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The Discourse of Written and Audio Feedback

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THE DISCOURSE OF WRITTEN AND AUDIO FEEDBACK

A Thesis

Presented to
The Graduate Faculty
Central Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
English (TESOL)

by
Zachary James Dalton

June 2018
CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Graduate Studies

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ABSTRACT

THE DISCOURSE OF WRITTEN AND AUDIO FEEDBACK

by

Zachary James Dalton

April 2018

Most teachers provide feedback for students daily. Whether it be a word of encouragement or a lengthy written comment in the margin of an essay, feedback is essential in first-year writing courses. This study investigates two distinct types of feedback, audio (a subset of oral feedback) and written (marginal comments and end comments). For this analysis, two instructors produced samples of audio feedback for students in their English 101 class sections (39 students total). The comments were then transcribed and compared with written comments left for the student by the same teacher on the same assignments. Students completed a follow-up survey after their assignments had been returned, thus providing them with time to review feedback before completing the survey. This survey aimed to quantify and qualify the student perception of both audio and written feedback. The questions guiding the research are as follows: (1) How do students perceive audio and written feedback from their teachers on assignments? (2) Do students have different perceptions of audio and written feedback? (3) Are there any specific discourse or register features that distinguish audio feedback from written? (4) Do those features correspond to the types of feedback that students prefer? (5) How do instructors perceive the audio and written feedback they give to their students?

Keywords: audio feedback, written feedback, discourse analysis, register
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>REVIEW OF LITERATURE .......................................................... 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The History of Process Pedagogy and Feedback ......................... 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Written Feedback ................................................................. 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audio Feedback ................................................................. 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Discourse and Register Analysis of Feedback ...................... 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>METHODS OF THE STUDY ............................................................ 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants ................................................................. 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Procedures ................................................................. 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discourse Analyses ............................................................ 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Survey ................................................................. 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructor Interview .......................................................... 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>THE RESULTS ................................................................. 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Perceptions and Preferences of Feedback .................. 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher Perceptions of Feedback ........................................ 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discourse Analyses ............................................................ 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>CONCLUDING REMARKS ............................................................ 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limitations ................................................................. 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implementing Audio Feedback ............................................. 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discourse Findings ........................................................... 47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE OF CONTENTS (CONTINUED)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIXES</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A—Student Survey</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B—Instructor Survey</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student Feedback Preferences ........................................ 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Frequency of Modal Usage in Directives for Instructor A’s Files......... 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Frequency of Modal Usage in Directives for Instructor B’s Files........... 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Average Number of Pronouns per Instructor for Both File Types .......... 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Prevalence of Contractions for Both Instructors for Both File Types ........................................ 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Frequency of Encouragement for Both Instructors for Both File Types ........................................ 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Average Word Count and Audio File Length for Both Instructors .......... 42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

All instructors provide feedback in one form or another. Although some make suggestions during conferences, the vast majority write comments on student papers, whether in the margins, on rubrics, or at the end of the composition. Lindemann (2001) states that the entire purpose of writing comments in response to a student composition is to provide feedback and guide student learning. While traditional feedback is normally envisioned as comments written in the margins of a lengthy composition, along with a final end comment, feedback today exists increasingly in other forms.

Although the medium of student feedback may be changing, the guidelines for the feedback seem to have remained unchanged. As Lindemann (2001) outlines in her book *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*, feedback should only be provided to students “(1) if the comments are focused and (2) if students also have opportunities actively to apply criteria for good writing to their own work” (p. 234). Lindemann warns of the difficulties students may have with vague teacher-centric abbreviations that students most likely will not understand, and she asserts that instructors should focus on the end comments rather than jotting quick notes in the margins. Lindemann concludes by mentioning that instructors should attend to a few important problematic areas within the composition. She advises instructors to avoid marking every error in a piece of student writing, advocating instead for a written dialogue to occur within the comments to encourage student engagement (e.g., asking questions in end comments to elicit further thought or exploration).
Lindemann clearly supports the use of written feedback on student work; however, she acknowledges that written feedback is far from perfect. She explains that students may not understand the feedback that they receive, or novice writers may not know how to incorporate the suggestions from the instructor into their compositions because explanations may be too complicated. In agreement with Lindemann, Ferris and Hedgcock (2013) provide additional suggestions for improving feedback. They explain that feedback should occur throughout the writing process, and they mention that teachers should avoid imperatives and opt for questions instead. They conclude that feedback should not be limited to written comments, and they mention that audio messages can be an effective method of providing feedback to students.

Although many authors mention the usefulness of audio feedback, there are very few guidelines provided within the literature for constructing successful audio messages. Ferris and Hedgcock (2013) mention that audio feedback can be especially helpful to auditory learners, and Bourgault, Mundy, and Joshua (2013) find that audio feedback has an advantage in that students perceive audio feedback in a more positive manner, but they counter this advantage with the caveat that audio feedback requires more effort on the part of the instructor. Additionally, students and teachers must have access to technology that allows for the sending and receiving of audio files.

As online education continues to flourish, and the education system continues to become more decentralized, an online learning management system (LMS) like Canvas or Blackboard has provided new and improved methods for providing audio and written feedback. This technological advance has made audio feedback less cumbersome for instructors and has thus encouraged more instructors to provide feedback orally. Yet,
with the growth of audio feedback, there has been little emphasis placed on the comparison between the discourse and register features of written comments and those of audio comments. Such a comparison could be used to offer guidance to instructors interested in providing audio feedback. In addition, as teachers continue to evolve their teaching strategies, more research needs to be done on how students perceive the use of audio technology. For example, teachers would benefit from knowing whether students appreciate the feedback or find it confusing. In fact, it would be helpful to know if students prefer one type of feedback more than the other.

Regarding discourse and register studies, research by Biber (2006) serves as the foundation for the analyses in this project. Biber explores the complexities of university registers from admissions letters to teacher-student conferences and lectures. His research has revealed that university registers (others would call these genres) vary far more than expected. By analyzing spoken and written registers via a multi-dimensional approach, Biber explains that features like vocabulary, tense and aspect, and syntactic structure have a significant correlation to specific registers in which they appear. Although Biber and others have examined the features typical of many registers, they have not looked at audio and written feedback. This study has been designed, in part, to discover what some of the features are that distinguish audio feedback from written feedback.

Research questions for this project are as follows: (1) How do students perceive audio and written feedback from their teachers on assignments? (2) Do students have different perceptions of audio and written feedback? (3) Are there any specific discourse or register features that distinguish audio feedback from written? (4) Do those features
correspond to the types of feedback that students prefer? (5) How do instructors perceive the audio and written feedback they give to their students?

The next chapter, Chapter II, reviews the literature related to these questions, followed by a methodology section, Chapter III, which describes the participants and explains the procedures used in the study. Chapter IV contains results and discussion of the results; the final section, Chapter V, concludes the project and suggests future research and applications.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter begins with an overview of the history of process pedagogy and its encouragement of written and audio comments to aid students in the revision process. The next section discusses previous research regarding student and teacher perceptions of each feedback type, and the final section investigates the discourse and register features in spoken and written contexts in relation to teacher-student feedback.

The History of Process Pedagogy and Feedback

With the birth and spread of process pedagogy in composition studies between the late 1950s and early 1970s, teachers began to teach writing as a process. New research in the field of composition studies pointed to the importance of a multi-draft pedagogical approach that supported teacher commentary on student papers. Both Hillocks (1982) and Ziv (1984) cite a doctoral dissertation written by Earl Buxton of Stanford University in 1958, in which students were split into three groups over the course of a sixteen-week study.

