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Holistic perspective on Feedback for adult beginners in an online course of Swedish

Liivi Jakobson, University of Gothenburg

Although several inquiries highlight the importance of feedback in language teaching and learning, there is a need for knowledge concerning a holistic perspective on feedback in the empirical context of written feedback for L2 adult beginners. The study reported here provides additional evidence about teachers' actual feedback and student attitudes to feedback. The unit of analysis addresses a new context, namely Swedish as a second language, in an online course for adult beginners. The study included ten male and female university-level students with different cultural backgrounds. The purpose was to analyze several previously scientifically tested feedback categories for writing, which were conceptually replicated in the present study, as well as to additionally explore a new category for feedback on pronunciation in the same context. To establish causality, this study used attribution theory. The findings revealed top rankings for language accuracy and pronunciation in students' evaluation. The teacher gave the most feedback on language accuracy. These results provide support for the importance of feedback on language accuracy which supports the empirical results of other inquiries. Furthermore, the study's explorative findings support the need for further investigations on feedback on pronunciation. A proposition for future research is that more holistic type studies be conducted, including different categories and proficiency levels.

Keywords: adult beginners, feedback, language learning, L2, pronunciation, student attitudes, writing

1 Introduction

To date, a great amount of feedback studies in the context of second language teaching and learning specifically assess the efficiency of written corrective feedback (WCF), e.g., the correction of grammatical and lexical mistakes (van Beuningen 2010; Ellis 2009). These studies largely investigate focused correction or are limited to one linguistic feature (Pawlak 2014). However, analyses reveal a considerable variation of teacher- and learner-related, psycholinguistic as well as linguistic factors (Goldstein 2008), which means that feedback is a complex research issue. Therefore, this study aims to investigate a more holistic feedback approach compared to recent studies and involves teacher-student related factors together with form-meaning connections. It also includes relations

Corresponding author's email: liivi.jakobson@svenska.gu.se
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University of Jyväskylä

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between teachers' actual feedback and student attitudes to this feedback. Additionally, an experience-based category of pronunciation is investigated.

Furthermore, previous studies have primarily concentrated on intermediate or more advanced language learners, while research on feedback for adult beginners remains largely unexplored (Furnborough & Truman 2009; Vyatkina 2010). The study presented in this article contributes to this gap in knowledge by focusing on adult beginners.

Another key area in L2 teaching research is computer-mediated communication (CMC). As the number of language learners increases, distance or blended language learning will probably be a normalized mode of education in the future (Coleman & Furnborough 2009). In this study, second language and foreign language overlap because boundaries between foreign and second languages become vague in the place-independent virtual environment of net-based teaching. Research on feedback is considered to be one of the main issues in net-based language teaching (Hyland 2010; Hyland & Hyland 2006; White 2003). Even if there is a wide range of literature on feedback in net-based language learning contexts, online written feedback for adult beginners in higher education is to a large extent unexplored.

The disposition of this article is as follows. First, the literature review about the role of feedback in teacher-student interaction and relevant feedback categories as well as the research questions are presented. Second, the empirical findings are analyzed in relation to the frame of reference. The categorization of feedback is adapted from Hyland (2001) or explored inductively, since there is deficient empirical evidence or theoretical knowledge from the literature. Finally, three kinds of results are reported as indications of analytical support or explorative propositions.

2 The role of feedback in teacher - student interaction

Student expectations about feedback are as significant as teaching pedagogy and research findings. In an earlier study, Hyland (2000) pointed out that teachers experienced students as passive receivers of feedback whereas several researchers have emphasized that L2 student attitudes must be taken into account and used in feedback because students are active agents in their own learning (Hyland 2010; Lantolf & Poehner 2011). Further, learner attitudes may affect the uptake of feedback (Storch & Wigglesworth 2010) even if Truscott (1996) pointed out that learner preferences and desires may not promote acquisition. Moreover, teacher and student attitudes about CF do not always coincide, which means that student wishes do not always match what they are provided with (Goldstein 2004). In addition, differences may exist between different L2 student populations (Ferris 2010; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz 1994). Therefore, the present study compares students' evaluations and actual teacher feedback, which has been suggested by Goldstein (2010) and Schulz (2001).

Above-mentioned studies point to the importance of an approach that creates as much holism as possible related to the present state of the art. In order to achieve this, the following literature review will elaborate both teacher-student related factors and product-process related categories.

2.1 Teacher feedback

There is a clear contradiction between Truscott's (1996) statement about the uselessness of feedback and teachers' actual practice. In other words, language teachers continue to give feedback on different issues, even if they know that not all kinds of feedback stimulate learning. In short, many teachers have a pragmatic and positive view of feedback (Evans et al. 2010; Ferris 2014; Murphy & Roca de Larios 2010). Additionally, the amount and diversity of feedback varies from teacher to teacher. For example, Hyland (2001) reported variation in teacher feedback of between 12-40% on language accuracy on the intermediate level. In Hyland (2003), feedback on language accuracy to mixed levels of students differed between 56 and 75% among six teachers. A variety of feedback practices between teachers probably depends on their attitude to teaching and error correction (Ferris 2010). How the differences among teachers and their beliefs affect learners is still unclear (Bitchener & Ferris 2012).

