Voice Diaries: Re(de)fining Oral Practice in the Large Language Class by Creating a Digital Extension of the Classroom

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In an article from 2018 on Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Greg Kessler underlines that, as of the past five or 10 years, there has been an increased availability of an impressive number of ways in which language instructors can take advantage of CALL. He emphasizes that the current iterations of the software we use to assist in language teaching are superior to their predecessors, stating that

we can easily create opportunities for learners to record their oral production for speaking and pronunciation improvement while presenting them with feedback from native speakers, peers, instructors, and others. [...] We can easily create opportunities for them to engage in extensive and meaningful target[-]language practice both in and out of the classroom with interlocutors who offer salient, nonthreatening feedback. We can do all this within contexts that are familiar and promising. (206)

Robert Blake echoes this, reiterating the importance of receiving feedback on such activities, speaking, in particular, about “types of programs [that] ask students to compare their own audio recordings with those of native speakers of diverse accents” but adding that “[o]ne obvious drawback of this type of exercise for improving L2 speech is the lack of any feedback” (130–131). He offers a remedy in the fascinating and useful automatic speech-recognition programs, web sites, and software that can parse, type out, and repeat what the learner has uttered, which certainly have their place when a human facilitator or interpreter is not available to provide feedback.

In this article, I will explain the use of the voice diary, in which the instructor provides feedback on pronunciation and morphosyntactic structures to students on the weekly audio recordings that students submit online through the course’s web site. I will outline the advantages, uses, and implementation of this oral exercise, and I will also briefly explain the online-forum activity, its written complement. In these activities, I seek to exploit all of the benefits of CALL outlined earlier, all within an asynchronous virtual environment that is, in Kessler’s words, “familiar and promising” and “nonthreatening.” Furthermore, I will explain how these activities prove to be vital and perhaps even necessary—for both students and instructor—in the large language classroom, an increasingly common phenomenon at institutions of higher learning. I will interweave concrete feedback from students on the voice diaries, though two appendices include the complete comments of students. Finally, I will include some reflections on minor challenges associated with these activities and a description of how I believe my students have benefited from getting weekly personalized feedback on their oral production in Italian and a dedicated online space to share and reflect on Italian language and culture.

For the first six years of my formal teaching experience at the university level, I taught at the University of Toronto, where I completed my doctorate. There, each instructor was responsible for anywhere between 15 and 30 students in first- or second-year Italian language courses—but never any more than 30 students at a time, which would be considered a large class. In September
2018, I began teaching at McMaster University and was faced with the prospect of having as many as 110 students in a single first-year language course taught in an auditorium-style classroom, with only two hours per week of face-to-face instruction and one hour at home of self-directed learning. How was I going to remember 110 names and faces? How would I connect with them? Would it be feasible to give individual and individualized feedback in class? How would I be able to assign each student a participation grade if I did not know who they were? From the first time one of my students thanked me for knowing her name, I knew that this concern to become familiar with my students and their abilities was not a luxury I wanted to forgo.

My personal hang-ups aside, the repercussions of not being able to give one-on-one attention to each student in such a large class of first-year language learners were potentially much farther reaching, namely in the realm of oral production and pronunciation. This challenge was unique: written assignments, for instance, did not risk losing their effectiveness, as the tangibility of the assignment and the asynchronicity of the submission and evaluation are not affected by class sizes or lack of in-person interactions; indeed, while the work load with written assignments certainly increases for the instructor with a larger class, class size does not negatively affect the student’s ability to produce written work, and the feedback that each student receives from the instructor happens privately and is personally tailored only to the work that the instructor has in her hands.

