



CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH
Language Assessment
Part of the University of Cambridge

The role of automatic writing assessment in providing diagnostic feedback to learners

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TCCRISLS, NY 12 October 2014





Gathering the evidence in LOA

- Digital technology provides an unlimited range of collaborative or individual learning activities
- IT-mediated tasks can readily generate data from which evidence can be extracted



Digital technology ...

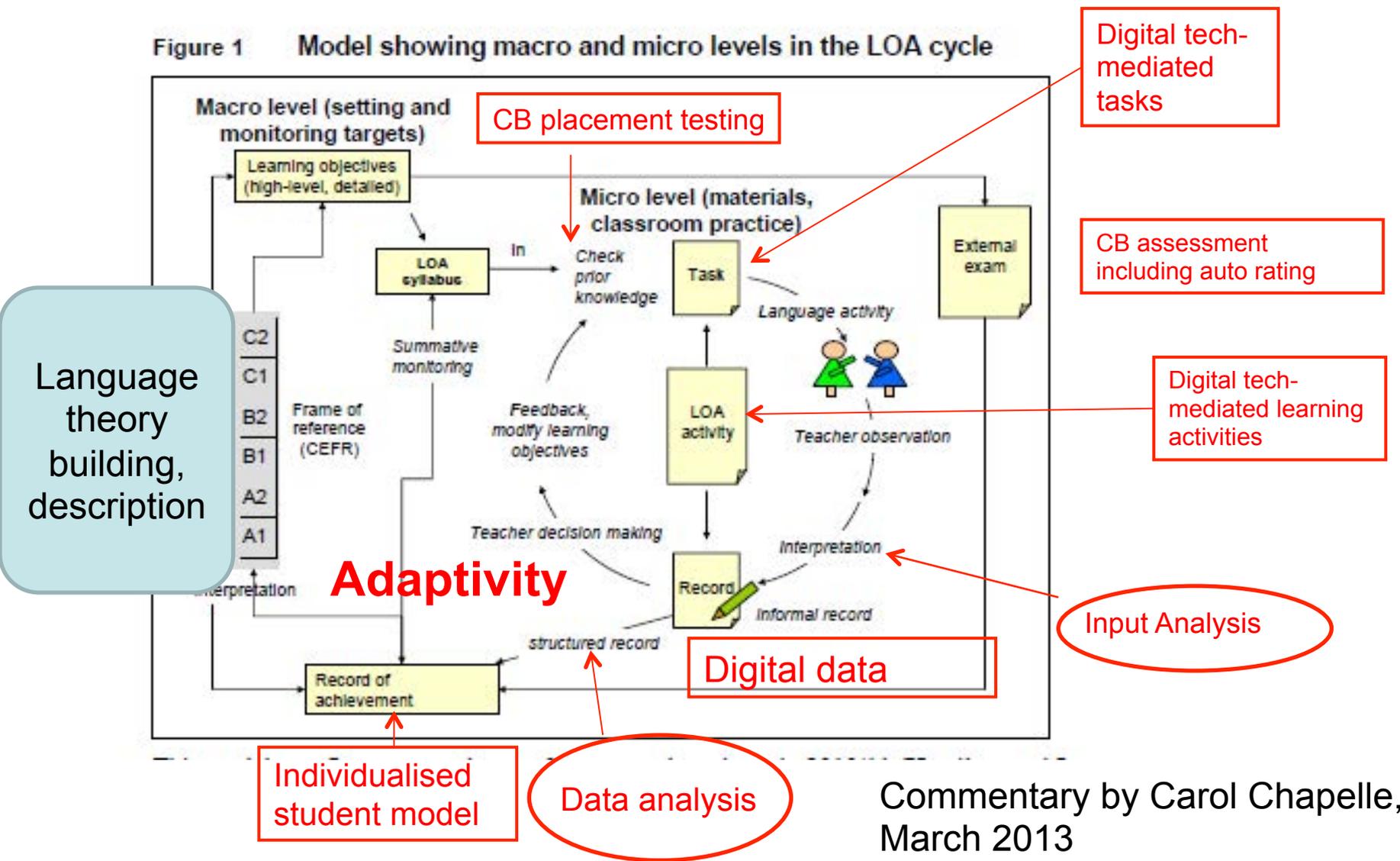
Plays a crucial role in facilitating LOA:

- by extending learning beyond the physical classroom
- by enabling new forms of learning interaction
- by capturing new forms of evidence for learning

It assists the teacher:

- by scaffolding the learners' use of language in more authentic contexts of use
- by removing the administrative burden of collecting and processing large amounts of information