The first was a control group that did not write, the second group was a writing group, and the third was a writing and revision group that received intensive feedback from instructors on one 500 word essay each week. At the conclusion of the study, Buxton discovered that all of the groups made gains from the pre-test to post-test essays; however, students who had received comments and revised their work were found to produce a final written product that was of significantly better quality than the others (as cited in Hillocks, 1982, and Ziv, 1984). Buxton’s dissertation is one of the first studies of
many to support the establishment of process pedagogy, and more specifically, the use of revision within composition courses.

Consequently, composition classes began to evolve: Students began to produce multiple drafts, and teachers began to read those multiple drafts with revision in mind. The pedagogical goal of instructors turned to the idea of teaching the writing process rather than focusing on a finished product. As Anson (2014) states, “perhaps the most common defining characteristic of the new paradigm [process pedagogy] was a shift from a focus on the product of writing to its process” (p. 215). Larson (1972) explains the results of the shift in further detail:

The characteristics of the finished piece of writing are less important than the processes by which it emerged, the kinds of learning that took place during its composition, the growth that happened in the student as he worked out his piece and in the process came to a better understanding of his world. (p. 54)

At that time, this pedagogical shift from product to process required changes to the composition curricula around the entire country.

To explain these changes, Murray (1972) elaborates on the importance of teaching process and the extent to which teachers must be involved in the process. Murray urges his colleges in composition studies to “respond to [their] students” and focus on the process of writing rather than on the finished product (p. 6). For Murray, process pedagogy consists of three basic stages: The first stage is prewriting, second is writing, and the third is rewriting. Murray explains that a majority of the writing process does not consist of writing. He suggests that roughly 85% of the writing process takes place in the prewriting stage, where students organize thoughts and ideas and begin to compose a first
The second stage consists of the formation of a rough draft, in which students finally compose a written product.

After the first draft is completed, the instructor reads it and introduces commentary or feedback on the condition of the first draft to be applied in subsequent drafts. These comments are then incorporated in the subsequent revisions of the work, leading to a polished and complete final draft. The increased attention to process pedagogy has led to an increased production of teacher comments on student writing.

While the process approach that Murray (1972) explains is widely adopted by most colleges and universities today, it varies largely from composition pedagogies that came before it. Anson (2014) explains that composition pedagogy before the process movement was often completely product based. Students were taught to produce their writing individually with little emphasis placed on the feedback from teachers or peers. As the process movement gained traction, the teaching of composition became a socially dynamic and student-centered effort, rather than teacher-centered.

A strong advocate for the process movement, Elbow (1973) states that the process of writing is a form of discovery. He encourages students to “write it four times, not once, and try to help the piece evolve through these versions” (p. 19). Later, Elbow (1998) clarifies the importance of feedback to this process: Writers require feedback for many reasons, but the type of feedback that a writer requires changes based on the type of work that is in production. According to Elbow, in the case of composition courses, teachers tend to use a criterion-based feedback model. This model encourages students to reference a rubric and focus on specific aspects of a piece of writing that should be improved for a future draft.
Criterion-based feedback is popular among college composition instructors because (1) it is verifiable and (2) it helps teachers focus on specific parts of a student’s writing, rather than on every aspect of the paper. When it comes to grading student compositions, a criterion-based system provides a clear and direct method for assessing the improvement of the students’ writing. Nonetheless, many teachers provide additional comments in the margins of the paper, on the rubric, or at the end of the paper.

**Written Feedback**

While Murray (1972) and Elbow (1998) are clear supporters of teacher-student feedback and the process movement, other prominent figures in the field of composition studies began to publish more on the topic of responding via written feedback. N. Sommers (1982) highlights the necessity of feedback in her seminal article, “Responding to Student Writing”: “As writers we need and want thoughtful commentary to show us when we have communicated our ideas and when not, raising questions from a reader’s point of view that may not have occurred to us as writers” (p. 148). N. Sommers points out the importance of written feedback within the writing process. She concludes that teacher comments should focus on demonstrating a need for revision within a student’s composition and that instructors should be demonstrating through their comments on student work that feedback has led to positive changes in the final draft.

Additionally, N. Sommers (1982, 2006, 2013) describes a “Dear Student” approach to writing end comments, advocating for written feedback to be composed in a conversational tone that encourages the students to engage in the feedback left by the instructor. She explains that the benefits of this approach to feedback may extend beyond the feedback itself. Such an approach may also play a social role in the classroom.
Written comments prompt students to interact with the instructor. The give-and-take of ideas during conversations with the instructor can help students to look at their work through a different lens. For this reason, N. Sommers encourages composition instructors to ask questions within the end comment about the content of the student’s writing. These questions should engage the students in a dialogue about their work and urge critical thinking during the revision process.

To encourage student engagement, instructors try to write comments that have a positive tone yet contain criticism, as well as praise. Ferris (1995) surveyed 155 ESL students about previous feedback that they had received relating to encouragement and praise across a multiple-draft writing assignment. She reported that “the students’ responses indicated how valuable they found positive comments, remembering many specific examples and expressing some bitterness when they felt that they had not received any praise” (p. 46). In fact, when they did receive praise and encouragement, they used these comments for guidance in future drafts. In some cases, Ferris noted that students were able to quote the positive comments that they had received with perfect accuracy. While it is essential to note that ESL students may have different perceptions of feedback due to English proficiency, their responses demonstrate that positive comments tend to be beneficial to student perceptions of feedback.

Because students tend to respond better to positive comments, both N. Sommers (1982) and Lindemann (2001) emphasize that teacher comments should not function to humiliate or discourage students from future growth in their writing. N. Sommers adds that teacher comments are often the only instance within a composition course when true writing instruction occurs, especially when there are time constraints. She mentions that
as class sizes continue to grow, the importance of providing high-quality feedback will continue to increase since instructors are less likely to interact with each student in a face-to-face conference setting. According to N. Sommers (2006), providing students with clear and effective feedback is crucial; she asserts that providing feedback for students is not worth the effort unless the feedback has future application. Within a multi-draft approach, feedback has a specific purpose: Students write and apply the feedback that they have received on past assignments to future drafts.

In accordance with N. Sommers, authors White (2007), Glenn and Goldthwaite (2014), and Connors and Lunsford (1988) all highlight the pedagogical importance of teacher-student feedback with some subtle differences in approach. White agrees with N. Sommers in the sense that comments should contain questions and engage the student in a critical conversation about the text; however, he emphasizes to a larger extent than N. Sommers that instructors may not realize how easily they overwhelm students with too much feedback. He suggests that teachers focus on a few main ideas to incorporate in a future revision rather than overburdening students with marginal comments that may have a less significant effect on the holistic product.

Similarly, Glenn and Goldthwaite (2014) highlight the importance of comments left in the margins of a student’s composition, but they also include some qualifications as to what types of comments should be left for the reader. They suggest that teachers attempt to “balance advice and criticism with praise,” leaving out cryptic abbreviations that might leave the student writer confused about the meaning of the feedback that they have received (p. 133). Glenn and Goldthwaite continue to discuss the importance of posing questions to encourage critical thinking for student writers as well; they mention
that simple questions that request more information, rephrase a student’s ideas, or show empathy for the troubles a student is having with a certain concept can be helpful for stimulating critical revision in later drafts.