With oral practice, however, the high number of students could not allow, in a 50-minute class twice per week, for each student to possibly have the chance to participate actively and receive recognition for and feedback on it. Indeed, perhaps as few as five or six students might speak up for only a few seconds, in a typical 50-minute class, and even conversations and activities completed in small groups rarely result in even close to 100% use of the target language. I needed to find a novel and fruitful way to provide feedback to students on their Italian language learning. I turned to an activity that I had devised at the University of Toronto in the previous year (the 2017–2018 academic year): I had offered intermediate students an extra-credit opportunity over the mid-term breaks to submit recordings in which they used the target language to provide their thoughts, perspectives, and insights on a handful of topics. I will explain the structure of the assignment, the progenitor or prototype of the voice diary, below.

Students were invited to complete an optional oral assignment worth 1%, or one-tenth of their participation grade, during each break in the year-long course, that is, the fall, winter, and spring breaks. This urged students—intermediate students, as I mentioned, with a fuller grasp of Italian and more expressive flexibility—to keep contact with their Italian learning and practise even while we were not meeting, and it allowed more timid and less forthcoming students a less intimidating way to practise and express themselves orally in the language of instruction. Since the curriculum included an oral presentation at the end of the year, providing students a practice run of speaking in Italian in a structured way potentially made the final oral assignment seem a less daunting task. Therefore, this was the prototype of the voice diary: students e-mailed me short recordings, lasting one to two minutes, which they could create on their smartphones, computers (via the now-widespread built-in microphone), or a web site that allows students to record and download an audio file. The content was of the students’ choosing, from a small selection of suggested topics usually having to do with holidays surrounding the break in classes (Valentine’s Day and Family Day, a holiday celebrated around Canada on the third Monday in February, for instance). These early versions of the voice diary did not receive very much feedback; students simply received a completion grade. While it is important to note that I had fewer than 30 students in this course and ample in-class oral practise was made available to students, I later recognized a
missing element in the assignment, which Blake and Kessler both underline: the massive importance of providing feedback. This will be discussed in descriptions of the voice diary in its refined and current iteration.

One of my goals in teaching Italian is to encourage students to use the target language to talk and write about their thoughts and everyday life experiences; I aim to make Italian a language that can add new dimensions to the student’s means of expression and viewing the world, and many of the submissions I received in the voice diary’s prototype were full of care and depth. These activities allowed students to express themselves outside of the rigid confines of textbook content and rote activities; they were and are important, as Pilar de Juan-González says, “most of all when the level of students is low, offering didactic alternatives to frequent transcriptions or adapted exercises”¹ (187). In these circumstances, as I have mentioned, the use of CALL was not a necessity as much as a perk to allow students to express themselves orally with more time and space at their disposal.

From this prototype at the University of Toronto came the inspiration for the 30- to 90-second voice diary that I used in 2018–2019 and will continue to implement at McMaster University. The format is as follows: in week one, in audio recordings created using their smartphones, computers, or external web sites, or by recording directly on McMaster’s course web site, students comment in English on a reading² about greetings amongst Italians and compare it to their own culture or practices. For those wanting to jump right in to using Italian, they could instead choose to practise Italian pronunciation by reading a short dialogue. This type of easy introduction serves the purpose of making students grow accustomed to using voice recordings in a commonplace, non-threatening way: by speaking in English about Italian culture or media; the appeal of the second option lies in its being a low-stakes activity allowing students to experiment risk-free with the target language.

Thus, for the first three weeks, students record an audio reflection in English or a recitation in Italian; in week four, we begin to implement grammar: students are instructed to complete a grammar activity from their textbook and record their responses in the voice diary. Therefore, the nature of the voice diary remains largely the same and occurs in the same online space while evolving smoothly in accordance with the students’ developing skills. Furthermore, the transition to a new language in a familiar space avoids jarring or intimidating students. Indeed, in their feedback on the voice diary,³ a few students mentioned this gradual evolution and the progressive increase in their confidence, with Madeline A. saying that the voice diary helped her “gain confidence in speaking Italian,” though she “was nervous in the first week and took an hour to complete it (even though it was in English)”; over the weeks, she “gained confidence in speech and pronunciation.” Luca B. said that he compared his first voice diary to week 26’s and he “noticed the progress” he had made in his pronunciation. The diaries, he added, helped him “be more confident with the language”; at first, he was “very shy,” even around his nonni (grandparents); he was “scared to speak Italian” because he feared making mistakes (whether he meant he was scared to speak in front of the class, in front of his relatives, or in front of the

