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# Audio Tours of Fish: Angling for an Effective Mediated Speech

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## Limitations and Future Research

Charles Horton Cooley (1902), a sociologist who wanted to better understand society and human behavior believed that the influence of groups within a society had a strong impact on human behavior, was of the view that the ideal society must be an organic whole. When he speaks of society as an organism, he does not want to make an analogy with biology in the manner of Spencer (1892), who compares society to a living organism, but rather he stresses the systemic interrelations between all social processes.

Family Dinner Night, through the systemic interrelations of its participants, has evolved. When the dinners first began, my partner, Steve, and I hosted every Wednesday night for 18 months. Then another couple asked to host one Wednesday a month. Steve and I continued to host all the other dinners, except for the one-week reprieve we received, for another six months. Then two other couples began hosting. We rotated between the four houses every month with a volunteer hosting the occasional fifth Wednesday of the month. This rotation sustained the longevity of the dinners for over a decade.

Today the dinners have become such an intrinsic part of the neighborhood that they are now hosted by so many individuals that there is no longer a need for the rotation of four homes. Instead, a private Facebook page has a monthly notification of who is hosting that month along with the host(s) name and address making family dinner a living and evolving 'thing'. 'If . . . we say that society is an organism, we mean . . . that it is a complex of forms of processes each of which is living and growing by interaction with the others, the whole being so unified that what takes place in one part affects all the rest. It is a vast tissue of reciprocal activity' (Coser, 1977, p. 307). Family dinner has evolved into this living organism of which Coser speaks. There is one change taking place that may or may not have an afect on the continuation of family dinner. It's founders, myself and Steve Johns, are moving to Washington. It is about as far away a move as we can make and still be in the continental United States of America.

I want to believe that the organic development of how the dinners are hosted show that the tradition of a weekly dinner with neighbors has become so engrained into the fabric of the neighborhood that it continues for another 16 years. However, the more adament supporters from the initial beginnings of the dinners have also moved out of the neighborhood. While I still believe that the communion of a meal builds those bonds and creates a family like attachment for many, I can only identify one couple that I think would make the concerted effort to keep the dinners a focus of the neighborhood. One family started the dinners; can one family be the transition for the next sixteen years?

## Pedagogy

### Audio Tours of Fish: Angling for an Effective Mediated Speech

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Public speaking is a course required in many degree programs traditionally taught in a face to face setting. Online and hybrid courses are now offered by many institutions in addition to traditional courses, and they are more likely to include mediated speech assignments. Mediated speaking situations include webinars, videoconferences, video recordings of speeches on DVD or YouTube, and other options that students may well find themselves using in their personal and professional communication. Online and some hybrid courses assign mediated speaking situations for the submission of speeches, not as a genre unto itself. In traditional face to face public speaking courses, mediated speeches are less common. Because the applications for mediated speeches are increasing, this paper presents a process used in a mediated speech assignment to attempt to increase student learning as defined by some of the student learning outcomes in the course.

### Literature Review

Linardopoulos (2010) surveyed students in online public speaking courses and found 80% of the students felt the delivery and knowledge acquisition skills from the online format were as effective as a traditional classroom format. In addition, 58% reported that their public speaking skills improved the same amount as they would have in a face to face course and 22% reported their skills improved more than they would have in a face to face course. Prelip (2010) compared delivery scores of students in hybrid courses with students in face-to-face public speaking courses and found overall no significant differences in the overall scores. Upon closer examination the author found differences in "organizational pattern, main points, transitions, support material/evidence, visual aids, verbal quality, and facial qualities" between speeches in the two course types, but no significant differences in "attention step/ credibility, central idea/preview, time, reasoning, dynamics, vocal quality, body qualities, and conclusion."