After marginal comments, the final written piece of feedback that a student normally receives on a written composition is commonly referred to as the end comment, terminal comment, or general comment. Glenn and Goldthwaite (2014) mention research from Connors and Lunsford’s (1988) study, which surveys feedback that is provided for student writers. Connors and Lunsford indicate that 84% of all teachers place longer comments at the end of a student composition, and they also mention that the length of an end comment should never exceed 200 words and that most end comments rarely are more than 150 words long. While Connors and Lunsford mention quantitative data about teacher-student feedback, Glenn and Goldthwaite conclude that terminal comments “should show students that [the instructor has] read their work carefully, that [the instructor cares] about helping them improve their writing, and that [the instructor knows] enough about the subject to be able to help them effectively” (p. 137).

As mentioned in this section, the importance of written feedback on student composition is clearly an integral part of process pedagogy. While most instructors tend to employ written feedback on student compositions, other forms of feedback, such as audio-recorded feedback, are available to composition instructors as well. N. Sommers (2013) briefly mentions that some instructors opt to record audio messages for students, create podcasts, or even record a screen cast commenting on student work. Similarly, Ferris and Hedgecock (2013) remark that some teachers choose to provide audio
comments on student writing via programs like Microsoft Word or Adobe Acrobat. The effectiveness of such audio feedback on written papers has not been studied in depth.

Audio Feedback

Since the early 1960s, instructors have implemented audio feedback as a means of commenting on the work produced in composition courses (Still, 2006). In a discussion about the strengths of audio feedback, Anson (1997) posits:

[Instructors] should be prepared to use available resources in as educationally rich a way as possible in those situations in which they are most useful and practical. . . . taped response has provided one such way to reach out to students through something more than red marks layered over their own words. (p. 113)

Since many instructors do not have the time to conference with students on a regular basis, Anson explains that audio feedback is one way for teachers to interact with students in a medium that allows for conversational tone and natural interaction; however, he provides no specific guidelines on the structure or form of the feedback.

J. Sommers (1989) explored audio-taped feedback in a case study that he conducted with a single student over a semester of instruction. The student prepared drafts of an essay, and J. Sommers replied to each draft with an audio tape. He believed such research was necessary because written comments often cause misunderstanding and because instructors often do not have time for individual conferences. J. Sommers demonstrates two clear strengths of audio feedback: (1) tape-recorded comments are more understandable and (2) tape-recorded responses foster individualized instruction.

The misunderstanding of written comments has been noted by others. Mellen and Sommers (2003) mention that, at times, students may misinterpret written comments on
their assignments; one example that they mention is a situation where a student misreads *good* as *garb*. The student assumed that the instructor had written *garb* as an abbreviation for the word *garbage*. Such a misinterpretation is a clear illustration of a weakness of written feedback that can be avoided by audio feedback. Instructors are often inundated with large stacks of student compositions; in order to comment appropriately on the work of each student, some instructors may rush the written comments, leaving room for misinterpretation due to poor penmanship or a lack of contextual cues to guide students through the commentary. J. Sommers (1989) suggests that audio comments allow for larger amounts of feedback to be produced in less time than the average written comment, so instructors do not have to rush. An average audio response of about a five-minute duration typically yields a transcription of roughly two double-spaced pages of feedback (J. Sommers, 1989). Klammer (1973) notes that speaking is five times faster than writing, and so the quantity of feedback that could be produced orally is far larger than what most instructors would be able to write for a student over the same amount of time. Klammer suggests that audio commentary may have other time-saving benefits as well: When instructors record audio messages, they may clarify questions that a student has within the conversation of the audio message. Since the student has received clarification via an audio file, he or she is less likely to reach out to instructors outside of the classroom, thus saving time that would normally be spent justifying a written comment or explaining a particular concept.

Moreover, audio responses allow the instructor to explain issues within a student’s work in a more thorough manner: The instructor is able to reference class lectures and the previous works of a student to provide a more comprehensive illustration
of the evaluation of the work (Klammer, 1973). Swan Dagen, Mader, Rinehart, and Ice (2008) suggest that audio feedback provides a richer and more comprehensive commentary of a student’s work from a student’s perspective. Furthermore, they find that audio comments tend to be more descriptive and that instructors perceive that they have produced more feedback than they would have normally produced in writing. Since audio feedback tends to be more detailed, instructors are able to relate the feedback to more global concerns within a paper. Feedback within an audio file often consists of ideas about how the topic of the paper relates to the reader. In a way, the instructor is able to give the student a play-by-play description of how the reader is interpreting the message that is delivered through a piece of work. This explanation of organization, structure, and overall quality can be very helpful for students, and ultimately leads to more positive student perceptions of the feedback provided by the instructor (Swan Dagen et al., 2008).

**Student Perceptions**

In regard to student perception, the research about audio feedback has an overall positive theme, especially when provided in conjunction with written feedback. Oomen-Early, Bold, Wiginton, Gallien, and Anderson (2008) provide evidence for this assertion in their study conducted on the use of audio feedback delivered via MP3 files and Adobe Acrobat Professional. To compare the merits of audio and written feedback, the researchers provided students both types of feedback on their assignments; after they reviewed the feedback, the students were asked to complete a survey. Oomen-Early et al. found that 84.6% of the 156 graduate students claimed to prefer audio feedback and written feedback on assignments; however, 52.6% of the students claimed that they disagreed with the complete replacement of written feedback by audio feedback. Students
perceived written commentary to be superior to audio commentary in terms of grammar instruction and proofreading. Oomen-Early et al. discovered that students valued the audio feedback because it helped them improve their relationships with their instructors. Audio feedback allows instructors to give feedback that is more personal, interactive, and pleasant.

In another comparison of audio and written feedback, Wood, Moskovitz, and Valiga (2011) report the perceptions of 48 students who received audio feedback online in their nursing courses. Of the students, 70% stated that they understood comments left in the audio messages better than those in the written format. Additionally, 67% stated that they felt more involved in the course, and 80% of the students claimed that the audio comments tended to be a personal way of receiving feedback from the instructor.

In a similar study, Bourgault, Mundy, and Joshua (2013) investigated the effectiveness of audio feedback versus written feedback with a sample of eight nurses in an accelerated master’s program. Each nurse received both audio and written feedback once per week for eight weeks, and after the completion of the study, the students completed an exit interview discussing their perceptions and preferences of each feedback type. While the participants confirmed that both types of feedback were important to their success in the program, they mentioned that audio feedback always seemed to be positive and constructive. The nurses all noted that audio feedback was helpful because the instructor was able to clearly and effectively connect the content of the course to the clinical setting in which the nurses were working. The audio commentary allowed for elaboration and explanations that would not be possible through a written modality. Although the nursing students did not receive feedback on written
compositions, these studies conducted by Bourgault et al. and Wood et al. (2011) are particularly interesting because they demonstrate that audio feedback is useful in fields other than composition.

In a more detailed comparison of audio and written feedback, Still (2006) tested the effectiveness of providing audio feedback via the audio-comment feature included in Microsoft Word. Still selected 80 students from four sections of the same technical writing course; he provided feedback on three assignments over the semester. When surveyed as to the quality of the feedback provided in the course, the students responded in an overwhelmingly positive manner. Of the 80 participants, 76 claimed that the combination of audio and written feedback was the preferable way to receive comments on their assignments. In addition, Still surveyed the students as to the technological difficulty of using voice comments. The results indicated that only four of the students cited difficulty accessing the comments after they had been instructed on how to use the program. Still expanded the study to discover what categories of instruction (grammar, formatting, clarity, organization, and tone) were best for each comment type.

