Meaning-Focused Audiovisual Feedback and EFL Writing Motivation

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Abstract

Having in mind the high level of challenge in writing as a foreign language, this research provided Iranian EFL learners with audiovisual feedbacks as an alternative of common written feedback and focused on its' meaningfulness in order to provide an incentive medium for the participants and increase their motivation. One hundred young adult female learners in addition to six English language teachers took part in this study. The data was gathered through opinionnaires, interviews and learner's composition papers and the triangulation method was used to analyze the data. The findings indicate that audiovisual meaning-focused feedbacks are not only effective in increasing the learners' motivation to write but also have the ability to change the negative view of the learners towards writing which can help learners further their efforts in also achieving educational progress in English.

Keywords: Feedback, Meaning-focused, Audiovisual, Motivation, EFL

INTRODUCTION

In traditional EFL classes, as soon as the word "writing" is mentioned you can clearly read the reluctance of writing a composition from the learners' faces. To provide an optimistic mental image for the learners besides the educational values, teachers may have tried to give positive feedbacks to the learners' compositions using different methods. As Hyland and Hyland (2006) argue, "teacher written feedback is designed to carry a heavy informational load", so giving written feedback is time-consuming and the more the number of the students, the more pressure there is on the educators' time in producing these comments and this may lead to less clarifications and feedback from the teacher's side (p.206).

To be more precise the real problem lies in the lack of motivation in students to take initiative in writing a composition and if the students are not motivated, they are less likely to make significant achievements in their writing as part of the learning process of a foreign language.

The significance of this study lies in the fact that with the help of audiovisual feedback, learners can enjoy a considerable amount of out of the class aural feedback which can improve their listening skill, while they live in an environment which does not provide them with real life experiences as a native or a second language learner. In addition, the learner is able to overcome the panic of misjudging the teacher's intention over even a small question mark. The essence of the visual part on the other hand is in that the learners feel present at the very moment their compositions, which are assigned as

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homework, are being checked. The hand movement of the teacher while expressing a sentence, pointing out to a word with a finger, a pen in your hand notifying the learner that you're all alert, or moving your hand up and down makes it a tangible example of passing the meaning through body language, vision and sight. More importantly the teacher cares more about the meaning which signifies the language learner's thoughts and notions rather than only the strict focus on the form and grammar rules in these meaning-focused feedback types.

Ideally, the purpose of giving a meaning-focused audiovisual feedback is to help encourage and motivate students to write. Thus the researcher is trying to find suitable and probable answers for the following question:

1. How does meaning-focused audiovisual feedback affect young adult Iranian EFL learners' writing motivation?

Thus, this research has tried to provide plausible responses in the following sections.

1.2 Definition of Key Terms
Definition of some essential key terms is presented as below:

Audiovisual. According to Tushnet (2008) audiovisual materials allow students to see the subject matter and it concerns ways that present material "visually or audibly" (p.2).

EFL. Müller (2005) directly points out the acronym EFL as "A language which is not the native one" (p.16).

Feedback. The definition of the word feedback may vary in regards with the purpose it serves or the context it is used in.

As a general view feedback is something that "provides the flow of information back to a person so that actual performance can be compared with planned performance"(InterLink Training & Coaching LLC, 2003 as cited in scholz, 2009, p.20).

Pollock (2011) defines feedback as "information about where you stand in relation to the goal and how to improve" (p. xiv), and she also asserts that "feedback is typically characterized as assessment of progress toward a goal, but it is also a cue to seek more information or instruction" (p.5).

Motivation. "The drive to do something" is Claimed by Tileston (2010, p.4) to be a clear definition of motivation. She also views motivation as "the desire to do something because of the promise of or hope for a tangible result" (p.8).

Meaning-Focused Feedback. To clarify the essence of this research the intended meaning-focused feedback is also depicted here. Based on Duppenthaler's (2002) definition, a meaning-focused feedback is one in which one engages an "ongoing and cumulative, interactive dialog with the participants, providing commentary on the content" as well as when the teacher also makes "comments or asks questions on grammatical errors, content or the students' ideas".

2. Review of the Related Literature
One of the most important portions of foreign language communication has been the written form. Thus, to actively involve foreign language learners, especially Iranian young adults, willingly in the learning process and in specific writing, an educator needs to place motivators in his approaches and methods (Hicks, 2008; Dornyei, Csizer & Van Lier, 2008 as cited in Hicks; Wang, 2009; Curzon, 2004, Pajeres & Raliante, 1997, etc.). There are different ways in which an educator can employ in his teaching methods to urge learners write in a foreign language.

