



**Positive and negative written corrective feedback: A mixed-method
investigation of EAP teachers' word choices**

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Abstract

The 2012 Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education report highlights feedback to students as an area in need of improvement. Recent National Student Surveys confirm assessment and feedback as the area of least satisfaction (<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/nss>). Written corrective feedback (WCF) is a much-debated area of teaching (Budianto *et al.*, 2016; Ferris, 1999; Hartono, 2014; Truscott, 1996, 1999), yet there is still a lack of consensus regarding what constitutes best practice. This study aims to contribute to the existing research by investigating some of the word choices made by teachers in their feedback. The research focuses on drawing comparisons between word choices in positive and negative WCF. A secondary aim of the study is to investigate teachers' perceptions of their own word choices in WCF. The study was conducted at a UK higher education institution that specialises in university preparation courses. A corpus analysis of feedback written by ten English for academic purposes (EAP) teachers was conducted, followed by semi-structured interviews with nine of the teachers. The data collected from the two methods were triangulated to gain a deeper and more complex understanding of the subject matter (Hyland, 2010). This is a methodological strength of this study: the combination of corpus analysis with interview data. The results show that teachers write considerably more negative than positive feedback but use more explicit evaluative language in positive feedback than in negative feedback. Another key finding is the greater presence of the teacher writer, through the use of the pronoun 'I', in negative feedback than in positive feedback. Teachers show awareness of strategies they employ in WCF (e.g. mitigation, hedging) and are somewhat aware of the impact their comments might have on students. However, they seem to be less conscious of specific word choices that they make in their WCF. The results suggest that teachers should be mindful of the learning benefits of positive feedback as well as negative feedback, and could be encouraged to reflect more on their own feedback practices.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Current discussions on feedback

The centrality of feedback given from teacher to student is well documented in academic literature (Ferris *et al.*, 1997; Hartono, 2014; Hyland and Hyland, 2012; Zhan, 2016), yet it has also been acknowledged that it can be the most challenging aspect of the job to do well (Ferris, 2007). Truscott (1996) sparked a well-published debate regarding the efficacy of written corrective feedback (henceforth WCF) in second language (L2) writing classrooms. Until now researchers have not managed to reach a consensus regarding what constitutes best practice for teachers giving WCF to L2 learners.

The debate is not restricted to English Language Teaching (ELT) and current research has also explored WCF in Higher Education contexts (Hyatt, 2005; Li *et al.*, 2017; Nicol, 2010; Randall and Mirador, 2003). In their 2012 report, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) identified ‘feedback to students on assessment’ as an area in need of improvement. The report states that, despite increased efforts by institutions to review processes, students’ perception of the feedback they receive remains the area of least satisfaction, with only a 67% satisfaction rate in the National Student Survey (NSS) 2010. Figures from the 2015 and 2016 NSS show that, while the satisfaction rate results have increased (to 73% and 74% respectively), assessment and feedback remains the area of least satisfaction (<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/nss>). While these results are pertinent, their usefulness is limited by not exploring the reasons for their dissatisfaction.

Current research investigating student perception of feedback uncovers some potential reasons for the lack of contentment that students may have concerning feedback processes. One such cause could be the presence of inconsistencies between student and teacher perceptions of teacher feedback, in that students often feel they need more specific, detailed and clear feedback than the teacher provides (Zhan, 2016). Another potential source of dissatisfaction is that student preference (e.g. method of delivery, or focus of feedback) can play a vital role in the successful application of WCF. If the teacher does not provide feedback that is consistent with student preference, it may not have a positive impact (Orts and Salazar, 2016). Furthermore, if there is a lack of consistency in preparation, planning and implementation, the feedback may fail to be beneficial to student improvement (Budianto *et al.* 2017). Finally, Mahfoodh (2017) observed that the receipt of negative evaluation

sometimes evoked a negative emotional response in students. Since feedback is inherently likely to contain elements that could be perceived as critical, this observation may account for students' negative feeling towards feedback processes.

Throughout my own professional practice, I have noticed a considerable lack of consistency in the feedback offered to students by different teachers. While it is difficult without considerable research to identify the superior methods, what is notable is that there are clear distinctions in approach and output by different teachers. In reflecting on my own classroom practice, and through informal discussions with colleagues, both past and present, it has become clear that the majority of teachers have not undertaken any formal training on how to give WCF. This could be said to account for the high degree of inconsistency in feedback processes, and it seems relevant to investigate these variances in more detail by exploring choices and decisions made by teachers when writing WCF.

In order to begin to understand the dissatisfaction of students towards feedback, it is first important to recognise what teachers are actually doing. As discussed, WCF has been well researched and debated over the years, however there is a relative lack of research that aims to investigate teachers' practice through an analysis of their WCF. Even fewer studies use corpus analysis and, during my investigation of existing research, I have found only one study (Hyland and Hyland, 2001) that then triangulates the corpus data with teacher interviews to also gain insight into teachers' perceptions of their WCF practices.

1.2 Aims of the study

This primary aim of this study is to explore word choice in English for academic purposes (EAP) teachers' WCF, in particular, drawing comparisons between positive and negative feedback. That is, it aims to identify words and structures that are used more frequently by teachers when commenting on strengths compared with commenting on weaknesses in the student assignment. Additionally, the study will analyse teacher perception of word choice within the framework of WCF to investigate whether choices are made consciously, or not.

In exploring these key areas, the study aims to answer the following research questions (RQs):

- RQ1: Which lexical items characterise EAP teachers' positive feedback comments? And what function do they fulfil in these teachers' WCF?
- RQ2: Which lexical items characterise EAP teachers' negative feedback comments? And what function do they fulfil in these teachers' WCF?
- RQ3: What perception do EAP teachers have of their word choice in WCF?

The study was conducted in an EAP context, at a UK higher education institution that specialises in university preparation courses. In line with the results of the NSS, at this particular institution, feedback on student work was identified as an area for improvement by their external examining body, and a secondary aim of this study is to make recommendations to improve this provision.

A multi-method approach was used in order to validate and crosscheck the data. The study began with a corpus analysis of the WCF data, followed by semi-structured interviews based on the key results of the corpus analysis. The final stage of analysis involved crosschecking the corpus data for additional findings uncovered during the interview process. As discussed, these approaches have seldom been used together and so this study further aims to contribute to the existing research by adopting the distinctive approach of comparing corpus analysis findings with teacher perception, gained through interviews.

While much of the previous research has addressed the function of teachers' WCF (Hyatt, 2005; Hyland and Hyland, 2001, 2006, 2012; Merckle, 2008), this study intends to identify the key features and word choices made in WCF through the use of corpus analysis. Hence it aims to provide comprehensive evidence of lexical preference in teachers' WCF.

1.3 Organisation of the study

The dissertation consists of five chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 explores relevant literature that contributes to the study of WCF, and identifies gaps in the existing research. In Chapter 3, the methodological approaches used in this study are presented and justified. This is followed by a detailed analysis and discussion of the key research findings in Chapter 4. The dissertation concludes with Chapter 5, which offers a summary of the results, along with an acknowledgment of the limitations of the study, before closing with suggestions for pedagogical practice and further research.

Chapter 2: Literature review

The following chapter examines some of the key literature relating to feedback practices. For the purpose of this study, it is first necessary to define EAP, and identify some of its key features, particularly in relation to academic writing. This review then explores current perceptions of feedback in the classroom, before focusing on WCF. A definition for WCF is given alongside a discussion of on-going debates regarding the efficacy of WCF. Then current recommendations for WCF are presented. Finally, the chapter considers previous studies that have employed the use of corpora in their data analysis of WCF.

2.1 English for academic purposes

A broad definition of EAP is ‘teaching English with the aim of assisting learners’ study or research in that language’ (Hyland, 2006, p. 1). In other words, it is predominantly concerned with the preparation of students for university education. EAP classes might take place prior to acceptance into university (pre-sessional), or may be provided in tandem with regular university classes as additional support (in-sessional). The primary goal for almost all EAP students is to develop academic literacy to allow successful progression, through university study, to graduation (Alexander *et al.*, 2008).

Study skills, such as research, referencing, critical thinking and avoidance of plagiarism, are a key focus of EAP courses, along with the introduction of academic conventions that may differ from academic expectations in the student’s country of origin (Alexander *et al.*, 2008). Given the focus that universities place on written assessment, and the widespread use of English in academic publications, it is no surprise that the teaching of academic writing is widely viewed as the cornerstone of EAP teaching (Alexander *et al.*, 2008; de Chazal, 2014).

Academic writing is a complex process, which involves such an amalgamation of skills that even native speakers may struggle (de Chazal, 2014; Wette, 2010). Students need increased exposure to a range of suitable academic texts so they can start to notice patterns and structural similarities (de Chazal, 2014), as well as clear and focused teacher feedback to help progress and improve their writing (Alexander *et al.*, 2008; Jordan, 1997). While entering the world of academia is often challenging for any student, regardless of language background, second language learners may face additional challenges such as limited vocabulary, or misinformation regarding English writing conventions. For example, students may be

advised in general English writing classes to avoid repetition of vocabulary, a convention that is often actively employed in academic writing, especially for technical or key terms, so as to ensure clarity, transparency and coherence (Alexander *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, in order to successfully establish feedback processes that are accurate, effective, and relevant for the specific teachers and students involved, it is important to remember that individual pedagogical contexts may have different feedback requirements (Ferris *et al.*, 2013).

2.2 Perceptions of feedback in the classroom

Nicol and McFarlane-Dick (2006) define feedback as ‘information about how the student’s present state (of learning and performance) relates to [their] goals and standards’ (p. 200). Feedback is regarded as a key aspect of classroom practice in both first and second language learning environments (Biber *et al.*, 2011) and is considered ‘essential for the development of second language writing skills’ (Hyland and Hyland, 2006a, p. 83). Students generally place a high value on teacher feedback in the classroom (Weaver, 2006) however, it is a common perception that teachers view giving feedback as a time-consuming chore, and often question the impact their feedback has on students’ language development (Lee, 2011). In fact, the feedback process can fill even the most experienced teacher with anxiety and frustration (Ferris, 2007).

To gain insight into teacher motivations for giving feedback, Lee (2003) conducted questionnaires and interviews with teachers and found the top two reasons teachers gave for writing feedback to be: making students aware of errors, and helping students to avoid making the same errors in the future. Evans *et al.* (2010) conducted a similar study, and discovered the most common reason teachers gave for providing feedback was: ‘it helps students’ (p. 60). Most commonly these teachers felt feedback helps students to develop linguistically. Zacharias (2007) found that 95% of the 20 teachers he interviewed felt teacher feedback was ‘important’ or ‘very important’ in improving student writing, since the teacher is generally best placed to help the student to improve. Thus, it seems that, despite its challenging nature, teachers recognise the value and importance of feedback.

Maclellan (2001) distinguishes between feedback that is provided to encourage and assist learning (formative feedback), and feedback used to justify achievement (summative feedback). Her study showed marked differences in student and teacher perceptions on the purpose of feedback. On one hand, Maclellan found that teachers expected their comments to

be developmental. They believed the feedback should have an effect on future performance, either in revisions of the same piece of work (known as process writing), or in different assignments. In contrast, her study revealed that students viewed the comments primarily as a justification of their performance in relation that particular piece of work, and not as a way of advancing their learning. This lack of mutual understanding of the purpose of WCF could be an issue that contributes to students' feelings of dissatisfaction, as uncovered by the NSS (see Section 1.1).

2.3 Written corrective feedback

WCF has been defined as: 'the correction of grammatical errors for the purpose of improving a student's ability to write accurately' (Truscott, 1996, p. 329); 'a written response to a linguistic error that has been made in the writing of a text by a second language (L2) learner' (Bitchener and Storch, 2016, p. 1); and 'any feedback provided to a learner, from any source, that contains evidence of learner error of language form' (Russell and Spada, 2006, p. 134). It may be worth considering that these definitions are rather limiting, since often teachers will make more generalised comments regarding content, structure, or overall argument, as well as addressing lexical or grammatical mistakes. For the purposes of this study then, we will classify WCF as any comments written by the teacher that are designed to 'enable students to read and understand the problems [with their writing]' (Leng, 2014, p. 390) and to assist in the 'development of his or her writing processes' (Hyland and Hyland, 2006a, p. 83).

Although not the first to suggest that error correction on student writing is not effective (see Semke, 1984), in his seminal work Truscott (1996) sparked what has come to be an on-going debate into the efficacy of WCF. Drawing on a wealth of existing research he claimed that WCF is not only highly ineffective, due to the lack of evidence of progression as a direct result of WCF, but that the process may actually be damaging to students since several studies (Kepner, 1991; Rob *et al.*, 1986; Semke, 1984 - all cited in Truscott, 1996) showed students who received no error correction actually performed better than students who had received error correction. Truscott's claims have been both supported and contested passionately for years. Ferris responded to Truscott's (1996) review declaring it to be 'premature and overly strong' (Ferris, 1999, p. 1) and called for further research into the field. Truscott further responded by examining Ferris' (1999) arguments, concluding that the criticisms were 'unfounded and highly selective' (Truscott, 1999, p. 111) and contending they may have even served to strengthen his own claims. What the two researchers did agree on, however, is that

there lies some truth in Truscott's arguments regarding the practicality of giving feedback, namely lack of student understanding, lack of teacher training, and teachers feeling overburdened with marking.

2.4 Current recommendations for written corrective feedback

Recent studies in the field have favoured targeting a particular grammar point or structural component, rather than the abandonment of WCF completely, and highlight the importance of teaching context in identifying which method of feedback is most appropriate to use (Ferris *et al.*, 2013; Lyster and Ranta, 2013; Rummel and Bitchener, 2015). Lyster and Ranta (2013) further express their concerns over attempts to generalise about the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of WCF and keenly promote an analysis of the practical application of any type of feedback in the classroom, to support any theoretical research.

As discussed, feedback can be seen as playing a pivotal role in developing and improving student writing skills through process writing (Hyland and Hyland, 2006a). However, it is acknowledged that feedback whose purpose is to encourage students 'not to repeat [those] errors and to develop their understanding' is a far more complex process than simply drawing attention to errors (Price *et al.*, 2010, p. 279). Despite the additional complexity and workload for the teacher, Biber *et al.* (2011) promote teacher feedback that concentrates on training students in the revision process, since they found it to have far more positive gains than feedback that seeks to identify specific errors in a text. They also note that 'feedback provided through written comments was found to be more effective for improving grammatical accuracy than error location' (p. 52). In other words, written summary comments located at the end, or separately from, the student work are more effective in improving grammatical accuracy than notations written in the body of the student text. The reason they cite for this is that in-text notations might be viewed by the student as 'simple editing corrections' (p. 52), which the researchers believe would be less likely to be transferred to other errors of a similar nature in future writing than if the error was identified in an end note.

Nicol and McFarlane-Dick (2006) posit that, especially in higher education, feedback should be used to enable learners to develop self-regulatory skills. In other words, feedback should empower students to monitor their own progress and make adjustments to meet set goals and targets. Alexander *et al.* (2008) echo the sentiment that EAP learners need to be taught to

become self-assessors, being able to evaluate their own work first and foremost, before benefitting from any other feedback methods. This is especially important since one of the main challenges of teaching EAP writing is that the student is often more of an expert in their discipline than the EAP teacher (Alexander *et al.* 2008; Hyland and Hyland, 2006a). One suggested model for EAP teachers is that comments on content should be reserved for times when the point is either unclear, or lacks detailed development, and feedback should instead concentrate on structure and language (Storch and Tapper, 2009), a notion which goes against Truscott's (1996, 1999) position.

While WCF will inherently veer towards a focus on negative aspects of a text, it is important to recognise the value of giving positive as well as negative evaluation (Ivanić *et al.*, 2000; Walker, 2009) and so feedback should not only advise of the failings of the text but should also comment on the successful features in order to reinforce good practice (Alexander *et al.*, 2008). Additionally, how the comments are presented needs to be considered. Phrasing comments in the first person, for example, may make evaluations seem more subjective, while comments that directly address the student writer using 'you' may leave them feeling judged (Ivanić *et al.*, 2000). Thus it is important to be aware of the impact word choice in feedback might have on the student.

Due to time restrictions, face-to-face contact time between student and teacher can be limited or rushed, therefore written feedback is often the main, or the only, way that students receive guidance on their work (Nicol, 2010; Randall and Mirador, 2003). It is little surprise, then, that teachers' feedback commentaries on student assignments are viewed as one of the most vital tools in the development of proficient student writers (Hyatt, 2005; Li *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, it is important that teachers are able to critically evaluate their feedback practices and consider the effect the comments might have on students (Ivanić *et al.*, 2000).