¹ “sobre todo cuando el nivel de los estudiantes es bajo, ofreciendo alternativas didácticas a las frecuentes transcripciones o ejercicios adaptados” (translation my own).
² Both at the University of Toronto as well as at McMaster University, Julia M. Cozzarelli’s Sentieri, 2nd ed. (Boston: Vista Higher Learning, 2015), is the textbook of choice.
³ See Appendix I for student feedback on the voice diaries recorded in their last oral submission of the year. Appendix II contains anonymous comments on the voice diary appearing in course evaluations.
instructor is unclear), but he “found the voice diaries to be helpful” because he learned “to be fine with making mistakes”—an essential skill in learning a new language.

This brings us back to the origin and purpose of this online activity: in a student’s private space, she can speak without fear of judgement, being corrected in front of peers, or being rushed; she can transition to a new language in a familiar space while not being jarred; she can prepare the activity and do as many takes as desired of a single recording. Conversely, many students enjoy an extemporaneous approach to the voice diary, laughing as they stumble and self-correct, mirroring the immediate and imperfect nature of live linguistic performance; still others embrace a somewhat formal conversational approach, aware of the listener, greeting me with a Ciao at the beginning and ending with a Grazie. Even if I never got to address students by name in class, as was the case early in the first semester, I was able to create a personal exchange with students by thanking and encouraging them by name in personalized online responses.

It is important to note here a piece of constructive criticism, however, provided by Anthony C., who echoes Blake (130–131) in reflecting what he saw as a limitation of the voice diary: the only thing he disliked “was that it was one-way—not a conversation where you get feedback and you have to understand what the other person is saying.” While, in written or audio-recorded comments, I would typically use Italian to provide feedback to students, communication still was not immediate or necessarily linear; many hours or days (as another student, Kathryn L., pointed out, “timeliness of feedback” was important for her) could pass between recordings and listenings. This was especially true during weeks when compositions or exams were submitted and corrections took precedence over listening to and providing feedback on audio recordings in a timely manner. This is an important challenge, but it can be overcome by limiting the length of recordings in larger classes to 30–60 seconds and dedicating, if possible, a block of time the day after recordings are submitted to providing timely feedback—or responding in kind to recordings progressively as they are submitted.

Naturally, the use of voice recordings in the language classroom is not novel; many foreign-language instructors, myself included, have frequented language labs as part of foreign-language learning. Krzysztof Kotula, in his study on the use of Skype in distance learning, cites the computer program’s advantages in second-language instruction as the following:

- comfort of use […], total focus on the content presented on the learner’s computer,
- complete privacy, abundance of tools permitting sharing and reusing of lesson content […] as well as the availability of multiple and parallel communication channels (Hashemi & Azizinezhad, 2011). [An added advantage is] […] the possibility of reaching people coming from diverse economic, ethnic and cultural groups […]. (Kotula 38)

The voice diary shares these benefits, with timid students or those less motivated to speak up in class benefiting most. Unlike with distance learning through Skype or other Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) programs, which permit learners to communicate synchronously with a facilitator and peers, the voice diary is an audio file submitted only to the instructor that she listens to and comments on at a later time; communication is monodirectional and occurs asynchronously, which can be seen as a drawback. Nevertheless, in an article from 2014 reviewing technology and the four skills (i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking), Blake explains that “asynchronous [computer-mediated communication] tend[s] to allow students more pre-planning time, which can enhance speaking accuracy, support more complexity, and possibly reduce frustration levels” (130). Thus, timid students are given an outlet from which they otherwise would not be able to
benefit even in a smaller class, as Luca B. explained was his experience. Petra I. reiterated this, explaining that perfectionism and self-consciousness usually got in her way, as she wanted to “sound native right away”; she was “usually self-conscious to start speaking but found that, by doing weekly voice diaries,” she was “eased […] into the process” and was a more confident speaker by the end of the course.