In this study, the teacher and the researcher are the same person - a teacher-researcher. As argued by Bitchener and Ferris (2012), few teachers carry out research on feedback. Several researchers have highlighted the need for teacher research due to reasons such as the need for useful results, field-based research which looks at CF in practice (Bitchener & Ferris 2012), finding effects of teacher feedback practices (Magno & Amarles 2011) and investigating naturalistic exposure in classroom settings (Ferris 2010; Storch & Wigglesworth 2010). Moreover, it is difficult to examine the relationship between the learners and the teacher who gives the feedback with experimental methods (Ellis 2010; Ellis et al. 2008).

2.2 Student attitudes

Earlier composition studies have reported a positive attitude among students to many issues, such as content, organization, grammar and lexicon. Despite individual differences between student attitudes (Hyland 2011), research about students' perceptions over time has shown that students want, expect and value feedback from the teacher and have strong opinions about the way of getting feedback (see Ferris 2012). For example, McMartin-Miller (2014) found that students would not accept teachers who did not give feedback at all, and the majority of these students preferred comprehensive error treatment. In studies of reactions to teacher feedback of various types, students indicated that they expected and valued teacher feedback on all aspects of their texts as long as they receive adequate input on grammar (Ferris 1995; Montgomery & Baker 2007). Further, Hyland (2011) and Schulz (2001) found a preference for grammar particularly among students in academic contexts.

2.3 Feedback categories

From a holistic perspective, feedback involves a complexity of issues. Hyland and Hyland (2010b) found five feedback areas that have been provided by teachers in the classroom: students' own ideas, form, praise, criticism and suggestions. In brief, these areas can be considered as focus factors for feedback on writing. Taking the complexity of language learning into account, feedback cannot only be offered on one separate category. This idea is supported by Storch and Wigglesworth (2010): "Future research on feedback needs to combine an

examination of the product (revised and new texts) and processes in an integrated manner" (p. 329).

This article relates to a comprehensive overview of integrated feedback categories and follows Hyland's (2001) classification of feedback on writing in two main categories. The first category, the product-related feedback, i.e., "the strengths and weaknesses of the assignment itself" (p. 237) includes four form-meaning related subcategories: *content, organization, language accuracy* and *presentation*. The second category, the process-related feedback, has three subcategories: 1. *praise/encouragement* containing non-specified praise or standard comments such as "… Keep it up!", 2. *reinforcement of learning materials* (for example "Look at unit 6, pages 27 to 28…"), and 3. *suggesting learning strategies* such as "It is most essential for you to read as much as possible …" (p. 238).

2.3.1 The product

Teacher feedback in ESL writing courses has to a large extent focused on *content, ideas* and *organization* rather than *language accuracy* (Ferris et al. 2011). Only few studies have reported some empirical evidence that teachers focus mostly on form-based feedback (Gascoigne 2004; Hyland 2003; Montgomery & Baker 2007; Tang et al. 2008).

The dichotomy between feedback on form and meaning is closely related but has not been properly evaluated, and further inquiries must include both form and content (Hyland & Hyland 2010b; Magno & Amarles 2011). Ferris (2012) and Hyland and Hyland (2010b) argue for a combination of content and form because language is a tool to create meaning. In other words, creating meaningful content occurs by using grammatical structures, and therefore it is difficult to separate form and content in feedback.

There are, however, conflicting views in research (Sheen 2011) on whether feedback must be mostly oriented towards content or form because of various influential factors. For example, in narrative writing more attention may need to be paid to stylistic problems and coherence while, in practicing grammatical structures, the focus is more on WCF.

Indeed, the impact on grammatical accuracy is significant for assessment. Andrade (2006) notes that the success of international students greatly depends on language proficiency. This aspect is essential for individuals in an academic environment for several reasons. First, teachers in higher education rarely assess the typical errors of L2 speakers (Hyland & Hyland 2010a). Secondly, according to Silva (1993), more errors and less general fluency in L2 writing lead to lower scores. This statement is supported by Celce-Murcia (1991) who argues that surface-level errors in university-level writing can have a negative impact on academic performance.

Based on the communicative competence model of Canale and Swain (1980), phonological knowledge besides lexical and syntactical knowledge are considered as main components of linguistic knowledge (Bachman 1995; Bachman & Palmer 2009; Common European Framework of Reference for Languages 2001). Therefore, one should not only focus on feedback on grammatical and lexical mistakes. Pronunciation, along with grammar and lexis, influences learners' success by getting meaning across in oral production. Language accuracy in the present study involves feedback both in a written context (grammar, lexis and spelling) as well as on pronunciation, i.e., oral accuracy. It is noteworthy that several recent studies have shown the relative

effectiveness of explicit feedback on pronunciation, and suggest that feedback on pronunciation is vital for successful pronunciation (Dlaska & Krekeler 2013; Mohammadi Darabad 2014; Saito & Lyster 2012). Learners do not always hear their pronunciation mistakes and need to be taught and scaffolded with feedback (Zielinski & Yates 2014). This concerns mostly adult beginners because they must have the correct learning patterns for pronunciation from the start. Moreover, feedback can promote the reducing of pronunciation errors, avoid fossilization, and develop correct pronunciation at higher proficiency levels (Derwing & Munro 2014).

