

Focus and Language Functions in Supervisors' Written Feedback on Master's Theses at KSU's Translation Department

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ABSTRACT

Written feedback is an essential communication between theses supervisors and postgraduate students. This study examines written assessments from academic supervisors from a master's program with no official assessment rubric or tool at a postgraduate level. The data from written feedback on five masters' theses underwent qualitative content analysis focused on identifying comments related to the foci; content, language, structure, and presentation; and directive, expressive, and referential language functions. The findings revealed that the dominant focus of the supervisors' written feedback was content, followed by language, then structure, and presentation. Supervisors strongly preferred directive language, followed by referential language, with a minimal representation of expressive language. This study concluded that the supervisors emphasized content-related feedback more, while language, structure, and presentation were secondary and tertiary concerns. The supervisors also preferred directives, such as clarifying questions and suggestions, over referential language functions, such as indirect corrections. They showed little interest in expressive language functions, such as giving praise or negative criticism when giving written feedback. Implications and recommendations were also provided in this study. It is concluded that the supervisors focused on the content of the thesis. In addition, they also looked at its overall aspects.

Keywords: assessment, content analysis, language functions, masters thesis, written feedback

Introduction

Theses and dissertations are often the culminating requirements of a postgraduate degree. While students direct the content and focus of these papers, they do so under the guidance of supervisors through assessment feedback. The importance of feedback assessment for students, supervisors, and the academe underlines the need to give more attention to feedback to achieve better outputs. Therefore, the supervisor's role is essential as written feedback has been shown to affect students' writing development positively (Biber et al., 2011) and without which postgraduate supervisees may not meet the expected proficiency in academic writing at a master's or doctorate level. The assessment of Ph.D. dissertations or master's theses also helps to uphold the standards of a program and encourages students to pursue subsequent research work (Man et al., 2020). While various studies have explored the topic of postgraduate feedback assessment of supervisors (e.g., Biber et al., 2011; Bourke & Holbrook, 2011; Ghadirian et al., 2014; Holbrook et al., 2014; Hussain, 2011; Kiley, 2009; Kumar & Stracke, 2017; Prieto et al., 2016), this has primarily been researched at a doctorate level. Only a few look at supervisor feedback at a master's status (e.g., Bastola, 2020; Hyatt, 2005; Man et al., 2020). This present study attempts to add to this area by addressing the topic of supervisors' written feedback assessment at a master's level in a Saudi Arabian university.

The data collected came from five supervisors, who each provided written feedback on their assessment of a master's thesis from one of their supervisees. The five students were all completing their Master of Translation Studies degrees at King Saud University (KSU), Saudi Arabia. An essential factor of this study is that the university does not have a standard rubric, standard format, or assessment tool for evaluating master theses or providing feedback, as Bitchener et al. (2011) and Bastola (2020) recommended. It is a significant motivating factor for this study, as it will be a foundation for creating a standardized assessment tool or template. It will also hopefully improve the writing standard of the graduate program. To this end, this paper aims to uncover common foci and categorize language functions through a qualitative content analysis of the supervisors' written feedback on master's theses.

Literature Review

Assessment of supervisory feedback

This paper draws on several studies that tackle this area of research, including Holbrook et al.'s (2014) study that, like this study, explored the focus and substance of constructive comments provided by Ph.D. examiners. Hussain (2011) studied the supervision and evaluation of graduate students' research projects in a localized setting, focusing on the realities and requirements of research and supervision in Saudi Arabia. The study's outcome was that he determined standards and benchmarks for evaluating theses. Ghadirian et al. (2014) conducted a similar survey of the challenges of improving the quality of supervision. The study concluded that more attention and proper planning are needed to modify related rules and regulations, improve qualitative and quantitative research in mentorship training, better the research atmosphere, and effectively monitor and evaluate the supervisory field. These studies imply that

theses supervision is a challenging task and is a continuous work in progress (Ghadirian et al., 2014; Hussain, 2011). Biber et al. (2011) explored the effectiveness of feedback for individual writing development. Their meta-analysis revealed that written feedback positively affected students' writing development. The study also highlighted that commenting is more effective than error location; generally, a focus on form and content seemed more effective than an exclusive focus on form (Biber et al., 2011).