The question arises as to how to use mediated speeches in an effective manner to address student learning outcomes, particularly in terms of audience. Tolman (2012) reported results of a content analysis of 44 course syllabi used in online public speaking courses. Only 26 syllabi included a

statement about audience requirements, and those requirements varied. Fourteen syllabi included no statement about audience requirements. Newbolt (2012) noted the roles and relationship of "audience" and "feedback" change in mediated speaking situations, arguing for more attention to these situations, to audience, and to feedback. The present paper offers a framework that highlights both audience analysis and feedback in a mediated speech assignment in a face to face speech course.

## Project Background

A service-learning project required students to record a speech (audio tour) for a virtual audience. Service-learning projects in a speech course provide an authentic assessment (Mueller, 2005). The students present to a different audience than they would in the classroom, which provides a rich opportunity to apply audience analysis. The ongoing service-learning project in the present paper involved three collaborators. The first collaborator, the community partner, is a biologist who oversaw this project for a natural history museum located in the Midwest. The second collaborator is an associate director with the Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence on the campus where the course was taught. The third collaborator is the faculty member.

During the spring of 2016, 70 students were enrolled in speech classes in which they created audio tours of fish specimen for a natural history museum. Content for the audio tours included identifying the assigned specimen using the common name and genus and species names, describing the appearance, type, and habitat of the fish, explaining the biomechanics of swimming in general and the specific biomechanics of their assigned specimen, and applying of the biomechanics to robotics or aeronautics. Multiple citations were required. Students were also asked to include sound files to make the tours more engaging.

The community partner requested that students participating in the service-learning activities create audio tours on biomechanics of select species found in the museum. The objective of creating digital content, in this case digital audio tours was to increase the museum's reach in the mostly rural region it serves. Once completed, the digital tours were posted on the museum's Facebook page and linked to specimens on display so that museum visitors cold listen to additional information while viewing exhibits. Additionally, posting the tours on social media sites allowed content to reach people who were not able to visit the museum. The ERAU student participants created content that was interesting and informative and the enthusiasm for biomechanics and for learning a new topic in natural history is evident in many of the tours. The addition of sound files for many of the tours made them more engaging.

### The Course

The course was a 200-level speech course required for students in most majors. The required assignment was designed to help students realize some of the student learning outcomes of the course. The relevant student learning outcomes relevant to audience, feedback, and confidence used in this analysis are listed below:

2. Demonstrate the ability to conduct and report research in accordance with professional standards
3. Demonstrate the ability to speak to multiple audiences for multiple purposes
4. Demonstrate competency and confidence in informative and persuasive speaking
9. Demonstrate presentational abilities, with emphasis on the following:
10. Maintain clear articulation, vocal variety and expressiveness, as well as offer effective pauses without using disfluencies (uh, and uh, like, okay)

### The Students

The students enrolled in the course can be described through major, gender, and year in school. The University has four colleges and Table 1 shows the breakdowns of students with majors within each college indicates nearly just over 3/4s were engineering or aviation majors. Table 2 shows the breakdown by gender, which is representative of the university's student population. Table 3 indicates the breakdown of students by year in school.

Table 1   Student Description by Major

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Engineering Undergraduate - | 27 | 38.6% |
| Aviation Undergraduate - | 26 | 37.1% |
| Arts & Sciences Undergraduate - | 12 | 17.1% |
| Business Undergraduate - | 5 | 7.1% |

Table 2: Student Description by Gender

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Female | 16 | 22.9% |
| Male | 54 | 77.1% |

Table 3: Student Description by Year in School

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Freshman | 13 | 18.6% |
| Sophomore | 23 | 32.9% |
| Junior | 17 | 24.3% |
| Senior | 17 | 24.3% |

### Methods

**Instructions and Draft Manuscript.** The background, purpose, and assignment were presented to students including specific instructions

about what to include in their audio tours. Students heard an audio file from a previous semester that was similar to what they would create. A written assignment with a bibliography of sources was posted in the learning management system. Students were assigned a specimen. They were asked to write draft manuscripts which were reviewed by the museum personnel, who provided written comments.