2.3.2 The process

The overall purpose of improving the learning process is to create a productive relationship between teacher and student (Hyland 2001). The category of process is based on inductive results, except for the subcategory *praise/encouragement*. The two subcategories, *suggesting learning strategies* and *reinforcement of learning materials*, are grounded concepts detected in the empirical inquiries conducted by Hyland (2001) and Hyland and Hyland (2012). Considering the relative importance of the learning process, Hyland (2001) found that only 17% of teachers' comments addressed this area[1].

As some researchers (Hattie & Timperley 2007; Shute 2008) have noticed, people may experience praise in many different ways. For this reason, it has been suggested that teachers should be careful with giving praise (Hyland & Hyland 2010b) even if it may develop learning, awareness and strategies by the learner in the long term (Ferris 2012). According to Hyland and Hyland (2001), the teacher should give specific feedback that is directly linked to the current text and not provide standardized comments or general praise, but should ensure that feedback is "consistent, clear, useful, and constructive" (p. 223, cf. also Ferris 1995; Hyland 1998). Sheen suggested that "…teachers should make sure that CF …is presented in a friendly, non-threatening manner, accompanied … by praise and encouragement, to reduce the potential negative attitudinal impact on the students" (2011: 170). Further, Hyland and Hyland (2010a) emphasized that the teacher should have an open discussion with their students about the benefits of and the possible strategies to deal with various aspects of feedback.

Ferris (2012) and Hyland (2010) argued that suggesting learning strategies should also be taken into consideration. Feedback not only highlights the assessment itself or corrects errors, but it helps to improve the writing skills and this helps long-term writing development. This idea is supported by Ferris (2012): "In a writing course, the goal of CF is not simply to "fix" individual student papers but rather to build knowledge and strategies that can help them become more proficient users of the L2 and more skillful writers over time" (p. 10).

Hyland (2001) indicated that reinforcement of teaching materials in the category of process should have a stronger connection to the teaching and the teachers' way of planning the teaching. She concluded that students want to solve their linguistic problems on their own and therefore want to use their own existing materials. Hyland (2001) examined questionnaire answers from 108 Chinese distance students on a general intermediate English proficiency course (40.4% males, 59.6% females) and interviewed ten students with Cantonese as their first language (four males and six females) in the 26-42 year old age bracket at the Open University in Hong Kong.

3 Research questions

The first purpose of the current study is to investigate the feedback the students on the beginners' level receive on writing and pronunciation in a net-based language course. Secondly, the students' evaluation of teacher feedback is explored.

The ambition to take a holistic approach in the present study is based on categories that derive from empirical studies about writing. This empirical starting point is, however, further elaborated by existing theories, and from this it is possible to make an analysis of the majority of subcategories related to two main categories. Therefore, this study addresses the following first question:

1. To what degree do specified categories appear in teacher's feedback on writing?

When it comes to feedback on pronunciation, this category is included in this study mainly due to experiential knowledge on the behalf of the researcher. Because of this experiential starting point with the lack of a theoretical foundation, the results remain explorative in the present study. The second question in this study is:

2. To what proportion do specific explorative categories appear in teacher's feedback on pronunciation compared to writing in the category of process?

Sheen (2011) argues in favor of the hypothesis that learners with positive attitudes towards CF and language accuracy will benefit more from feedback than those with negative attitudes. The relation between student attitudes and teacher's actual feedback is investigated in this study. Therefore, students' evaluation of the identified categories in questions one and two is investigated by adressing the third question:

3. How do the students rank the feedback categories concerning appreciation?

4 Method

In order to elaborate the research questions the following methodology was applied.

4.1 Course, participants and setting

The present investigation is based on data from a net-based distance course at a university in Sweden, for beginners without any formal exposure to Swedish prior to this course. The course was given at the preparatory level from August 2011 until January 2012 and consisted of two periods. Each period lasted ten weeks and ended with an oral and a written exam. In Period 1, 27 students participated, and Period 2 with 16 students began directly after Period 1. The participants in the present study were students who completed courses in Period 1 and 2 since they were involved in the same context under the same periods. Some of the students stayed in Sweden, while some lived outside Sweden or commuted between Sweden and other countries during a single course (see Table 1).

The prerequisites for course admittance were the general entrance requirements to Swedish universities, including English B (CEFR level B2) at Swedish upper secondary school or equivalent knowledge. Through a variety of assignments and interactive classroom activities, the students continuously practiced grammar, pronunciation and their communicative skills. The focus in

second and foreign language writing lay both in form and content. The instruction was given in Swedish and English in turn. After having completed the course, the students should be able to apply their basic knowledge of grammar both verbally and in writing in Swedish in a communicatively comprehensible way.