The students pointed to the success of audio feedback in all categories, but they overwhelmingly reported that audio feedback was successful for topics like grammar and formatting. This result is much different from the results of previous studies (e.g., Cavanaugh and Song, 2014; Oomen-Early et al., 2008; Swan Dagen et al., 2008). This different result could be attributed to the use of the word-processing program that embeds the comment in context, rather than traditional audio tapes or voice recordings that tend to be provided to students in a separate medium.
Of all the research available, Still’s (2006) work provides the strongest foundation for implementing audio feedback into a course; he explains how instructors can give audio feedback by providing a step-by-step instruction manual for teachers to follow. The training that his article provides for instructors is extremely helpful. While research tends to discuss the merits of audio feedback, little attention has been given to how teachers can implement the practice into their pedagogical approach.

Teacher Perceptions

While student perception of audio feedback is generally positive, teacher perception of audio feedback tends to vary from instructor to instructor. Anson (1997) explains some of the benefits and disadvantages for teachers conducting teacher-student feedback via audio-taped responses. He begins by suggesting that written feedback tends to distance the instructor from the student because, as he claims, “[written feedback] often yields a formal, authoritative, and judgmental style of response” (p.105). Anson perceives audio feedback to be a solution to the shortfalls of written commentary: It provides a tone and interaction that he perceives to be important to the working relationship of teacher and student.

Anson (1997) posits that audio feedback has increased student satisfaction in his courses and that the audio responses provide a more thorough picture of how he has evaluated a student’s work. He perceives audio commentary to be successful when given in response to student rough drafts and earlier assignments in the curriculum. While many of his students disregard written comments on their first drafts, he contends that the final drafts that have previously received audio commentary tend to have the changes that he has suggested in his taped comments. Anson suggests that this level of student
engagement is second only to face-to-face conferences with students; however, since time is a factor for all composition instructors, face-to-face conferences are difficult to manage when an instructor may have over 100 students over a period of instruction. This large student count encourages some instructors to employ audio feedback in order to foster teacher-student dialogue without the hassle of scheduling and attending conferences.

Moreover, Anson believes that not just instructors should compose audio messages; he suggests that teachers assign students to provide audio commentary on final projects to allow for them to explain and contextualize their final products for the instructor. Anson notes that these explanations are of value to the instructor and student because they allow the students to express their thoughts on their own writing, reflecting on the writing process that has functioned to form their final product. For the instructor, messages received from students may function as another technique to evaluate the progress a student has made in critical thinking without being hampered by the mechanical weaknesses that are often observed in beginning writing.

Anson (1997) emphasizes that audio commentary allows for instructors to show students what occurs in the mind of their readers. He mentions that this style of feedback varies substantially from written commentary because it is not simply an instructor searching for errors within a composition; it is a reader (who happens to be the instructor) evaluating and explaining how the piece of work relates to an audience. Anson perceives this reader-based commentary to be one of the strongest benefits of providing audio commentary for students. Even though he describes his positive experience with audio commentary, he mentions that initially audio feedback can be more time consuming than providing the traditional written commentary, an observation also made by Hunt (1989),
Klammer (1973), Medlicott (1980), and Still (2006). Nonetheless, all these authors argue that the time that is required to compose these comments tends to abate over time as instructors streamline the process to fulfill their pedagogical needs.

Hunt (1989) admits that prior to introducing audio commentary to his feedback process, he could grade about six pieces of student work per hour. He spent an average of ten minutes on each student composition: After grading for a couple of hours, he found that he was exhausted and weary. Subsequently, after adopting the use of audio feedback, he was able to provide a larger quantity of feedback per student, increase his grading output to seven papers per hour, grade for a longer period of time because he was no longer hunched over a desk writing comments. Hunt found audio comments to be a major help to him physically because he was able to sit at a comfortable chair and dictate comments about a composition in a relaxed fashion.

Hunt (1989) also discovered that the commentary he provided via audio message was more positive and encouraging. He appreciated being able to explain in a conversational tone the parts of the paper that needed revision. He was even able to soften the disappointment of a failure by explaining to the student that he had experienced similar problems in his own writing and that he continues to have them even later in his career. Hunt believes that while implementing audio commenting can seem daunting in the beginning, the practice provides fruitful feedback that students would most likely have never received just in writing.

Like Hunt, Medlicott (1980) lists many benefits of audio feedback. Early in his career, he noticed that when he would write extensive end comments on student work, some students would skim through the written comments to find the grade on the paper.
Once the grade had been discovered, he found that the students might not return to the paper to check the comments for applications to their future drafts, or the students sometimes discarded the draft in the wastebasket on their way out of the building, essentially erasing any work that the instructor had provided to them. Medlicott asserts that audio comments are not so easy to discard. The conversational tone of audio comments engages and connects with the students in a fashion that written comments do not.

Instructors perceive this connection to be a major advantage because the comments can be replayed and referenced at later times (Medlicott, 1980). However, Klammer (1973) suggests that some instructors may have trouble cutting down the length of the audio comments for their students, which ultimately leads to a major time burden for the teacher. He also mentioned that some instructors may find it odd to dictate feedback into a microphone; others may not understand when to conclude a comment or how to address the students comfortably. Such negative experiences are reported by other researchers and providers of audio feedback.

Most instructors can easily spend 30 minutes talking about a student paper, but this massive amount of feedback may not be in the best interest of the students. Klammer (1973) suggests that teachers have a better experience providing audio feedback if they use the audio message to respond to specific items of a composition like organization and paragraph development. He also claims that the extra time required for the process can be largely streamlined as the instructor continues the process and sets a limit on the amount of time for a message.
Instructors have cited technological issues as another negative aspect of implementing audio commentary into their courses. Since most modern classes have access to online technologies and programs like Microsoft Word, Canvas, Blackboard, and Google Documents, instructors may find it challenging to locate a system that is advantageous for them and their students (Still, 2006). And with readily available technology, technological difficulty may arise. Cavanaugh and Song (2014) refer to technological difficulties as one of the biggest inhibitors to providing audio commentary for instructors. In their study, they gathered information about the preferences of teachers and students in regard to audio feedback. All four of the instructors involved asked for assistance with technical concerns. Three of these instructors were not familiar with how to record MP3 files and send them to their students.

Even though the instructors in the study all reported technological concerns, the students did not report any trouble at all. Once they received the files, they simply had to open the file, and the computer processed the contents automatically. Cavanaugh and Song (2014) mention that training teachers to use the latest audio technology is the best way to avoid technological problems. For this reason, Still (2006) suggests that teachers use programs that already have voice note features within them, rather than attempting to send students the audio messages separate from the assignment document.

In sum, teachers perceive the strongest benefits of audio feedback to be the conversational tone that encourages student engagement and fosters positive teacher-student communication, the increased quantity and quality of feedback, and the decreased mental and physical workload of recording rather than writing the feedback. However, with these benefits come technological problems, an increased time commitment to
student feedback, and the awkwardness of dictating feedback into a microphone. Even though the negative factors of providing audio feedback do pose difficulties for instructors, the advantages of supplementing written feedback with audio feedback are hard to ignore.

As instructors streamline the feedback process, the time required to record audio messages decreases, and the literature demonstrates that teachers who provide audio feedback in their classes perceive an overall positive impact on the quality of work that they receive from their students. These positive perceptions raise the question of whether there are specific discourse and register features that differentiate spoken from written feedback. The discourse and register features that appear in audio and written feedback could play a significant role in the way teachers and students perceive feedback.