Figure 1 Model showing macro and micro levels in the LOA cycle



Commentary by Carol Chapelle, March 2013



The task: automated writing feedback

Automated writing feedback

- Automatically evaluate the quality of writing and provide
- immediate feedback

Challenges

- Provide accurate, effective and detailed feedback
- Provide pedagogically useful feedback like human teachers



Deployment

Advantages

- Prompt detailed feedback
- Promote writing development
- Facilitate self-assessment and self-tutoring
- Application of constant assessment criteria
- Reduced workload
- Cost-effective approach to teaching / grading



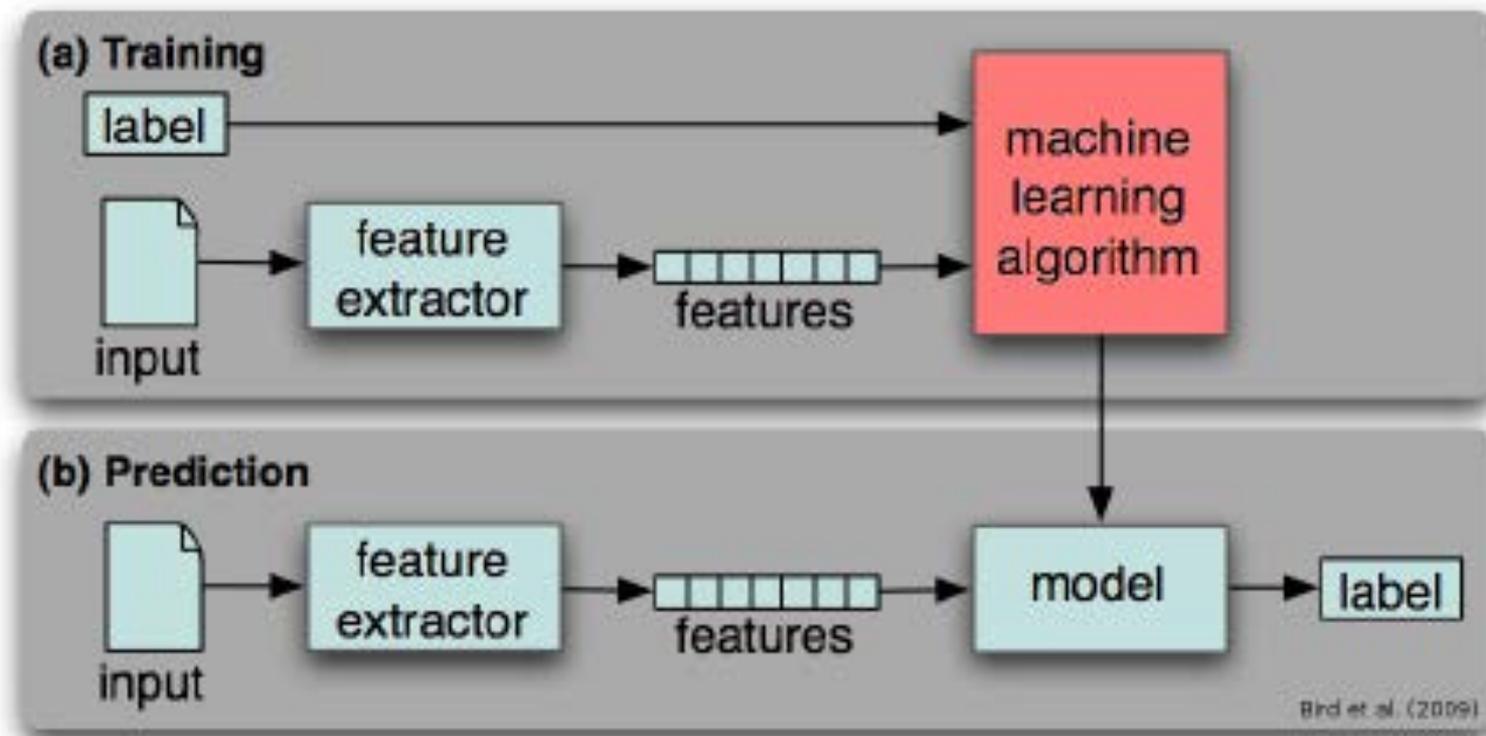
Script-level feedback

Text Assessment: Overall assessment of someone's proficiency by scoring the text as a whole

1. Assess general linguistic competence
 - a) Gather annotated data
 - b) Identify textual features considered to be proxies for intrinsic qualities of writing competence
 - c) Predict score using weighted combination of features (Machine Learning)
 - d) Evaluate predicted scores
2. Provide scoring feedback