The prerequisites to pass the course were active participation in all web seminars, the continuous submission of all required assignments and a written examination as well as an oral examination. After the examinations, ten students who had passed the course were invited to participate voluntarily in the inquiry. Teacher feedback on these ten students' assignments was used for data collection. The informants with different cultural backgrounds (see Table 1) were in the 25-36 year-old age bracket.

Table 1. The background of informants.

	Nationality	Gender	L1	The country of resistance during the course	The country visited during the course	Educational level
1	Australia	male	English	Sweden		undergraduate
2	Greece	female	Greece	Sweden		undergraduate
3	Greece	female	Greece	Greece		postgraduate
4	India	female	Hindu	Sweden		postgraduate
5	India	male	Hindu	Sweden		postgraduate
6	Italy	male	Italian	Sweden		undergraduate
7	Spain	male	Spanish	United Kingdom	Spain, Sweden	postgraduate
8	Germany	male	German	Germany	Sweden	undergraduate
9	Ukraine	female	Ukrainian	United Kingdom	Sweden	postgraduate
10	USA	male	English	Sweden		postgraduate

The course was supported and delivered through virtual learning and conference tools. The first, the learning management system called Fronter, was used for information, communication and for handing in short written and oral assignments. The other tool was the net-conference platform called Adobe Connect where synchronous net-seminars were held once a week for 90 minutes in two groups. The students in respective group participated at the same time. The focus in Adobe Connect seminars was on oral communication, but also other features such as pronunciation, grammar and listening were dealt with. The students had the opportunity to get group feedback during the seminar and personal support after every meeting on Skype or Msn.

4.2 Instructional procedures

Instructional procedures consisted of weekly work schedules, the course book as the main learning tool, and extra material, e.g., recorded lectures about grammar. The teacher delivered a weekly detailed work schedule every weekend in Fronter. Work schedules provided details of tasks and material for each weekday as well as information about how to learn new material and complete the exercises. Writing assignments were integrated with recorded pronunciation exercises. The teacher returned assignments with consistent feedback (Ferris 2004) individually on all home assignments at the latest one week after submission. In written pieces of writing, the teacher submitted comments in or after students' texts. Concerning the pronunciation exercises, the teacher gave feedback in the "Comments" window in Fronter. The students were encouraged to read and think about the comments in order to try to avoid the same errors in future assignments.

At the end of each week in Fronter, students submitted weekly assignments in the form of shorter pieces of writing tasks in line with Hartshorn et al. (2010), such as narratives, grammar exercises, translations into Swedish, as Word documents, as well as pronunciation tasks such as recorded audio files. Students wrote new tasks every week, and most of the writing tasks were related to the students' own personal experience (Stokes 2007), and the students were encouraged to use the language structure and vocabulary they learned.

Regarding the pronunciation tasks, the textbook included a CD with recorded texts, dialogues and pronunciation exercises from the book. With some of these texts, the students had to work extra hard on their pronunciation and not only focus on lexical or grammatical features. The students had to listen to these texts, repeat and imitate what they heard, and finally record and save the recording as a sound file in Fronter.

The total number of hand-in assignments submitted during the 20-week period were five pronunciation tasks and 15 writing tasks consisting of eight narrative pieces of writing, five grammar exercises, one reading comprehension task and one translation exercise.

4.3 Teacher-researcher

The teacher/researcher has wide experience in teaching three foreign languages at different levels, and has planned, developed and evaluated online and campus courses for large and small groups on many occasions. She was aware of the feedback categories before the planning of this study and has given such feedback in her previous courses.

An additional advantage with teacher-researcher in research relies on the relaxed environment created by the teacher role (Denscombe 1998).

The possible disadvantage with teacher-researchers is that the study can provide a bias based on values if the design is poor. The teacher-researcher in this study conceptually replicates Hyland's (2001) categories and argues that the first research question and related categories are properly theory-anchored in the frame of reference. Furthermore, the second research question is exploratory and treated as such in this study, i.e., only generating propositions for future research following established methods.

4.4 Data collection and analyses

4.4.1 Writing tasks

Only narrative tasks, such as letters or descriptions, were chosen for data analysis. Such narrative stories are basic text types that focus on content and express personal experiences, and they play an important role in the early development of language skills (Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005; Long 1988). Eight of the 15 writing assignments had a narrative character, and five of them were used for data analysis: from weeks 2, 6, 10, 14 and 17. There were three reasons for choosing five out of eight texts: 1. the formative character of feedback, 2. the principle of continuity, 3. the saturation was reached with five texts based on teacher-researcher experience. The first writing activity from week 2 averaged 69 words and the average composition length for all five compositions was 106 words which indicated the development of L2 writing skills. The teacher assessed task three in week 10 (see Table 2 in the Results) summatively as a part of the final examination in Period 1 as well as formatively. As ten informants were participating, and five pieces of texts were collected from each participant, the total number of assignments was 50.

The teacher's feedback for each piece of writing was investigated by identifying every separate feedback indication, such as marking, comment, correction, underlining, phrase or sentence, made by the teacher. All these indications were then totaled for each piece of writing and categorized according to the feedback classification scheme (see 2.3). For the units that could not be placed in the scheme, an additional category *other* was created. The total number of feedback units for the writing tasks was 514.

