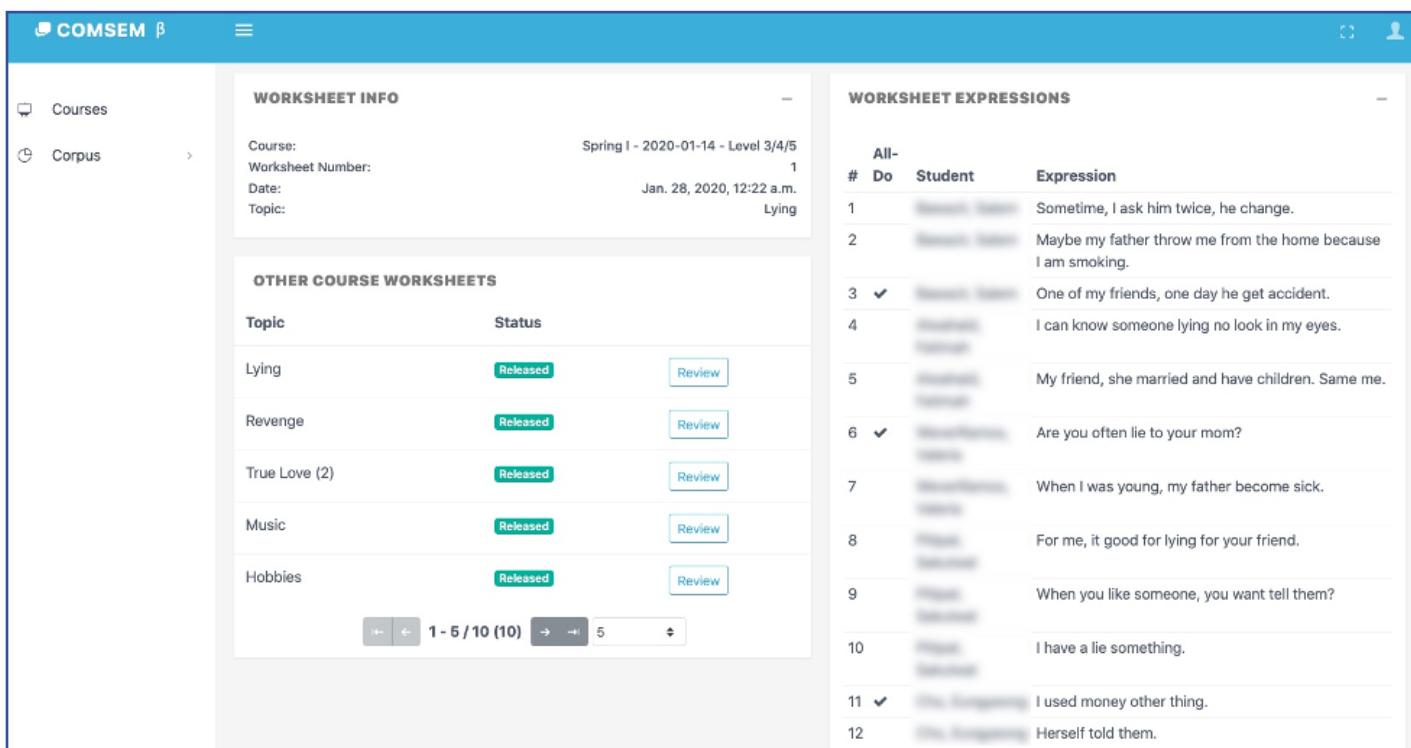


Figure 1: Comsem teacher interface showing a worksheet

formats has become apparent. This is where delayed CF (Hunter, 2012) or “postponed” CF (Quinn, 2014, p. 105) may offer a solution. The idea here is to allow students to communicate without CF interruption, while providing person-specific or whole-class corrective feedback in the background, feedback which the learners can attend to later, once the communicative pressure is removed. Since the teacher’s feedback comes in the form of an audio (recorded) reformulation, the students have to listen carefully and record their own reformulation of their original error, e.g.

Student’s original error from class: *Are you often lie to your mom?*
 Teacher’s audio reformulation: *Do you often lie to your mom?*
 Student’s audio reformulation: *Do you often lie to your mom?*

For the past four years, I have been developing a free, online platform for providing CF, comsem.net. Using this resource, teachers can provide CF without interrupting learner production by creating a “Worksheet” for the conversation or activity (Figure 1) in which the original expression (mistake/error) is transcribed, the speaker is

identified (and/or the CF can be assigned for all students to do), and an audio reformulation is provided.

Learners can access the CF at any time, create oral and/or written reformulations of their errors (Figure 2), and receive teacher feedback on these reformulations.

Finally, they can test themselves on their developing accuracy (Figure 3) using a timed grammaticality judgment test (Shiu, Yalçın, & Spada, 2018) consisting of items chosen from previous Worksheets. In other words, they hear themselves speaking, and have to decide whether they are getting it right or not.

Because the system keeps track of their accuracy and reaction time, it can give immediate feedback and identify items which need more attention and practice (the orange and red items in Figure 4). But it is the students themselves who choose which items to focus on, and so (we hope) this approach will also encourage more autonomy and responsibility for learning.