**Rehearsal.** After submitting their draft manuscripts students rehearsed in small groups during class time. Each person in the small group had a role. One student timed the speech, two students were given lists of the content required in the audio files and they checked off the items to give feedback on what was missing or was not clearly covered. Two other students listened for delivery elements and content that would make the speech engaging for the audience. One student observed vocal variety only using software that gave a visual indication of pitch. The visual display was projected behind the speaker. The student paying attention to the screen gave feedback on total range used and whether the delivery was monotonic in parts, and if so identified those parts. Each of the students gave individual feedback based on what they were listening for and the instructor also gave feedback to each speaker.

**Putting it All Together.** Having received feedback from the community partner, classmates and the faculty member, the students finalized their manuscripts and recorded their voices. They were encouraged to go to the Digital Studio on campus to edit their recordings of the manuscripts to edit their audio files and add in sounds. Students submitted audio files and final manuscripts to the museum. The final audio tours were evaluated by museum personnel and the faculty member. The museum personnel decided which tours they would accept, which would possibly be included, and which they would not accept. Students wrote a reflective paper after the audio tours were submitted, but before the tours were graded. The students also completed a self-report survey at the beginning and end of the semester evaluating their skills.

## Results

Sixty-six students submitted audio tours evaluated by the museum. Nearly a third (21) of the audio tours were accepted by the museum. About 38% (26) of the audio files were not accepted. Twenty-nine percent (19) were considered as maybe, meaning they could possibly be accepted, usually with revisions.

The project was evaluated based on the student learning outcomes using three sources. The first source was audio tour evaluations by museum personnel and the faculty member. The second source included results from the student skill survey administered at the beginning and the end of the semester. The third source included responses written by students in the reflec-

tive papers written about the assignment. Findings are presented from the relevant source for each student learning outcome.

### Demonstrate the Ability to Conduct and Report Research in Accordance with Professional Standards

Correct citation of sources was one of the criteria used in evaluating the audio tours. All students cited sources, but not all cited the sources correctly. Seventy-five percent of the students correctly cited sources in the audio tours. The twenty-five percent who did not correctly cite sources made errors such as using the name of the institution (Virginia Cooperative Extension) sponsoring the publication rather than the names of the authors.

The student skill survey included items related to research. Responses from the Spring 2016 semester were compared with combined responses from Fall 2014, Spring 2015, and Fall 2015, in which students completed similar projects for the museum. While all students perceived their citation skills increased during the course, the amount of the increase was lower for the spring 2016 group.

Table 4 Comparison of Student Skill Survey Responses to Research Citation Item

| Cite sources appropriately | |
|---|---|
| Combined (2014 & 2015) Posttest Ave | 4.27 |
| Combined (2014 & 2015) Pretest Ave | 3.55 |
| Combined (2014 & 2015) Difference | **0.72** |
| | |
| Spring 2016 Posttest Ave | 4.18 |
| Spring 2016 Pretest Ave | 3.71 |
| Spring 2016 Difference | 0.47 |

Student reflection prompts did not ask directly about citation of sources.

### 3. Demonstrate the ability to speak to multiple audiences for multiple purposes

Effective audience analysis is an important skill in public speaking. The item most directly related to audience analysis that was evaluated by the museum was "Create a tour that is easy to understand and informative." The item was rated from 0 to 4, with zero being low. The average of the scored tours that were chosen was 2.98, for tours in the maybe category the average was 2.71 and for the tours not accepted the average was 2.19. These results indicate that audience analysis was a factor in the selection process.

The student skill survey responses present a somewhat consistent picture. Table 4 shows that during the three previous semesters students reported a higher increase in their skills relative to selecting appropriate language. However, during the spring of 2016 students reported a greater increase in their skills related to adapting their speech to the audience.