The Discourse and Register Analysis of Feedback

Registers are defined by Staples, Egbert, Biber, and Conrad (2015) as the “language varieties associated with a particular configuration of situational characteristics and purposes” (p. 505). Conrad and Biber (2001) state:

Register is used as a cover term for any language variety defined in terms of a particular constellation of situational characteristics. That is, register distinctions are defined in non-linguistic terms, including the speaker’s purpose in communication, the topic, the relationship between speaker and hearer, and the production circumstances. However […] there are usually important linguistic differences across registers that correspond to the differences in situational characteristics.
In many cases, registers are named varieties within a culture, such as novels, biographies, letters, memos, book reviews, editorials, sermons, lectures, and debates. (p. 3)

Staples et al. (2015) explain that registers vary largely from situation to situation; for example, a register like a school newspaper is much different from the register observed when a teacher is conferencing with a student. While both fall under the larger umbrella of university registers, the former is a written register, while the latter is a spoken register. Thus, in the most basic of terms, there are two basic registers, written and spoken. This distinction proves to be an important one in the study of registers in a university setting.

As Biber (2006) concludes in his corpus-based study of spoken and written registers, “the distinction between speech and writing is by far the most important factor in determining the overall patterns of linguistic variation across university registers” (p. 213). While this distinction seems rather obvious, the register that an instructor chooses to employ when providing students with feedback has an effect on the way the message is interpreted and applied to the student composition.

**Written and Spoken Registers**

Written registers differ from spoken registers in that they generally allow for thought and revision; the text is often altered and organized in a coherent and logical manner. One specific register of interest to composition instructors is academic prose because it is the register that instructors intend to teach in most composition courses. Biber (1988) mentions that academic prose contains register features that demonstrably set it apart from spoken registers, such as the prevalence of nouns followed by
prepositional phrases. He further explains that academic prose aims to provide information in a dense and concise way. The use of prepositional phrases functions to provide clear descriptions of concepts and ideas in a relatively condensed fashion.

In addition to the prevalence of nouns followed by prepositional phrases in academic prose, *that*-clauses are also significant. Work done by Staples et al. (2015) demonstrates that the complementizer *that* within *that*-clauses is almost always retained, especially in three situations:

1. When there are conjoined *that*-clauses
   
   He would have argued *that philosophy is nothing but the ancilla of theology and that the principles of Thomas’s *Summa contra Gentiles* are irrefutable for a Christian.* (p. 511)

2. When a passive-voice verb is used in the main clause
   
   *It was found that the rate of atrophy of frog muscles was very sensitive to the environmental conditions.* (p. 512)

3. When there is a noun phrase between the verb in the main clause and the *that* clause.
   
   *I persuaded myself that something awful might happen.* (p. 512)

Staples et al. provide a clear quantitative indication that academic prose differs from conversation.

Written and spoken registers also differ in the way verbs, adverbs, and pronouns are used. For example, in transcripts of service encounters, verbs express required actions as well as the speaker’s attitudes and desires, and first-person and second-person pronouns reflect the interactive nature of service encounters. Verbs in a text book usually
serve to connect long noun phrases, and first-person and second-person pronouns rarely appear (Biber, 2006). However, discourse cannot merely be broken down into spoken and written registers. Classroom teaching is generally considered a spoken register, though when it includes informational lectures, its features are more typical of written registers that are organized.

Staples et al. (2015) note features that distinguish a number of registers, including telephone conversations, face-to-face conversations, personal letters, academic prose, and official documents. They place both registers and features on a continuum to show that certain features correlate with registers (e.g., conversations) that include involvement and interaction while others correlate with registers (e.g., official documents) that are considered informational. Staples et al. show that registers cannot simply be described as written or spoken registers but that levels of involvement must also be taken into account.

There has been no analysis of linguistic features typical of either written feedback or audio feedback provided to college-level writing students. This study, in part, examines examples of both types of feedback in order to determine what their distinctive features are. These features can be discussed in terms of not only written and spoken registers but also registers that are involved and registers that are informational.

**Giving Advice and Direction**

The purpose of feedback is to give advice or to offer instructions. Essentially, instructors provide advice and instructions as a means to encourage students to improve their writing. The form of this feedback is varied. A direct way of advising or instructing is to use the imperative (e.g., *Make sure these are your ideas*). An indirect way is to ask a question that could elicit revision (e.g., *Is this your original idea*?). Both the direct and
indirect form are examples of directives, "whose aim is to get the addressee to do something" (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 29). There is a wide range of directives, including "not just orders, requests, instructions and the like but also advice or merely giving permission" (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 929). Although it may be tempting to equate just imperatives with directives, interrogatives and declaratives may be directives as well. Examples found in Huddleston and Pullum demonstrate the variety of forms directives can take:

- Open the window. (p. 924)
- Let's open the window. (p. 924)
- Why not go to the beach? (p. 906)
- You should go to the beach. (p. 906)

Clearly, directives cannot be defined as having a single form.

Nonetheless, different forms, such as Develop this section, You should develop this section, and Could you develop this section? are not strictly synonymous. Imperatives may be considered "brusque or preemptory, even if . . . modifiers like please and kindly are added" (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 939), so speakers tend to opt for indirect constructions, “making the utterances more tentative and polite” (Oka, 1981, p. 82).

However, form alone does not correlate with politeness. Although interrogative directives are often deemed more polite than imperatives, prosody and the content of the interrogative are factors to consider. Imperatives delivered in a soft voice would be more polite than imperatives or interrogatives delivered in a harsh, mocking, or sarcastic tone.

To show how content affects the perception of politeness, Huddleston and Pullum (2002) compare "Can you move your car?" with "Must you park your car across my driveway?"
and point out that the former would have a better chance of being considered a polite request (p. 939).

Declarative sentences that serve as directives are often indirect. According to Huddleston and Pullum (2002), many indirect declaratives may address "(a) the speaker's wants or needs; (b) the addressee's future actions; (c) deontic necessity" (p. 941). They provide the following examples:

(a) I want / need / would like someone to hold the ladder.

(b) You are going to / will apologize.

(c) You must / have to come now.

Missing from the list is the speaker's perception of the addressee's wants/needs (e.g., You need to develop this section).

To make declaratives more polite, Huddleston and Pullum (2002) believe they need to be combined with an interrogative: "I wonder whether you would mind moving your car a little" (p. 941). This example and the examples in the previous section lead to another topic. Because they all contain modal or modal-like verbs, the role of modality in discourse must also be taken into account.

Larson-Freeman and Celce-Murcia (2016) explain that modals have many different context-dependent meanings and uses and serve complex social functions. They add that modals are often employed in situations where advice or feedback are provided. In some instances, the modal that is selected during an utterance is correlated to the authority a speaker holds in the conversation (Takahashi, 2012). For example, the use of the modal must in a directive sense constructs a sense of authority, while the modal should communicates a softer suggestion rather than an order (Huddleston & Pullum,
2002). The following sentences illustrate the subtle differences in meaning that modal verbs add to an utterance.

1. You **must** include a works-cited page.
2. You **should** include a works-cited page.
3. You **could** include a works-cited page.
4. I **would** include a works-cited page.

Sentence one is not a suggestion; it contains a modal of obligation that communicates a compulsory action. The modal **should** carries a softer meaning. Sentence two is most likely to be interpreted as a speech act of advice rather than an order. The third sentence communicates that including the works-cited page is not compulsory, or that including the works-cited page depends on what the student would like to do. The final example is an abbreviated hypothetical conditional that is quite common in giving advice, direction, or explanation. The hypothetical conditional use of **would** in a sentence such as *I would* leads the listener or reader to infer that the sentence would normally entail the concept of *If I were you*. The hypothetical conditional signals more social distance than the imperative does (Frazier, 2003). Its use may thus be considered more polite than the use of the imperative.