Deployment





Script-level feedback: Feature Space

1. Word Sequences
 - belive (unigram)
 - suggest idea (bigram)
 - the people is (trigram)
2. Part of Speech sequences
 - VVO VVO (e.g., keep develop)
 - NN2 VVG (e.g., children smiling)
3. Grammatical constraints
 - V1/modal bse/+ - (e.g., can only travel in July)
 - S/pp-ap s-r (e.g., for better or worse, he left)
 - T/txt-frag (e.g., but know Kim knew)



Script-level feedback: Evaluation

Features	Pearson's correlation r	Spearman's correlation ρ
word seq	0.601	0.598
+PoS seq	0.682	0.687
+text length	0.692	0.689
+syntax	0.714	0.712
+error rate	0.741	0.773
Upper bound	0.796	0.792



Script-level feedback: Evaluation

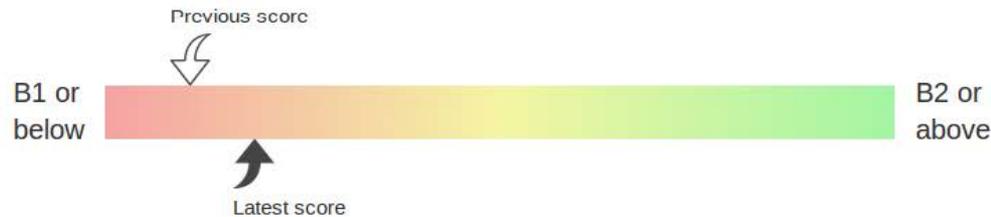
Comparison with previous work
Regression Vs Ranking

Model	Pearson's correlation r	Spearman's correlation ρ
Regression	0.720	0.750
Our Model (Ranking)	0.750	0.785



Script-level feedback

Overall score



i An overall score is assigned on a scale from red to green. Red is for text that looks like it may be at CEFR level B1 or below. Green is for text that shows some evidence of being at CEFR level B2 or above. Once you have had a look at your feedback, try to use it to improve your writing, and then submit it again.

Now, improve your answer

Some people learn a foreign language in order to widen their horizons and etc.
Perhaps you prefer to stay on dry land. Can you see the see from were you live?

Word count: 31

Save

Save & Submit

Script-level feedback



Write & Improve

https://sat.ilexir.co.uk/1m/responses/5501/edit

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Websites A

i Write your text in English using the task you've chosen. You can enter your text directly, or paste in work you've already done. If you want to save your writing but aren't ready to get it assessed, click on **Save**. You can come back and review it when you like by clicking on **Edit**. When you are ready to have your writing assessed, click on **Save and Submit**. Once you've got your feedback use it to try and improve your writing – then click **Save and Submit**. Remember the tasks are there to help you think of what to write. You won't be marked on your ability to complete the tasks, just your writing.

Describe two websites that you use. What do you like about them?

Feedback

Overall score



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Detailed feedback [\(Help\)](#)

Combined **Error feedback** **Sentence feedback**

i Combined feedback allows you to see the information contained in the Sentence feedback and Error feedback together on one page. A red box indicates that explanations or corrections are available and can be viewed by hovering over the word. An orange box indicates words that might need attention to improve your results, but for which the system doesn't have a suggestion.

Some people learn a foreign language in order to widen their horizons and use the computer to find website of places to go on holiday. Others go sailing on the open sea. A maritime holiday abroad combines the two. Perhaps you prefer to stay on dry land. Can you see the sea from where you live?



Word-level feedback: error detection & correction

Ensure high precision and good coverage

1. Corpus-derived rules

- Error rules derived from the Cambridge Learner Corpus (CLC)
- Detect incorrect word sequences (unigrams, bigrams and trigrams)
- At least 90% incorrect occurrences

2. Electronic dictionary-derived rules



Word-level feedback: error detection & correction

Error detection and correction

1. Strict criteria for rule extraction
2. Reliable rules
3. Few false positives
4. Precision and Recall measured against human annotator: 90% and 30% respectively
5. Precision is more important in terms of learning effect (Nagata and Nakatani, 2010)



Word-level feedback: error detection & correction

Trigrams	Error	Correction
he] want [to	AGV	wants
to] thanks [all	FV	thank
are] to [old	SX	too
's] interesting [place	MD	an+
is] need [to	MD	a+
Bigrams	Error	Correction
of] whole	MD	the+
This [why	MV	+is
few] absence	AGN	absences
listening] at	RT	to
Unigrams	Error	Correction
beloveds	C	beloved
disappointment	S	disappointment
singed	IV	sang



Word-level feedback: error detection & correction

Response text

Some people learn a foreign language in order to widen their horizons **and** **etc.**
Perhaps you prefer to stay on dry land.

Can you **sea** **the** **see** from where you live?