The quality assurance of results was made by inter-rater reliability calculations and theoretical validity (Denscombe 2010). First, an experienced university lecturer in Swedish as a second language applied inter-rater reliability, i.e., degree of agreement. This colleague identified counted and categorized 10% randomly chosen data. One disagreement appeared in three of five chosen texts and consensus was reached how to deal with these problems. In terms of theoretical validity, this empirical examination is primarily based on Hyland's (2001) model, and the results were then compared with Hyland's study (2001). To increase the reliability of the data analysis, the teacher's feedback was counted and categorized a second time one week after the first counting by the researcher[2].

4.4.2 Pronunciation tasks

Feedback classification on pronunciation follows the same pattern as the feedback classification scheme on writing in two main categories: the product and the process. However, subcategories in the product are based on the main phonological contrasts in the Swedish language: *sentence stress, word stress, length, vowels, consonants* and *phonological processes/assimilation.* These suprasegmental and segmental features in interrelationship with each other are important for intelligibility and comprehensibility in Swedish (Bannert 2004; Engstrand 2004; Garlén 1988). Intelligibility and comprehensibility can be improved through formal pronunciation instruction (Derwing et al. 1998; Strange 1995). The category of process includes the same subcategories as the classification of feedback on writing.

Feedback on all five pronunciation tasks was printed, and the total number of feedback instances for pronunciation was 50. Data units like a sentence, phrase, single words, marked double letters, capitalization, etc. were categorized according to the feedback classification scheme for pronunciation. The feedback classification of pronunciation also includes the category other. The total number of feedback units for pronunciation tasks was 229.

As the main category of product in pronunciation includes new inductive subcategories, the categorization of data units in pronunciation was discussed with a phonetics expert until an agreement was reached.

4.5 Survey

The inquiry conceptually replicates Hyland's (2001) categories and adds a new category. Such a mainly inductive approach needs a design strategy that organizes inductive data, in order to be able to estimate causality and predict outcomes. The strategy offering such a possibility is called the expectancy-value model (Fishbein & Ajsen 1975), which was named attribution theory by Weiner (1985) who pinpoints hierarchies of perceived causality. Attribution theory has been applied in many contexts. Pishghadam and Zabihi (2011) specifically address the context of SLA and apply this attribution theory in the field of motivation, but it is equally applicable for other subject areas such as feedback categories. In research question three, the hierarchies of perceived causality are applied for feedback on two main categories and subcategories.

An e-mail with an attached questionnaire in English was sent to ten students two weeks after Period 2 .The students were asked to evaluate the feedback they had received during the course and all ten students answered which means that the response rate was 100%.

As feedback categorization was mainly based on Hyland (2001), the questionnaire was also constructed using the same model. The questions in the questionnaire are consistent with the categories in the feedback analysis model, i.e., seven categories that were applied to writing. Six subcategories of pronunciation in the main category of product were counted as one category that was added to the seven categories of the feedback analysis scheme on writing. In the main category of process for pronunciation, three subcategories were applied which overlap with the same categories in writing. Altogether, the questionnaire includes eight categories.

The design of the survey was also based on Denscombe (1998), whose three principles were taken into consideration: 1. recommendations for the length, the identifying of questions etc., 2. the importance of social climate during the course while expressing their views, 3. the teacher´s personal contact with the students which eventually results in higher response rates.

To reduce the risk of misunderstanding and clarify the categories, some striking examples and clarifications were added to the questionnaire. For instance, language accuracy was presented as follows: Grammatical and lexical problems, for example *comments and error correction of word order, definite-indefinite form and choice of vocabulary* ". Some examples were taken from Hyland (2001), and some examples were based on the feedback students received from the teacher in the present study. Instead of validating each category separately, the researcher asked the participants to rank the eight categories according to a modified Likert scale. In other words, the participants were asked which categories they valued first as *most important* (I), secondly as *second most*

important (II), on the third position as *the third most important* (III) and lastly as *also important* (IV). The informants could choose only one category on the first, second and third place, but they could place several categories in *also important* or exclude categories they evaluated as not important.

5 Results

5.1 Feedback on writing per task and category

The results of teacher feedback on writing per task and category are illustrated in Table 2 (N=514). Numbers in parenthesis are the number of units in each subcategory for language accuracy. Most feedback was provided on the product (77%), and, interestingly, 68.5% of all feedback focuses on language accuracy, which mostly dealt with grammar and lexical problems. Spelling gets more attention than organization and content. Process-focused feedback took only one fifth of all feedback and centered mainly on praise/encouragement (11.4%).

TABLE 2. Feedback on writing per category and task.