Furthermore, in an asynchronous environment, the voice diaries allow more forthcoming students to take advantage of a space in which they can explore creative and risk-taking approaches to communicative competence. Luca T. zeroed in on this, saying that he “would have liked more opportunities to speak, not only in class but also with other class members,” and yet “voice diaries were a really good way to practise Italian, especially since it’s hard to speak Italian by yourself or even with family members; it’s hard to start a conversation randomly. Having an actual subject to talk about was nice.” He seemed to be the exception to the rule of students’ tending to be intimidated to speak up in a large classroom. Indeed, the danger of the large language classroom is such that students feel exposed while at the same time invisible—nameless and faceless. Only two or three students regularly volunteer to speak and, sometimes, when called upon, students refuse or are unwilling to participate. The voice diary counteracts this challenge, as students can complete this work from anywhere and these activities take advantage of technological resources that students already use with their friends and family and employ them for language practice. As Kessler says,

[m]any of the most compelling opportunities are situated within the same global social and technology trends that have become commonplace in our daily lives, including social media [and] artificial intelligence […]. These technologies are familiar to many of us, and learning to use them for our personal lives has become an expected societal norm. (206)

Through the employment of such tools, students can seamlessly integrate their language practice and use with their everyday activities.

The advantages for the students are clear: these weekly activities are each worth 0.5% of their overall grade. With 26 voice diaries, that means that, even students who perform less well on formal assignments get a 13% advantage, even if their recordings are rife with mispronunciations. Students are given one-on-one pronunciation and morphosyntactic support, attention and care that, even in smaller classes, they may not receive or get to see their peers receive. Students are guaranteed a pass just by fulfilling the requirements of the assignment (provided that no plagiarism is involved).

The same happens with the online forum, which I will describe briefly before concluding: as long as students satisfy the requirements of posting, they receive recognition worth a portion of 10% of their overall grade in the course. The online forum requires little effort and just a bit of creativity on the part of the instructor, as it simulates the productive and spontaneous space within which students operate when engaged in group conversation in class. It is lightly monitored but not moderated. I like to let students know that I read but that I will rarely participate, unless students explicitly ask for written feedback; I like that it is their space.

While the voice diary has students become accustomed to and comfortable with speaking in Italian, the online forum encourages comfort with writing in Italian and about Italian society, language, and culture, reflecting on a range of topics in a variety of media, like readings in Italian, videos, or songs. We write in English in the first few weeks: last year, in week one, students were invited to talk about why they chose to study Italian, in what faculty they study, and what motivates
them or fills them with passion; to make the playing field even, I answered these questions, too. In subsequent weeks, they commented in English on a current news story regarding the grand opening of Starbucks in Milan (“Is Starbucks in Italy a disgrace or a triumph?”) and on the video for the song “Occidentali’s karma” by Francesco Gabbani (“Is Gabbani guilty of or simply a critic of cultural appropriation in the West?”). Students could debate with one another by replying directly to other students’ threads, but they chose to keep their replies separate.4

The online forum continues to follow a fairly consistent structure, with English writing being replaced by Italian after several weeks: after reading, watching, or listening to media, students write two or three new things they learned or that struck them in that piece of content; in the same post, they relate this content to their lives. When we learnt about the use of technology in Italy and the related lexicon, for example, I asked students to reflect on their use of technology in Italian. Finally, they list three to five new words they learned. This is illuminating to me, to them, and to their peers: I can anticipate which lexical items are new to students, but when some surprise me with simpler words that I would have assumed they knew, I can adjust my lessons and the lexicon I use. It is useful for students, too, because they can learn from and compare with their peers on new lexical items.