One such way of conducting this self-evaluation is through corpus analysis. An emerging area of corpus analysis that remains relatively under-researched is teacher corpora (Merckle, 2008). Teacher corpora are distinctive in that they are used to tell us more about professional practice rather than exclusively about the language itself. Teachers can use corpora to analyse interactions, whether spoken or written, to develop a greater awareness of language choices made in the classroom (O'Keefe *et al.*, 2007). Despite the clear benefits of this type of reflective practice, it is still a relatively underused tool (McCarthy, 2008).

2.5 Previous corpus studies of teacher feedback

Previous studies using corpus analyses of teacher feedback have tended towards an investigation into the function or category of the comments (Hyatt, 2005; Hyland and Hyland, 2001, 2006b, 2012; Merckle, 2008; Li *et al.*, 2017; Randall and Mirador, 2003). What follows is a summary of some of the key studies that have the most relevance to the current research.

Hyatt (2005) conducted a detailed corpus analysis of the functional categories of teachers' WCF in a variety of Educational Studies Master's programmes. His corpus comprises 60 texts written for 6000-word student assignments. Hyatt does not disclose the details of the participants of the study so it is not possible to confirm how many teachers wrote the feedback or how many students were involved. The data was categorised according to the perceived function of the comment, employing seven main categories. Some of these further were divided into subcategories, amounting to 19 in total. One of the key findings from Hyatt's (2005) study is the strong link between the *stylistic* category (defined as 'use and presentation of academic language', p. 345) and imperatives and obligating modality. For example, 'be careful with commas. They can make a big difference to readability!' (p. 345, where 'be careful' is an imperative structure. This is an interesting point as the current study also explores the use of imperatives. Another interesting finding is that there was little evidence of personalisation in the dataset. These are occurrences where the tutor made clear to the student that the comment was a personal viewpoint not an undisputed truth. Again, this is an area of interest for the current study. Finally, Hyatt (2005) noted his surprise to find how much presence positive evaluation had in the comments in his study. He noted that teachers 'regularly commented' (p. 350) on positive aspects of the students' writing. He had predicted that writing which demonstrates the required academic conventions would not receive praise, since 'good' writing is not as readily perceptible as writing that does not meet expectations. This postulation is suggested as an explanation for why feedback is often weighted in favour of negative comments. However, the hypothesis is not supported by his data analysis which shows that teachers do, in fact, comment positively as well as negatively (though no exact figures are given as to the number of instances of each).

Hyland and Hyland (2001, 2006b, 2012) are generally seen as key players in the field of teacher feedback analysis. They have produced several studies based on the same round of data collection (conducted in 1998 by Hyland, F.) that approach the data from different

perspectives. The data was gathered from feedback written by two teachers from a New Zealand university to six ESL writers, three pre-undergraduate and three pre-postgraduate. The original study in 1998, as well as the 2001 write-up, used corpus analysis along with a think-aloud process while the teachers were writing their feedback. This was followed up with teacher and student interviews. This is the only study I have found that triangulates corpus data and teachers' interview data when researching WCF. The methodology of the study is comprehensive, and allowed for a wealth of data that could be explored from different angles. Primarily, the research focused on praise, criticism and suggestion in WCF, and so the comments were categorised accordingly. This is very relevant to the current study as praise and criticism could be seen as synonymous with positive and negative feedback. Some of Hyland and Hyland's (1998, 2001) key findings included the identification that mitigation strategies can lead to students' miscomprehension and miscommunication of feedback. The researchers suggest that a direct approach may sometimes be the most effective way of giving feedback since indirectness can lead to misinterpretation, especially with low-level learners. Finally, the 2001 study uncovered the need for teachers to take care when offering positive feedback as there is a danger that students see it as simply 'sugaring the pill' of criticism rather than sincere positive evaluation.

Hyland and Hyland's (2006b; 2012) research projects have the same focus: giving advice in feedback in relation to power relationships between student and teacher. Here they use the corpus, along with teachers' verbal protocols and retrospective student interviews, to explore the concepts of interpersonal engagement and mutual understanding through WCF. They found mismatches in student and teacher expectations with regards to the delivery, and subsequent application, of feedback. Teachers were conscious of hedging their comments to avoid upsetting the student, while students often preferred a more direct approach as it aided their understanding. Additionally, as with Maclellan's (2001) study, teachers had more expectation of the student carrying the feedback into future assignments than the students showed. Furthermore, individual students in their study had different preferences for feedback (further confirmed by Orts and Salazar, 2016) with some preferring grammar correction while others favoured structural and organisational comments. The final key point of their research is that it revealed teachers display a clear awareness of students' weaknesses with regards to WCF, such as their inability or unwillingness to act on feedback advice. However, Hyland and Hyland (2012) found that teachers are less reflective of problems in their own practice, for example not offering the type of feedback that the student wants or needs.

Randall and Mirador (2003) performed a corpus analysis of tutor feedback to part-time MA (Ed) students concentrating on how the tutor comments relate to the discourse of institutional assessment criteria. The researchers compared a tutor corpus, made up of 270 texts written by nine tutors (though it is unclear what assignment the feedback was in response to), with an institutional corpus consisting of official institutional documents. The tutor corpus was also compared with the institutional criteria for assessment. Their findings suggest that tutor comments are largely congruent with the formal institutional discourse, which is regarded as a positive relationship. However, the study does not go so far as to investigate the level of student understanding of the comments. If tutors are inclined to use formal, institutional wording in their comments then it would be interesting to know if students are able to interpret their meaning correctly. Randall and Mirador (2003) also found that tutors tended to provide more positive than negative feedback, which goes against the conclusions of Ivanić *et al.* (2000) and Ädel (2017) (see below) who both discovered a tendency towards negative feedback comments. As with many discourse analysis studies, this research required the application of researcher judgement and intuition during categorisation, particularly in terms of delineating between positive and negative comments. As Hyatt (2005) notes, there can be difficulties in distinguishing between positive and negative comments. It may be necessary for the researcher to interpret the intention of the writer, and personal beliefs regarding semantic prosody can affect judgement. The current dissertation overcomes this issue through the use of a feedback template employed by the institution, which demarcates areas in which to write positive and negative comments.

Ädel's (2017) study addresses the idea of reader, writer and text visibility through a corpus analysis of metadiscourse in teacher feedback on student writing. To do this she examines the frequency of personal pronouns and deictic expressions in a corpus of 375 student texts, written by five teachers from an English undergraduate course at a Swedish university. The feedback was written in response to a series of five tasks, building in complexity from a single paragraph to a complete text. Her findings showed a greater presence of the student reader (you) than the teacher writer (I) in the feedback data. She also found a high presence of reference to the original student text using deictic words and phrases, such as 'here', to highlight areas of weakness in the student work. A key difference between Ädel's study and the current research is that Ädel considered the corpus as a whole, while the current research focuses on only part of the corpus.

As we have seen, relatively few studies have been conducted into teacher WCF using corpus analysis. To the best of my knowledge there have been no studies that have focused on teachers' word choice in WCF, and this research contributes to the current literature by analysing teachers' word choice patterns for positive and negative comments.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter details the methods adopted in this research project, namely corpus analysis and semi-structured interviews. The chapter begins with an outline of the research design followed by an explanation of the approaches used, firstly, in the corpus data collection and analysis, and then, in the interviews. The subsequent section highlights the value of using a multi-method approach in research. The chapter concludes by clarifying the ethical issues concerning the research project.

3.1 Research design

This section provides details of the research design for this project. It will first describe the participants of the study as well as the coding system used to refer to them throughout the research. Next, follows a description of the context from which the data used to compile the corpus was collected. Finally, it presents an outline of a pilot corpus project that was conducted as a trial for this research.

3.1.1 Participants

The participants for this study are a group of EAP teachers working for a private institution that specialises in university preparation courses. A total of 12 teachers were approached to participate in the study. However, due to narrowing the parameters of eligible data to only include comments from a specific feedback template, only ten have contributed to the data pool (Table 3.1).

Age	31	33	34	34	42	46	47	47	55	61
Sex	Female	Male	Female	Female	Male	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male
Nationality	Polish	British	British	British	British	British	British	British	British	British
Mother Tongue	Polish	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English
Teaching Experience	5 years	6 years	3 years	5 years	21 years	12 years	16 years	24 years	31 years	36 years
EAP Experience	2 years	2 years	2.5 years	2 years	5 years	11 years	4 years	18 years	8 years	8 years
Time at Institution	2 years	1 year	2 years	1 year	2.5 years	3 years	2 years	1 year	2 years	3 years
Qualifications	MSc TESOL	TEFL, PGCE	CELTA MSc TESOL	CELTA, MSc TESOL	CELTA	CELTA	CELTA, DELTA, MSc TESOL	DELTA	CELTA	DELTA, MSc TESOL

Table 3.1: Participant information

Teachers were assigned a number code (e.g. T1 = Teacher 1) and this has remained consistent throughout the study. However, since the institution in question is relatively small, it has been decided not to present the code alongside the participant information so as to ensure identities remain confidential. The information in Table 3.1 is presented in ascending order of teacher age, and does not reflect the order of the coding system.

The participants comprise four male and six female teachers, ranging in age from 31 to 61. All but one of the participants is British and a native English speaker, the other being Polish. Teachers have between five and 36 years teaching experience, with between two and 18 years experience in an EAP context. As this is a new institution which has been operating in this location for only three years, teachers have worked for the company for between one and three years. All teachers have at least one teaching qualification, at varying levels.

As I am an active member of the teaching team, it was deemed appropriate to include my own feedback in the study as an accurate representation of all comments from the feedback template for this institution. However, it was not appropriate to contribute to the interview data since I would likely be influenced by my involvement in the research. Therefore, a total of nine interviews are included in the study.

3.1.2 Description of context

Data was collected from feedback comments that teachers wrote in response to a short, timed essay (250-300 words, 60 minutes), written under exam conditions. The essays were written as one component of a mid-term mock exam and form part of the formative assessment process. The same assessment process was repeated in two separate academic terms in the academic year 2016-2017, and the data for this study was collated from these two separate occasions. All comments considered for this study were written on a feedback template (henceforth FT) (Appendices 1 and 2) adopted by the institution, which was designed to standardise and structure teachers' comments. This was the first time that the FT had been introduced. As end comments are seen as a more effective way of improving accuracy in student work (Biber *et al.*, 2011), and to ensure consistency in the data, additional comments written directly on the essays, or comments submitted in any other format, were not considered for the study.

Each FT has three sections in which comments may be written, with the following headings:

- Two things done well in your writing
- Two things to develop in your writing
- Further comments

Comments were either hand-written or typed, depending on teacher preference. No explicit instruction was given by me, as the researcher, or by the institution, regarding how the template should be used, and a variety of methods have been employed. Some teachers have written comments in bullet point or list form, while others have written full sentences or paragraphs. In some cases teachers have chosen not to complete all three of the sections. Some participants have adhered to the heading instruction of ‘two things’ for each of the first two sections, while other teachers have included more than two points per section.

3.1.3 Pilot corpus project

After the first round of data collection, a pilot project was conducted using only the data from one academic term. This allowed the data to be assessed as to its suitability for corpus analysis. Since the corpus in question would be a specialised corpus, representing a particular genre (feedback texts), there was a danger that the data might not be of sufficient length to use corpus analysis tools (e.g. if all comments were simply bullet points of a few words in length then they would not be well suited to corpus analysis). Similarly, if the comments had been copied directly from standardised grading criteria, then they would only be reflective of the wording of the matrix, not of the teachers’ own words. Fortunately, the pilot study was successful and highlighted a number of interesting patterns and relationships to be further explored after the final round of data collection.

3.2 Corpus analysis in language research

While corpus analysis is not a new concept, the term *corpus linguistics* is commonly perceived to have been coined by Aarts and Meijs in 1984 (McCarthy and O’Keefe, 2010). Advancements in technology have opened doors to exploring greater quantities of data in shorter periods of time (Baker, 2006), and modern day corpus linguists have a breadth of digital tools available to make data analysis procedures more effective and efficient (Scott and Tribble, 2006). A corpus can be defined as ‘a collection of authentic language, either written

or spoken, which has been compiled for a particular purpose' (Flowerdew, 2012, p. 3). It is important for a corpus to accurately represent the data and population that it derives from, and for analysts to remember that a corpus cannot claim to represent a wider context than its data allows (Aston, 2011).

One of the key defining features of corpus analysis is that it allows us to observe how language is really used as opposed to how we think language is used (Anderson and Corbett, 2009). Since corpora are compiled of authentic language, they can be said to be 'messy and noisy' (Gries, 2011, p. 89) but they also allow researchers to consider patterns and variations of language in context, rather than in isolation (Biber *et al.*, 1998; Clancy, 2010).

Another advantage of corpus analysis is that it limits researcher bias (Baker, 2006, Biber *et al.*, 1998). As humans, researchers tend to notice abnormalities rather than consistencies which can lead to judgements being unreliable and inaccurate (Biber *et al.*, 1998). Using an intuition-based approach can be ineffective since conclusions may be heavily influenced by the researcher's own context and experiences (McEnery *et al.*, 2006). Researchers may be more inclined to search for evidence that supports or denounces their personal beliefs or suspicions (Baker, 2006) than to approach the data objectively. In short, corpora allow us to identify patterns that may otherwise escape human intuition (Hyatt, 2005, Reppen, 2010), and to avoid imposing patterns that do not truly exist (Scott and Tribble, 2006).

Pedagogically speaking, corpus studies can help develop professional practice and encourage self-reflection by 'build[ing] up sensitivity to the language we [teachers] use so as to hone our judgements about what we say in the classroom' (O'Keefe *et al.*, 2007, pp. 220-221). This study provides the ideal opportunity for me to analyse my own personal practice, and compare it with that of my colleagues. In sharing the results of the study, it is hoped that the research will also impact on institutional feedback practices.

Despite the obvious benefits of using corpora in language studies, some criticisms of the process do prevail. Hunston (2002) argues that, since corpora require the text to be taken out of its 'spatial context' (p. 23), the original layout or features may not be accurately represented. Baker (2006) concurs with this idea, arguing that language in a corpus can become decontextualised, meaning that it will invariably be subject to researcher interpretation, which can be inaccurate.

Despite the criticisms, and since this research is concerned with analysing specific word choices made in WCF, a corpus analysis seems like the ideal choice of method to identify ‘systemic patterns of variation’ (Hyatt, 2005, p. 343) in the dataset effectively, with minimal researcher bias. A major advantage of this study is that it also employs interviews with the authors of the original texts. Therefore, questions relating to the corpus data may be addressed directly to source, lessening the need for heavy researcher interpretation.

3.3 Corpus data collection and analysis

The section begins by outlining the processes employed in corpus compilation as well as detailing the corpus specification. It then presents an initial corpus analysis, followed by a detailed account of the categorisation process employed in this project.

3.3.1 Corpus compilation

The corpus in this study is compiled of teachers WCF from a genuine teaching context. In line with Flowerdew’s (2012) definition (Section 3.2), the language is both authentic, and written for a specific purpose, in this case to give feedback to students. It is representative only of these particular feedback comments, written by the specific participants, at one EAP institution. It cannot be said to be representative of EAP, teachers, or WCF as a whole.

The compilation process began with gathering copies of the completed FTs. Teachers uploaded digital copies or scans of their FTs to a designated, secure folder. From there, the raw data was converted into Plain Text files. The typed comments were copied directly from source in order to retain as much of the original context as possible, and handwritten comments were transcribed exactly as they appeared in the original file. Therefore, any spelling or grammatical errors were also preserved. In order to address Hunston’s (2002) concerns regarding spatial context, during the transcription process a system of mark-up codes were employed to denote features of the text that are not easily transferrable to a Plain Text format, for example smiley faces and ticks/crosses. (See Appendices 3, 4 and 5 for full details and examples of mark-up).

When saving the Plain Text files, it is necessary to assign an appropriate file name. In order to efficiently identify and sort the files according to their key features, ‘creating files names that include aspects of the texts that are relevant for analysis is helpful’ (Reppen, 2010, p. 33).

Each file name in the corpus includes a code that relates to: the author of the text (T01); feedback number (FB01); task type (MT); class (Fnd); and academic term (02). Thus, a file name has the following format: T01FB01MTFnd02 (see Appendix 6 for details of all possible variants). Subsequent examples in this dissertation that have been taken from the corpus are associated with the relevant file name.

The three sections on the FT were delimited by tags in the corpus files. The sections were tagged according to their purpose as <positive>, <negative>, or <comments>. This allowed the comments from each section to be grouped across all of the FTs, so that all comments tagged <positive> could be compared with all comments tagged <negative>, and so on. Each corpus file starts with a header (Appendix 7) that contains extra-textual information concerning the context in which the feedback was written (e.g. setting, course, assignment type), the teacher who wrote the comments, and the format of the FT.