Table 4: Changes in Student Skill Survey Responses related to Audience Analysis

|  | Select language appropriately | Adapt speech to audience |
|---|---|---|
| Combined (2014 & 2015)  Posttest Average | 4.42 | 4.32 |
| Combined (2014 & 2015)  Pretest Average | 3.72 | 3.21 |
| Combined (2014 & 2015)  Difference | **0.7** | 1.11 |
|  |  |  |
| Spring 2016 Posttest Average | 4.50 | 4.21 |
| Spring 2016 Pretest Average | 3.88 | 2.94 |
| Spring 2016 Difference | 0.62 | **1.26** |

Students identified the importance of audience analysis in response to the reflective prompts. Statements such as, "*Overall, this experience emphasized the importance of keeping your audience in mind at all times*," and "*I had to employ what I'd learned about audience analysis in a big way*," were illustrative responses.

## 4. Demonstrate competency and confidence in informative and persuasive speaking

The community partner did not evaluate confidence directly. The students responded to an item about confidence in the student skill survey (Table 5).

Table 5: Changes in Student Skill Survey Responses related to Confidence

|  | Speak confidently |
|---|---|
| Combined (2014 & 2015)  Posttest Average | 4.37 |
| Combined (2014 & 2015)  Pretest Average | 3.34 |
| Combined (2014 & 2015)  Difference | 1.03 |
|  |  |
| Spring 2016 Posttest Average | 4.35 |
| Spring 2016 Pretest Average | 2.97 |
| Spring 2016 Difference | **1.38** |

Student reflections on confidence generally included explanations such as these two statements.

> "*I discovered that making an audio tour is not easy and requires a lot of research. Another discovery is, creating a manuscript is considered a good tool to plan for a speech. Reading a manuscript to make a tour is a new skill that I learned and I felt confident doing it. One of my biggest concerns was to not be able to deliver a clear speech because of the difficult pronunciation of some words. I learned that I could view my vocal diversity and do some editing through using technology.*"

> "*I have found myself as a good planner for the project, and being more confident as I gather and learn more information about the fish. As I was doing more research on the fish, I became more knowledgeable of the fish, which makes me easier to organize information into the script. Also, as I practiced the presentation more and more, I became more confident to myself which helped me to deliver more clearly to the audience in pronunciation.*"

Some students commented they felt more confident using technology, while other students felt less confident using technology to deliver a speech. Some people gained confidence in both the mediated and face to face settings as indicated by this student's comment,

> *Even though I was not very interested in fish before this project, the tools needed to have a successful audio-tour and good grade, resulted with me learning a lot about my ability to present a speech of researched material and becoming more confident in my public speaking abilities. Being forced to make a speech about a subject matter I was unfamiliar and uninterested in taught me how to better prepare for giving a speech. After this portion was accomplished successfully, I felt much more confident using the technology to record my speech.*

9. Demonstrate presentational abilities, with emphasis on the following:

- Maintain clear articulation, vocal variety and expressiveness, as well as offer effective pauses without using disfluencies (uh, and uh, like, okay)

Tour evaluations from the Museum included the item, "Appropriate volume, rate, pitch, fluency, articulation and tone." Using a scale of 0-4, the average rating for selected tours was 2.60, the average for tours in the maybe category was 2.39, and the average for tours that were not selected was 1.96. The student skill surveys indicate students perceived improvements, especially so in the areas of using vocal variety, articulating clearly, and using creativity in delivery (Table 6.)

Table 6: Changes in Student Skill Survey Responses related to Delivery Skills

| | Use vocal variety | Articulate clearly | Speak dynamically | Use creativity in delivery | Incorporate critiques |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Combined (2014 & 2015) Posttest Average | 4.1 | 4.11 | 4.16 | 4.19 | 4.45 |
| Combined (2014 & 2015) Pretest Average | 3.14 | 3.25 | 3.09 | 3.05 | 3.66 |
| Combined (2014 & 2015) Difference | 0.96 | 0.86 | 1.07 | 1.13 | 0.8 |
| | | | | | |
| Spring 2016 Posttest Average | 4.32 | 4.36 | 4.06 | 4.12 | 4.44 |
| Spring 2016 Pretest Average | 3.00 | 3.09 | 2.97 | 2.88 | 3.74 |
| Spring 2016 Difference | **1.32** | **1.28** | 1.09 | **1.24** | 0.71 |

Reflections from students indicated that practice and technology using technology both helped students with delivery.

