

Title: **Speaking the same language: how to create a language-aware feedback culture**

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Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- identify key linguistic features which might impair the effectiveness of written feedback
- utilise three activities designed to promote the linguistic awareness of staff when providing written feedback
- suggest alternative ways of raising staff awareness of the impact of the language they use when giving feedback
- suggest ways of researching how we can investigate the impact of the language of written feedback on students' response to this feedback
- reflect on the relevance of this session to their institution

Session Outline

In the past decade, UK universities have become increasingly multi-lingual, in terms of both staff and students (The Multilingual University, ESRC Seminar Series, 2014 – 2016). At the same time, research cited by O'Donovan, Rust and Price (2015) suggests that feedback as part of assessment is often not delivered effectively. One aspect of effective delivery of feedback is that students need to understand the feedback which they receive, and are motivated to act on it. However, feedback may not be understood by students as it may be encoded in language which students find opaque or inaccessible (Hyland and Hyland 2001). In addition, the language in which the feedback is framed may be demotivating or disheartening to students (Boud 1995, following Rorty 1989; Carless 2009), or may discourage dialogue (Lillis 2003).

This discussion paper explores how incorporating a language-aware approach to feedback when working with staff can enable staff to make more effective linguistic choices when providing written feedback. It describes a series of activities used with multi-lingual staff on a PG Cert HE at a post-1992 university, designed to promote critical awareness of the language

used when giving written feedback. We will report on the staff evaluation of the activities devised and piloted, and will invite discussion of the implications of using these kinds of activities. We will then invite discussion about what other types of activities could be used to promote linguistic awareness among staff when giving written feedback, as well as suggestions for how we might research whether this improved linguistic awareness has any impact on student responses to feedback.

Key issues to be addressed at the session are:

- how the language of feedback may impact on student responses to this feedback
- how we can promote awareness of this in staff
- how we can research the impact of the language of written feedback on students

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

The outline of the workshop is as follows;

- Presentation of our project aimed at promoting language-aware feedback among staff on a PG Cert HE course (20 minutes)
- Discussion of the following questions:
 - what linguistic elements do you consider problematic in written feedback?
 - how can we raise staff awareness of these elements?
 - how might we research the impact of our language on student responses to feedback? (20 minutes)
- Presenters' summary of key issues or ways forward raised in the discussion (5 minutes)

References

- Boud, D. (1995) Assessment and learning: contradictory or complementary? in Knight, P. (ed.) *Assessment for Learning in Higher Education*. London: Kogan Page, 35 – 48.
- Carless, D. (2009) Trust, distrust and their impact on assessment reform, *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 34 (1): 79 – 89.
- Hyland, K. and Hyland, F. (2001) Sugaring the Pill: Praise and Criticism in Written Feedback, *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 10, 185 – 212.
- Lillis, T. (2003) Student writing as 'academic literacies': drawing on Bakhtin to move from critique to design, *Language and Education* 17 (3), 192 – 207.
- The Multilingual University: The impact of linguistic diversity in higher education in English-dominant and EMI contexts, ESRC Seminar Series. <http://multilingualuniversity.wordpress.com> (5/11/2015)

- O'Donovan, B., Rust, C. & Price, M. (2015): A scholarly approach to solving the feedback dilemma in practice, *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, DOI: 10.1080/02602938.2015.1052774
- Rorty, R. (1989) *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.