To conclude, the voice diaries and the online forum allow for students to engage with the material in a thoughtful way, to participate with others and/or be evaluated by the instructor in the virtual classroom, to practise using the target language in writing and speech, and to receive direct and detailed feedback on their oral production. While these activities were born from necessity, I believe that they can be used in classes of any size and could offer even more advantages in smaller classes. They are lifesavers—for the students and the instructor—in larger classes, offering consistency and a productive outlet while requiring a low to medium amount of effort on the part of students. As Giovanni B. said, he “enjoyed the consistency [of the assignments] and that they weren’t time-consuming.” Together, the voice diaries and the forum postings create a felicitous extension of the language classroom, a place where students can feel comfortable to express themselves, take risks, and improve their language skills, all while earning grades for their efforts and improving pronunciation and communicative competence.

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4 This was a curious development, since the facelessness of the Internet often makes people act with disregard and rudeness, but because students’ names are visible on the forum—thereby creating a digital extension of the classroom—a sense of accountability and community appears to be associated with this sharing, just like there might be if we had the time and space for debate in the classroom.
Appendix I: Student Reflections on Voice Diaries (prompted via voice diary and therefore not anonymous)

The following contains the transcribed feedback, somewhat in note form, that students recorded in their voice diary for week 26 (the final week). Not all students submitted the assignment. Colloquialisms have been retained and anything appearing between quotation marks in Italian reflects the student’s word-for-word comments, with pronunciation notes or any other additions on my part included in square brackets. In addition to summarizing the content by omitting subject pronouns, these comments have been adapted to the third person (the first-person plural refers to the class as a whole and the first-person singular refers to the instructor, unless it appears within quotation marks).

Students were prompted by the following questions, in English: “What did you find was most useful, most productive, most satisfying in these voice diaries? What did they bring to your learning experience?” Permission was granted to answer in English, though a handful of students opted to answer partially or entirely in Italian. Though students were also invited to indicate what they did not like about the weekly diaries, I expressed my understanding of students’ wishing to abstain, since these recordings, by their very nature (each submission is connected to a name and, by the end of the term, I recognized students’ voices), are not anonymous.

1. Madeline A.
   Helped her gain confidence in speaking Italian; first week was nervous, took an hour to complete it (even though it was in English); over the weeks, gained confidence in speech and pronunciation; also doing it once a week was really helpful (instead of biweekly or once a month); doing it at home helped a lot (versus in class) with confidence as well. Overall, really enjoyed voice recordings and hopes I enjoyed listening as well!

2. Brittany B.
   Even though they became annoying to do every week, especially during busy weeks, the voice diaries at least ensured that she would work on pronunciation and she probably wouldn’t have worked on pronunciation at all throughout the year; on the other hand, having something due weekly helped her stay on top of all of her work, because she had to plan around them and make sure she had enough time to do them, along with planning to do other assignments; feels bad about missing one — was sitting in a bar when she realized she didn’t do it and after that her week was thrown off because she didn’t have the solid thing due in the middle of the week that she could revolve her life around. Forum posts, too, were helpful for practising writing when there wasn’t a written assignment to work towards. They were good and I should continue doing them.

3. Arianna B.
   […] Enjoyed the voice recordings; it helped her with pronunciation and allowed her to practise pronunciation and it made her Nonna happy because her Nonna heard her say an actual Italian sentence without stuttering.

4. Michael B.
   Liked the voice diaries because they gave him a chance to practise Italian pronunciation.
The WebSAM and forum posts didn’t give him the chance to practise speaking, so he found it very valuable to his learning.

5. **Giovanni B.**
   What was most useful: made him think in Italian, like, answers weren’t thought of in English by the end—thinking in Italian at the end. Speaks French, too, and notices that when he speaks French he thinks in French; for these recordings, by speaking in Italian, it helped him to think in Italian. That was the biggest thing for him: that, as he progressed, he began to think in Italian more and more. Enjoyed the consistency and that they weren’t time-consuming.