*The delivery is the most critical point for me because I was never good at standing up in front of an audience, and I wasn't very confident. However, the professor taught ... how to be more confident before the audience ...rehearsals make a better speech because you can see your speech from different angles from the different feedback.*

*I learned that recording a speech and reading off of a manuscript is much more difficult than it seems. It was extremely difficult to keep enthusiasm, tone variation, and deliberation in my delivery over four minutes with no audience in front of me. It didn't help that I kept messing up and had to re-record a lot of times. I also learned how to use the audio editing technology in our digital studio and it was extremely helpful. It allowed me to piece together different parts of my recordings, so that I didn't have to get one perfect take and could take the sum of parts and make it greater as a whole.*

## Lessons Learned

Overall, mediated speeches created for a service-learning project in a traditional speech course contributed to students achieving the student learning outcomes. The reasons for the effectiveness likely included feedback. Feedback from the community partner helped students develop content, while feedback from peers in a small group setting seemed to make a difference in several ways. First, students heard their peers' performances, and several students made adaptations based on what they found engaging and effective in those presentations. Second, the visual display of vocal variety provided students with an objective way to give feedback on range and patterns. Third, we learned feedback must be specific. The feedback given for citation errors was not effective. Editing audio files also seemed to help students select the take or segments they wanted to submit. Students generally seemed to find the assignment meaningful and the opportunity to present to a broad audience is sincerely appreciated and will be continued.

The assignment worked in many ways thanks to an involved community partner, support from the center for Teaching and Learning Excellence, and student interest. The plan based on lessons learned is to develop materials to clarify and reinforce how to correctly cite sources, assign points for the draft manuscript which will be submitted using a plagiarism service, and instruct students during rehearsals to listen for correct citations. The rehearsals will be conducted in a similiar manner.

The goal of the course is for students to learn how to speak publicly. The draft manuscript helped students learn the importance of audience-based, well-documented content written clearly, concisely, and correctly. The rehearsals helped students learn creative ways to express ideas through hearing peer presentations. The visual feedback used during rehearsals helped students perceive the value of vocal variety and how to use more variety. The rehearsal feedback gave students information about elements of the assignment that were unclear or that they may have missed, and they had the opportunity to revise their manuscripts. The process of recording speeches and editing the files gave students the opportunity to hear themselves and to make adjustments, so they were satisfied with the final product. For this mediated speech assignment, students demonstrated audience adaptation through their content and their delivery and they seemed to appreciate and benefit from feedback.

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## Pedagogy

## The Effect Threat Mitigation in Online Instructor Feedback on Student Perceptions of Mentoring Behavior

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### Abstract

*Students who report having had an enthusiastic faculty mentor during their university years are more engaged in their careers and thrive better in their jobs. Yet providing this type of mentoring is challenging as more and more students enroll in online courses. This study examined the role of face threat mitigation in online feedback as a means of evoking a sense of mentorship in online courses. We randomly assigned 71 undergraduate students to read an instructor email providing feedback with either high or low face threat mitigation. Students in the high face threat mitigation condition reported a higher sense of mentoring even after controlling for overall feedback orientation.*

### Introduction

Students who report having had an enthusiastic faculty mentor during their university years are more engaged in their careers and thrive better in their jobs (Gallup, 2014). Yet providing this type of mentoring is challenging as more and more students enroll in online courses (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Online courses do not allow for face-to-face discussions in class, or with students during office hours. Without the physical presence of instructors, available communication channels must be maximized to provide students with this type of critical guidance. One area in which instructors can contribute toward a positive online learning experience and promote a sense of mentoring is through the type of feedback they offer. This study examined the role of face threat mitigation in online feedback as a means of evoking a sense of mentorship.

### Literature Review

The benefits of mentoring for university students are long lasting. A nationwide sample of 30,000 college graduates concluded that employed graduates who had an enthusiastic mentor throughout the education process were twice as more engaged in their current jobs. In addition, graduates who