Possible errors

and Insertion: This word may not be needed.

etc. Substitution: A different word might be better here. Perhaps 'so on' is better.

sea Confusion: Is this the right word? Did you mean to write 'see'?

the Insertion: This word may not be needed.

see Confusion: Is this the right word? Did you mean to write 'sea'?



Sentence-level feedback

- Sentence evaluation
 - Assess and score the quality of individual sentences, independently of their context
- Challenges
 - Limited linguistic evidence that can be extracted automatically
 - Difficulty in acquiring annotated data



Sentence-level feedback

Previous work

- Content scoring of short answers, ranging from a few words to a few sentences (e.g., Attali et al., 2008; Mohler et al., 2011; Ziai et al., 2012)
- Intra-sentential quality (Higgins et al., 2004)
- Writing instruction tools (e.g., Burstein et al., 2003)



Sentence-level feedback

Approach

- Exploit already available annotated data
 - Script-level scores and error annotation in CLC
- Evaluate various approaches, two of which are to:
 - Use the script-level model to predict sentence quality scores
 - Combine script-level score and errors per sentence, and create pseudo-gold labels to train a sentence model



Sentence-level feedback

	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Correlation</i>		
r_{errors}	-0.111	-0.750
ρ_{errors}	-0.078	-0.702
<i>Pairwise acc</i>		
Correct	0.608	0.703
Incorrect	0.359	0.204

Model 1: script-level model

Model 2: sentence-level model
with pseudo-gold labels: $\frac{\text{score}}{\text{errors}}$



Sentence-level feedback

Model 2: sentence-level model with pseudo-gold labels: $\frac{\text{score}}{\text{errors}}$

Feature set

- 1 Main verbs, nouns, adjectives, subordinating conjunctions and adverbs
- 2 Clausal subjects and modifiers
- 3 Affixes
- 4 Phrase-structure rules
- 5 Errors
- 6 Number of words forming an error



Sentence-level feedback

In the past people didn't have electricity and if they wanted, for example, to read or to cook something they used to light a fire.

You must have a TV because you can learn about what is happening in the world and you can see some places that you haven't been to.

You can enjoy watching a film if you have some free time.

In our daily life, however, we seldom notice how easy a life we've got or, what is more, how difficult our grandparents found it.

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Write & Improve (www.cambridgeenglish.org/writeandimprovebeta)

Feedback

Overall score

 A horizontal bar with a color gradient from red on the left to green on the right. The left end is labeled 'B1 or below' and the right end is labeled 'B2 or above'. A white arrow points down to the bar from the text 'Previous score' above it. A black arrow points up to the bar from the text 'Latest score' below it.

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Detailed feedback ([Help](#))

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Now, improve your answer

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Can you sea the see from were you live?

Word count: 31

Save

Save & Submit



Trials

- Ten institutions from nine countries
- Eight universities, one secondary school and one private language school
- Between 4 and 8 institutions in each trial
Each institution participated in two or three trials
- Over 450 students participated, expected to be at or above the upper-intermediate level



Trials

- 3000 submissions in 2 trials, including revisions
 - Over 600,000 words
 - Average response length: 200 words
- Average number of revisions: 3.2
- Median of number of revisions: 2
- Max number of revisions: 54
- Score given to the last revision is higher than that given to the initial revision in over 80% of the cases



Write & Improve User Comments

The colouring system, the problem is that it doesn't tell you specifically what's wrong with constructions so you have think what you failed.

I liked this system because the sentence colouring suggests me to think about my writing style, mistakes, what I should improve. This system is not like a teacher, who checks all our errors, but makes us develop our critical thinking.



User Satisfaction

	Trial 1	Trial 2
Using W&I helps me to write better in English	3.80	3.92
I find W&I useful for understanding my mistakes	3.74	3.96
I think the sentence colouring is useful	3.74	4.15
I think the word-level information [error feedback] is useful	3.86	4.12
W&I is easy to use	4.45	4.49
The feedback on my writing is clear	3.80	3.93
If you have used W&I before, has it improved since the last time?	—	3.86

Table : Average feedback scores on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

- User-driven development between trials



Conclusion

- Feedback at three different levels of granularity
 - Script-level
 - Sentence-level
 - Word-level
- Visualisation displays information in an intuitive and easily interpretable way
- Usefulness and usability of the tool confirmed through questionnaire-based evaluations



Future work

- Improve methodologies used for providing error feedback
- Add further functionality
 - L1-specific feedback
 - Discourse organisation feedback
 - Task achievement feedback
- Introducing Speaking data collection
 - *Write, Speak and Improve*



Write & Improve

How does it work?



Thank You for Listening

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