3.3.2 Corpus specification

The corpus comprises 190 texts written by ten teachers, all from the same genre (feedback texts). Corpus analysis uses the terms *token* and *type* when describing corpus data statistics. According to Evison (2010), ‘at the simplest level a token and word can be considered to be the same thing’ (p. 124) while *type* is a ‘particular, unique wordform’ (McEnery and Hardie, 2011, p. 50). In other words, the token count tells us the total number of words, whereas the *type* provides the number of distinct words, which can be found in the corpus (Table 3.2).

No. of Texts	No. of Tokens	No. of Types
190	12,002	1,184

Table 3.2: Corpus specification

The individual text files range in size from six tokens to 204 tokens. This is important to bear in mind during the analysis stage since the large variance in size of text files could influence the results. That being said, the aim of this corpus is to accurately represent the WCF of the participants and so it is necessary to include all text files, regardless of size.

3.3.3 Initial corpus analysis

This study employs a bottom-up approach, moving from ‘specific observations to broader generalisations or theories’ (Cheng, 2011, p. 188). Corpus analysis software, in this case WordSmith Tools 6.0, was used to create an overall wordlist, and individual wordlists of each

of the three sections of the FT. Table 3.3 shows the statistics for each of the three wordlists. Since this study is primarily concerned with exploring word choice in positive and negative comments, the <comments> section of the FT has been excluded from further analysis.

	Tokens	Types	TTR
<positive>	3355	428	12.76%
<negative>	6785	954	14.06%
<comments>	1862	443	23.79%

Table 3.3: Wordlist statistics for <positive>, <negative> and <comments> sections of the feedback template

By combining the type and token statistics (outlined in Section 3.3.2), it is possible to calculate a type-token ratio (TTR), which indicates how varied the vocabulary is. The closer the ratio is to 100%, the greater degree of lexical variety (McEnery and Hardie, 2011). It is normally expected that a larger wordlist would have a lower TTR than a smaller wordlist. Logically, if a text contains more words, it is likely to contain more repeated words, and therefore would have less lexical variety. However, we can see from Table 3.3 that the wordlist for <negative> feedback (henceforth WL-NF) has a higher TTR than the wordlist for <positive> feedback (henceforth WL-PF) despite being a larger wordlist, which is an unusual finding. This indicates that the WL-NF uses more different words than the WL-PF.

The WL-PF and WL-NF were used to compile keyword lists for the <positive> and <negative> sections respectively. Keywords (KWs) are words that appear with ‘unusual frequency in one corpus in comparison with a reference corpus’ (Scott and Tribble, 2006, p. 55). In this case, the WL-PF was compared with the WL-NF, and vice versa. For the purposes of this study, KWs with a *p* value of less than 0.001 were considered for analysis, which is lower than the usual 0.05 threshold that is adopted in the Humanities and Social Sciences (Stevens, 2012). This generated a total of 37 KWs from the <positive> feedback (henceforth KW-PF) and 22 KWs for the <negative> feedback (henceforth KW-NF) for consideration. It was then decided to exclude KWs with a dispersion rate of less than 50%, so as to ensure that each KW had been used by at least half of teachers. After these limitations were applied, a total of 21 KWs-PF, and 20 KWs-NF, were left for final analysis (Appendices 8 and 9).

Concordance lines were then generated, again using WordSmith Tools, in order to view each of the KWs in context. This process allows researchers to check how the word is used in the original text and to identify if a singular word has a singular function or if it has many meanings or functions (Adolphs, 2014).

3.3.4 Corpus data categorisation

The next stage of the process was to categorise the KWs by considering each individual occurrence, and its co-text (i.e. the words surrounding the KW). The following six categories were applied: evaluative; directive; representative; metalanguage; textual deixis; and reader/writer visibility. Throughout the categorisation process it became clear that there was not a one-to-one correspondence between form and function, and that different instances of the same KW could be (and have been) assigned to different categories, depending on their use. On considering the KW in its co-text, if the KW could be assigned clearly and easily to a category as an independent term, then that categorisation process that was employed. This was the case, for example, for GOOD as an evaluative term, and INTRODUCTION as a metalinguistic term (please note that focal KWs in the following examples are denoted by capitalisation). If it was unclear what category a KW should be assigned to (for example, AND, which fell into many different categories), the co-text played a greater role in the categorisation process.

3.3.4.1 Evaluative

Since feedback is evaluative by nature, all of the comments could, in theory, be seen as evaluative. However, this label was reserved for times when there was a clear evaluative word that directly linked to the KW. Borrowing from Hyatt's (2005) study, the term evaluative was used to categorise words that refer positively or negatively to appropriateness or accuracy of the student work. Some of the KWs are evaluative in themselves, for example, the top three KWs-PF are: GOOD (KW-PF#1), CLEAR (KW-PF#2), and WELL (KW-PF#3). As discussed, co-text was important in the categorisation of the more ambiguous KWs. KWs directly modified by or associated with an evaluative word (underlined in Examples 3.1 and 3.2) were assigned to the evaluative category. KWs used to connect two evaluative words (underlined in Example 3.3), or to introduce an evaluative word (underlined in Example 3.4), were also classified as evaluative.

3.1. *Excellent IDEAS, good sound academic argument.* (T08FB07MTFnd02)

3.2. *It's NOT appropriate to use personal anecdotes as evidence.* (T01FB01MTFnd02)

3.3. *Your essay is coherent AND logical.* (T03FB06MTEus02)

3.4. *Very well written WITH excellent examples.* (T02FB02MTFnd02)

3.3.4.2 Directive

In Searle's (1975) taxonomy of speech acts, he defines the term *directive* as 'attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something' (p. 355). In this study, comments where the teacher explicitly gives a direction, or advice, to the student were categorised as directive. The most common structures used are imperatives (Example 3.5) and modalisation (Example 3.6). Additionally, KWs that are directly associated with directive structures were also assigned to the category. For instance, in Example 3.7, TO (KW-NF#10) was categorised as directive because it follows REMEMBER (KW-NF#19) in the imperative form.

3.5. MAKE SURE *your sentences are not too long.* (T10FB23MTGdp03)

3.6. You SHOULD *work on the structure of your essay as there is only one paragraph in the main body.* (T03FB04MTEus02)

3.7. REMEMBER TO *proofread your work.* (T09FB07MTGdp02)

3.3.4.3 Representative

This category borrows, again, from Searle's (1975) taxonomy, using the term, *representative*, which he defines as utterances that commit the speaker to the truth of what is expressed. Confirmatory praise or criticism differs from direct praise or criticism in that it does not explicitly use positive or negative language (Egan, 2014; Hooton, 2008). Contrary to the evaluative category, representative was assigned to comments that seemed to be asserting a generalised truth, as opposed to a comment that offered appraisal. In the same way that confirmatory feedback is more factual and less descriptive in nature, representative KWs commit the teacher to the truth of what is said, rather than offering overt positive or negative evaluation. Examples 3.8 and 3.9 have been categorised as representative because they contain no explicit evaluative tokens.

3.8. *Lots of IDEAS for relieving stress.* (T10FB01MTGdp02)

3.9. *The question does NOT refer to hobbies.* (T09FB10MTDip02)

3.3.4.4 Metalanguage

In the broadest sense, metalanguage is 'language that describes language' (Michaud and Perks, 2015, p. 117). That is, words that are used when talking about linguistic concepts or

features, for example, grammatical terms (noun, verb, adjective) or structural components (paragraph, sentence, clause). Since the current study analyses feedback for written assignments, it also considers terms that are associated with academic writing structures, such as introduction, topic sentence, or thesis statement, as metalanguage (Example 3.10). As discussed in Section 3.3.4, co-text was less salient when the KW had a clear function as an independent term. Therefore, in Example 3.11, INTRODUCTION (KW-PF#8) has been categorised as metalanguage despite being closely linked to an evaluative term (underlined). In addition, words that are used to connect (Example 3.12), or introduce (Example 3.13), metalinguistic terms (denoted in **bold**) were also categorised as metalanguage.

3.10. *There has been a good attempt of a thesis statement in the INTRODUCTION.* (T09FB22MTDip02)

3.11. *Excellent INTRODUCTION paragraph.* (T02FB19MTDip02)

3.12. *You have included a **thesis statement** AND **topic sentences**.* (T04FB07MTDip03)

3.13. *Note: to commit suicide is the correct form, we can't use suicide AS a **verb**.* (T01FB18MTFnd03)

To clarify some choices made during categorisation, in Example 3.14, AND (KW-PF#6) has been categorised as metalanguage, since its function is to link two metalinguistic terms (denoted in **bold**). The evaluative term (underlined), modifies the two features of the writing, not the conjunction AND. This is in comparison with Example 3.15 where AND is used to link two evaluative terms (underlined) and has therefore been categorised as evaluative.

3.14. *Clear introduction AND **thesis statement**.* (T10FB05MTGdp02)

3.15. *Interesting AND clear introduction.* (T10FB13MTGdp02)

3.3.4.5 Textual deixis

Deixis comes from the Greek word for 'pointing', and refers to words that require an understanding of the immediate context in order to be fully understood (Harman, 1990). The textual deixis KWs in this study are often the same terms as those classified as metalanguage, however their function is different. Textual deixis KWs point back to the student's original essay, referring to a particular part or feature of the text (Example 3.16), in contrast to metalanguage, which uses to the term in a more general sense (Example 3.17).

- 3.16. *The second PARAGRAPH of the main body loses its way a little.*
(T01FB18MTFnd03)
- 3.17. *Look at PARAGRAPH structure...* (T07FB04MTDip03)

3.3.4.6 Reader/writer visibility

This category denotes the extent to which the teacher makes reference to themselves, as the writer, or to the student-readers of the feedback text. Ädel (2017) studies the frequency of pronoun use to assess the prominence of reader/writer visibility. Adopting the same premise in this study, KW which were, themselves, personal pronouns (Example 3.18), or were used in association with a personal pronoun (underlined in Example 3.19) were categorised as reader/writer visibility. KWs linked to possessive pronouns (underlined in Example 3.20) were also included in this category, as well as KWs that are used in structures indicating reader/writer visibility (underlined in Example 3.21)

- 3.18. *I feel that this has been rushed.* (T09FB10MTDip02)
- 3.19. *You HAVE a clear overall structure...* (T01FB26MTFnd03)
- 3.20. *You supported your IDEAS with specific details...* (T03FB08MTEus02)
- 3.21. *...have more, shorter paragraphs which would be easier for the reader TO follow.*
(T04FB07MTDip03)

While it could be argued that Example 3.19 could be seen as evaluative, it is in clear contrast with Example 3.22 where there is no reader/writer visibility and where IS (KW_PF#19) has been categorised as evaluative.

- 3.22. *There IS a clear overall structure...* (T01FB19MTFnd03)

3.4 Semi-structured interviews

When compared with other data collection methods, such as conducting surveys or questionnaires, interviews allow the researcher to form an ‘interpersonal connection’ with the participant (Perry, 2005, p. 119). Perry (2005) also notes that interviews allow the researcher and participant to ensure mutual understanding through clarification and modification of questions and answers. An example of how this technique has been used in this study can be seen in Appendix 10.1. To minimise researcher bias and ‘leading-the-witness’ (Burns’, 2010,

p. 90), the current research used pre-written questions to ensure consistency in the approach (Dornyei, 2007), and only used additional prompts when it was felt that a particular point needed further clarification or development (Appendix 10.2), or to link back to something the teacher had previously stated to help with understanding (Appendix 10.3).

Interviews should go beyond simple fact gathering and build a relationship that enables people to provide an insight into their perception of the world, while avoiding the promotion of a pre-designed agenda (Richards, 2003). A benefit of semi-structured interviews is that they allow participants to discuss their perceptions and perspectives on a given subject more freely than if responding to preconceived categories, such as in a questionnaire, hence, interviews often prove valuable in providing data that is not easily predictable or obvious, and that the researcher may not have anticipated before the interview (Hyland, 2010).

In this research project, the questions were constructed as a combination of open and closed questions. Closed questions, (Appendix 11.1) allowed for more easily predicted results to be gathered from the interviews, while open questions (Appendix 11.2) encouraged the teacher to expand and develop their train of thought. Whilst the questions remained consistent for all participants, the framing of the questions was adapted to suit the interviewee, and to show researcher engagement and interest in the responses (Richards, 2009). It was felt that having flexibility in the questions helped the interview to flow more naturally (Dornyei, 2007). Since the purpose of the interview was to ask teachers to reflect on their own practice, teachers were sent copies of their own feedback sheets in advance of the interview, and asked to re-familiarise themselves with them.

3.4.1 Interview specification

It is important to ensure that all interviews are piloted in advance to assess the efficacy of the questions (Nunan, 1992). The interview script designed for the current project was piloted with one of the participants who did not contribute any of the final data to the dataset. The original interview schedule (Appendix 12) could be divided into four sections. The first section focused on background information, the purpose of which was two-fold. Firstly, it provided data that was useful for the data analysis stage, and secondly it allowed the candidate to relax, answering easy personal information questions. The second section asked for detail regarding the teacher's personal feedback practices. The third section focused on the results of the corpus analysis and asked teachers to reflect on specific features of the

findings. The final section explored teachers' beliefs regarding the impact their feedback has on students.

After the pilot, a number of revisions were made to produce the final interview script (Appendix 13). During the research process, the RQs changed, and the revisions helped to focus on questions that were more closely linked the revised RQs. Of the three RQs outlined in Section 1.2, RQ1 and RQ2 would be answered using the corpus analysis, while the interviews would address RQ3. It was felt that by narrowing the scope of the research a more detailed and focused analysis could be conducted. The remaining questions provided enough scope for teachers to comment on their own practices, in a way that directly addressed the RQ.

In the final interview script, the questions predominately asked teachers to comment on specific features that appeared during the corpus analysis phase. In doing the corpus analysis first, the interview questions could clearly target the key findings, in order to gain the teachers' perspective effectively.

3.4.2 Interview transcription

During the transcription process, researchers are faced with a number of decisions to make regarding how to best represent their recorded data (Lapadat and Lindsay, 1999). In this dataset, to try to retain an accurate representation of the speaker's message, it was decided to transcribe each interaction, or turn, without making assumptions about where sentences should start and finish. A degree of *naturalized transcription* (Davidson, 1999, p. 38) was employed in that commas were used to indicate the natural start and end of a phrase, to separate items in a list, or to indicate meaningful pauses in order to make the text easier to read and review (Appendix 14). Richards (2009) notes that during transcription the researcher needs to capture 'only essential aspects of delivery' (p. 192). This will vary depending on the focus of the research. In this case the focus is on the content of the interview, and it was not deemed necessary to indicate non-verbal cues, emotional responses, or fillers. All other utterances were transcribed verbatim so as to provide the most accurate depiction of the verbal interview content.

3.4.3 Interview analysis

Following transcription, which allowed for a deeper familiarisation of the data, the interviews were analysed according to their content. Since the interview questions were written post corpus analysis, the *thematic framework* (Ritchie and Spencer, 2002) for the interviews was deeply embedded in the corpus analysis findings. The primary purpose of the interview data was to support or denounce the corpus findings, so the transcripts were first reviewed for patterns in responses that linked to the key corpus findings. For example, in response to Q7: *Are there any words you avoid using in your feedback? Which one(s)?* (Appendix 13), specific word suggestions were grouped by teacher and arranged in a table so common words could be identified.

In the final stage of analysis, salient word choice patterns that emerged that did not correspond directly with the corpus findings were identified. These were then extracted and crosschecked against the corpus data to compare what teachers think they write in WCF with what they actually write.

3.5 Multi-method triangulation

Triangulation, or a multi-method approach, involves using more than one method of data collection in the same study (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). Although some criticism of triangulation exists, claiming that it can, in fact, overcomplicate the data analysis process (Hammersley, 2008), the prevailing view is that triangulation helps to ensure the validity of findings (Burns, 2010; Dornyei, 2007). Singular methods of data collection and analysis often leave results vulnerable to error, while adopting a multi-method approach can add layers of relevant and revealing results from different perspectives (Patton, 1999). In using more than one data source and approach to investigate a single line of enquiry, researchers gain a deeper and more complex understanding of the data (Flick, 2004; Hyland, 2010).

However, it is important to remember that triangulation should not be used to offset weaknesses in one approach, or the other, and that results will only be strengthened if all methods employed are equally sound and viable (Thurmond, 2001). Another common myth is that triangulation is designed to allow researchers to prove consistency in their findings when, in fact, triangulation can be prone to revealing (often salient) inconsistencies (Patton,

1999). This study uses corpus analysis as a starting point, and then seeks to uncover both consistencies and inconsistencies with teacher interview data.