Category	**Task 1 units**	**Task 2 units**	**Task 3 units**	**Task 4 units**	**Task 5 units**	**Σ units**	**%**	**Σ**
	Week 2	Week 6	Week 10	Week 14	Week 17			
PRODUCT								
1. Content	1	8	5	5	8	27	5.2	
2. Organization	0	10	0	1	7	18	3.3	
3. Language accuracy	42	72	120	56	60	350		
3.1 Grammar, vocabulary	(29)	(63)	(110)	(47)	(57)	(306)	60	
3.2. Spelling	(13)	(9)	(10)	(9)	(3)	(44)	8.5	
4. Presentation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
PRODUCT Σ	43	90	125	62	75	395		77
PROCESS								
1. Praise/encouragement	16	13	10	8	12	59	11.4	
2. Reinforcement to learning materials	1	3	8	2	4	18	3.5	
3. Suggesting learning strategies	0	3	14	11	3	31	6	
PROCESS Σ	17	19	32	21	19	108		20.9
Other	0	3	2	2	4	11	2.1	2.1
Σ	60	112	160	85	97	514		100

5.2 Feedback on pronunciation per task and category

Table 2 illustrates the results of teacher feedback on pronunciation per task and category (N=229). The proportion of data units for product is 51%, 41.7% for process and 7.3% for other (see Table 3). Praise/encouragement in the category of process has received most feedback, with 25% of the total feedback on pronunciation. Suggesting learning strategies have received relatively much attention (15.7%) compared to the same category in writing.

TABLE 3. Feedback on pronunciation per category and task.

Category	**Task 1 units**	**Task 2 units**	**Task 3 units**	**Task 4 units**	**Task 5 units**	**Σ units**	**%**	**Σ**
	Week 1	Week 3	Week 14	Wee 16	Week 17			
PRODUCT								
1. Sentence stress		2	5	4	4	15	6.6	
2. Word stress		8	3	5	1	17	7.4	
3. Length/quantity		16	8	7	8	39	17	
4. Vowels		10	6	8	6	30	13.1	
5. Consonants		2	4	5	2	13	5.6	
7. Phonological processes		1			2	3	1.3	
PRODUCT Σ	0	39	26	29	23	117		51
PROCESS								
1. Praise/encouragement	19	13	7	12	6	57	25	
2. Reinforcement to learning materials			1		1	2	1	
3. Suggesting learning strategies		7	7	11	11	36	15.7	
PROCESS Σ	19	20	15	23	18	95		41.7
Other		3	7	2	5	17		7.3
Σ	19	62	48	54	46	229		100

5.3 Students' evaluation: Hierarchy of importance concerning category

In order to estimate the importance of each category to the participating students, the mean value was applied and the results are illustrated in Table 4.

The hierarchy of importance was based here on points assigned to the categories from 1-5, where 5 is the highest score and the maximum score per category was 50. A mean value concerning each category was calculated based on the scores. An example of this calculation was the category of language

accuracy. Since six participants gave the category the highest rank of 5, the score is 6*5=30, which gave a substantial contribution to its final ranking in position I.

The eight categories were naturally clustered into four 12-step positions. Position I was defined by the interval 39-51, position II by 26-38, position III by 13-25 and position IV by 0-12.

Since language accuracy totaled 43 points, it was placed in position I. Since pronunciation received 33 points it was placed in position II. Content, organization, reinforcement to learning materials and suggesting learning strategies received 21, 23, 24, 24 points, respectively, and were, therefore, clustered in position III. Presentation and praise/encouragement got 10, 12 points and ended up in last position, IV.

TABLE 4. The subjective importance of each category and the mean value.

Category	**No highest rank * 5**	**No second rank * 4**	**No third rank * 3**	**No fourth rank * 2**	**Σ**	**Position**
PRODUCT						
1. Content		8	3	10	21	III
2. Organization	5	8	6	4	23	III
3. Language accuracy	30	8	3	2	43	I
4. Presentation				12	12	IV
5. Pronunciation	15	4	6	8	33	II
PROCESS						
6. Praise/encouragement				10	10	IV
7. Reinforcement to learning materials		4	6	14	24	III
8. Suggesting learning strategies		8	6	10	24	III

The empirical results of the survey illustrated that the participants ranked language accuracy highest, i.e., regarded it as the most important; pronunciation was ranked a strong second position; content, organization, reinforcement and suggestions came in third position; and praise/encouragement as well as presentation came a clear fourth place.

A comparison of the categories of product and process showed that the two highest ranked categories (position I and position II) were included in the category of product, i.e., that the participants most valued product-oriented feedback, especially language accuracy and pronunciation. Other categories were evenly distributed between the process and the product.

None of the participants excluded language accuracy, pronunciation and reinforcement. Five informants excluded praise/encouragement in their evaluation which means that they evaluated this category negatively, i.e., as not important.

6 Discussion

The present study examined previously tested feedback categories for writing in the categories of product and process and explored a new category for feedback on pronunciation for adult beginners in Swedish as a second language. In the literature, there exist almost no deductive inquiries about feedback on adult beginners; and regarding inductive inquiries, they represent a vast variety of proficiency levels.

