

What Do We Mean? A Review and Linguistic Analysis of Feedback

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Introduction

The resounding conclusion about feedback is that it is desired by teachers (Disbeger et al., 2022), is powerful (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), and supervisors are the primary agent for fulfilling this important role (Fritz & Miller 2004). However, recommendations from research in *The Journal of Agricultural Education* (JAE) loosely suggest increasing the quantity of feedback for teacher candidates, without much guidance on effective implementation. When the concept of feedback is used without shared understanding, the word itself becomes taken-for-granted and complicates considerations for research and practice (Winstone et al., 2021). Therefore, there is a need to dedicate scholarship to more clearly articulate the meaning of *feedback* and establish shared language regarding feedback. This systematic review worked in tandem with a *corpus linguistics* analysis to explore the representations of feedback across contemporary literature in agricultural education. The research questions guiding the study were: “How is feedback represented in contemporary agricultural education literature?”, and “How is feedback represented when analyzed through corpus linguistics?”

Theoretical Framework

Corpus linguistics is an analytical tool for exploring scholarly works and involves a computer-generated analysis of a written text to better understand how language is used (Brezina, 2018). A corpus is a “large, principled collection of naturally occurring examples of language”, and meaning can be made from examination of the sequence of words, (Bennett, 2010, p.2). Within corpus linguistics, a keyword is identified for interest, and then possibilities for its meaning are derived from the associated collocates (or collocations), which refers to the relationship between particular words, the context in which they are used, and the strength of that association based on the given context (Brezina, 2018). Corpus linguistics is not a primary approach to understanding meaning and should be used as a complementary approach (Biber et al., 1998). For this study, corpus linguistics will accompany a systematic review of literature.

Methodology

Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 was used to guide this systematic literature review (Page et al., 2021). *Feedback* was the search term used in the JAE (19), Google Scholar (100), and Education Resources Resource Center (ERIC) (16), generating a 135-article sample. Google Sheets was used to organize the identified literature. Findings were reviewed to identify and remove 35 articles where the keyword *feedback* appeared less than two times, and 29 duplicate records (Page et al., 2021). Thirty-four articles were retained specifically for the purpose of corpus linguistic analysis and the final inclusion criteria for the systematic review were: contemporary publication in the JAE (2000-present), the participants were involved with agriculture teacher education (e.g., supervisors, mentors, cooperating teachers, teachers, and teacher candidates), and the word *feedback* was used at least five times in the context of participants, reducing the literature review sample to 15. All screened literature was uploaded to Sketch Engine, widely accepted as the premier software for corpus analysis (Kilgariff et al., 2014). Sketch Engine offers Word Sketch, a tool to aid in quantitative corpus linguistic analysis. Word Sketch generates a summation of a particular keyword or phrase in terms of the “grammatical and collocational behavior” (Kilgariff et al., 2014, p.9), where the surrounding words are known as the “collocation window” (Brezina, 2018,

p.67), which are used to better identify the context shaping the grammatical and collocational behavior of the keyword.

Findings

This review captured perspectives of 976 individuals involved with the phenomenon of feedback, including preservice teachers, cooperating teachers, university supervisors and beginning teachers. The keyword *feedback* appeared 268 times in this data corpus. The top ten collocates for the keyword *feedback* were: *provide, from, received, receive, provided, providing, supervisors, university, peer, and verbal*. Feedback was represented in a wide variety of ways and differentiated in meaning within each article. For as often as the word feedback was used, few authors operationalized or clearly defined what they meant by the word. The theoretical framework guiding this systematic review was important to begin uncovering the predominant representations of feedback as either information (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), an event (Kurtoglu-Hooton, 2016), or a process (Henderson et al., 2019).

The most common representation of feedback suggested information transmission from one agent to another (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), and typically in a unidirectional pathway of information from a supervisor or cooperating teacher, to the teacher candidate. When feedback was represented as an event, the practices were focused on the meeting, time frequencies, or events occurring during a post-observation conference (Kurtoglu-Hooton, 2016). Some language indicated feedback was occurring as discourse (Henderson et al., 2019), including references to a *verbal conversation, feedback conversation, reflection process or dialogue*.

The predominant collocates were *receive* and *provide*, highlighting feedback as information, and grammatically positioning feedback as the object of a sentence and interpreted as information passed from supervisor to the teacher candidate. Feedback was also characterized by distinct features related to how it was given, and when it was given. *Verbal* was the main modifier, which indicates feedback is typically spoken communication. Other modifiers of the keyword *feedback* included *immediate* and *constructive*.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The distinction between feedback as a process, event, or information, might be subtle in nature, but has significant implications if only left to the reader to make their own interpretation. Language is powerful, and when a co-existence of meaning is not clearly communicated it can result in conflicting interpretations, and implications for practice (Winstone et al., 2021). Leveraging definitions of existing scholars related to feedback, and consistently using them in scholarship will better align research with three primary representations:

1. *Feedback information*: a primary focus on the content, information, or cues used to inform changes, practice, or performance, in relation to a standard or goal. Feedback information can be acquired by the learner, or it can be supplied by an external source or agent such as a supervisor, cooperating teacher, peer, or data.
2. *Feedback process*: a primary focus on how a dialogue, discussion, reflection, and relationships drive forward changes in practice or performance in relation to a standard or goal. Feedback processes can be internally or externally derived and are a mechanism for actively formulating outcomes and actions based on the feedback information available.
3. *Feedback event*: an occurrence where either feedback information or feedback processes to occur; a post-observation conference.

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