Giving proper feedback can function as an effective motivator (Cole, 2006; Landsberg, 2011). Apart from the traditional written form of feedback the educator can also use different presentations of feedback such as: meaning-focused feedback, audio and even visual feedback to motivate learners and as a result promote learning outcomes (Duppenthaler, 2002; Holmes & Moulton,1997; Johanson, 1999).

Meaning-focused feedback is defined by Duppenthaler (2002) as one in which the teacher engages himself in an ongoing and interactive

dialog with the learners and provides commentary on the content of each piece of writing, suggesting alternative options in some cases, and asking for additional information and clarification from the learner. Numerous "feedback scholars advocate engaging students in a dialogue" which increases motivation and results in more student participation (Burk & Pieterick, 2010, p.41). From another view this feedback may seem as the combination of an error-focused feedback in which all errors, including grammatical and spelling errors are corrected (Hyland & Hyland, 2006) and a commentary-focused feedback that responds to the content of the learners' writing and not correcting their errors (Holmes & Moulton, 1997).

An audiovisual feedback on the other hand, "allows the student the opportunity to experience the process that the instructor goes through in reading a paper" (Johanson, 1999, p.31) and feels more like "a conversation, which is a much more natural way to give and receive feedback" and allows the educator give descriptive feedback in a way that is far more "natural and personal" (Whisen, 2010). Many more researches have been done on usage of aural feedback (France & Wheeler, 2007; Hill, 2008; Jordan, 2004; King, Mcgugan & Bunyan, 2008; Lunt & Curran, 2009) and visual feedback (Cassidy, 2007; McLaughlin, 2009; Rodway-Dyer, Dunne & Newcombe, 2009; Stannard, 2007) benefiting students in similar ways.

Other variables such as the use of art work and colors by learners, their responses to the feedbacks they received and their academic achievement are indicators of the learner's motivation (Bourn, 2011; Wang, 2012; Curzon, 2004). For instance Remark (2011) has used writing and artwork hand in hand to help students see that there are many ways they can express themselves. The students then can relate and learn more when they complement their writing with some form of art. Thus to fully engage and motivate young learners to compose, myriad of elements have to be taken into account for prosperous results.

2.1 Paralanguage in Use

When dealing with a means of communication which is visual and aural, paralinguistic features can be of use. In specific, paralinguistic features in Communication, are those facets of communication with considerable amount of general body movements, tone of voice, emphasis and pauses in speaking (Seligman, 2000).Thus, "the teacher and pupils can communicate a rich collection of messages to each other" and how they feel by "the precise choice of words and phrases used, their tone, and accompanying body language" (kyriacou, 1997, p.101).

Besides the everyday usage of hand gestures, the role this paralanguage facet plays is vital in education. Kelly, Manning and Rodak (2008) all emphasize on the usefulness and efficacy of hand gestures to language and they seem to be important in how we think because they "provide a visual clue to our thoughts" as well for the audience (Science Daily, 2011).

As a result it is of benefit to use paralinguistic features with care and in needed areas since it can help illuminate misunderstandings and eradicate vagueness as far as possible.

3. Method

As a qualitative approach was best suited for this study, a variety of alternative approaches and forms of data collection were used to gather and analyze the data.

3.1 Participants and Setting

One hundred young-adult Iranian female learners studying at Iran Language Institute in addition to six female English language teachers took part in this study. The learners' age range was from eleven to fourteen and the teachers aged from twenty five to forty five years. Four teachers had job-related educational background and the other two had long years of experience in the field of English teaching as a foreign language Levels in this institute start from Start level(beginners), and continues to Run 1-4 levels(intermediate), Race 1-3 levels(higher intermediate) and finally Reach 1-4 (advanced) levels.

Since the main focus of this research is on the participants' compositions, it is good to note that the main activity takes place outside the classroom walls and the researcher had no control over the environmental conditions in which they composed their paragraphs.

3.2 Field Work Procedures

With the aim of determining the effectiveness of this new approach a total number of five paragraphs were assigned to four groups of twenty participants with parallel institutional conditions, two of whom namely known as meaning-focused audiovisual groups and the other two as error-focused and commentary-focused audiovisual groups, presenting feedbacks to participants as their names imply.

The main meaning-focused audiovisual groups received both audio and vision in place of common written feedbacks with the inclusion of comments and ideas alongside grammatical nuances. In addition, instead of correcting the participants' mistakes overtly, the researcher sought answers from the participants themselves, whether in the functional part or the commentary part.