3.6 Ethical issues

In accordance with the university guidelines, all participants were briefed on the nature of the study and provided with written information regarding their role in the study. While they were not directly involved in the data collection, permission from students to use comments that had been written on their work was needed. Consent was obtained from all teacher participants, and those students who opted out of the study had their wishes respected, with data from their essays excluded from the dataset. Teachers are referred to by a number throughout the research, which has not been associated with their participant information in the final dissertation to ensure anonymity. All participants were given the right to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

Chapter 4: Data analysis and discussion

This chapter begins with an analysis of the statistical data from the WL-PF and WL-NF, before turning to the individual KWs contained within those lists. At each stage of analysis, the corpus data is compared with results from interviews conducted with individual teachers.

4.1 Wordlist statistical data

The first stage of analysis involves the statistical information for the WL-PF and WL-NF (Table 4.1). One of the key findings from the interview data was that many of teachers were reluctant to use the term *negative* when discussing their WCF. Some of the preferred terms teachers used to discuss the comments that fell into the box tagged <negative> in this study were: *constructive feedback*, *constructive criticism*, or *points for improvement*. There did not seem to be any issue with the term positive, though. Nevertheless, this study will henceforth make the distinction between positive and negative comments, as outlined in Section 3.3.1. It is also interesting to note that, in line with Ferris' (1999) observations, seven teachers revealed during interview that they had received no formal training in the delivery of WCF, either in their current or previous roles. Therefore, the following analysis predominantly reflects individual practitioners' beliefs and interpretations of feedback processes, rather than institutional practices.

	No. of Texts	No. of Tokens	No. of Types	TTR	No. of KWs	KWs per 1000 tokens
Complete wordlist	190	12,002	1,184	9.87%		
WL-PF	188	3,355	428	12.76%	21	6.3
WL-NF	189	6,785	954	14.06%	20	2.9

Table 4.1: Statistical information for complete wordlist, WL-PF, and WL-NF

The complete corpus contains 190 texts but some teachers chose not to complete all of the boxes for all of the FTs. We can see from Table 4.1 that two FTs contained no <positive> comments while one FT contained no <negative> comments. Some teachers expressed that it was sometimes difficult to think of comments for each essay, particularly positive comments for lower level essays, which could explain this absence.

The token count shows us that, at 6785 tokens, the WL-NF contains approximately double the number of tokens than the WL-PF, which has 3355 tokens. Thus, we can conclude that teachers in this study tend to write more negative comments than positive comments, in line

with Lee's (2008) research. The TTR and KW relative frequency data shows us that the comments written in the <negative> box have a higher lexical variety than those written in the <positive> box. This indicates that these teachers use a greater variety of words when writing negative comments than positive comments. The observation could indicate a tendency to comment on similar positive features in different student texts, so common words are repeated, but a proclivity to cover a greater variety of negative features, therefore the lexical output is more diverse. This corpus finding was supported by the interview data as seven teachers correctly identified that their negative comments would be more lexically varied (the other two teachers were unable to choose between positive and negative). Six teachers identified that their positive comments would be more general than their negative comments; with one teacher adding that positive features of an essay may be taken for granted and so are not given the same level of attention (T8). In contrast, all teachers expressed that their negative comments would be more specific than their positive comments. Some key points from interviews include the views that negative feedback tends to be 'bespoke' (T6), focused more on the individual (T3), and delivered 'in a roundabout way' and therefore 'lexically more dense' (T5). These results indicate that the personalisation and mitigation of negative comments contributes to the overall word count and the increased lexical variation found in the <negative> box. These two aspects will be further explored in the analysis of individual KW categories.

4.2 Analysis of individual categories

The next stage of analysis involved considering the function of the KWs in their surrounding co-text as explained in Section 3.3.4. This resulted in the KWs being assigned to one of six categories. Since this study is concerned with drawing comparisons between positive and negative feedback, the KW-PF and KW-NF were categorised separately (Table 4.2).

	Evaluative	Directive	Representative	Metalinguage	Textual deixis	Reader/writer visibility	Total
KWs-PF	58.9% (687)	0% (0)	10.4% (121)	23.0% (268)	1.0% (12)	6.7% (78)	100% (1166)
KWs-NF	5.5% (65)	55.4% (649)	8.2% (96)	10.3% (121)	10.5% (123)	10.1% (118)	100% (1172)
KWs-PF and KWs-NF	32.2% (752)	27.7% (649)	9.3% (217)	16.6% (389)	5.8% (135)	8.4% (196)	100% (2338)

Table 4.2: Percentage (and number) of KW-PF and KW-NF tokens by category

4.2.1 Evaluative

When KWs-PF and KWs-NF are considered together, evaluative KWs form the greatest percentage of tokens overall. This is, perhaps, not surprising since feedback is inherently linked to the assessment of performance (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). What is interesting, however, is that there are considerably more evaluative tokens from KWs-PF than KWs-NF.

Most teachers confirmed that they are aware of consciously choosing to avoid evaluative terms that they believe to be ‘overtly critical’ (T6) or ‘too explicitly negative’ (T2). Some examples given include: bad (T1, T10); rubbish (T4); terrible (T7); and horrible (T3).

The corpus data confirms the absence of these negative evaluative terms, with the exception of *bad*, which appears in the complete corpus twice (Examples 4.1 and 4.2). In Example 4.1, the term *bad* seems to be evaluating a very specific feature of the essay i.e. the word *stupid*, rather than making a more general statement about the whole piece. This use is in contrast to many of the instances of its antonym, GOOD (KW-PF#1) which is often used to comment more generally on the essay (Example 4.3). In Example 4.2 the term *bad* could, in fact, be seen as a positive evaluation, albeit a weak one.

- 4.1. *The word ‘stupid’ is not appropriate in this context and sets a BAD tone for the essay. (T01FB17MTFnd03)*
- 4.2. *Introduction is not BAD, needs a thesis statement. (T08FB06MTFnd02)*
- 4.3. *A GOOD, clear piece of writing. (T04FB01MTFnd02)*

Overall, only 5.5% of the KWs-NF tokens can be categorised as evaluative. These instances come from only four different KWs: TO (KW-NF#10); NOT (KW-NF#2); TOO (KW-NF#11); and MORE (KW-NF#1), in descending order of frequency. While there are some examples of bald negative comments (Examples 4.4 and 4.5), most of the negative evaluative KWs have been mitigated in some way (see underlined expressions in Examples 4.6 and 4.7).

- 4.4. *The tone of the essay is TOO informal for academic writing. (T01FB10MTFnd02)*
- 4.5. *Some of the arguments do NOT clearly link to the essay topic... (T03FB07MTEus02)*
- 4.6. *Your points are a little close TO lacking relevance... (T01FB06MTFnd02)*
- 4.7. *Some parts NOT clear. (T06FB26MTFnd03)*

Hyland and Hyland (2006b; 2012) also noticed this trend when teachers were giving criticism in feedback. In the current study, during interview all participants gave examples of mitigation strategies they use in feedback, for example hedging, paired feedback, and personalisation. However, not all teachers were able to name specific words used in the mitigation strategies that they employ in their WCF. This suggests that teachers do have some awareness of using particular strategies to lessen the impact of direct statements, but that their word choice is not always a conscious process.

In contrast, an overwhelming number of KWs found in the positive feedback have been used for evaluative purposes to comment on an individual aspect or feature of the original text (Examples 4.8, 4.9, 4.10 and 4.11).

- 4.8. GOOD *range of vocabulary* (T10FB01MTGdp02)
- 4.9. CLEAR *introduction to the topic*. (T10FB17MTGdp02)
- 4.10. *You develop your points* WELL. (T05FB09MTEus02)
- 4.11. CLEAR, *simple writing which is EASY to understand*. (T08FB14MTFnd02)

The word AND (KW-PF#6) also features commonly as a function word used to link two or more positive evaluative phrases (Example 4.12), or words (Example 4.13).

- 4.12. *There is a balance argument AND includes a reasoned opinion*. (T09FB23MTDip02)
- 4.13. *Your essay is coherent AND logical*. (T03FB06MTEus02)

This might imply that teachers are more inclined to list positive comments than negative comments since seeing a list of negative points, or errors, can have a demotivating effect on students (Lee, 2003). It could also be the case that a list is less like to appear in the negative feedback since teachers may feel that a negative point requires more explanation and ‘unpacking’ than positive comments. In fact, during interview, seven teachers noted that they often did not comment or expand on features that students had done well, since it was assumed that the student would already understand and recognise the positive qualities of their writing.

The noticeable absence in the KWs-NF of the negative evaluative equivalents for the top three KW-PF (i.e. *bad*, *unclear*, *badly*), further demonstrates the imbalance in positive versus negative descriptive language when giving WCF. As previously noted, *bad* only appears in the entire corpus twice, while GOOD (KW-PF #1), has 143 occurrences. There are no instances of *not good* in the corpus. CLEAR (KW-PF #2) features in the entire corpus 180 times, while *unclear* only shows 12 occurrences in total. Interestingly, these 12 occurrences come from only three teachers. During interview, four teachers predicted that one of the most commonly used words in negative WCF would be *unclear*, but only one of those teachers actually used *unclear* in their comments. Despite almost half of participants making this prediction regarding their language use, the corpus data shows that this is not the case. Even if we include *not clear* as a variation of *unclear*, it only provides one further instance in the entire corpus. Additional instances exist where *not* and *clear* occur in the same co-text in evaluative comments (Example 4.14), however these examples, as before, are mitigated (see underlined term) which leads them further away from being directly comparable with the direct evaluative term, *unclear*.

4.14. *You need to be careful when using referencing words, as it's NOT always clear what they refer to.* (T01FB25MTFnd03)

Hence, we can conclude that, in this study, teachers' positive WCF contains more explicit evaluative terms than negative WCF.

4.2.2 Directive

In the KWs-PF there are no occurrences where the KW token is being used as a directive, all instances of KWs having a directive function come from the KWs-NF. It is possibly not surprising that this function does not lend itself to positive comments, since positive WCF is more likely to give credit for the existence of a positive feature (Hyland and Hyland, 2012), while negative WCF tends to express dissatisfaction (Afraz, 2017), which then poses a request for change – hence the directive function.

These ideas were echoed in the teacher interviews, as all nine participants believed they would use more directive words or structures in their negative comments than in their positive comments.

Because I would suggest what they can change, what they can do... ...in positive I would probably just comment. (T3)

...in positive feedback you're generally commenting on what they've done rather than directing them. (T10)

Contrastingly, almost half of all instances of KWs-NF have been categorised as directive. In fact, only three of the KWs-NF are never used this way in this corpus: WORD (KW-NF #8); PARAGRAPH (KW-NF #15); and I (KW-NF #20). Imperative structures feature commonly in directive comments, with many of the KWs-NF appearing alongside another KW-NF to form an imperative structure (Examples 4.15, 4.16 and 4.17).

4.15. MAKE SURE *you answer the question.* (T10FB24MTGdp03)

4.16. BE CAREFUL *with your grammar.* (T10FB17MTGdp02)

4.17. TRY TO *keep focused on the question that is being asked.* (T09FB06MTGdp02)

This could account for the particularly high frequency of the directive category in the corpus. It could be argued that since some structures consist of two KWs-NF, they would have been counted twice. However, the same analysis method was applied consistently across the KWs and so there would have been similar instances from the KWs-PF, for example when AND (KW-PF#6) was used in conjunction with INTRODUCTION (KW-PF#8), as in Example 4.18.

4.18. The INTRODUCTION AND *conclusion are effective and help to guide the reader through your text.* (T01FB20MTFnd03)

Five teachers correctly identified the inclusion of several of the KW imperative words and structures in their WCF including MAKE (KW-NF #3), TRY (KW-NF #11), AVOID (KW-NF #17), and REMEMBER (KW-NF #19). Of the remaining four teachers, two were not able to name any specific suggestions in terms of imperatives they would regularly use in WCF. They did, however, note the common use of *you need* as a directive structure in their feedback, which is another key feature of this corpus. The other two teachers named imperatives that were not frequent enough to be KWs, or did not feature in the corpus at all.

T3 named several structures that she felt would appear in her WCF which do not feature in the corpus data, for example: *rewrite, rephrase, rethink* (T3). Additionally, there were a

number of terms that teachers suggested which do appear in the corpus but not with enough frequency to feature in the KWs. Some examples include: *consider* (T3), *expand* (T4) and *look at* (T10). On closer analysis of the corpus, we can see that *consider* only features twice in the entire corpus as an imperative (underlined in Examples 4.19 and 4.20), but in Example 4.20 it is preceded by a modal adverb, which mitigates the directive function. Interestingly, both of the instances were written by T9, not T3, who made the suggestion.

4.19. *Consider using 'they' as a gender neutral pronoun instead of she(he) or he(she).*
(T09FB13MTDip02)

4.20. *Maybe consider writing a plan before your start writing.* (T09FB07MTGdp02)

Another common feature of the directive KWs is modality. Both pure modals (SHOULD KW-NF#4) and semi-modals (NEED [to] KW-NF#6) (Parrot, 2010) are present in the KWs-NF (Examples 4.21 and 4.22). In the directive category, these structures are used to indicate to the student that the teacher would like something to be changed.

4.21. *Points SHOULD be strengthened with more examples.* (T09FB02MTGdp02)

4.22. *You NEED to develop your argument much better, it is quite simplistic.*
(T08FB13MTFnd02)

In response to the direct question regarding words commonly used in directive WCF (Appendix 13, Q14), six out of nine teachers predicted the presence of either NEED [to] (KW-NF#6), SHOULD (KW-NF#4), or both.

Hyland and Hyland (2001) note that feedback can vary in its directness and intensity since teachers generally desire to foster positive social interactions with their students and want to avoid unnecessary conflict. One method that can be used to adapt directive feedback is the use of modals to make the comment seem less severe (Spiteri, 2017). Additional modal structures that are not KWs can be found in the corpus, most frequently in the co-text of BE (KW-NF#7) and are often used as a mitigation strategy (underlined in Examples 4.23 and 4.24) to lessen the impact of a direct comment.

4.23. *Points could BE strengthened further with more examples and ideas.*
(T09FB23MTDip02)

4.24. *It would BE better to have your solutions paragraph in the main body of the text...*
(T01FB25MTFnd03)

Eight of the nine teachers interviewed named using modality, such as *could* or *would*, in their feedback. Some reasons for the use of modality include attempting to maintain a degree of sensitivity (T9), and trying to ensure that comments do not embarrass the student (T3), hurt their feelings (T4) or discourage students from writing (T7). This is in line with Hyland and Hyland's (2001) study where they found that teachers were aware of the potential to demotivate students with their feedback.

Another key finding from Hyland and Hyland's (2001) research is the awareness from teachers that sometimes students fail to understand mitigated comments. Five teachers in the current study noted their concern that indirect or mitigated feedback may not always be the best approach for some second language learners. Language level and cultural barriers were cited as the main reasons for this potential misunderstanding or misinterpretation.

Sometime students from certain nationalities, or certain levels, you know, the more direct, the clearer it is, the clearer it is, the more beneficial to the student... quite often it's direct, the students that want the direct language, you know, it doesn't hurt their feelings, you don't need to worry about that quite as much as we think...(T4)

From this analysis we can conclude that, while these teachers are generally aware of how and where directive words and structures are used more commonly in WCF, some have a more conscious awareness than others of their specific word choices in directive comments. What is clear is that teachers in this study are conscious of the impact their feedback might have on the student, and how the comment might be perceived or interpreted.

4.2.3 Representative

Representative comments can be found in both KWs-PF and KWs-NF with a slightly greater percentage in the KWs-PF (Table 4.2). The representative WCF makes a factual statement about the existing content of the essay, without an explicit evaluative term, and it seems that the responsibility lies with the student to interpret the implied meaning behind the statement. Consider the following examples, both from the KWs-PF, and both written by T10, where Example 4.25 is representative while Example 4.26 is evaluative.

- 4.25. *Some IDEAS suggested.* (T10FB18MTGdp02)
4.26. *Some good IDEAS included.* (T10FB17MTGdp02)

Example 4.25, unlike Example 4.26, does not contain any language that tells the student whether this comment is positive or negative. Without knowing that the comment is from the box tagged <positive> it would be difficult to know whether the feedback is positive or negative. In fact, this could be an example of what teachers wrote when they found it difficult to comment positively on the essay, as discussed in Section 4.1.

Similarly, in Example 4.27 the teacher has chosen to make a representative statement rather than make a directive comment to remedy the student's use of repetition, as they have done in Example 4.28. Since Example 4.27 can be found in the <negative> box, we can assume that the comment should be regarded as negative. However, it could just as easily be placed in the <positive> box had the task required the use of repetition.

- 4.27. *There is some repetition IN the main body...* (T04FB07MTDip03)
4.28. *Use synonym TO AVOID repetition.* (T02FB08MTFnd02)

It could be argued that the structure of the FT led teachers to use comments of this nature, since the feedback was already separated into pre-defined boxes and so perhaps did not require further clarification of whether a comment was positive or negative. By asking teachers to write feedback in pre-defined boxes, the comments are essentially pre-framed as positive or negative.