The results of the studies cited above were mainly positive regarding written feedback. However, Soden (2013) found the opposite when he investigated the impact of written input on critical academic writing in two master's programs in the UK. The study revealed that written feedback could have been more suitable for conveying the implicit nature of critical academic writing and that nuance was lost in the written form, leaving room for misinterpretation. (Soden, 2013). Soden recommends developing an approach to feedback delivery that engages other senses through visual exemplars and dialogue as audio feedback. These approaches can strengthen the supervisor and supervisee relationships and improve supervisee engagement and motivation (2013). This result is also one of the considerations of the current study as it also aims to analyze written feedback from supervisors on identified theses and if it will serve as corroboration or a contradiction in the future. In contrast, Singh's 2016 study on graduate students in the Malaysian setting showed that while they preferred written feedback, they needed frequent feedback from their supervisors via an electronic method. The implication is that although the feedback is written, it more closely resembles the dialogues recommended by Soden (2013).

Written feedback: focus and functions

Other recent studies have also explored the topic of supervisory written feedback in thesis writing (Gedamu & Gezahegn, 2021; Man et al., 2020; Noel et al., 2021; Nurie, 2018; Saeed et al., 2021). Nurie (2018) explored supervision practices in higher education, concentrating on language function and written feedback. While the study's results implied that better supervision practices were needed, it also identified supervisors' written feedback as essential to effective communication. Another related research was conducted by Man et al. (2020) that focused on the content of assessment feedback in examiner reports on master's dissertations in translation studies. The research revealed that supervisors considered the expression of ideas as more important than the accuracy and originality of those ideas (Man et al., 2020). The study of Gedamu and Gezahegn (2021) addressed the focus and language functions of supervisors' written feedback in an EFL context. Their results showed a trend where thesis supervisors consistently chose the directive feedback language function over the expressive feedback language function in written assessments (Gedamu & Gezahegn, 2021). Saeed et al. (2021) investigated supervisory feedback formulation for research proposals and postgraduate students' responses to that feedback. The study revealed that directive language was overwhelmingly represented in the results of questions that aimed to engage students. The feedback focused on content, organization, linguistic accuracy, and appropriateness (Saeed et al., 2021).

As discussed in the introduction of this paper, most studies explored Ph.D. dissertations/research, and there is scant research into the feedback of master's theses by

supervisors. This study aims to explore more on master's thesis, particularly the written feedback provided by the supervisors. In addition, most of the studies cited used quantitative and qualitative research. In contrast, this study uses a qualitative approach to analyze the data unique to this locus and situation. To this effect, this study concentrates more on the focus and language functions of the written feedback to provide a micro-discussion on variables related to the assessment of supervisory written feedback. Based on this study aims to analyze the supervisors' written feedback on a master's thesis. Specifically, it seeks to answer to determine the following:

- (1) The common foci of supervisors' written feedback on a graduate's thesis; and
- (2) The categories of language functions that the supervisors' written feedback.

Methodology

Theoretical and conceptual framework

To reiterate, the focus of this study is on the analysis of supervisors' written feedback on master thesis research. Drawing on Saeed et al. (2021) research, this study defines written feedback "as a tool for communicating issues and flaws in academic writing." This current study intends to explore the foci of the data and adapt the categories listed by Saeed et al. (p1. 2021); linguistic accuracy, content, appropriateness, and organization. They categorized foci according to language, content, structure, and presentation. The operational definitions are the following: language refers to grammar, spelling, and punctuation, as well as linguistic accuracy and appropriateness. Structure and presentation refer to the organization and formatting of the paper, specifically the formatting of references, tables, figures, headings, and appendices. Lastly, the content relates to the inputs on ideas or data presented in the study.

Influenced by various studies on language functions within advisory feedback (Bastola, 2020; Basturkmen et al., 2014; Kumar & Stracke, 2007; Saeed et al., 2021; Xu, 2017), the researchers have identified and coded certain pragmatic functions found in the data as part of the content analysis process. As such, the coding is grouped into three main categories: referential, directive, and expressive. As these categories reflect Saeed et al.'s (2021) findings, this study uses the definitions provided by their research: "referential (feedback that provides information, corrections, and reformulation), directive (feedback eliciting information such as seeking students' clarification, justification, and confirmation, and telling and suggesting what to do and not to do), and expressive (registering a positive or negative response)" (p. 3). The data on supervisory written feedback will analyze these three categories of functions. Figure 1 shows the conceptual model and key constructs used for this research.