6.1 Teacher feedback on writing

To answer ~~to~~ the first research question "To what degree did specified categories appear in the teacher's feedback on writing?" It was found that the majority of teacher feedback focused on the product itself. A large amount of product-related feedback was given on form. The teacher focus on form in the current study supports some previous studies (Gascoigne 2004; Hyland 2003; Montgomery & Baker 2007; Tang et al. 2008). Additionally, in the present study, the teacher frequently corrected beginners' spelling mistakes (see Table 2), which has not been reported in previous studies.

Two reasons might explain the focus on language accuracy. First, this category can be related to learners' proficiency level, i.e., adult beginners. As recommended by Bitchener and Ferris (2012), low-level language students need more CWF as they are intensively acquiring the L2 lexicon, morphology and syntax. Therefore, teachers need to focus their attention on form. This is in line with Ferris (2012) who has suggested that learners need interventions from teachers to reduce deficits and to develop strategies for finding corrections and avoiding errors. Additional research is needed to determine and compare the proportions of teacher feedback on product-related categories for different language proficiency levels of students and, further, to find possible reasons for any differences.

The second explanation for these findings might be the variation in feedback on language accuracy among teachers. As explained in the review of the literature, differences in teachers' individual attitudes and strategies can influence dissimilarities in feedback (Ferris 2010). Hyland (2001), who examined almost the same subcategories which were used in the present study, reported that the teachers gave less feedback on language accuracy to higher language proficiency level students than the teacher in the present study concerning beginners. In contrast, in another study by Hyland (2003), feedback on form was provided to a great degree even to the intermediate and advanced language proficiency levels of students.

The data in Table 2 reveal that the teacher in the current study offers a comparably smaller amount of feedback on content and organization. Compared to Hyland (2001), the teachers gave feedback on content and organization to a larger extent, which may depend on the higher language proficiency level in her study. Since the students in the present study are adult beginners, they can construct single sentences and priority is given to language accuracy. The more advanced learners become in their L2, the greater the importance of the content and organization. However, one can expect a relatively high level of writing performance from beginner language learners in higher education settings. Moreover, it is difficult to determine when feedback on content and organization should be involved. According to my experience, content and organization can

be understood as universal, i.e., as natural features in most native, second and foreign language writing.

To summarize, this study demonstrates the focus of teacher feedback on form in the category of product. University language teachers should provide feedback on form to L2 students because of the high requirements in academic disciplines (Andrade 2006; Hyland & Hyland 2010a). Likewise, following the theoretical argument of Ferris (2012) and Hyland and Hyland (2010b), meaning and form in language teaching are inseparable, and, therefore, writing not only involves grammatical issues but also other aspects, such as content and organization.

In the main category of process, compared to feedback from four teachers on writing in Hyland (2001) (all teachers 7.8%), the teacher in the present study gave more attention to praise/encouragement (11.4 %). Because people can react to praise differently, it must be given with caution (Ferris 2012; Hyland & Hyland 2010b). It is important that teachers consider seriously if feedback is appropriate with specified or non-specified praise. However, even if praise/encouragement may help to maintain or increase motivation among students (Sheen 2011), the empirical results in the current study indicated only weak support for the positive impact of non-specified praise.

Concerning reinforcement of learning materials and suggesting learning strategies, the findings are similar to previous research of Hyland (2001) which provides empirical support because feedback is given at a relatively low level of language proficiency in both studies. In these categories, there is a potential for improvement in the context of adult beginners, especially in online teaching due to its different character compared to campus education.

Regarding the category reinforcement to learning materials, students should be considered as "active not passive recipients of their feedback" (Hyland 2001: 245) which indicates evidence of the need for the development of clear and understandable teaching materials, particularly in online courses. Furthermore, teachers should offer suitable resources and tell the students where to find appropriate materials. According to suggesting learning strategies, this category needs more attention because learning strategies help students to understand and deal with language problems. Based on the empirical results of Hyland (2001) and the current study, further research is needed to examine if and how suggesting learning strategies are used in the classroom and particularly net-based distance learning contexts.The empirical findings to date point to the importance of this category for adult beginners.

6.2 Teacher feedback on writing compared to pronunciation in category process

To answer the second research question "To what proportion do specific explorative categories appear in teacher's feedback on pronunciation compared to writing in the category of process?" The results showed that the teacher gave more feedback on pronunciation, specifically on praise/encouragement and suggesting learning strategies. This result is valid in comparison to process-related feedback on writing and pronunciation. It is, of course, interesting to conjecture possible reasons for the differences between writing and pronunciation. A greater degree of praise/encouragement feedback on pronunciation can be interpreted as a relatively new and unusual situation enabled by new technical requirements. To record and submit his/her own voice and to send it to the teacher can be difficult. An experienced teacher's praise/encouragement can be

interpreted as a confirmation of the students' success in working with their pronunciation which can increase students' confidence. In other words, this may show that the learner has passed the technical part and dares to send his/her voice to the teacher. For example, the teacher provided only praise/encouragement and the biggest amount of praise/encouragement for students´ first recording (see Table 3). Dlaska and Krekeler (2013) point out that teacher feedback not only helps learners correct their pronunciation, but it is also potentially motivating. Therefore, feedback on pronunciation is as important as feedback on other components of communicative competence (Bachman & Palmer 2009; Common European Framework of Reference for Languages 2001) because students need to learn how to speak intelligibly to others (Zielinski & Yates 2014). As stated earlier, several studies have shown the positive impact of feedback on oral accuracy (Dlaska & Krekeler 2013; Mohammadi Darabad 2014; Saito & Lyster 2012).

