

Asynchronous Online Output Tasks to Increase Student Speaking Time

学生の発言時間を増やすための非同期 オンライン出力学習

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces the transformative potential of asynchronous online output tasks through utilizing self-recorded videos uploaded on Seesaw® Class App, a learning management system. Based upon the initial learning outcomes of these tasks implemented inside and outside of the classroom, their potential to draw out more meaning-focused speaking output is discussed. Administrative and logistic issues are addressed and recommendations on how to better carry out the tasks and prepare for the challenges are presented. The conclusion is that asynchronous online output tasks promise to increase student speaking time even beyond the classroom and are in sync with the practicality of in-class traditional communicative activities.

KEYWORDS: Asynchronous learning, Meaning-focused output, Output tasks, Seesaw®

1. INTRODUCTION

Common experience as a language teacher would indicate that students who are either shy or unmotivated are an ongoing problem during speaking activities. Whether we are a novice or experienced teacher, time and time again, we desire classes where students actively participate and are willing to talk more in classroom discussions. Oftentimes we may carefully prepare speaking tasks in the classroom to elicit meaning-focused output which zeroes in on students' being able to communicate messages to others (Nation, 2013, p. 9). However, more often than not, with students who have low-level speaking proficiency (e.g., A1 to B1 level on the Common European Framework of Reference or CEFR), this may be an ideal that is not practical or easily implementable. A language teacher may utilize pair work, group work, and other methods of group dynamics to engage students in interaction, but students often give trite and short responses to discussion prompts. Finally, during in-class speaking activities, all students may be willing to speak more, but a language teacher can only monitor and guide a few students at a time and thus may miss giving feedback to some.

One strategy that may elicit more speaking opportunities for students is the use of asynchronous (i.e., not-real-time) online speaking tasks (Barbudo, 2019). According to Mayadas (1997), asynchronous tasks use “online learning resources to facilitate information sharing outside the constraints of time and place among a network of people,” (p. 2) or simply put, online activities outside the classroom.

Asynchronous online tasks underscore the importance of output. Comprehensible output hypothesis suggests that students may notice gaps in their language during production tasks and turn to input for the needed linguistic resources to convey their messages (Swain & Lapkin, 1995). While comprehensible input has been recognized as valuable, one cannot discount the role of output in language learning. When a student becomes aware of the gaps in their language, they may be able to rectify their output so that they learn about the language anew. Leading researchers contend that a balanced English curriculum does not just place importance on arbitrary output, but a meaning-focused one. Doing this could make students “speak about things that they know a lot about but which stretch their language knowledge” and that a “quarter of a language course should be spent on it” (Nation, 2013, p. 9). Therefore, output is also as essential as input in increasing opportunities for students to speak and be able to self-assess it.

This paper will introduce the use of Seesaw, a learning management system that contains built-in features such as a video-recording function as a tool to produce meaning-focused output beyond the classroom. A classroom-tested protocol on how to implement meaning-focused output tasks efficiently will be highlighted. If properly conducted by the language teacher, from creating and assigning, to evaluating the speaking tasks, using the Seesaw Class App (web.seesaw.me) could be an extremely convenient and ecological way to increase student speaking time not just during face-to-face teacher-student interaction, but more importantly, outside the four walls of the classroom.

1.1 Selfie-videos for Language Learning

The asynchronous tasks were mainly performed by making selfie-videos. On the whole, selfie-videos can impact the lives of teens enormously (Katz & Crocker, 2015) as young people today normally enjoy creating their own videos and sharing them on social networking sites. Researchers at the University of California, Irvine, found that regularly taking selfies with a smartphone and sharing these with friends, can help make one happier (Solano, 2016). A common agreement among studies on using digital tools in learning, particularly selfie-videos, is that they change the academic environment, both directly and indirectly. As language teachers, we can take advantage of the power of digital tools in helping our students to communicate more.

Not surprisingly, selfie-videos have become extremely widespread recently because both asynchronous and synchronous online modes of communication dominate the lives of today's students (Barbudo, 2019). Content creation platforms such as Dubsplash, Musical.ly, Snapchat, Instagram stories, Facebook Live, Youtube Live, and the Japanese app TikTok, among a plethora of others, have allowed our students today to organically interact in the moment. Based on observable experiences in the English as a lingua franca (ELF) classroom, shy and inexpressive students often reveal their thinking on their own social media platforms because they exercise their agency and thus have a voice and feel

comfortable in their own bubble, unlike being inside the classroom.