A Canon Power Shot SX110 IS compact camera was used to record the videos. To make sure the participants have watched the feedbacks; a thin colored paperboard was attached at the back of each composition. This also helped collecting the participants' replies to the questions asked in the video feedbacks by the researcher (see Appendix A) Moreover, instead of underlining the points which seemed interesting, important or vague with a red pen; pink, blue, green and orange highlighters were used to highlight necessary parts to lessen the anxiety of participants when they had their compositions returned (see Appendix A)

3.3 Data Generation and Analysis

The participants' composition papers with drawings, pictures, handicrafts, personal belongings accompanied with them were all part of the data. In addition, a formal interview with six teachers from the same institute, one informal interview with a group of participants from one of the meaning-focused groups and some other informal interviews with individual students in error and commentary groups took place at the end of the research.

In order to analyze the data scores were given to the themes in the compositions to identify the level of participants' motivation. Also comments and answers of the participants on the attached colored paperboards and parents' comments in reports cards given to them during the experiment were considered as part of the data and were elaborated on in the form of quotes.

On the other hand, all groups including the twenty participants of the control groups filled out opinionnaires before and after the actual process of giving feedbacks, except the control group which received it only once at the end. Using an inductive analysis of the raw data and having a dynamic system strategy in mind, the researcher sorted the data into categories, presented a few tangible evidences of the effects of these feedbacks as an example for some cases under study and calculated the data from the opinionnaires in the form of percentages.

Finally, observations and field notes regarding the control group helped the researcher significantly in the collection of the data and based on heuristic inquiry (Patton, 2002, as cited in Best & Kahn), the researcher could use her actual experiences with the participants, through the expression of feeling on both sides as part of the data.

Thus, the researcher used the triangulation method to justify the validity of the research using the comparison between main focused groups through various means of data collection.

4. Findings and Discussions

The triangulation method was used to validate each piece of datum with the help of other data. The data collected were comprehensively described in the form of charts, tables and descriptions.

According to the opinionnaires, the meaning-focused groups' participants were more satisfied with the combination of both feedback types and

the commentary and error-focused groups preferred receiving the aspect missing in each group at the end of the experiment. As a result, a meaning-focused type of feedback consisting of commentary and error as a whole is more desired by the participants.

On the other hand, the data gathered through opinionnaires, individual interviews and the participants' composition papers (the amount of drawing, color, crafts and pictures' application in the in the first and second meaning-focused groups' composition papers compared to the control group's papers) reveal that these feedbacks not only provided positive feelings for the participants but also had the ability to increase writing motivation of individual learners after receiving audiovisual meaning focused feedbacks in which as Hicks (2008) announces is the sign of a "motivated behavior" (p.11). Thus, the meaning-focused groups' attitude which received audiovisual meaning-focused feedbacks had considerably become better towards writing compared to the control group (see Appendix B).

Furthermore, 100% of the participants in both meaning-focused groups requested an audiovisual feedback for their upcoming terms. The reason may lay with the audio aspect of the feedbacks which "allows the instructor the opportunity to impart more meaningful feedback to the student" (Johanson, 1999), applies stress and tone of speech that influences the applicability of these feedbacks (kyriacou, 1997) and focuses on the video aspect as a whole which "allows the educator" to give descriptive feedback in a way that is far more "natural and personal" (Whisen, 2010).

5. Conclusions

Based on the findings, a huge difference exists in the identity, quality and the usage of these feedbacks compared to the traditional written types of feedbacks provided for the students which led to a positively different outcome. These feedbacks are not only effective in increasing the learners' motivation to write but also have the ability to change the negative view of the learners towards writing which can help learners further their efforts in also achieving educational progress in English.

The findings from the composition papers all infer that, magnificent changes were made to the level of the two meaning-focused group participants' motivation compared to the control group which reveals the efficiency of these feedbacks.

The audiovisual format of these feedbacks can bring qualities such as clarity and privacy for the students which results in the learners' rise of motivation and is an aid for EFL teachers in creating an opportunity for effective writing instructions which are unambiguous, understandable and consistent in quality.

The meaning-focused aspect of the feedbacks on the other hand, carries educational benefits which help learners with educational achievement goals meet their desired end to some extents and as a result increases their self-efficacy which leads them to the growth of motivation. The combination of these two aspects can increase the students' willingness to write and cause didactic enhancements. These results are consistent with the findings of Duppenthaler (2002) who investigated the effect of three types of written feedback on students and found that students who receive meaning-focused feedback show a greater degree of positive motivation than students who receive either positive comments or error-focused feedback.