Hudson (1990) provides an alternate way of understanding the use of **I would**. His study explored the discourse of advice given on a radio talk show. After transcribing the responses given to callers on the radio show, Hudson discovered that the advice was seldom given as imperatives and that the radio host tended to shift the agent in the directive responses away from the second person. Instead, the advice was often delivered through an **I would** construction. Hudson asserts that this construction functions as a
“generic agent of the directive” (p. 294), meaning that the advisor tends to avoid the second person in order to de-emphasize the agent (i.e., the advisee) who should be completing the action. For example, the host responded to a caller by stating, “I would put it outside into the shade” instead of you should put it outside in the shade (Hudson, 1990, p. 228). By employing these modal verbs as directives in student feedback, instructors are able to soften or strengthen the advice or instructions that they give to their student writers, thus creating the conversational and interactive approach advocated by N. Sommers (1982), Glenn and Goldthwaite (2014), and Lindemann (2001).

Although it is easy to believe that one's intentions can be clearly communicated to students, instructors have likely experienced their comments being misunderstood. Not only is it possible for students to misunderstand content (recall the student who understood good as garb) but also tone as well. Although there has been research on the ways students perceive written feedback, there are no studies that analyze the types of directives used in written feedback and compare those with the perceptions students have of the feedback. It would be helpful for teachers to know whether the types of directives they use have an impact on the way their feedback is viewed.
CHAPTER III

METHODS OF THE STUDY

This chapter contains a description of the participants taking part in the study and procedures followed during the study. The procedures for the study were reviewed and approved by the Human Subjects Review Council at Central Washington University. Students and instructors were given opportunities to ask questions about the study before it took place, and they were permitted to terminate their participation in the project at any time. Written consent was obtained from all students who took part in the study. Verbal consent was obtained from the instructors.

This multi-phase project first explored the connections between student perception of audio and written feedback. Students received both audio and written comments on an assignment from one of the two instructors participating in the project. After the students reviewed the feedback, they completed a short survey on how they perceived the feedback. The perceptions of audio feedback were then compared to those of written feedback. The next phase consisted of collecting and analyzing the audio and written feedback provided by the two instructors. The analysis of the teachers’ comments was completed by identifying the discourse and register features found in each type of feedback. In the final phase, the two instructors in the study were interviewed to gain their perspective on the effectiveness and manageability of the feedback that they had provided.
Participants

Instructors

Two instructors were selected as participants for this research project. Each instructor taught one section of English 101 at Central Washington University. One of the instructors was female; the other instructor was male. Instructors were selected in this manner to account for any style differences that might be based on gender.

Students

Students were selected randomly for this project because they had enrolled in the designated sections of English 101 without prior knowledge of a research study. All students were required to be at least 18 years of age when the study began so that they could individually provide consent. Each section of English 101 consisted of 25 students; 50 students were eligible to take part in the study. Of the 50 students, 39 provided consent. For this project, demographic information was not collected about the students to ensure privacy of the individuals taking part in the study.

Procedures

This project contained four strata of data. Data were collected in order. First, audio data were collected, next written data were collected, third student surveys were administered, and finally instructor interviews were conducted.

Written Data Collection

Written data were collected from student assignments. The written data consisted of short comments left in the margins, final end comments, and rubric comments. Since
both instructors used online commenting features within the Canvas LMS, the comments were downloaded into Word documents for further reference and analysis.

**Audio Data Collection**

Audio data were collected through a commercial grade microphone, an audio recording program, and Canvas LMS used by instructors at Central Washington University. The audio files were first recorded within the program then sent to students via the secured LMS grading system, and the messages were only available to the researchers, the instructors, and the student who received the specific audio comment. Students were explicitly instructed to listen to the audio comments and read all the written comments provided by the instructor. After the students reviewed the comments, the audio files were transcribed from the original recordings into written form for discourse analysis.

**Discourse Analyses**

Once the audio files were transcribed, two researchers completed a discourse analysis of the audio data. For the audio data, specific discourse features were selected for study, including the average audio file length in words and time, average prevalence of encouragement and praise, average frequency of pronouns, average frequency of contractions, average frequency of imperatives, and the average frequency of modal verbs functioning in directives. These modal verbs include *could, should, would, need* + infinitive, and *want* + infinitive. To account for variance in modal constructions, if an audio file contained one or more examples of the modal of interest, it was counted as positive as long as it appeared in a sentence functioning as a directive. For example, if the file contained the sentence *I would edit this*, that file received a positive score for the
modal *would* functioning as a directive. This process was repeated for each modal of interest. If the file did not have an example of the modal construction used in a directive statement, then that modal was counted as negative. After all the files were examined, the percentage of files with positive examples was computed for each modal type.

For the frequency of contractions and pronouns, each contraction and pronoun was counted in each file; the average number of occurrences of pronouns and contractions was calculated for the instructors individually. Pronouns and contractions were investigated because work by Biber (2006) posited that first- and second-person pronouns and contractions tend to be features of interactive registers. The final item of interest was the prevalence of praise and encouragement within each file type. Positive comments were counted within the audio and written files, and the average was calculated for each instructor.

Like the analysis of the audio data, the analysis of the written comments focused on the use of specific grammatical constructions and features: Researchers analyzed the comments for word length of both marginal comments and end comments, frequency of directive modal verbs, prevalence of contractions, frequency of different pronoun types, and frequency of encouragement and praise. The comments on each assignment were investigated individually, and a table of the data was constructed describing the prevalence of the previously mentioned features.

**Student Survey**

After the students reviewed both forms of feedback from their instructors, they completed a brief survey that inquired about their preferences and perceptions of the feedback that they had received from their instructors. The survey contained one multiple
choice question; this multiple-choice question asked students to select one of the following: (a) audio feedback was helpful, (b) written feedback was helpful, (c) both types of feedback were helpful, (d) neither type of feedback was helpful (see Appendix A). Once the students selected the answer that matched their personal preference, the next four short-answer questions asked them to elaborate on their response. These four questions asked how written and audio comments could be improved, why students found the feedback helpful or unhelpful, and whether they thought that both forms of feedback were necessary. The remaining short-answer questions were considered as qualitative data and introduced to the instructors in the final instructor interview.

**Instructor Interview**

After the completion of the data collection and discourse analysis phases, the instructors were interviewed. Instructors responded to questions about the feedback process and how producing audio and written comments helped or hindered them in their courses. Results of the student survey were disclosed to the instructors, and they were requested to respond to the findings of the survey. In addition, instructors were asked to detail their experiences with the audio feedback process. They were asked to elaborate on the manageability of the audio comments and the technological skills required, as well as their perceptions of the effectiveness of the feedback (see Appendix B). The instructors’ responses were then related to the student perception data.
CHAPTER IV

THE RESULTS

The following chapter includes the results of the study. The results are categorized into three separate sections. The first section discusses the results from the student survey. The second section contains the results of the teacher interview, followed by a final section that presents the findings of the discourse analysis.

**Student Perceptions and Preferences of Feedback**

Student responses to the survey clearly indicated that the students perceived the audio feedback in a generally positive manner. Of the 38 students who took the survey, 10.5% claimed that written feedback was more helpful than audio feedback, while 26.3% felt that audio feedback was more helpful than written, and 63.2% preferred a combination of both audio and written feedback (see Table 1 below). None of the students found either type feedback unhelpful.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Written</th>
<th>Audio</th>
<th>Audio and Written</th>
<th>Neither</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>%</strong></td>
<td><strong>10.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>26.3</strong></td>
<td><strong>63.2</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Later in the survey, students mentioned reasons why they felt one form of feedback was more helpful than the other. Those students who found audio feedback to be more beneficial explained that hearing the comments allowed them to understand the corrections better. In addition, some students claimed to feel more engaged by the audio comments than by the written comments, but they indicated that one weakness of the
audio feedback was that it lacked clear references to specific locations within the assignment. Since the audio comments lacked visual guideposts, many students pointed out that they had difficulty locating the errors that were expressed in the audio files.