To date, there has been little research on written feedback on pronunciation. This feedback category is a new situation due to the increasing number of net-based communicative language courses (Coleman & Furnborough 2009). The results in the present study indicated that pronunciation is a central component in language learning for adult beginners. These results should, however, be interpreted cautiously because of the exploratory character of the findings, but they generate a proposition that teachers' comments on pronunciation should be investigated deeper in the future. Further research should be undertaken to investigate the differences between physical classroom feedback and online feedback, as well as how to support online learners with suitable strategies and create effective feedback models of pronunciation online.

6.3 Students' ranking of teacher feedback

The third question in this research was "How the students ranked feedback categories concerning appreciation?" and it was found out that the participants put language accuracy in first position. Although students value feedback on all issues of their texts (Ferris 2012; McMartin-Miller 2014), a high evaluation of grammatical accuracy was not particularly surprising giving the growing evidence from several written feedback studies (e.g., Hyland 2003; Schulz 2001). Based on these studies, students expect their grammar and lexicon to be corrected. The results of the present study contribute additional support for the significance of form in language learning for adult beginners. Furthermore, these results apply especially to individuals who carry out academic studies (Hyland 2011; Schulz 2001).

Turning now to the product-related category of pronunciation, it appears from the results of the present study that pronunciation got a clear second place in the students' ranking. This is a notable finding because all students had pronunciation in their ranking, and it can be estimated that L2 adult beginners view feedback on pronunciation as a scaffolding feature in their phonological development. This finding in the evaluation of pronunciation for beginners in L2 communication classes provides a strong proposal for further studies.

Two product-related categories (content and organization) and two process-related categories (reinforcement to learning materials and suggestions for improvement of learning process) were ranked in third place, i.e., higher than praise/encouragement. These results indicate that these four categories were not

possible to neglect for adult beginners, and that it is a proposal to include them in future feedback studies.

One reason for the placement of content and organization in the middle position may be the universal character of these issues in writing. Based on my experience, these categories might have "followed" from the students' first language or English because contextual and organizational aspects can be interpreted as natural in a native language or in English writing. In addition, the informants have a relatively high level of education which presupposes a basic knowledge of composition writing. Concerning reinforcement and suggestions, Montgomery and Baker (2007) noted that students expect feedback on all issues in their assignments. Also for adult beginners, positive attitudes towards these categories support earlier research because one can observe that adult beginners believe that such an approach will help them to develop their language.

Praise/encouragement and presentation came in a clear fourth place in the students' ranking in the present study which can be interpreted as the lowest evaluation. It is clear that the students did not value positive, general praise/encouragement highly in the current study. Similarly, this analysis is in the line with other researchers (Ferris 1995; Hyland 1998; Hyland & Hyland 2010b) who highlight the need for detailed and specific comments in teacher feedback.

Finally, there was a considerable lack of agreement between the amount of the teacher's feedback and students' evaluation of praise/encouragement. Whereas the teacher gave a relatively large amount of praise/encouragement, the students evaluated this category as least important.

7 Conclusion

In conjunction with many other inquiries, the present study gives additional evidence for the positive influence of feedback in classroom teaching. Students' attitudes by ranking in the present study indicate a further step towards feedback effect research, but do not address learning outcomes. Instead, it only offers indirect indications on outcomes based on students' motivation beliefs.

This study, regarding adult beginners, provides evidence that students showed a strong favorable attitude towards form and pronunciation. This suggests that form and pronunciation in L2 learning are important attributes for adult beginners. The importance of pronunciation for adult beginners is a significant empirical result.

Taken together, this study highlights the integration of product- and process-focused categories. This perspective includes several categories which illustrate that language learning does not consist of independent separate issues, which has also been pointed out by other scholars (Hyland 2001; Storch & Wigglesworth 2010). Feedback categories are dependent on each other and are closely related to classroom teaching and L2 learning. So there is an obvious need for further studies with more holistic approaches. All in all, this study, which is situated in an online context, strengthens the idea that there is a need for a holistic perspective in research on feedback, especially on adult beginners, and in other contexts such as physical classroom environments and feedback applied to a wider student and teacher population.

Endnotes

[1] For detailed information concerning the distribution of four teachers' feedback see Hyland 2001: 239.

[2] Two problems occurred during the feedback categorization on writing assignments. Firstly, the existing statements in some units overlapped in some general and long comments in the category content (one case) and in the category other (two cases). Therefore, it was difficult to determine where one unit ended and the next unit started. The researcher discussed these problems with a colleague until an agreement on classification was reached. Secondly, on three occasions in the category language accuracy, the teacher counted several grammatical elements in the same sentence. The question was whether these units should be counted as one or more units. After discussion with a colleague, the joint decision was made to count various grammatical elements in the same sentence as one unit.

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