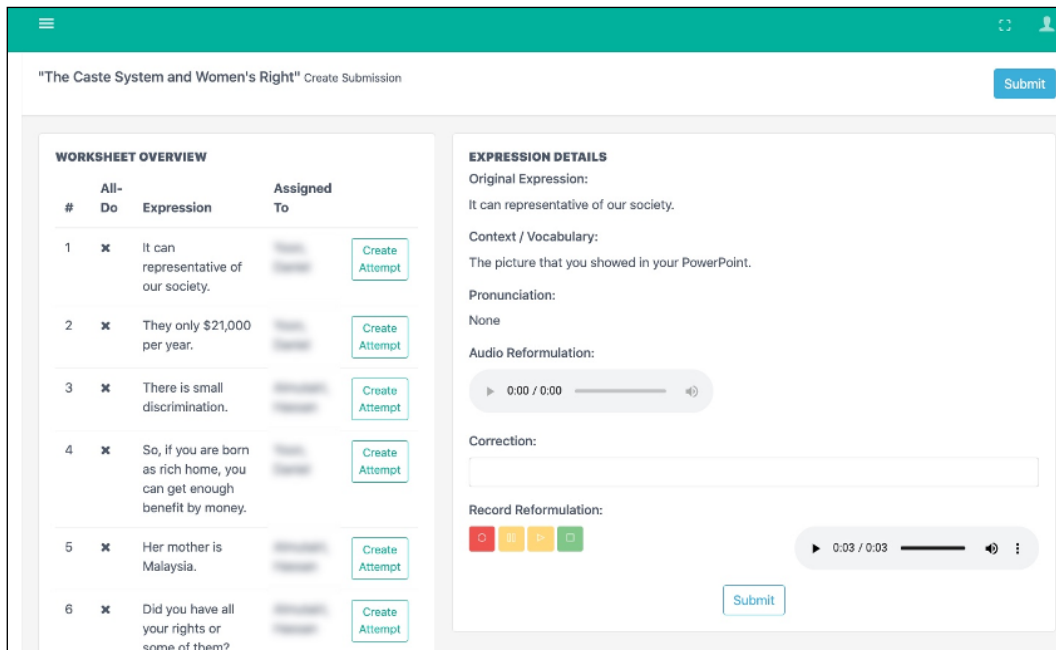


Figure 2: Comsem student interface showing a student’s reformulation

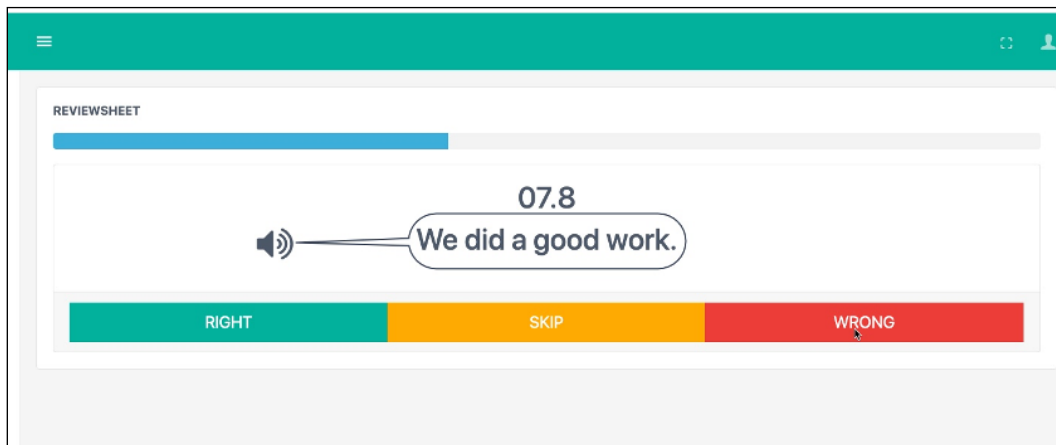
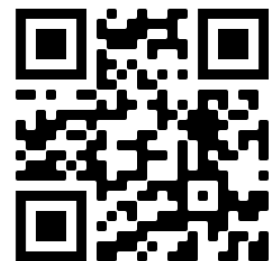


Figure 3: Comsem student interface showing self-test function

We are currently working on incorporating speech-to-text functionality so that the students’ audio reformulation can be immediately transcribed, providing instantaneous and accurate feedback on their pronunciation (McCrocklin et al., 2019). Another exciting development is the inclusion of automatic detection of errors using machine learning algorithms, which could potentially assist the teacher in providing CF.



Scan or click on this QR to go to the Comsem Homepage.

The screenshot displays the COMSEM student interface. On the left, there's a sidebar with 'Courses' and a 'Back to Course' button. The main area shows 'COURSE DETAILS' for 'Pedagogical Grammar' at Gonzaga University, Spring I - 2020-01-14, Section 1. Below this is a 'Start Practice' button. The 'REVIEWSHEET GENERATOR' section provides instructions on selecting expressions and includes a legend for familiarity levels: RED (low), ORANGE (moderate), and GREEN (high). It also has radio buttons for 'Use audio expressions' and 'Exclude audio expressions'. A 'Worksheet' section is visible, showing a date filter for 'Feb. 29, 2020' and a list of expressions with progress bars and checkboxes. The expressions include 'We did a good work.', 'On Saturday, we moved to new house and bought a lot of furnitures.', 'I have idea.', and 'I want to save my money in bank'.

Figure 4: Comsem student interface review function

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