Thus, by considering the importance of foreign language writing in and out of academic settings, addressing multitude of research issues can be a helpful step in the right direction of teaching and learning languages.

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APPENDIX A. **Meaning Focused Group Vs. Control Group Sample Dat**

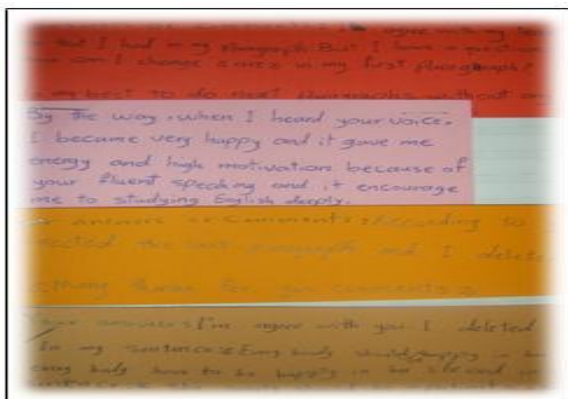**Figure A.1. Generated Data from Meaning Focused Group Compositions**

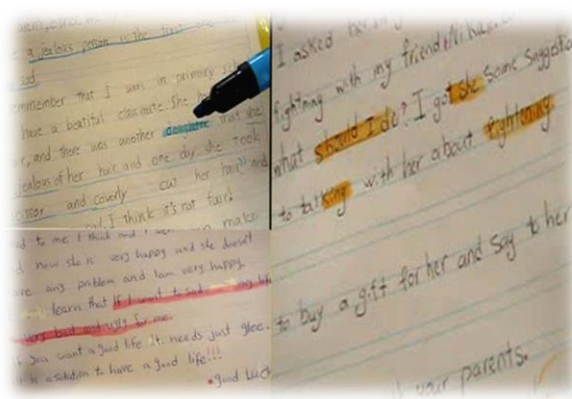**Figure A.2.Sample Colored Paperboards attatched toCompositions**

Figure A.3. Highlights in the Students' Composition Paper

Figure A.4. Generated Data from Control Group Compositions

Appendix B

Table B.1.
Mean Scores of Students' Compositions

Group	Application of Art	The Bulk of Writing	Academic Achievement	Usage of Colored Paperboards
Control	0.50	-0.10	1.80	0.00
Meaning Focused 1st	1.15	0.70	3.50	0.90
Meaning Focused 2nd	0.90	1.80	3.95	0.95
Average	0.85	0.80	3.08	0.62

Table B.2.
 Increase in Motivation through A.V.M. Feedbacks

			Group		Total
			Meaning Focused 1st	Meaning Focused 2nd	
Increase in Motivation to Write through A.V.M. Feedbacks	No	Count	3	2	5
		% within Increase in Motivation to Write through A.V.M. Feedbacks	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%
		% within Group	15.0%	10.0%	12.5%
	Yes	Count	17	18	35
		% within Increase in Motivation to Write through A.V.M. Feedbacks	48.6%	51.4%	100.0%
		% within Group	85.0%	90.0%	87.5%
Total		Count	20	20	40
		% within Increase in Motivation to Write through A.V.M. Feedbacks	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
		% within Group	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table B.3.
 Students' Change of View at the End of Term

			Group			Total
			Control Group	Meaning Focused 1st	Meaning Foucsed 2nd	
Students' Change in View at the End of Term	Better	Count	3	15	19	37
		% within Students' Change in View at the End of Term	8.1%	40.5%	51.4%	100.0%
		% within Group	15.0%	75.0%	95.0%	61.7%
	Worse	Count	7	1	0	8
		% within Students' Change in View at the End of Term	87.5%	12.5%	.0%	100.0%
		% within Group	35.0%	5.0%	.0%	13.3%
	Neutral	Count	10	4	1	15
		% within Students' Change in View at the End of Term	66.7%	26.7%	6.7%	100.0%
		% within Group	50.0%	20.0%	5.0%	25.0%
Total		Count	20	20	20	60
		% within Students' Change in View at the End of Term	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	100.0%
		% within Group	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table B.4.
End of the Term Feedback Preference

			Group		Total
			Meaning Focused 1st	Meaning Foucsed 2nd	
End of the Term Feedback Preference	Audio-Visual Feedback	Count	20	20	40
		% within End of the Term Feedback Preference	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
		% within Group	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	20	20	40
		% within End of the Term Feedback Preference	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
		% within Group	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%