The teacher can employ selfie-videos as a powerful digital tool to engage students in articulating their learning in the language classroom. A form of self-presentation action, taking selfie-videos allows one to establish his individuality, self-expression, and interests (Ehlin, 2014) because students can communicate more authentic and spontaneous self-reports. Consequently, when students are involved in creating their knowledge content, they will most likely be more motivated (Bruno, Pisanski, Sorokowska, & Sorokowski, 2018). Creating selfie-videos, as an experiential process, paves the way for students to speak more and enhance their learning.

As video production encourages visual, spatial, audio, and linguistic literacies (Morgan, 2013; Norton & Hathaway, 2010), student-produced videos can also help activate their language skills acquired during the language course (Pearson, 1990). In implementing asynchronous online tasks, we may want to see our students articulating vocabulary already taught previously. Called *productive retrieval*, this means “recalling the spoken or written word a learner wants to produce that could strengthen the form and the meaning” (Nation, 2013, p. 217). Selfie-videos can encourage productive retrieval by giving learners opportunities to recall what they need. When students face a camera, they are compelled to retrieve information and language, thus facilitating language production.

Since seeing oneself in videos is obviously reflective, selfie-videos also aid a student’s metacognition (Solano, 2016). Roughly defined, metacognition refers to a heightened awareness of one's thought processes or the ability to think about his own thinking (Flavell, 1979). When students see themselves in their self-recorded videos, they can scrutinize their thoughts and assess their own learning. Simply put, self-assessment through selfie-videos enhances a student’s reflective practice. A student becomes more engaged because he creates knowledge rather than merely consuming it.

With asynchronous output tasks integrated into the ELF classroom, there should be independent language learning experiences among students. These tasks lead to a student’s second language acquisition while also promoting a learner’s retrieval and retention of information. Consequently, “automaticity in recalling this information could be enhanced, resulting in enhanced fluency” (Ishihara & Cohen, 2014, p. 103).

1.2 Seesaw App

Consistent findings emanate across research on the efficacy of digital tools in the classroom. Learning management systems (LMS) are one such helpful digital resource. Language teachers leverage these digital platforms through smart devices to use, create, manipulate and share information inside and outside the classroom. In a similar manner, today's students use smart devices in class to take notes, access materials and applications, and for finding relevant information. The integration of computer-mediated communication in language education (LMS, in this case,) has long been recognized as a way to develop learner autonomy as it promotes reflective learning (Chang & Sun, 2009) and enhances academic engagement (Sinclair, 2009).

Seesaw, an example of an LMS, is a “new learning environment” the teacher can use to support teaching and learning (Bosch et al., 2017, p. 52). Seesaw is a digital portfolio where teachers and students can see, save, share, and respond to each other’s

work anytime and anywhere as long as they are connected online.



Figure 1. Interface and functions of Seesaw class app

Students can share their work and their classmates can provide encouragement and constructive feedback. They can encourage their peers to do their best work, while language teachers can review any comments before they are posted to ensure that feedback is appropriate.

2. ASYNCHRONOUS TASKS OUTSIDE OF CLASS

2.1 Speaking Journal

Students regularly create short videos about a series of topics within the course to practice independent speaking outside of class. This task promotes speaking fluency and some class-tested examples are “Introduce Your Neighborhood” and “Back-to-University”.

2.2 Share Your Thinking Video

If getting spoken responses is difficult in class, this task can make students open up and share their opinions on numerous topics. Students are encouraged to use vocabulary that they just learned in class. The complexity of this task can be increased by asking them to express their ideas without memorizing or reading a script. Productive retrieval (Nation, 2013) is enforced as students may have the chance to recall previously learned linguistic features such as vocabulary and grammar.

2.3 Ecological Momentary Reflection

The author coined the term ecological momentary reflection (Barbudo, 2019) based on ecological momentary assessment (EMA), an approach widely used in clinical psychology. Interchangeably called experience sampling method, EMA was adopted in this paper as a framework to capture ecological momentary behaviors and states in context which are tracked over a period of time (Moskowitz & Young, 2006).

Students, through videos in asynchronous mode, provide feedback on the course content and instruction with their own learning. When applied appropriately in pedagogical

research, it can be a great method for capturing students' authentic behavior. Students reflect and learn about their own learning weekly, mid-semester, and at the end of the course. Their selfie-videos should be taken in a place where they are filming at the moment to capture more ecological responses (Rose, Sierschynski, Björling, & Elin, 2016), thus promoting more authenticity. In the case of this paper, through asynchronous output tasks, using selfie-videos can elicit student communication that is natural, immediate, and embedded within the lessons. This paper contends that the best reflections are done through speaking ecologically, thereby “momentary” and “ecologically valid,” (Shiffman, Stone, & Hufford, 2008) or within the environment where learning is taking place.