From the interviews, it would seem that teachers would expect to see more representative comments in their positive feedback, since they perceive these comments would simply draw attention to or highlight features rather than offer evaluation. The teachers' views are supported by the corpus data, which shows a slightly stronger presence of representative feedback in the KW-PF.

4.2.4 Metalanguage

This category of word appears in both the KWs-PF (Example 4.29) and KWs-NF (Example 4.30) but with a considerably higher presence in the KW-PF. Teachers use metalanguage to

comment on features of the original text using terminology that they expect the student to understand.

4.29. *Clear structure, with INTRODUCTION, main body, and conclusion.* (T09FB11MTDip02)

4.30. *Be careful with WORD forms and structuring.* (T01FB19MTFnd03)

In order to effectively use metalanguage in feedback it is necessary for both student and teacher to have a shared understanding of the terms used (Lee, 1997) but research shows that students often lack the depth of knowledge of the terminology required to effectively understand and action the feedback (Berry, 2014; Clifton, 2014). Indeed, there was some acknowledgement by the participants in this study that, occasionally, technical language can get ‘lost in translation’ (T5).

Contrastingly, it has been said that having a shared set of metalanguage between student and teacher provides a key to unlocking and scaffolding learning in the classroom (Geoghegan *et al.*, 2013). Most teachers in this study showed a clear awareness of their word choice in relation to technical terminology, stating that they would only use words in feedback that had been previously taught and used in class, so as to ensure student understanding.

...my feedback generally matched what we have covered in class, it doesn't tend to introduce anything new... (T10)

...if it's not something you have taught then I don't think the written comments is the place to start to open that up for discussion...(T2)

Some key metalinguistic terms that teachers felt would feature in WCF include grammar words and tenses (e.g. verb, noun, present simple). The corpus data shows some evidence of grammatical terminology overall, but none feature frequently enough to be included in the KWs. Terminology relating to writing structures, for example, STRUCTURE (KW-PF#7); INTRODUCTION (KW-PF#8); and PARAGRAPH (KW-NF#15), features more prominently in the KW-PF and KW-NF than grammatical metalanguage. During interview, three teachers referred to additional comments and corrections made within the original student text, or to other methods of feedback that they used for this assignment. As discussed in Section 3.1.2, any comments not written on the FT were not considered for this study. Although teachers

were asked to only consider the FT during interview, not all teachers followed the instruction, which could account for this discrepancy.

All nine teachers felt that they would use more metalanguage in negative feedback, since those comments would be specifically targeting features that require improvement, whereas, again, positive comments would be more general. However, we can see in the data that metalanguage features more in the tokens for KWs-PF than KWs-NF, and that there are more explicit metalinguistic terms in the KWs-PF than the KWs-NF. This perhaps indicates that teachers are not aware of the extent to which they comment on specific positive features of a student text.

4.2.5 Textual deixis

Textual deixis features more prominently in the KWs-NF than the KWs-PF. Around half of the tokens for textual deixis in KW-NF come from one KW: IN (KW-NF#16). This is predominantly used by the teacher to direct the student reader to a particular part of their original essay and is often used in conjunction with PARAGRAPH (KW-NF#15, Example 4.31), *introduction* (Example 4.32) or *conclusion* (Example 4.33).

4.31. *For example, IN paragraph three, sentence three – ‘they’ seems to link back to ‘games and devices’ not the children.* (T01FB15MTFnd03)

4.32. *Also make your stance clear IN the introduction.* (T10FB14MTGdp02)

4.33. *Include an opinion/recommendation IN your conclusion.* (T02FB14MTFnd02)

Another commonly used KW-NF in textual deixis comments is ABOUT (KW-NF#10). The instances of ABOUT are generally used to reference ideas or content found in the student essay (Example 4.34).

4.34. *The example ABOUT your friend boxing can be used but you need to talk about it in a more general way – in academic writing it’s not important that it is your friend.* (T01FB06MTFnd02)

The higher presence of textual deixis in KWs-NF is perhaps not surprising since, as discussed in Section 4.1, teachers felt that their positive feedback would be more general, while the negative would focus on specific points for improvement. Thus, negative feedback would

lend itself more naturally to the use of language to ‘point’ at undesirable features. As presented in Section 4.2.1, these teachers felt they are less inclined to comment on specific positive features of a student text. In particular, three teachers commented that they would not indicate positive features in relation to grammatical structures, or language, in the same way they would comment on negative features, or errors.

Because [in positive] I won't comment on good grammar here, or used past simple, you used past simple, I don't, you know, if that's correct I won't say it because that's kind of obvious... [in negative] of course specific grammar points, so subject verb agreement, wrong word, informal, too informal, unsuitable, things like that. (T3)

In the KW-PF, the most commonly used textual deixis is THROUGHOUT (KW-PF#21), which is used exclusively to make a generic comment on the essay as a whole (Example 4.35). This, again, supports the view that teachers feel positive WFC is more general than negative WFC.

4.35. *A structure is clear* THROUGHOUT. (T10FB18MTGdp02)

Thus, we can conclude that teachers in this study are generally aware of how textual deixis words are used in both positive and negative WCF.

4.2.6 Reader/writer visibility

Reader/writer visibility features in both KWs-PF and KWs-NF; however only one personal pronoun features as a KW: I (KW-NF#20). This, in theory, tells us that there is a greater presence of the teacher writer in negative than in positive feedback. During interview, teachers were asked to comment on their use of personal pronouns in general, so it is not possible to know their views in relation to the presence of I as a discrete item in positive versus negative feedback. Only one teacher made the distinction themselves, stating he would use I more in positive feedback and you more in negative feedback. Three teachers felt personal pronouns would feature more prominently in negative feedback, four felt the presence would likely be equal in positive and negative comments, and one teacher stated she would avoid the use of pronouns. The corpus data reveals that, in total, four teachers used I to indicate writer visibility in their feedback, including one teacher who believed that they would not use the term.

During interview, teachers had mixed reactions when asked to reflect on their use of personal pronouns in feedback. Three teachers felt that they would not use I when writing feedback. One reason given for this omission is that ‘it is not important’ (T7) to attribute the feedback to a specific teacher. Contrastingly, another teacher noted that their use of I in feedback was ‘realistic’ (T8) since the student already knows the feedback is coming from them. One teacher felt that using pronouns would personalise the comments and make it clear that the teacher has engaged specifically with the student essay (T9). Only one teacher voiced concern that personal pronouns might make the feedback seem aggressive and felt their use would be ‘avoided to a greater extent’ (T6). Another reflected that the absence of personal pronouns in feedback might make it ‘quite impersonal’ and ‘distant’ (T4).

Personalisation of feedback helps to indicate that the comments are ‘personal views and not objective truths’ (Ivanić et al, 2000, p. 64). It was noted by one teacher that feedback can be subjective and that ‘a different teacher might consider it perfectly fine what I’m commenting on’ (T7). Therefore, the inclusion of the pronoun, I, helps to mitigate the impact of a statement by showing it is the teacher’s own perspective and not necessarily a blanket opinion (Examples 4.36 and 4.37).

4.36. *As a reader, I feel a little overwhelmed by the amount of information you try to fit into such a short piece of writing.* (T01FB24MTFnd03)

4.37. *I feel that the conclusion was rushed and just stopped.* (T07FB01MTDip03)

An interesting theme that appeared during interview was that three teachers believed they would use the phrase *I like* when commenting on positive points in student work. The corpus data shows no occurrences where I and like are used in the same co-text. This is perhaps a phrase that would occur more frequently in face-to-face feedback, where the language would be more informal. Again, as discussed in Section 4.2.4, it is possible that, during interview, teachers were commenting more broadly on their feedback processes rather than only their WCF on the FTs.

It can be concluded that, while personal pronouns do feature in their WCF, teachers in this study have different perceptions of how their use might impact on the student. It can also be said that the teachers’ intuition on their use of pronouns in feedback is not consistent with their actual language use.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

As outlined in Chapter 1 (Section 1.2), the main aim of this study was to investigate word choice in teachers' WCF, in particular, to draw comparisons between positive and negative feedback. The research was also concerned with teachers' perceptions of word choice in WCF, and of how aware teachers are of making specific choices when writing feedback comments.

The study was carried out at a UK higher education institution, which specialises in university preparation courses. A multi-method approach to data collection was employed. Firstly, the study used corpus analysis to examine WCF both quantitatively and qualitatively. Next, semi-structured interviews were conducted to determine teachers' views on key findings from the corpus analysis. The results were crosschecked in order to validate the data.

Following this introduction, the chapter outlines the methodological strengths of the study; then, it summarises the key findings of the research; followed by an assessment of the limitations of the study. Following that, recommendations for pedagogical practice are made, based on the results of the research. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

5.1 Methodological strengths

While it is common for corpus linguists to use triangulation in their research by employing several corpus analysis techniques on the same data set, it seems to be less common for researchers to cross-analyse corpus results with other methods of data collection (Baker and Egbert, 2016). One major outcome of this study is that it shows the strength of combining corpus analysis with interview data in order to substantiate conjectures. The interviews provided an insight into how aware teachers are of the choices they make. This not only added value to the corpus data, it also humanised the study, making it less abstract and theoretical, and rooted the findings in pedagogical relevance.

Another prominent methodological contribution of this study is regarding the effectiveness and relevance of using small, specialised corpora in language-based research. In using a small corpus, the data can be honed on the direct needs of the research goals, and the researcher can engage with, and interpret the data with minimal time delay (Sinclair, 2001).

This is especially important in educational settings where teachers have already busy schedules. Small-scale studies are a manageable way of providing a snapshot of insight into personal practice. This particular corpus allowed common practice in WCF to be examined and explored for an individual institution. This type of investigation could be extremely useful for teacher education as a way of encouraging and developing self-reflection on teaching practice.

5.2 Summary of key findings

In response to RQ1 and RQ2 (Section 1.2), the results of the study show that teachers use more explicit evaluative terms when giving positive feedback than when giving negative feedback. These terms manifest themselves in the KW lists where there is a strong presence of overtly positively connotative descriptive terms in the KWs-PF, but no evidence of overly negatively connotative descriptive terms in the KWs-NF.

Another salient point is that there is a clear differentiation between the overall profiles for positive and negative feedback. While positive feedback is predominantly evaluative in nature, negative feedback primarily contains directive overtones. Similarly, individual categories can have different distinct features when considered in a positive or negative context. For example, metalanguage in positive feedback tends to be found in lists of generally positively evaluated features, while in negative feedback it tends to be used to pinpoint and explain errors.

The current study also shows that writer visibility plays a stronger role in negative feedback than positive feedback, with the inclusion of the first person pronoun I as a KW-NF. This finding gives the teacher writer more prominence in negative than positive feedback.

Regarding RQ3 (Section 1.2), in general, the teachers seemed to be aware of the impact that their comments might have on their students, however, it transpired that these teachers are more conscious of the strategies they employ in WCF (e.g. mitigation) than of specific word choices (e.g. modalisation – should, could). The triangulation of data revealed discrepancies in teacher intuition versus genuine language use in relation to word choice, in both positive and negative WCF. For example, teachers predicted the presence of *I like* in their positive comments when the corpus showed no examples of this structure. In negative feedback, there

were no instances of several of the directive structures (*rephrase, restructure*) that the teachers believed would commonly appear.

Finally, the research highlighted concerns from teachers regarding student understanding of WCF. Complex metalanguage, hedging, and indirect structures were seen as obstacles to how students are likely to receive and interpret the message of the feedback. Nevertheless, the data shows a substantial presence of each of these features throughout positive and negative comments.

5.3 Limitations

With the limited number of participants it is, of course, not possible to make generalised statements about WCF in EAP. However, as the study included contributions from ten out of 12 of the teachers at this institution, it can confidently offer valuable insights into WCF practices for the teachers and institution involved. These findings could also prove interesting for other similar institutions and EAP teachers alike, as well as educators from other pedagogical contexts.

The study was further limited by the fact that it does not include all instances of feedback for the student assignments in question. The study focused on only two of the three boxes on the FT, and did not include comments written directly on the student text, or separate from the FT. It is likely that teachers used alternative resources to deliver their WCF, the inclusion of which would reveal additional findings about these teachers' WCF practices.

As the interviews were carried out retrospectively, they relied on an element of memory in order for the teachers to comment accurately on their specific word choices on the FTs. This could be said to account for the failure of some teachers to name specific word choices made in positive and negative WCF.

While the initial corpus analysis informed the interview script, and the results of the interviews informed the revision of the corpus analysis, the ideal situation would have been to interview the teachers a second time in order to close the cycle. This is was not possible due to time constraints. An alternative option would be to conduct think-aloud protocols with the teachers while they write their FTs and conduct the corpus analysis as a second step, but this

would require a completely different research design and would be more demanding in terms of the teacher participants' commitment to this research project.

Finally, the study can only speculate on the impact word choice might have on the student since students were not included in the interview process. Within the scope of this study it was not possible to follow this additional line of enquiry, and it was not within the aim of the study.

5.4 Potential impact on English for academic purposes

In line with the secondary aim of the study, as discussed in Chapter 1 (Section 1.2), the following recommendations are intended to improve feedback provisions at this particular institution, and they might well be relevant in other EAP contexts. What has been clearly identified in this study is the need for more reflection on teachers' own feedback practices. During the interviews, several of the teachers expressed surprise and interest in the results of their reflection on feedback processes, as in the following example.

...it would probably be very unusual for me to comment in a positive way that somebody has got something grammatically correct... I would never say, I've just realised I never compliment students on their actual language... (T10)

This study performed a detailed investigation of WCF at this particular institution in order to raise awareness of collective feedback practices. Although it was not the focus of this study, the existing corpus could be further exploited to provide individual teacher profiles, which could be used to examine feedback tendencies for individual practitioners, and has the potential to provide valuable insights for self-reflection and teacher education.

For me, this study provided an opportunity to compare my personal WCF practice with the practice of my colleagues. The comparison showed vast differences in the amount, depth, and focus of comments across the teachers. A key finding of the interviews is that more than half of the teachers stated that they had not had any formal training on how to give WCF. At an institutional level, a key recommendation from the results would be to provide more opportunities for teachers to share best practice, and to work towards a standardised approach to WCF, so as to provide a higher degree of consistency in student experience.

Finally, supporting Walker's (2009) suggestion that making explicit to students 'what constitutes praiseworthy work' (p. 5) is as useful as highlighting errors, the impact of this current research on future EAP teaching practice is that teachers should be aware of the potential advantages of commenting on positive examples of language and structures in student texts. By concentrating detail on negative feedback, the students are deprived of the chance to learn from positive models within their own writing. It should not be assumed that students know which specific features of their writing are good and should be repeated.

5.5 Recommendations for further research

One unexpected point that this study uncovered was that using a pre-determined structure for feedback, in this case the FT, might be inhibiting in terms of what feedback the teacher delivers. Six teachers expressed that they did not like or find the FT helpful in their delivery of feedback. The main reason given by all six teachers for this was that the FT felt restrictive in that forced them to write two points when they often wanted to write more or less. Of the three remaining teachers, one felt that the FT helped to structure and balance his feedback and to prevent it from becoming too wordy. The remaining two teachers did not follow the instruction on the box (i.e. to make two points in each section), adding as many points as they felt were appropriate. One area for further consideration would be whether using a feedback template affects the framing and word choice of WCF compared with writing comments more freely, without adherence to a pre-determined structure.

The most salient research point to pursue with regards to the current data would be to interview students to explore two key areas: reaction to and interpretation of WCF. Although there is a wealth of current research regarding student response to feedback (Mahfoodh, 2017; Simard *et al.*, 2015; Zhan, 2016), there does not appear to be any that explores the subject specifically from the perspective of teachers' word choice. It would also be interesting to build upon existing research (Chen *et al.*, 2016; Diab, 2005; Orts and Salazar, 2016) and further investigate student preferences in WCF, particularly concerning the balance of positive and negative feedback.