6. **Luca B.**
   Found them “pretty effective.” Compared his first voice diary to now and he notices the progress he’s made in his pronunciation. They’ve helped him be more confident with the language; at first, he was very shy, even around his nonni; he was scared to speak Italian because he didn’t want to make mistakes, but he found the voice diaries to be helpful because he’s been able to be fine with making mistakes. On the whole, he’s content with the voice diaries.

7. **Anthony C.**
   Usefult: practising pronunciation in the comfort of own home. In class, we are encouraged to do pronunciation exercises and read out loud, but at home we have the ability to make mistakes and maybe go back and change some things to ensure pronunciation is best it can be which causes us to practise more and more. Dislikes: only thing disliked was that it was one-way—not conversation where you get feedback and you have to understand what the other person is saying.

8. **Loren C.**
   Really liked getting out of his comfort zone to practise saying the words and how I responded to each one on how to improve. Forum discussions: really liked this type of indirect way of learning Italian because we got to read articles (and respond to them) and it prepared us for reading Italian articles online.

9. **Chiara C.**
   Enjoyed the weekly diaries, think they’re really good way to improve pronunciation and reading and a really good way to get feedback on pronunciation. Sometimes it was a challenge when we first started getting recorded instructions (rather than written instructions), but nothing too hard.

10. **Victoria C.**
    Definitely good to practise Italian skills weekly, and definitely helped to track progress in reading and in speaking throughout the year, but I think something to improve, maybe to give a freebie voice diary and give a bank of different topics to talk about, because some

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people might be more motivated with choice. Overall, though, voice diaries were good.

11. **Veronica D.**
   “Mi è piaciuto molto registrare i diari vocale quest’anno. Mi è piaciuto sentire i commenti e crescere nelle mie conoscenze dell’italiano. Io ammetto a volte non volevo fare i diari vocale ma sono contento ho perseverato perché mi hanno aiutato a riuscire in altri settori.”

12. **Lauren D.**
   “I actually really loved doing the voice diaries every week.” Really benefited from chance to practise pronunciation and speaking weekly. Rewarding to have family (notably nonni) comment on improvements in pronunciation and rhythm and understanding, inspired her to keep working hard. Feedback made her much more confident and provided specific advice and constructive help. She appreciated this so much because she knew what to work on specifically. Wanted to add that she thought it was amazing that I listened to and provided feedback to every single student’s voice diaries; that takes a lot of time and patience. Lucky to have generous and dedicated prof.

13. **Rebecca D.**
   Favourite part of voice diaries was being able to practise speaking Italian since she didn’t really get to at home. It was nice to get to practise pronunciation and be able to not only read and write but also say it, too, which she thinks is the best way to learn a language. […]

14. **Marcus G.**
   The most beneficial thing was just speaking Italian. A lot of exercises and tests are all written, so speaking was beneficial. Didn’t like having to do it every week because he was very busy. Did enjoy voicing out what he learned. Best thing, overall: using our voice and being able to speak out what we’ve learned on paper. Thanks and “glad I got to do one in English after all this time.”

15. **Halle G.**
   Wanted to start with dislikes first, but not really dislike, because it leads into what she liked: really disliked, well, no, not disliked, but thought it was way harder when the instructions were all in Italian in a voice recording, but it was also a good thing, because she thinks it made her do more work for the voice diary and really understand the instructions, so she liked that as well. What she really liked is when we did readings and then answered questions from the textbook.

16. **Elizabeth G.**
   Were really good, liked them a lot. One of reasons was because it gave everyone a chance to practise Italian outside of the classroom, because not everyone has opportunities/people to practise with. Liked feedback, was really helpful. Liked topics; fun to do. It was good all around. Had no issues with it.