The lack of contextual cues within the audio format appeared to be a common concern among the students. One student explained that “both [types of feedback] provided helpful information, but for different reasons. The audio feedback was helpful because it provided more detail than written; however, written was nice because it had the visual element.” The same student later mentioned that “both [written and audio] are necessary; especially when they work together because they expand on regular feedback and answer any questions I usually have about why things were marked off.” This was a common reaction noted within the survey data. Students who preferred written comments cited the lack of clear reference points as the main deciding factor in preferring written feedback. Other students mentioned that while written comments were simple and clear, the audio comments seemed more personal and explanatory, which helped them better understand the written comments.

The survey data concluded that while both types of feedback are beneficial for student understanding, audio feedback did not appear to be a replacement for written comments, but rather a strong supplemental tool. Even though most students perceived the audio feedback in a positive manner, written feedback appeared to serve as a strong foundation for the audio feedback, and the survey results suggested that written comments should not be replaced by only audio comments. While student perception of audio feedback was mostly positive, teacher perceptions of audio feedback seemed mixed.
Teacher Perceptions of Feedback

The instructors perceived audio feedback to have a positive impact on the feedback process; however, they both mentioned that audio feedback had some weaknesses as well. In regard to the positive aspects of audio feedback, both instructors commented that the audio comments were more personal. Instructor A claimed that the students were more engaged with the feedback when it was presented in the audio format and that the audio feedback seemed to be a more polite way to critique student work. Like instructor A, instructor B agreed that the audio format allowed for more elaboration and a conversational tone that may have functioned to better engage the students. In addition, the data clearly demonstrated that the quantity of feedback provided in the audio format was larger than the written format.

Even though both instructors thought that audio comments allowed them to produce more feedback at a faster rate, they commented that using audio comments did not save time. Since the instructors read and provided written comments for each assignment, the audio comments added to the amount of effort required by the instructor. Additionally, the instructors mentioned that the audio files would be quite difficult to compose without a written commentary to follow, and if the instructor misspoke it often times resulted in a second or third attempt at a single file. In a sense, the written comments served as a foundation for the audio data that they provided, and as instructor B mentioned, “the written comments seemed more polished” than the audio files. Both instructors concluded that the audio data would not function well as a singular feedback method: Written feedback functions as a guide for both the students and the instructors because the written comments are clear, easy to revise, and easy to reference.
When asked if either instructor would use audio feedback in their future pedagogical approach to feedback, both instructors explained that audio feedback could be an important tool for students who need extra support. They both claimed that audio feedback might not be a good option for instructors with large class loads or a large numbers of students. In addition, instructor B opined that while the technological difficulties of learning a system and creating audio files abated over time, managing hundreds of files could pose a challenge for instructors. Both instructors confirmed that for audio comments to be effective, the instructor should create a system for recording and storing the files before compiling the files.

**Discourse Analyses**

The results of the discourse analyses demonstrate some clear differences between audio comments and written comments. As illustrated in Tables 2 and 3 below, both instructors used directives containing modals within their instruction. However, instructor A clearly employed different modals dependent on the feedback type. Each column in tables 2 and 3 indicates the percentage of the total files that contained each modal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>% Could</th>
<th>% Should</th>
<th>% Would</th>
<th>% Want + Infinitive</th>
<th>% Need + Infinitive</th>
<th>% Imperative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audio</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As noted in Table 2, instructor A demonstrated a preference for the modals *should* and *would* within the 22 audio files.
It is interesting to note that 86% of the audio files produced by Instructor A contained directives with *would*, while only 23% of the written files contained the same construction. Forty-five percent of the audio files contained an imperative, while 91% of the written files contained some type of imperative construction. In contrast, modal data from instructor B was less variable, as demonstrated by Table 3 below.

Table 3

*Frequency of Modal Usage in Directives for Instructor B’s Files*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>% Could</th>
<th>% Should</th>
<th>% Would</th>
<th>% Want + Infinitive</th>
<th>% Need + Infinitive</th>
<th>% Imperative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audio</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Instructor B had similar modal usage regardless of feedback type; however, like instructor A, instructor B did demonstrate a preference for the imperative form within the written data, with 64% of the written files containing an imperative, while 53% of the audio files contained an imperative construction. Since the audio comments favored modals over imperatives, one could argue that this use of modals had a social function that led to the personal aspect that was mentioned in the student surveys.

Furthermore, the variance in pronoun usage is a clear indication of the interactive nature of audio feedback. As Table 4 illustrates, first- and second-person pronouns were far more common in the audio comments than the written comments.
Table 4

*Average Number of Pronouns per Instructor for Both File Types*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Instructor A</th>
<th>Instructor B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audio</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Biber (2006) explains, first and second-person pronouns as well as contractions (discussed next) are spoken discourse features that function to create interactive and informal discourse. Since the student survey data suggested that students preferred the personal and interactive nature of audio feedback, the usage of first- and second-person pronouns appears to be a clear indication of a difference between written and audio comments. In addition, the increased frequency of first-person pronouns functions to support Hudson (1990), which explains that the usage of first-person pronouns with the modal verb *would* functions to de-emphasize the agent of a directive. Both instructors often used the construction *I would* to avoid emphasizing the students as an agent. This construction serves to create indirect directives via the use of modals like *could* and *would*, which are generally considered to be polite in speech.

The presence of contracted speech in the audio comments also shows a clear difference between written and audio feedback. For both instructors, contractions were used to a far larger extent within the spoken comments (see Table 5 on the next page).
Table 5  
*Prevalence of Contractions for Both Instructors for Both File Types*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Instructor A</th>
<th>Instructor B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audio</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevalence of Contractions</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another difference between audio and written data can be seen in one of the instructor’s responses. Table 6 reveals that instructor A clearly praised students roughly five times more often within the audio data than the written data. For instructor A, audio comments had a positive tone that was not demonstrated as clearly within the written data. For instructor B, praise was equal between both the written and audio data.

Table 6  
*Frequency of Encouragement for Both Instructors for Both File Types*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per File</th>
<th>Instructor A</th>
<th>Instructor B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audio</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Frequency of Encouragement</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, as shown in Table 7, instructor A had an average word count of 366 per audio file, while the average word count for the written files was considerably lower, at 99 words per file. Instructor B also produced a larger word count within the audio data, with an average audio file length of 306 words and an average written file length of 169 words.
Table 7

Average Word Count and Audio File Length for Both Instructors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per File</th>
<th>Instructor A</th>
<th>Instructor B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audio</td>
<td>Written</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Word Count</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Time</td>
<td>2:37</td>
<td>2:12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In accordance with the previously mentioned teacher perceptions, these data suggest that the audio format produced a larger quantity of feedback. The average time per audio file for instructor A was 2:37, while instructor B had an average file length of 2:12 seconds. These findings are consistent with the work done by Still (2006) and Klammer (1973) that suggests that audio comments allow instructors to produce a larger quantity of feedback in less time than traditional written comments.