Word Count 16, 285

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Sample of feedback template: typed feedback

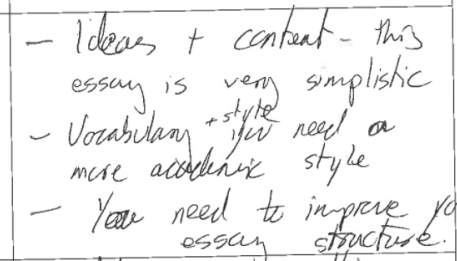
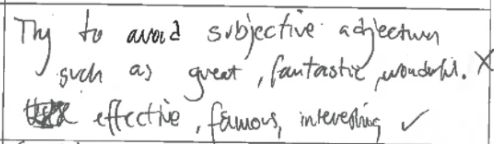

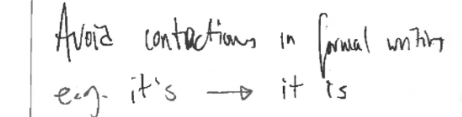

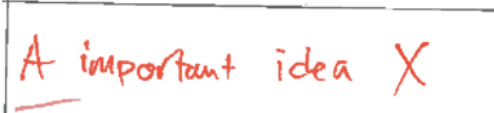
Date	14 th February 2017
Two things done well in your writing :	You have included a thesis statement which clearly outlines the intentions of the essay. Your introduction follows a sensible structure. There are some strong examples to support your points. You have kept your opinion out of the main body of the essay, only including it in the conclusion. The tone of the essay is appropriate and you use a good range of vocabulary.
Two things to develop about your writing:	The overall structure is unclear. It's difficult to tell when there is a new paragraph in the main body of the essay. I think there should be more paragraphs than you have included – each new idea should take a new paragraph. Due to the lack of structuring, it is difficult to follow your argument at times. The conclusion is too long for this length of writing, and it includes new information which you haven't mentioned earlier in the essay. The conclusion should not contain new ideas but should simply summarise your main points.
Further comments:	You have shown evidence of understanding of some of the points covered in class, and you have some interesting ideas. You now need to work on clearly structuring your argument.
Performance so far: Exceeding Expectations (EE) 65 and above On Track (OT) 50-60 Below Expectations (BE) 45 – 50 Cause for Concern (CC) Below 45	On track

Appendix 2: Sample of feedback template: handwritten feedback

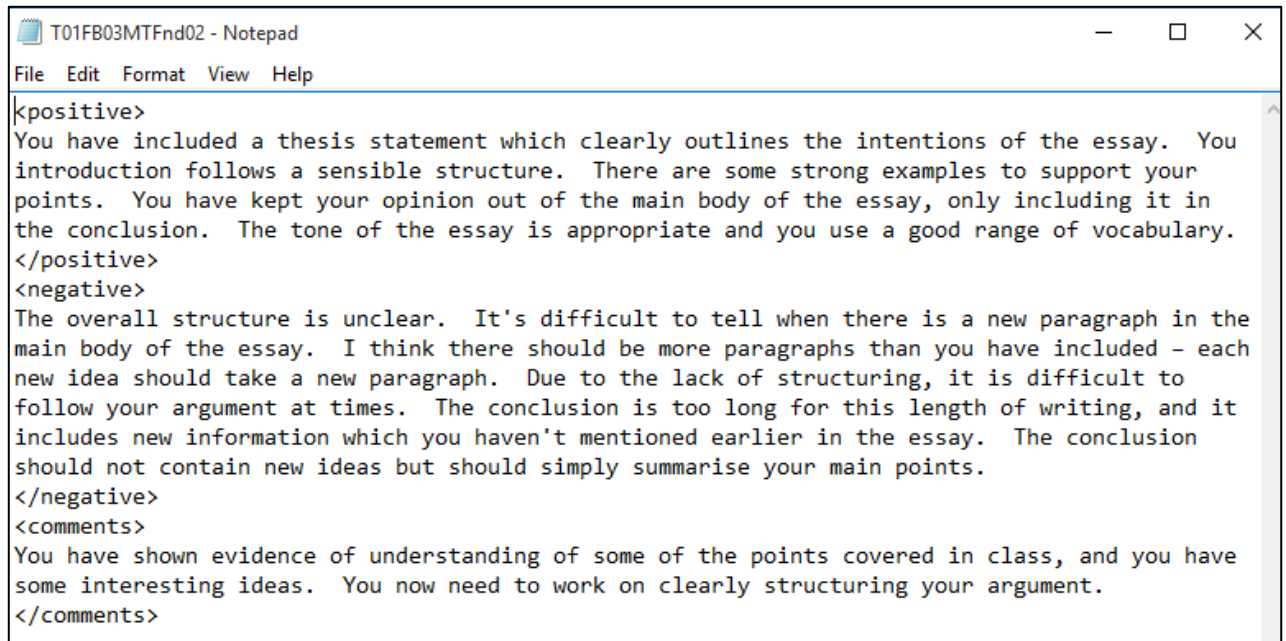
<p>Two things done well in your writing :</p>	<p>Very well structured Clear and well written Good signposting</p>	
<p>Two things to develop about your writing:</p>	<p>Avoid contractions it's x it is cause x because Avoid 1st person</p>	
<p>Further comments:</p>	<p>A squirrel running in a wheel 😊</p>	
<p>Performance so far: Exceeding Expectations (BE) 65 and above On Track (OT) 50-60 Below Expectations (BE) 45 - 50 Cause for Concern (CC) below 45</p>	<p>60</p>	

Appendix 3: Table showing mark up codes and examples from original texts

Tags were used to add clarity to formatting choices made by teachers. Where appropriate, some indication is given of how I believe the item was intended to be interpreted.

<L>	denotes an item in a list/bullet point	
<cross>	denotes the omission of a cross (most likely shows the prior text is incorrect, has an error, or is not the preferred choice)	
<tick>	denotes the omission of a tick (most likely shows the prior text is correct or preferred)	
<smiley>	denotes the omission of a smiley face	
<arrow->	denotes the omission of an arrow pointing right	
<strike_out>	denotes the previous word or letter has been crossed out e.g. when /crossed	
<U>	denotes that something is missing (word or letter). Most likely indicated by an underscore, and may be a quote from the original student text, though quotation marks are not always present.	

Appendix 4: Sample of Plain Text file with mark up: typed feedback



The image shows a Notepad window titled "T01FB03MTFnd02 - Notepad". The window contains the following text:

```
<positive>
You have included a thesis statement which clearly outlines the intentions of the essay. You
introduction follows a sensible structure. There are some strong examples to support your
points. You have kept your opinion out of the main body of the essay, only including it in
the conclusion. The tone of the essay is appropriate and you use a good range of vocabulary.
</positive>
<negative>
The overall structure is unclear. It's difficult to tell when there is a new paragraph in the
main body of the essay. I think there should be more paragraphs than you have included - each
new idea should take a new paragraph. Due to the lack of structuring, it is difficult to
follow your argument at times. The conclusion is too long for this length of writing, and it
includes new information which you haven't mentioned earlier in the essay. The conclusion
should not contain new ideas but should simply summarise your main points.
</negative>
<comments>
You have shown evidence of understanding of some of the points covered in class, and you have
some interesting ideas. You now need to work on clearly structuring your argument.
</comments>
```

Appendix 5: Sample of Plain Text file with mark up: handwritten feedback

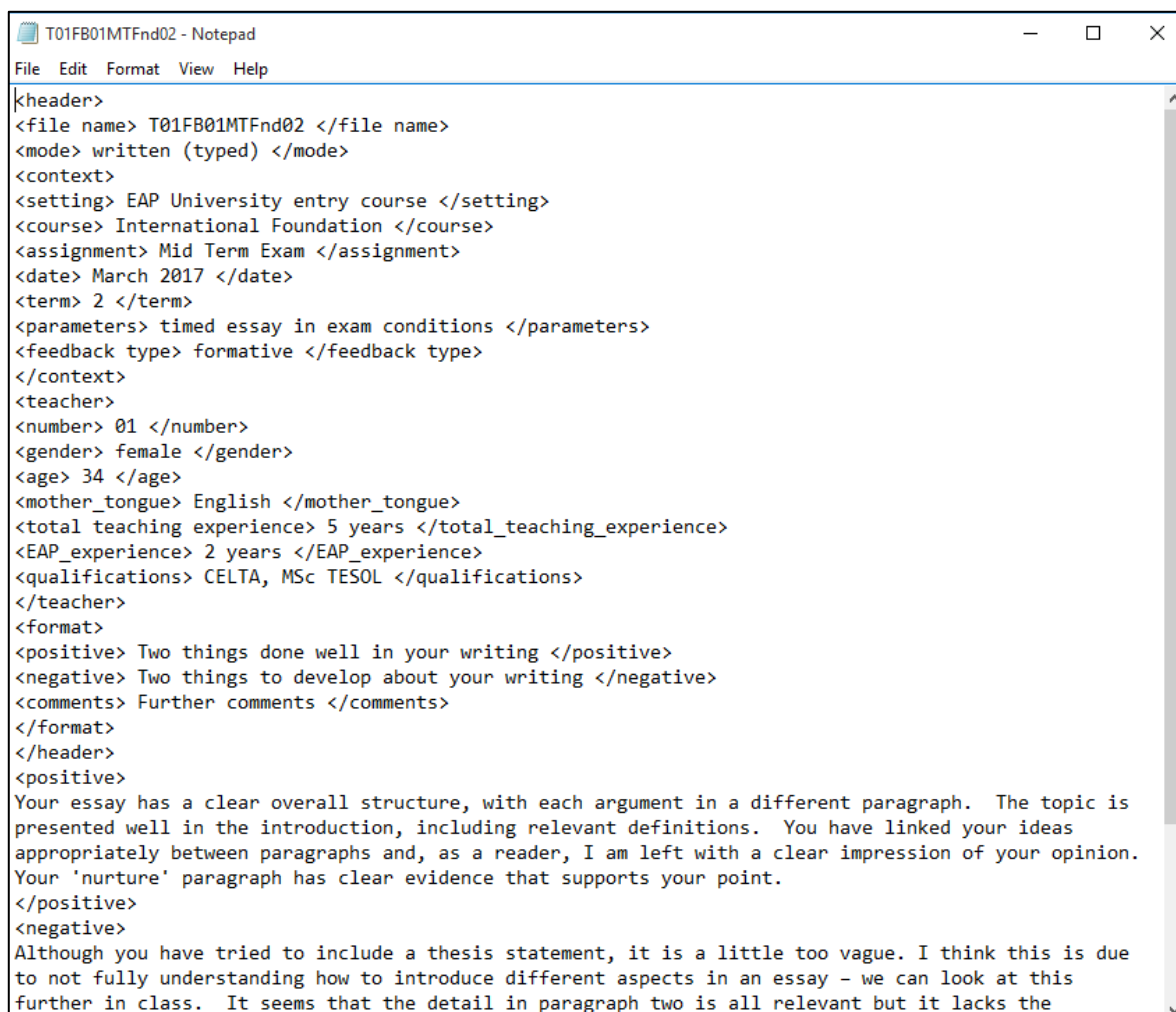
```
T02FB06MTFdn02 - Notepad
File Edit Format View Help
<positive>
<L> Very well structured. </L>
<L> Clear and well written. </L>
<L> Good signposting. </L>
</positive>
<negative>
<L> Avoid contractions. It's <cross> it is. Cause <cross> because.</L>
<L> Avoid first person. </L>
</negative>
<comments>
<L> A squirrel running in a wheel. <smiley> </L>
</comments>
```


Appendix 6: Explanation of corpus file names

The possible variations for each component of the file name are listed below:

Author of file (Teacher)	T01 - T12
Feedback number	FB01 – FB34
Task Type	MT (mid-term exam) CW (coursework) ET (end of term exam)
Class	Fnd (International Foundation) Dip (International Diploma), Gdp (Graduate Diploma) Eus (English for University Study)
Academic Semester/Term	02 or 03

Appendix 7: Sample header



```
T01FB01MTFnd02 - Notepad
File Edit Format View Help
<header>
<file name> T01FB01MTFnd02 </file name>
<mode> written (typed) </mode>
<context>
<setting> EAP University entry course </setting>
<course> International Foundation </course>
<assignment> Mid Term Exam </assignment>
<date> March 2017 </date>
<term> 2 </term>
<parameters> timed essay in exam conditions </parameters>
<feedback type> formative </feedback type>
</context>
<teacher>
<number> 01 </number>
<gender> female </gender>
<age> 34 </age>
<mother_tongue> English </mother_tongue>
<total teaching experience> 5 years </total_teaching_experience>
<EAP_experience> 2 years </EAP_experience>
<qualifications> CELTA, MSc TESOL </qualifications>
</teacher>
<format>
<positive> Two things done well in your writing </positive>
<negative> Two things to develop about your writing </negative>
<comments> Further comments </comments>
</format>
</header>
<positive>
Your essay has a clear overall structure, with each argument in a different paragraph. The topic is presented well in the introduction, including relevant definitions. You have linked your ideas appropriately between paragraphs and, as a reader, I am left with a clear impression of your opinion. Your 'nurture' paragraph has clear evidence that supports your point.
</positive>
<negative>
Although you have tried to include a thesis statement, it is a little too vague. I think this is due to not fully understanding how to introduce different aspects in an essay - we can look at this further in class. It seems that the detail in paragraph two is all relevant but it lacks the
```

Appendix 8: Keyword list for positive feedback

This table shows the list of keywords for positive feedback. It also shows the number of times each word featured in the positive comments and negative comments (frequency); the keyness of the term; and its p value.

	Key Words for Positive Feedback (KW-PF)	Frequency in Positive Comments	Frequency in Negative Comments	Keyness	p value
1	GOOD	121	5	232.46	0.0000000000
2	CLEAR	124	44	118.57	0.0000000000
3	WELL	57	5	95.94	0.0000000000
4	SUPPORTED	24	0	53.20	0.0000000000
5	SOME	67	30	52.87	0.0000000000
6	AND	157	143	48.50	0.0000000000
7	STRUCTURE	63	33	42.77	0.0000000000
8	INTRODUCTION	55	26	41.24	0.0000000000
9	STRUCTURED	26	3	40.75	0.0000000000
10	VOCABULARY	42	19	32.71	0.0000000078
11	IDEAS	64	47	28.41	0.0000000952
12	RANGE	25	7	27.40	0.0000001626
13	HAVE	51	36	23.96	0.0000009822
14	WITH	62	52	22.04	0.0000026678
15	VERY	23	8	21.98	0.0000027590
16	USED	24	9	21.73	0.0000031432
17	EXAMPLES	41	28	20.15	0.0000071490
18	EASY	11	1	18.27	0.0000191238
19	IS	96	109	16.94	0.0000385450
20	PARAGRAPHS	24	16	12.16	0.0004889267
21	THROUGHOUT	9	2	11.10	0.0008644393

Appendix 9: Keyword list for negative feedback

This table shows the list of keywords for negative feedback. It also shows the number of times each word featured in the positive comments and negative comments (frequency); the keyness of the term; and its p value.

	Key Words for Negative Feedback (KW-NF)	Frequency in Negative Comments	Frequency in Positive Comments	Keyness	p value
1	MORE	107	3	65.59	0.0000000000
2	NOT	64	2	38.10	0.0000000000
3	MAKE	60	2	35.12	0.0000000006
4	SHOULD	38	0	30.61	0.0000000287
5	SURE	35	0	28.18	0.0000001074
6	NEED	49	2	27.02	0.0000001983
7	BE	81	9	26.67	0.0000002378
8	WORD	28	0	22.54	0.0000020577
9	CAREFUL	28	0	22.54	0.0000020577
10	TO	267	74	22.18	0.0000024762
11	TRY	40	2	20.55	0.0000058125
12	AS	40	3	17.07	0.0000359616
13	TOO	20	0	16.09	0.0000603837
14	USING	28	1	16.04	0.0000618622
15	PARAGRAPH	62	9	15.84	0.0000690402
16	IN	127	31	14.38	0.0001493701
17	AVOID	25	1	13.85	0.0001980642
18	ABOUT	24	1	13.12	0.0002915952
19	REMEMBER	15	0	12.06	0.0005139916
20	I	35	4	11.21	0.0008114747

Appendix 10: Samples from interview transcripts

IR = Interviewer; T2 = Teacher 2; T7 = Teacher 7

(Bold font is used for the interviewer to help delineate between turns).

10.1: Sample from interview with T7 showing opportunity for clarification

IR: Do you think that you write more positive or negative comments when you are giving feedback?

T7: When you say more do you mean more word count or just more detail.

IR: You can interpret more however you like there.

10.2: Sample from interview with T2 showing prompting for further development of response

IR: Are there any words you avoid using in your feedback?

T2: Bad, bad, and again other negative adjectives like that, I wouldn't, poor would I say poor, this is poor, maybe in final comments, poorly written, poorly structured, no but nothing too explicitly negative, you know, rather than looking at the problem and pointing in the right direction, or maybe you want to have a look at this, or remember to use this, but rather than saying this is shite change it.

IR: So you've identified that you would avoid using negative adjectives, do you think that you maybe use positive adjectives in positive comments?

T2: Well done, I like that, well done, a big happy smiley face, keep it nice and simple, I don't know how long the students actually take to read feedback, if they invest much time, I think they look at the top, the headline comments rather than going into too much detail, I think, so just keeping it short and if something is good a big smiley face, a big tick, well done, I like, I like it, well written, well structured, as well, as a kind of positive comments that I can remember writing.

10.3: Sample from interview with T7 showing linking to the teacher's previous comments

IR: What metalanguage do you use in your feedback?