17. **Daniela G.**
   Thought they were very useful in the fact that they helped us to know exactly what we
learned, so we’d have to figure out what you [Christina] were saying and once we’d say it and we heard the recording and it was like, “Wow. I said all that?” Thought it was useful because it helped us realize what we had learned and how much we’d improved throughout the weeks. Also really appreciated feedback because you helped with pronunciation and even phrases that didn’t really make sense. Appreciate your getting back to every single voice diary because it was helpful.

18. Keara G.
Really enjoyed this class and voice diaries were favourite part of entire class. Nothing super specific that she enjoyed the most, just the kind of things that she could use in conversation and just forcing herself to speak Italian out loud, so the voice diaries were completely invaluable. Enjoyed when I made recordings as well instead of just reading instructions; felt like we learned a lot of reading and writing but wanted to learn speaking and listening, so really enjoyed the voice diaries.

19. Petra I.
[…] What she found most useful about the voice diaries is that they kept her on track with concepts learning in class and helped her become more comfortable with speaking the language. Always self-conscious and perfectionist and wants to sound native right away, but not possible from beginning, so usually self-conscious to start speaking, but found that by doing weekly voice diaries, eased her into the process, and is now more confident speaking. Forum posts: also great. Appreciates the effort going into the feedback each week and thinks the weekly repetition of diaries and posts are what truly contributed to great learning curve this year. Nothing negative to say.

20. Danielle L.

21. Kathryn L.
Really liked voice diaries, thought they were great way to practise—quick and easy but also good challenging way to use some new structures and words and practise those pronunciations, thought really valuable. Not huge time commitment, like five minutes out of the day. Suggestion to improve: timeliness of feedback. When feedback is a few weeks delayed, she forgets what she said so feedback isn’t quite as relevant. Recognizes I do my best to describe what the word or phrase was that needs work. More written instructions and written feedback could be helpful to see what discrepancy was (versus recorded feedback, perhaps). Overall, really liked voice diaries this year and would definitely recommend continuing with them.

22. Anthony M.
“Il diario vocale è molto favorore e mio italiano pronuncia. Aiutare mi meglio capare la lingua. In mio opinione loro erano un molto bene strumento imparare la lingua italiano.”
23. Jessica M.
What she found most useful is the voice diaries actually made her speak Italian out loud and in daily life she wouldn’t necessarily speak Italian out loud for any reason. Weekly recordings were helpful for pronunciation and for the practise of speaking. She liked the feedback I gave and that each diary was related to topic discussed in class. This relation [connection] also helped to further understanding of what we talked about in class.

24. Veronica M.
“Ho piaciuto molto il diario vocale perché ho imparato a parlare italiano con fiducia.” Found the diaries really helpful in learning how to speak Italian and keeping up with practising it regularly. Easier to practise when no one is around, so when you make a mistake, no one is judging you, so in that way, really helpful. Next year, definitely continue doing them. Don’t have anything negative to say. […]

25. Cecilia M.
Most helpful: when we had to describe a way that we were feeling or express ourselves in Italian and not just answering questions because, even if we’re practising with a partner in Italian (in class), we usually just answer questions back and forth. She found it more useful to have a topic to build on but in Italian so we’re getting the practice.

26. Nicholas N.
Personally thought they were really effective, really helped him work on his pronunciation, especially reading practice [reading an excerpt out loud]. Reading in Italian isn’t really that hard, but it is more challenging when you actually have to pronounce things and he’s become more efficient at that. No one to practise with, which may have reduced anxiety in terms of learning, but nevertheless it still is important to be able to practise with someone. Constructive criticism: voice diaries in term 2, would have liked more challenging diaries because we had already established a fair base in terms of vocab and grammar and so we could have been more challenged to do more sophisticated work the diaries, not always same structure as previous term. Felt we could have been pushed a little more. It might help us improve a little more how we grasp the language.

27. Jasmine O.
What she found most useful about the voice diaries is that they made us employ the verbs and pronunciations that we learned in class. When she first started the voice diaries, she had a lot of pronunciation problems but, by the end, her spoken Italian got way better.