Overall, these data suggest that audio and written comments often have distinctive discourse features. Within the data, written comments had a larger prevalence of the imperative form and tended to be shorter in terms of word count. Audio comments were highly interactive and contained many indirect directives that materialized through modal verbs like *should*, *would*, and *could*. In addition, contractions were a clear indication of variation between the two feedback types: The audio comments contained contractions while, in contrast, contractions were nearly non-existent in the written data. These features point to the assertion that audio feedback is an interactive, personal, and engaging form of feedback that many students perceived in a positive manner. However, the written comments, though shorter and less interactive, appeared to be incredibly
important to the feedback process since they served as a foundation on which the audio comments were constructed.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter discusses the applications of the results and the limitations of the methods of this study. It explains how the results of this project relate to the outcomes of previous studies, and finally it provides suggestions for instructors who intend to implement audio feedback into their pedagogical approach.

**Limitations**

The difference in the pedagogical style of the two instructors sometimes made it difficult to compare data. Each instructor had a style that clearly influenced the data. For example, the prevalence of written encouragement may have differed in part because the type of feedback each provided differed. Since instructor B provided marginal comments, end comments, and comments on a rubric, there was variation in the types of comments that the students for instructor B received. In contrast, instructor A included marginal comments for all students but tailored end comments to fit the needs of each student. This created inconsistencies in the types of written comments that each student received. Additionally, Instructor B had technical difficulties providing written comments on two assignments.

Since the instructors knew that they were taking part in a study, their audio and written comments may have been altered because they were aware that researchers would investigate the data later. In addition, the students were explicitly instructed to read and listen to all feedback provided for the assignment to ensure accurate responses to the student survey. This may have affected the data because some students may not have
referred to the feedback without explicit instruction, which would have changed the results of the student perception survey.

**Implementing Audio Feedback**

Since the shift from product-based writing instruction to process-based writing instruction, feedback has been an integral part of the multi-draft writing process. Work from N. Sommers (1982), Ferris (1995), Lindemann (2001), Ferris and Hedgcock (2013), and Glenn and Goldthwaite (2014) supports the assertion that feedback should function to encourage, engage, and challenge writers within each step of the writing process. The results of this project suggest that the conversational tone of audio feedback functions to encourage and engage students in ways that written commentary may not achieve. Like Still (2006) and Klammer (1973), this project proposes that audio feedback allows instructors to produce a larger quantity of feedback in a relatively short amount of time; however, the student surveys clearly demonstrated that audio feedback is not a viable replacement for written feedback, but it is rather a supplemental option for instructors who wish to enhance the feedback that they provide to their students.

Supporting the conclusions of Bourgault et al. (2013), the results of this study show that a clear majority of the students believed that audio feedback had a positive impact on the feedback process; however, these students noted that audio comments lacked clear references and guideposts within the assignment. The students struggled to find the specific locations that the teacher referred to in the audio comments. This finding demonstrates that audio comments are dependent on context cues that can be found within the written comments left by the instructor. The two forms of feedback appear to be interconnected to a further extent than one might have previously believed.
Work by Friederich (2018) poses a solution to the possible weaknesses of audio feedback; he suggests that instructors provide feedback to students via videocasts by using programs that allow teachers to create a video of the feedback process. Friederich explains that videocasts have allowed him to communicate clearly with learners by including the features of audio comments that students prefer such as a conversational and interactional tone while still allowing for written commentary as well. In addition, he has surveyed students and found that many of them have positive perceptions of this approach.

Videocasting appears to be a viable solution to the difficulties that students encountered with audio feedback, and further study regarding the student perceptions of videocasts seems to be a logical expansion of this study. Furthermore, having a visual element may also affect the discourse features within the videocasts, so a discourse analysis similar to the one that was used in this study could potentially uncover other discourse and register features that set videocasts apart from other feedback types.

For instructors who wish to implement audio feedback, the results of this project provide insight in the implementation process. Instructors should note that the written comments should function as referents for the audio comments. In addition, instructors should explicitly refer to the written comments and the location of the comments within the student composition. These references alleviate some of the confusion for the students. In addition, technological difficulties of audio feedback were noted by both instructors. It is important to find a program and to invest the time into learning the recording and editing features of that program. Since every product is different, instructors should find a program that works for them and focus on perfecting a work-
flow process within that program. In the beginning, audio commentary can be challenging, but instructors should note that the difficulties will abate over time as the process is streamlined.

In terms of suggestions for LMS providers, a comprehensive sound editing program that is linked to the LMS would be the most beneficial system for instructors. If the sound editing tools are built into the LMS, then instructors are able to mitigate issues with file management and student privacy concerns. While most LMSs have options for providing audio feedback, the attachments often still require file management, or they simply do not contain features that allow for the editing and manipulation of the audio data. For videocasting, most LMSs systems have a video-recording feature that is similar to audio recording, but they generally do not contain editing capabilities. Instructors interested in videocasting may want to implement a supplemental program like Panopto, which pairs well with most LMSs to allow for the production and storage of sophisticated videocasts.

**Discourse Findings**

The findings of the discourse analyses illuminated that audio comments contain features that set them apart from written comments. The prevalence of contractions, first- and second-person pronouns, and the de-emphasis of the agent observed in modals used in directives support the assertion that audio comments contain discourse features that are considered to be interactive and conversational. When these data are compared with the student survey data, there is a clear correlation between student satisfaction and these discourse features.
One unexpected result was the prevalence of imperatives in the audio files. Work by Ferris and Hedgecock (2013) suggests that instructors should avoid the use of imperatives when constructing feedback. This project found that the use of imperatives was still common in the audio comments and that imperatives served to clearly indicate encouragement and criticism. Even though the prevalence of imperatives was lower in the audio data, it appears that avoiding imperatives may not be as crucial as other factors like tone, style, and intention.

While these features clearly lend themselves to teacher-student interaction, there is one final observation that caught the attention of the instructors and the researchers. It appeared that while students had positive perceptions of the feedback that they received in their courses, it may not necessarily be the feedback type that fosters positive student perceptions as much as the thought and effort that goes into creating the feedback. Students acknowledged the extra effort that their instructors had invested into the feedback process, and for this reason, it may be argued that students appreciate both audio and written feedback because they recognize the dedication that it took to provide it.

Clearly, feedback is a foundational element of the learning process, especially in a multiple-draft process approach. While both audio and written feedback are differentiated by many features, it cannot be conclusively stated that one feedback type is superior to the other. They seem to function in unique ways to improve student writing. As online learning becomes more ubiquitous and classroom sizes continue to increase, instructors will be faced with the challenge of providing extensive meaningful feedback. The
integration of audio comments into the feedback process can enhance the written feedback that students receive.
REFERENCES


53
APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

The Student Survey

1. In this course, you were provided with two types of feedback on your papers: written and audio. Please circle one:

   A. Written feedback was more helpful than audio feedback.
   B. Audio feedback was more helpful than written feedback.
   C. Both types of feedback were equally helpful.
   D. Neither type of feedback was helpful.

2. Explain why you felt one type of feedback was more helpful or why both types of feedback were helpful or not helpful.

3. How do you think audio comments could be improved?

4. How do you think written comments could be improved?

5. If you found feedback helpful, would you prefer to receive only one type of feedback or do you think both are necessary? Please explain your answer.
APPENDIX B

The Teacher Survey

1. What aspects of Audio Feedback did you like or dislike?

2. How do you believe the students perceived the feedback?

3. What do you perceive to be the strengths and weaknesses of audio and written feedback?

4. Was there any technical difficulty involved in the process for you? Did these difficulties abate over time?

5. Do you believe that the extra time spent on the audio feedback saved you time in the long run?

6. Would you consider employing audio comments for future assignments?

7. What are your final perceptions of audio and written comments?