T7: I don't know.

IR: That's ok.

T7: I don't think it's something I've ever considered, I wouldn't know how to answer that.

IR: Ok, don't worry. Do you feel like you use metalanguage, in general, in your teaching?

T7: Yeah, definitely, in general teaching different, in the different, if it's receptive skills, or if it's productive skills, I would be trying to use a certain vocabulary that will need to either be focusing on or remember, or like I say, recapped, or, like I said, trigger words, to try and, think about.

IR: So I think thesis statement was one of the examples that you gave. To what extent do you feel the students understand the metalanguage that you use, and what do you do to ensure that they do understand?

T7: So when explaining the language, I tend to explain the language quite early, in the first lesson or two, if it's, so, for example, introducing essay structures and I go through the different types of essays and I make sure that the understand each type of the essays.

Appendix 11: Sample of closed and open questions from interview script

11.1: Closed questions

Have you had any training on how to give written feedback?

Do you think that you write more positive or negative comments when giving feedback?

Where would you use more metalanguage – in positive or negative comments?

11.2: Open questions

How conscious are you of your word choices when writing negative/positive comments?

To what extent do you think the students understand the metalanguage you use?

In what circumstances do you use personal pronouns ('I' and 'you') in feedback comments?

Appendix 12: Pilot interview script

(Excerpts in bold were removed from the final interview script, and those in italics were modified in the final interview script. This version of the interview script shows the original research questions which changed during the study to those highlighted in Section 1.2).

Research Questions

1. How does teachers' word choice differ in written corrective feedback between positive and negative comments for writing assignments in an EAP context? **OR** What are the defining features of teachers' positive and negative written corrective feedback comments for writing assignments in an EAP context?
2. What aspects, if any, influence teachers' word choice when giving written corrective feedback for writing assignments?
3. What perceptions do teachers have regarding the impact of their written corrective feedback comments on students?

Good morning/afternoon. Thank you for agreeing to spend some time with me today. To recap, the interview is part of the research I am conducting for my MSc TESOL dissertation here at XXXX. I am exploring written feedback in an EAP context. Your input into this project is very much appreciated. *I anticipate that the interview will take a maximum of 30 minutes.* Before we get started I would like to confirm that you are still happy for the interview to go ahead, and that you are still comfortable with my recording the interview on my iPhone so that it can be reviewed and transcribed at a later date. The data will be stored securely on BOX and I will be the only person to have access to it. All data and personal information will be destroyed once the project has been completed. Your participation is very much appreciated but, should you wish to withdraw from the project, you are free to do so at any time without explanation or penalty. If you wish to withdraw your participation, please email me directly on ****.

I will first ask you some questions regarding your background and experience in English teaching. Then I will move on to questions relating to your own perceptions and processes of written feedback and ask you to comment on current procedures. There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in hearing about your own views and experiences. If there are any questions that you do not wish to answer, please just let me know. You are free to stop the interview at any time. Do you have any questions about me, the research or the interview before we begin?

Thank you. Are you ready to start? First, I would need to get to know a bit more about you as this information will be useful during the data analysis stage.

Background Information

A few quick details first: Age? Sex? Nationality?

What is your mother tongue?

How long have you been teaching English in total?

How long have you been teaching in an EAP context?

How long have you been teaching at this institution?

How many hours a week of EAP do you teach currently? Can that vary throughout the academic year?

What teaching qualifications do you have? (CELTA/DELTA/Masters...)

Have you had any training on how to give written feedback? **What kind of training have you had on how to give written feedback?**

Feedback Practices

The following questions should be answered in relation to your experience as an EAP teacher.

Questions relating to Research Question 2 (Research Question 1 to be addressed through corpus data analysis)

- Q1. What methods of feedback do you use for student writing? (written comments, correction code, tutorials, peer...)**
- Q2. Why do you use this/these method(s)? What affects your choice of which method to use?**
- Q3. Which method do you use most frequently?**
- Q4. What factors influence your choice of feedback method? (time, level of student, available space, task type...)**
- Q5. Can you describe a typical marking/feedback process for you, from receiving the piece of writing to returning it to the students? What do you do? How long does it normally take? Do you use handwritten or typed comments? Why? Do you enjoy the marking/feedback process? Why?**
- Q6. What do you take into consideration when wording your feedback comments? (time, level of student, student personality, task type, marking matrix comments, effect on student...)
- Q7. What affects how much feedback you write (i.e. how long the comments are)? (time, level of student, available space, handwritten/typed, task type, perceived impact on student...)
- Q8. What do you normally comment on? (content, structure, grammar, vocab...) What affects your choice of what to comment on?

Corpus related interview questions

- Q9. Do you think that you write more positive or negative comments when giving feedback? Why? How conscious are you of your word choices when writing negative/positive comments? What word choices do you make in negative comments? What word choices do you make in positive comments?
- Q10. *Would you consider that your positive or negative comments contain a greater lexical variety? Why?*

- Q11. **What positive/negative descriptive words (for example adjectives/adverbs) do you commonly use when giving feedback? Why?**
- Q12. **Do you think you use more positive or negative descriptive words? Why?**
- Q13. **What metalanguage do you use/share with your students?**
- Q14. What metalanguage do you use in your feedback? Why?
- Q15. To what extent do you think the students understand the metalanguage you use?
- Q16. *Where would you expect to see more metalanguage used – in positive or negative comments? Why?*
- Q17. *Do you think you use more directive words/structures in positive or negative feedback? Why?*
- Q18. What directive words/structures do you think you use most commonly in positive/negative feedback?
- Q19. **Do you think you use more modification in positive or negative comments? Why?**
- Q20. **What words or phrases do you use to modify your positive/negative feedback comments?**
- Q21. In what circumstances do you use personal pronouns in feedback comments? Why?
- Q22. What impact, if any, do you think the use of personal pronouns has on the student?
- Q23. In what ways, if any, did the structure of the feedback template affect the choices you made when writing feedback comments? (structure, word choice, mitigation strategies?) **Do you feel like it guided you to use any particular techniques?**
- Q24. Q16. How did you interpret the headings/instructions in the boxes? Did you respect the instructions (2 things.../improve NOT 'done badly')? Did you fill in all of the boxes on the feedback template for every student? Why/not?
- Q25. How aware are you of using mitigation strategies in your feedback? **When would you use mitigation strategies?** What mitigation strategies do you use most commonly? What do you think is the effect of mitigation strategies on the student?
- Q26. *When, if ever, do you use questions in your feedback? What impact do you think it has on the student?*
- Q27. **What is your understanding of sandwich or paired feedback? To what extent do you think you use it in your feedback comments?**
- Q28. To what extent do you think you were able to separate positive and negative comments into the pre-defined boxes on the feedback template? How would you explain the presence of positive comments in the negative box and vice versa?

- Q29. **To what extent do you use hedging in your feedback comments? Why do you use hedging in your feedback comments? What effect do you think it has on the student?**
- Q30. What would you predict to be the top 5 most frequent words that teachers use when giving positive/negative feedback?
- Q31. Q23. You said that you thought you write more positive/negative comments. The data shows a far greater percentage of negative feedback overall. What explanation could you give for these findings?

Questions related to Research Question 3

- Q32. **From your experience, what do students do with the feedback they receive? How do they react to your feedback? To what extent do you think students understand your written feedback? What impact do you think your feedback has on your students' future written assignments?**
- Q33. **In general, how effective do you think giving written feedback for student writing is for short/long term gain?**
- Q34. **What do you feel is the biggest challenge in giving written feedback to students? How do you think this could be addressed?**

That's all my questions. Do you have anything you would like to add? Do you have any questions for me before we finish?

Thank you very much for your time.

Appendix 13: Final Interview Script

(The final interview script was adapted to address the redefined Research Questions. Research Question 1 and 2 are addressed through the corpus analysis, the interview script is designed to answer Research Question 3).

RQ1: Which lexical items characterise EAP teachers' positive feedback comments? And what function do they fulfil in these teachers written corrective feedback?

RQ2: Which lexical items characterise EAP teachers' negative feedback comments? And what function do they fulfil in these teachers written corrective feedback?

RQ3: What perception do EAP teachers have of their word choice in written corrective feedback?

Good morning/afternoon. Thank you for agreeing to spend some time with me today. To recap, the interview is part of the research I am conducting for my MSc TESOL dissertation here at XXXX. I am exploring written feedback in an EAP context. Your input into this project is very much appreciated. The interview should take around 30 minutes.

Before we get started I would like to confirm that you are still happy for the interview to go ahead, and that you are still comfortable with my recording the interview on my iPhone so that it can be reviewed and transcribed at a later date. The data will be stored securely on BOX and I will be the only person to have access to it. All data and personal information will be destroyed once the project has been completed. Your participation is very much appreciated but, should you wish to withdraw from the project, you are free to do so at any time without explanation or penalty. If you wish to withdraw your participation, please email me directly on ****.

I will first ask you some questions regarding your background and experience in English teaching. Then I will move on to questions relating to your own perceptions and processes of written feedback and ask you to comment on current procedures. There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in hearing about your own views and experiences. If there are any questions that you do not wish to answer, please just let me know. You are free to stop the interview at any time. Do you have any questions about me, the research or the interview before we begin?

Thank you. Are you ready to start? First, I would need to get to know a bit more about you as this information will be useful during the data analysis stage.

Background Information

How old are you?

What's your nationality?

What is your mother tongue?

How long have you been teaching English?

How long have you been teaching in an EAP context?

What teaching qualifications do you have? (CELTA/DELTA/Masters...)

How long have you been at this institution?

Feedback Practices

The following questions should be answered in relation to your experience as an EAP teacher and should consider only written feedback.

Questions relating to Research Question 3 (Research Question 1 and 2 to be addressed through corpus data analysis)

- Q1. Have you had any training on how to give written feedback? What kind of training?
- Q2. What do you take into consideration when wording your feedback comments? (time, level of student, student personality, task type, marking matrix comments, effect on student...)
- Q3. What affects how much feedback you write (i.e. how long the comments are)? (pos/neg, time, level of student, available space, handwritten/typed, task type, perceived impact on student...)
- Q4. What do you normally comment on? (content, structure, grammar, vocab...) What affects your choice of what to comment on?

Corpus related interview questions

- Q5. Do you think that you write more positive or negative comments when giving feedback? Why do you do so?
- Q6. How conscious are you of your word choices when writing negative/positive comments? What words do you use in positive/negative comments? Why?
- Q7. Are there any words you avoid using in your feedback? Which one(s)? Why?
- Q8. Which would you say is more lexically varied (i.e. contains more different words) your positive or your negative comments? Why?
- Q9. Do you write feedback from scratch or do you recycle comments from other sources?
- Q10. What metalanguage (i.e. language used to talk about language – this could be grammatical terms – verb/noun, or features of language – paragraph) do you use in your feedback?
- Q11. To what extent do you think the students understand the metalanguage you use? What do you do to ensure this understanding?
- Q12. Where would you use more metalanguage – in positive or negative comments? Why?
- Q13. Do you think you use more directive (i.e. words or phrases that are intended to get the student to do something) words/structures in positive or negative feedback? Why?

- Q14. What directive words/structures do you think you use most commonly in positive/negative feedback?
- Q15. In what circumstances do you use personal pronouns ('I' and 'you') in feedback comments? Why? Do you think you use more personal pronouns in positive or negative feedback?
- Q16. What impact, if any, do you think the use of these two personal pronouns has on the student?
- Q17. In what ways, if any, did the structure of the feedback template affect the choices you made when writing feedback comments? (structure, word choice, mitigation strategies?)
- Q18. How did you interpret the headings/instructions in the boxes? Did you respect the instructions (2 things.../improve NOT 'done badly')? Did you fill in all of the boxes on the feedback template for every student? Why/not?
- Q19. Do you think you were able to separate positive and negative comments into the pre-defined boxes on the feedback template? Why (not)? How would you explain the presence of positive comments in the negative box and vice versa?
- Q20. How aware are you of using mitigation strategies (techniques used to soften the impact of a direct comment) in your feedback? What mitigation strategies do you use most commonly? What do you think is the effect of mitigation strategies on the student?
- Q21. Do you use questions in your feedback? When do you do so? What impact do you think it has on the student?
- Q22. What would you predict to be the top 5 most frequent words that teachers use when giving positive/negative feedback?
- Q23. (GIVE OUT FLASHCARDS) Would you say these words are associated more frequently to identify strengths or weaknesses in students' writing?
- Q24. You said that you thought you write more positive/negative comments. The data shows a far greater percentage of negative feedback overall. What explanation could you give for these findings?

Appendix 14: Sample of complete interview transcript

(Defining details of the teacher participant have been excluded from this transcript in order to ensure anonymity. A bold font has been used to more clearly delineate between the interview and participant turns).

IR = Interviewer; T10 = Teacher 10

IR: Good afternoon. Thank you for agreeing to spend some time with me today. To recap, the interview is part of the research I am conducting for my MSc TESOL dissertation here at XXXX. I am exploring written feedback in an EAP context. Your input into this project is very much appreciated. The interview should take around 30 minutes. Before we get started I would like to confirm that you are still happy for the interview to go ahead, and that you are still comfortable with my recording the interview on my iPhone so that it can be reviewed and transcribed at a later date. The data will be stored securely on BOX and I will be the only person to have access to it. All data and personal information will be destroyed once the project has been completed. Your participation is very much appreciated but, should you wish to withdraw from the project, you are free to do so at any time without explanation or penalty. If you wish to withdraw your participation, please email me directly on ****. I will first ask you some questions regarding your background and experience in English teaching. Then I will move on to questions relating to your own perceptions and processes of written feedback and ask you to comment on current procedures. There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in hearing about your own views and experiences. If there are any questions that you do not wish to answer, please just let me know. You are free to stop the interview at any time. Do you have any questions about me, the research or the interview before we begin?

T10: No. That's fine.

IR: Thank you. Are you ready to start? First, I would need to get to know a bit more about you as this information will be useful during the data analysis stage.

T10: Ok, no problem.

IR: How old are you?

T10: I'm **.

IR: What's your nationality?

T10: British

IR: And your mother tongue?

T10: English.

IR: Thank you. How long have you been teaching English?

T10: Ooh, in total, um, ** years, I think.

IR: And how long have you been teaching in an EAP context?

T10: That would be ** years now.

IR: What teaching qualifications do you have?

T10: Only English Language teaching, I have ****

IR: Ok, thanks. Final question, how long have you been at this institution?

T10: For ** years.

IR: Great thanks. Now, the following questions should be answered in relation to your experience as an EAP teacher and should consider only written feedback.

T10: Ok.

IR: Have you had any training on how to give written feedback?

T10: For EAP.

IR: Yes, as an EAP teacher, yes.

- T10: Whilst teaching EAP, no, maybe, I can't remember, have we done any teacher development on giving feedback, I don't think we have, have we, I don't remember any.
- IR: So there's nothing that...**
- T10: There's nothing that sticks out, no.
- IR: What do you take into consideration when you are wording your feedback comments?**
- T10: I take into consideration, well, who I'm writing comments for, which obviously if you don't know who the student is, you can't do, but, if it's a weaker student then, you've got, I mean, you know, if you like, the bar is set lower for them so we're looking at more basic stuff, whereas if you're looking looking at a higher level of student then my expectation of them would be higher, so, and often it depends why they're doing the written work, you know, have I set them a task to specifically look at say writing introduction, for example, in which case feedback would be target all around that and not looking at what else they've done, you know, have they actually done what I did in the lesson, or not.
- IR: So you've said level of student and probably task type affects, I'm going to give you some other options and you can tell me if that also comes into your consideration. Time restraints?**
- T10: Unfortunately yes, yes it definitely, yeah time restraints and, sort of, the, the expectation of the students, to a certain extent, you know, what they're expecting feedback wise, because you do exams, feedback for exams you'll never see it, that's for the examiners and it's not for the students, but, yes, time unfortunately does.
- IR: The personality of the student? Assuming you know who are writing to, of course.**
- T10: Yes it does, because, you know with certain students that they will read it and take it onboard, or if they don't understand then they'll ask you what you mean, they question it, and other ones you could write this is totally, totally irrelevant and they go, oh I did ok then, so yes, it depends whether they are going to pay attention or not, it does.
- IR: The marking matrix comments? So like our assessment criteria comments, does that come into consideration?**
- T10: Well it does when you're do exams, it doesn't when we did the midterm tests, I didn't use the marking matrix for my comments, particularly because that's, I don't think they are particularly helpful for students, but obviously when you're marking exam scripts it does, because that's what criteria that you're a marking with, so you have to put the criteria that match the marks, but for, I suppose feedback for students, no it doesn't come into consideration.
- IR: And finally the effect that your comment might have on the student?**
- T10: Yes, cause you, yeah, you always have to try and put something positive in there, and if it's a student, particularly if it's a student the tries really, really hard, you know, and it's just been a disaster, and you have to really, and, you know, you can search but you have to put something positive, so that they have something to make them feel good while looking at everything else that they've had a disaster with
- IR: What affects how much feedback you write so how long your comments are?**
- T10: Time, time, the task, the student, how, where we are in the course, you know, if we're right at the end of the course it might be shorter comments that, you know, remember, you know, and then just one word things, whereas the beginning of the course you're giving them more structured guidance, but yeah, that's probably, the student as well, who you are writing for, time plays a massive part I think.
- IR: What do you think that you normally comment on?**
- T10: I tend to get a bee in my bonnet about something when writing a whole set, so it might be one time I'm doing my marking and I might be obsessing about the introduction

and the outline, and the thesis statement or the structure, and another time it might be the fact that they've not use signposts or discourse markers, but it tends, I tend to focus quite a lot on structure because I think that's so important with academic English, and then for the other things, I tend to use a code which they can then, they should know that, and they should be able to sort that out for themselves, although I do tend to write my code on the thing as well, because they go, what does w mean.