28. Paula Q.
“Mi piacevamo i diari vocale. Penso li erano bene per praticare la pronuncia. All’inizio dell’anno sapevo parlare un po’ d’italiano ma avevo paura di sbagliare quando parlo con mia famiglia. Mo, ho più confidenza e ogni tanto parlo in italiano. Mi piace quando dovevamo creare le nostre frasi per praticare a scrivere [referring to the forums].”

29. Catherine S.
“Mi piacciono i diario vocale perché è una buona pratica per parlare in italiano. Il diario vocale aumentato la mia capacita nel parlare in italiano. Grazie per un anno fantastico. Mi sono divertito molto nella tua classe.”

30. **Ciara T.**
Found the voice diaries were very helpful and effective in her Italian learning process. Found them helpful to practising pronunciation weekly and kind of forced her to talk in Italian because she usually feels pretty shy about talking in another language. They also were useful in terms of practising and reviewing concepts we learned that week in class. For example, most activities involved instances in which they allowed us to practise writing out sentence structures and different verb conjugations. Don’t have anything bad to say about them; overall, they were very beneficial and useful throughout the semester.

31. **Laura T.**
 ―Thank you for allowing us to learn Italian [and then she started laughing because her sister was laughing in the background. This is the realness of the voice diary!] and for being such a great teacher. […]” What she liked about the voice diary is it allowed us to practise vocal part of Italian without necessarily having to speak in front of the entire class. Speaking in the class is not only nerve-wracking in English but when learning a new language it’s also really scary to do.

32. **Luca T.**
What he found most useful: the fact that we actually got to speak in Italian. One of the downsides of the course, though it was nice to learn basics and how to write everything, he would have liked more opportunities to speak, not only in class but also with other class members. Voice diaries were a really good way to practise Italian, especially since it’s hard to speak Italian by yourself or even with family members; it’s hard to start a conversation randomly. Having an actual subject to talk about was nice. Worst part: forgetting to do them every Wednesday [this particular student regularly forgot to do them]. Besides that, found them very useful; not too hard or too intense—just about the right difficulty, but good enough that you could improve every week and have a chance to practise Italian.
Appendix II: Anonymous Feedback on the Voice Diaries (and, to a lesser degree, online forums) in Course Evaluations

In the Course Evaluations used at McMaster University, question 7, one of only two free-form questions, is as follows: “Please list in the space below two aspects of the course that you found to be valuable.” I have gathered notes featuring any commentary on oral practice (i.e., voice diaries), instructor feedback on oral practice, and/or writing in the online forum. This feedback has not been modified in any way.

1. Voice Diaries and Online Forum
2. Weekly Homework Online (WebSAM)
3. I found the voice diaries to be very helpful. These were the main source of building my confidence to actually speak the language.
4. I found it very valuable the amount of practice we had available to us. I also enjoyed the speaking part of it as well, as it helps us develop the correct accents for the Italian language. Christina Vani is a very wonderful professor who genuinely cares about helping us students in any way possible, she has a very effective teaching method!
5. I found the Web Sam and the Voice Diaries very valuable.
6. I thought the Websam activities and weekly voice diaries were very valuable and helpful in terms of the course.
7. The voice recordings helped with practicing the pronunciation of vocabulary and was a fun aspect to the course.
8. The weekly activities helped strength my writing and reading skills.
9. Two things I found valuable were the weekly voice diaries and forum post submissions as well as the integration of the textbook in class and at home. I found the weekly assignments to be very useful in terms of helping me practice and keep up with my Italian. The voice diaries are a great way to comfortably practice speaking the language because they are recorded alone. The feedback from these diaries was also very helpful in terms of learning correct pronunciation and being able to view your progress over the weeks.
10. The course it self is very straightforward, the voice diaries and forum posts and websam is very helpful but it does become a lot of work especially trying to balance it with all the other classes we have but other than that this course was super fun!
BIBLIOGRAPHY