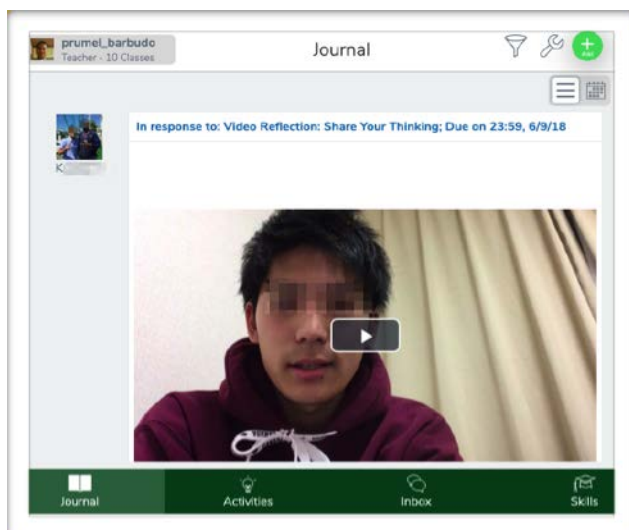


Figure 2. A student shares his thinking asynchronously through an “ecological momentary” self-reflection video

2.4 Process Genre Video

We can supplement our teaching of genre approach in writing through asynchronous selfie-videos. Students can describe a certain process such as how to cook a simple meal by video-recording the real thing. There is so much creativity and authenticity in this task as students actively engage and are thus remarkably motivated.

2.5 Reading Fluency Video

A selfie-video summary of what students have read— be it a page, a scene, a chapter, or a whole book — can give insights on a student’s reading fluency, comprehension, pronunciation, and speaking level. This task could be an extension or an alternative to regular book reports in the Extensive Reading program. Letting the students talk about what they are currently reading would give an instant assessment of not just a student’s metalinguistic knowledge, but more practically, if the student understands his own reading.

2.6 Repeated Dialogic Practice

With purposeful repetition through video-recorded speaking practice, students can be encouraged to explicitly notice their mistakes so they can correct them in succeeding

performances. This task helps student pairs pay attention to the accuracy of their own language. Following the Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990), this paper advocates language noticing as necessary for the acquisition of metalinguistic knowledge.

3. ADMINISTERING THE TASKS

3.1 Getting Started with Seesaw (help.seesaw.me)

A language teacher can first create his own account at app.seesaw.me and then create classes within his account. The next step is to instruct students to sign up using their Seesaw account and join the online class created by the teacher. Next, one should download the Seesaw Class App and select “I’m a teacher.” Then, the teacher can create the class and give it a name and grade level. Seesaw will suggest a sign-in mode for the students based on their grade level.

The teacher must then approve access so the students can use the features of their Seesaw account. Students can sign in two ways: Class “Code Sign In” and “Email Sign In.” For “Class Code Sign In,” the teacher adds students’ names by tapping “+ Students.” Then, a class QR Code can be printed or projected on a screen. Students would have to tap “+ Students” then “Print student sign in.” Students will choose “I’m a student” from the Seesaw Class App, then the blue “scan code” button. Finally, students can scan the class QR code. For “Email Sign In,” students can tap “+ Students,” and then type the class join code, which is automatically generated in the teacher’s account. They will type it in, create student accounts, and then connect to the teacher’s Seesaw class.

It is worthwhile to prepare a preliminary model selfie-video task that students can do inside the class during the first few days of introducing the app to them. This will orient the students with the Seesaw Class App functions. Right from the outset, a teacher may start doing a short self-introduction video together in class to familiarize students with the app. This will somehow decrease the usual awkwardness that students feel when making their own videos. Here, it cannot be emphasized enough to make sure the students understand and know how to get connected in the Seesaw class to avoid major frustrations later.

3.2 How to Create and Assign Activities (help.seesaw.me)

Creating tasks in each class is free and sharing them is easy. Tap the green button, then select the “Browse Activity Library.” Tap the “My Library” tab and “Create New Activity” to make a new activity. The Seesaw Activity Library hosts numerous activities that a teacher can easily customize. To customize an activity prompt made by other teachers, the teacher fills in the details of the task: activity name, student instructions which can include examples and voice instructions, and students tagged to the task. The activity created can be previewed and then the “Share” tab can be tapped next to publish the activity. Students, on the other hand, will tap the “Activities” tab to see new activities.