IR: What affects your choice of what to comment on?

T10: What we've been doing, what I think they should, what they are are capable of and what they've actually produced, what mood I'm in, can I admit to that, what mood I'm in, you know, also whether I think they've been, if we've done something several times over and then 50% of the class haven't done what they've been asked to do, you know, or you know, if they've structured it wrongly, they've not answered the question when we've clearly or, you know, they've done it as the wrong type of question, then that would affect how I mark them, but, it depends, how they responded to the question often affects, and that can be the first one I look at, you know, if the first student hasn't, has written an incredibly good introduction than that would be what I'd be, you know, that's my, my benchmark, and so if the others haven't, whereas, vice versa, if it's poor then I'll get a bee in my bonnet and think they haven't listened.

IR: Do you think that you write more positive or negative comments when you are giving feedback?

T10: I try to have an equal number of both but it very much depends on what has been written, there is, there is always both, there is always both, because I think the students can always work on something, even if it's, you know, by the time, if you've got a really good student who has taken on board what you said and they've tried really hard, you are looking at minor points, I do try to have an equal number but sometimes it's just not possible, and if they shouldn't hasn't tried then, you know, you just focus on the main issues because you can't have a whole list of 10 negative points, I'd probably put 3 or maybe four, if you think that they would be able to take that on board.

IR: Why do you try and have an equal number?

T10: So that they, so that they, If you just throw negatives at people then it absolutely crushes them, even if they've not put much effort into it, you know, it can still be quite a devastating thing, and I think you need to have a, some form of equal feedback, well, I once received training a long time ago on giving oral feedback, and it was always, kind of like, we called as shit sandwich, that you'd have your, you'd have your good, and your bad, and then you finished with good, now your bad in the middle might have three layers, so you start off with the positive and you'd finish with the positive, but you go with what you need to work on in the middle, and I think written feedback to some extent needs to be like that, that you need to have, that they need to feel warm and fuzzy about something that they've done even if it's just, you know, you're scraping the bottom of the barrel to find things, but then they also need to have things to work on because otherwise they just feel, you know, it's hopeless.

IR: How conscious are you of your word choice when writing positive or negative comments?

T10: Most of the time I'm just trying to make it clear what I want them to do, so I probably wouldn't say I'm that conscious of my word choice other than clarity, that's my main focus, and I don't overly complicate it, so probably, I probably use quite a restricted range of vocabulary, you know, good, work on, focus on, look at again, you know, review.

IR: So you've given me some examples there, which was kind of my next question. Can I get you to separate them into positive and negative for me? What do you

think you might use in positive most commonly and what in negative most commonly?

T10: Well structured, well organized.

IR: This is positive?

T10: Positive, yeah, well argued, so well probably, it's probably my most common one, good, equally very good if I'm feeling extremely enthusiastic, good to see would be another one.

IR: And negative?

T10: Negative, review, unclear, you need to, you should, it would be a good idea to, so I've probably actually got a much bigger range of negative introductory words, if you like, that I use with negative than with good.

IR: Are there any words that you avoid using in feedback?

T10: I avoid using bad and all the synonyms for that on various levels, yes, so yes, rather than putting something in negative I will try to, when you do, when I do negative feedback, I will try to see what they need to do rather than what they've done wrong, because there's no point particularly saying, yeah, this isn't that great unless they know how to make it great, that's not to say I wouldn't do it sometimes because you can get quite cross, well I can get quite cross when marking if they've not done what they're told.

IR: I think you've answered this already but I'm going to ask it just in case you want to expand. Which would you say is more lexically varied, so contains more different words, your positive or your negative comments?

T10: My negative, yeah, because trying to find different ways of giving encouraging negative feedback, or a constructive negative feedback, so they know what to build on, I think it needs a bigger range of vocabulary, whereas it's that they've done something well you're just reinforcing it rather than trying to get them to change what they're doing.

IR: Do you tend to write feedback from scratch or do you recycle comments from other sources?

T10: No, it's all my own my own, but that doesn't mean it's not recycled from student to student, you know, you get, kind of, get us stock phrases in your head, but no, they're, they're originals.

IR: So I'm going to talk about some terminology that I'm using in my dissertation and I want to just make it clear what I'm using that to describe first of all. So I'm using the term metalanguage to mean language used to talk about language, so that can be grammatical terms, nouns, verbs etc or it could be because we talking about writing specifically it could be maybe something relating to writing structures. So, what metalanguage do you think that you use in your feedback?

T10: Well I would use, I would use some grammatical terminology, which is often based around the codes, or my explanation of the codes contains the grammatical metalanguage, I'm also, well, things like thesis statement, well, discourse markers, what else would I use, topic sentences, concluding sentences, linking words, you know, all sorts of things like that, I'm just trying to think of, your stance, stance would be another one, your argument, position, yeah.

IR: Ok, to what extent do you think that the students understand the metalanguage that you use, and what do you do to ensure that they do understand?

T10: Well I generally, for the, the grammatical metalanguage, I would like to think that they would understand, and they, and it's a code and then quite often they give an example and I tend to put a number next to every error of that type, so they can, sort of, hopefully, I mean, I try to use the same type of language in class as I use on my written feedback because otherwise there's no point, and I quite often will say things in two different ways, so I might say discourse markers, and I put in brackets

signposts, just in case they've only taken on board one of the words, I tend to, it tend, I tend, my feedback generally matches what we have covered in class, it doesn't tend to introduce anything new, unless it's a really excellent piece of work and you're looking for really refining it, and then I might introduce something new, but probably give an example of what I mean.

IR: Where do you think you would use more metalanguage in positive or in negative comments?

T10: Negative probably.

IR: Why?

T10: Because you've tried to give constructive feedback, so when you say what they need to work on, you know, it might be, for example, oh your thesis statement is too vague, you know, whereas, well no, I don't know, I would say thesis statement, saying it's a really good clear a thesis statement, and yeah, well there would be more grammatical terminology in, sort of, negative comments, it would be probably be very unusual for me to actually comment in a positive way that somebody has got something grammatically correct, whereas I would comment, about, you know, that they need to review prepositional usage or something like that in, you know, in negative terms, yeah, actually, I wouldn't comment on their fantastic use of prepositions, yeah, I would never say, I've just realised I never compliment the students on their actual language, the grammatical language, I might comment on their vocabulary usage, you know, if they used a really good range of, and upscaled their vocabulary, used a good range of academic vocabulary, but I would never comment on the fact that they've actually got the grammar correct.

IR: So the next term I'm going to look at is directive words or structures, so here I'm talking about words or phrases that we use to try and get the student to do something. So do you feel that you use more directive words or structures in positive or negative feedback?

T10: Negative

IR: Why?

T10: Cause I'm trying to direct them to the correct, so when you're saying, you know, you need to look at something again, or you should try to, you direct them towards what you would like them to do, whereas in positive feedback you're generally commenting on what they've done rather than directing them.

IR: What directive words or structure do you think that you use most commonly positive or negative feedback?

T10: I think you, oh, you need to, you should, you should would be a popular one, if I'm being really indirect with my directive language I would probably say it would be a good idea if you, or if I'm being really direct just using imperative, look at your, you know, prepositional usage again, but it tends to be quite indirect directives.

IR: I'm now going to move onto the use of personal pronouns, In what circumstances do you used personal pronouns, so probably most prominently I and you, maybe we as well, in your feedback comments?

T10: I would use, yes, no, I would use you, you need to, you should, and, let me think, do I use I, do I say I, I like, yes, I would probably say I like, I probably wouldn't do we, or would I, no, if I was going to use we I would probably make it quite neutral, the only thing I might say is, the only, kind of, example I can think of is I might say, we use something in, general, in academic English, but I would usually say in academic English something is used, I'd probably use passive rather than we, actually, so I would use I or you, you when giving constructive feedback, and I, possibly, if I'm saying what I like or I don't like really.

IR: Ok so just to slightly expand on that then, would you feel like you would use personal pronouns more in positive or in negative feedback?

- T10: Probably, I would probably use I more with positive, and you in negative, probably, I would say, yes gosh something else that I've never even thought of before, yeah.
- IR: **What impact, if any, do you think the use of personal pronouns has on the student?**
- T10: Probably it makes it seem quite personal to them, and as though I'm talking to them rather than just producing random criteria off a marksheet, or comments off a worksheet, I would like to think, you know, if I particularly like something, I generally always use I, or if it's something that that I maybe I slightly OCD on, then I might use I just to make it clear that this is my little bugbear but someone else might let it slip, or slide, yeah.
- IR: **Ok, so we're thinking about the feedback template now the structure of that feedback template, which has three boxes, in my study I only concentrated on the first two boxes, which I've tagged positive and negative, although that's not what they were called I didn't include the further comments box. In what ways, if any, did that structure of that feedback template affect the choices that you made when you were writing your feedback?**
- T10: I tended, well, I think, because it had positive negative, you probably were looking for positive first and then looking for negative, but then if you got a really poor piece of work that needed a lot of constructive, then, I don't if affected me that much really, I just filled it in as things occurred to me whether it was the top or the bottom, what I would say that is often my further comments bit, which you're not focusing on, was jam packed full, as well, with overall comments of what they really needed to do, or sometimes an overflow of negative, so it couldn't, it was generally not an overflow of positive, it would be an overflow of negative, so I don't know whether you might be better just having two big boxes rather than the third one, which you're not looking at, but yeah.
- IR: **How did you interpret the headings in those boxes, so it said two things done well in your, two things you could improve on, so, for example, did you respect the instructions?**
- T10: No, I generally did more than two, I did usually three or four, or anything that I thought that they needed to know, to be perfectly honest, which is why the third box at the bottom was often overflowing, so I didn't just, I did make sure that there were a minimum of two, I would say that, were there always two negative, probably there's always two negative even with a poor piece of work I always made sure that there are two positive things, and the fact that the positive came above the negative, I think, possibly, helped influence the students way of interpreting their feedback, because they were reading positive things first rather than negative things first, like, you know, your shit sandwich, so you could, you know, you could maybe have another little final positive comment at the bottom but, yes, so did I follow the instructions, not really, no.
- IR: **And the second heading for negative said two things that you should, that you need to improve on, do you feel like that maybe influenced how you structured your feedback there?**
- T10: Yeah, well, yes, probably, well it definitely did, because two things you need to improve on would be, I would then put your usage of prepositions rather than just saying prepositions, so it's, I suppose it made it quite clear, made it clearer probably for the student.
- IR: **Do you think it was easy to separate, or do that you were able to separate the positive from the negative comments into the predefined boxes?**
- T10: Pretty well I think, but then there was that third box, yeah so it was easy enough to separate the sentences, also I'm not sure that the student would necessarily read it as positive negative, they would probably read all the comments, and so if there was a bit

of flow, of overflow, you know, mixed up, yeah, so, more or less, more or less I would say.

IR: So my data shows that some, there was some evidence of positive comments in the negative box and negative comments in the positive box, what explanation might you be able to give for that?

T10: That the negative leapt out at the marker first and they stuck it in the first box, teachers didn't read the instructions, yeah, really, gosh, in mine.

IR: I couldn't tell you off the top of my head, sorry.

T10: I think, possibly, I think as teachers we, possibly, often focus on the negative and things and, well, the students are there to learn so, often, we are looking at, possibly, what they need to improve and that might be why that was put first, because that was what the teacher was focusing on, almost looking for things that the student needs to work on, because that's what they're here for, rather than looking to pat them on the back and say well done first of all, because if they were all fabulous we wouldn't have a job.

IR: Ok, the next technical term I want to talk about is mitigation strategies, so this is techniques that we use to soften the impact of a direct statement. How aware are you of using mitigation strategies in your feedback?

T10: Quite a lot I would say, it would be a good idea to, I think softens the blows to, you know, it would be a good idea if you read the question carefully, rather than saying you haven't answered the question, I don't know how much mitigating language actually helps the students, maybe they just, sometimes, some of them maybe, they just need it really bluntly so that they're absolutely clear what feedback they've been given, because I think sometimes, I try to be quite gentle with my feedback, oral and written, and I think, sometimes, the message doesn't get through, we're not, I think, sometimes we're too gentle, you know, to soften the blow and they say, well you didn't tell me that, and you say well I did, I just didn't, you know, put it in the words of improved by a lot or you will fail, you know.

IR: What mitigation strategies do you think you probably use most commonly?

T10: This is, I might just say this is ok but it would be a good idea to, it would be better if you, it would make it easier for the reader if, so, sort of, a lot of conditionals with if is how I would say I do it, yeah, this yeah or buts.

IR: And, I think you've answered this a little bit already but what do you think is the effect of mitigation strategies on the student?

T10: I think the reason we use them is so that we don't really, sort of, kill the students spirit and make them feel really down heartened, and it's if they've done nothing right, because I think it is awful if the student thinks they've done absolutely nothing right, and we tried to soften the blow and couch it in language that is a bit kinder, but as I just said, sometimes, I think we, you know, we put it into much cotton wool and they don't actually hear the message at all, so I think that sometimes there is a case for saying, you know, you need to do this this and this and this or you will fail, and I think we're very, sometimes I think we're not direct enough.

IR: Do you use questions in your feedback?

T10: On my, on the sheet.

IR: Yes in the feedback template.

T10: No I wouldn't say I do, no, I might put questions in the body of the work but not in the template because, I'm, because the questions I put are probably about specific points, you know, what has a student meant, or why is this relevant, obviously not particularly on the midterms, but if they're involving in research, maybe, where did this come from, or something like that, or how do you know this, but not on the template because I'm not actually expecting, it would be about specific points rather than feedback, like, why did you structure it like this, I wouldn't, no, I wouldn't put that.

- IR:** **And what impact do you think the use of questions has on the student?**
- T10: Hopefully gets them to think and to look at what they've done, and why did they, why they did it, or how they did it, or, and question whether that was the right approach, it depends if they read it.
- IR:** **What would you predict would be the top 5 most frequent words that teachers use in positive and in negative feedback? So I'm looking for 5 and 5, 10 words in total.**
- T10: Good, well,
- IR:** **I'm assuming you're talking positive first.**
- T10: Oh yes, nice, clear, I can't think of any more that would be used a lot, great.
- IR:** **And negative?**
- T10: Should, need, work, think about, yeah, all instructions as opposed to, unclear.
- IR:** **I'm going to give you 10 cards, 5 of them are used most commonly to talk about strengths in student writing and 5 of them are used to talk about weaknesses. Can you try and sort them into two piles please? So you've got positive on the right and negative on the left.**
- Positive: supported, some, well, good, clear*
- Negative: make, sure, should, not, more*
- IR:** **Ok final question is, you said at the beginning of the interview that you tried to have a balance between positive and negative comments as much as possible. The data shows that overall we have a far greater percentage of negative feedback. What explanation could you give for those findings?**
- T10: We are looking to develop the skills in the student, and so we're giving pointers that students should work on, and that in itself is negative, you know, that you're looking at something and saying, well you know you could do something better, and because we are teaching students to improve you're looking for points they need to work on, and so that would be why, you're probably picking holes in it more than giving them gold stars for what they've done, done well, and students, I think, generally want to know what they can do better to get a higher mark, so if you give them, you know, a mark that's not as high as they think they want to get, but there's, you know, heavy reliance on positive comments and then not many negative, then they will be wondering what they need to do, so, you know, they would be asking, what do I need to do to get 70 or 65, and I think, as long as the negative feedback is constructive and telling students what they need to work on, what they should improve and what they need to look at again, its ok, I think, and saying what they have done well, and if they've done everything fantastically then, then, yes, there should be more positive than negative, but, most, you know, students are there to learn, they're there to improve, so you're telling them how to improve, not telling them, you can tell them what they've done well, but they are there to improve and that's why, I think, there is generally more negative.