All student responses and videos will be stored with their names under the activity. The teacher can see who has responded to an activity by tapping the response banner.

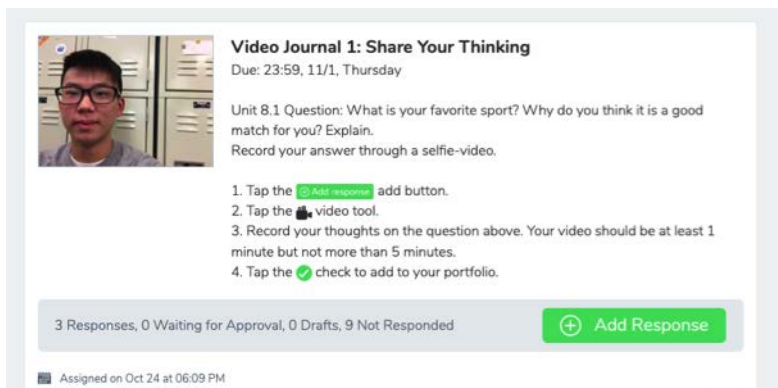


Figure 3. A sample speaking task assigned to the whole class in which students have to respond asynchronously on Seesaw Class App

3.3 Challenges

The first consideration that teachers deal with is the reluctant attitude of the students when they are first instructed to take selfie-videos. To prepare for this, it is strongly recommended that students make short selfie-videos or photographs inside the class during the teacher's orientation of the Seesaw Class App. Although some students can be extremely undemonstrative and timid, a language teacher should first convince students about the importance of seeing oneself when practicing speaking through selfie-videos. The teacher should orient the students well in setting up their Seesaw accounts. The teacher could also spend sufficient class time to help students become familiar with the Seesaw Class App features first before giving any task instructions.

If left unnoticed by the teacher, recording can lead to bias and the students will only report speeches that are somewhat well-prepared and less authentic videos. Some students tend to memorize their spoken reflections, for example. While fluency may be encouraged here, it could lead to rote memorization and not automaticity.

Also, there are ethical and privacy issues abound when using online videos, hence careful reminders and caution should be observed by teachers and students alike. Teachers ought to emphasize that videos should not be downloaded or exported elsewhere, whether online or in other forms of exhibition. As in the case of this paper, the author did not allow students to download the videos but made the videos accessible and viewable on the Seesaw Class App only.

Finally, it would be helpful if teachers remind students to be respectful in giving their comments, as this format could be abused. The primary responsibility of the teacher is to foster positive, constructive comments that could benefit all in the class.

4. INITIAL LEARNING OUTCOMES

Based on the classroom experiences of the author, and self-reports and surveys of students, asynchronous online output tasks were helpful in developing a positive attitude towards lessons. They were also a practical way of practicing individual speaking fluency and vocabulary outside the classroom. These tasks could inform the teacher's pedagogic decisions, especially in formative assessments.

Students reported that the Seesaw Class App was intuitive and similar to their private social media accounts. The commenting feature of the app is a great addition to monitor students' language and interaction. It serves as an informal evaluation tool where the students can receive helpful comments from classmates which benefit both themselves and their peers (Ozogul & Sullivan, 2009). Teacher feedback in the form of likes and comments shows students that someone is appreciating their work. The teacher's comments have demonstrated an increased enthusiasm among students and improved attitudes towards producing more meaningful speaking output.

Having mentioned the learning outcomes, this paper was limited to observational findings. Future studies on speaking fluency and complexity and a more in-depth analysis of the linguistic features of students' discourse should be conducted.

5. CONCLUSION

Increasing opportunities for students to practice comprehensible output can be a challenge for teachers in the classroom. Asynchronous activities introduced in this paper would serve as suggestions to better equip our students with ways to reinforce their communicative skills. Through using Seesaw, students are provided space for immediate feedback from their peers and their teacher. Also, asynchronous tasks promise to increase student speaking time beyond the classroom and may provide teachers a tool to elicit more opportunities for speaking output. Further, asynchronous tasks also boost the student's positive self-image and can pave a way to better language acquisition. While they serve as successful extension activities of the lessons, output tasks are in sync with the practicality of in-class traditional communicative activities.

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