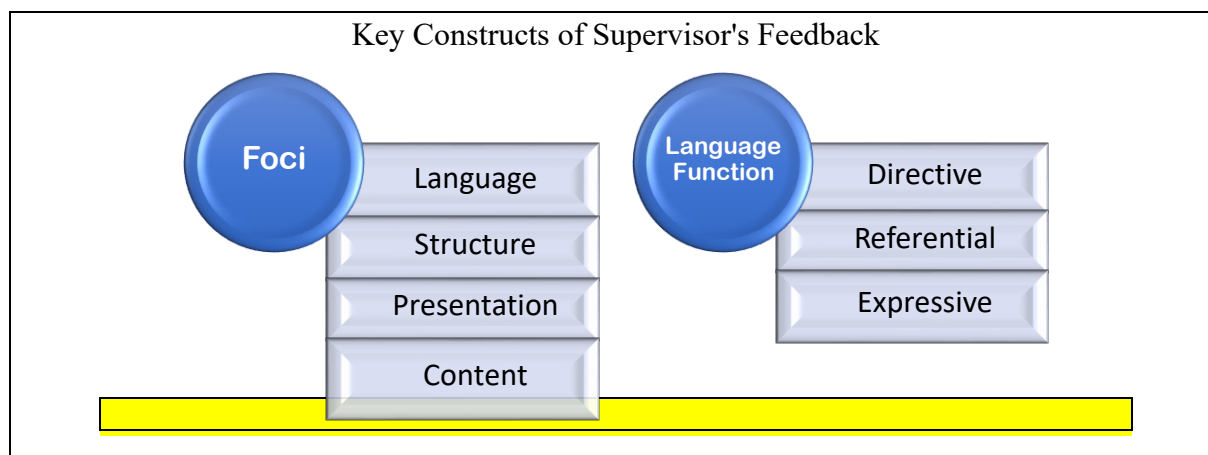


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Feedback Analysis of Master's Thesis

Research design and method

This study uses qualitative design to answer the two research focuses on the common foci of supervisors' written feedback on graduates' theses and the categories of language functions of the supervisors' written feedback. The researcher employed content analysis to identify code and categorize the foci (language, structure, presentation, content) and language functions (directive, referential, expressive) in the written feedback. According to the supervisor, all relevant data were organized in tables, focus (language, structure, presentation, content), and language functions (directive, referential, expressive). Inter-rater validation was also done to provide a more objective interpretation of data. The inter-rater has similar leverage as the researcher.

Content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within some given qualitative data (i.e., text). This paper's content analysis adapted methodology aims to quantify and analyze the presence, meanings, and relationships of certain words, themes, or concepts used by the supervisor in providing feedback to the five sample understudies. The researcher can thus evaluate the feedback context and content to identify bias or partiality and then make inferences about the messages within the feedback, both the sample and supervisor intent, and even the culture and time surrounding the text. The content analysis aims to find correlations and patterns in how feedback concepts are communicated and reveal differences and biases in communication in different contexts. In addition, it seeks to understand the supervisor's intentions in providing feedback and analyzing the consequences of communication context and content, such as the flow of information or student and inter-rater responses.

The content analysis follows the adapted approaches of Holsti (1968), "Any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages," and Constable et al. (2005), "An interpretive and naturalistic approach. It is both observational and narrative and relies less on the experimental elements normally associated with scientific research (reliability, validity, and generalizability)." As such, a minimal statistical approach is applied in this paper of the context and content analysis, which is more observational and narrative, to make inferences by systematically and objectively identifying particular feedback characteristics.

In this paper, the Content Analysis general steps are adapted from Hsieh and Shannon (2016), Elo et al. (2014), and Krippendorff (1980):

1. Deciding the level of analysis: word, word sense, phrase, sentence, themes
2. Deciding on an interactive set of categories or concepts allows flexibility to add categories through the coding. It provides for introducing and analyzing new and vital material that could have significant implications for the research questions.
3. Deciding coding for the frequency of a concept to enable the researcher would count the number of times a concept appears in a text.
4. Deciding on coding rules so that word segments are transparently categorized logically. The rules could make all of these word segments fall into the same category, or the rules could be formulated so that the researcher can distinguish these word segments into different codes.
5. Developing rules for coding your texts. i.e., for translation of the text into codes. It will keep the coding process organized and consistent. Validity of the coding process is ensured through consistency and coherence in code usage, meaning that they follow their translation rules. In content analysis, obeying the translation rules is equivalent to validity.
6. Deciding what to do with irrelevant information: should this be ignored (e.g., common English words like "the" and "and") or used to reexamine the coding scheme in the case that it would add to the outcome of coding?
7. Coding the text is done as the researcher can recognize errors far more easily (e.g., typos, misspellings).
8. Analyzing the results by drawing conclusions and generalizations where possible. Determine what to do with irrelevant, unwanted, or unused text: reexamine, ignore, or reassess the coding scheme. Interpret results carefully, as conceptual content analysis can only quantify the information. Typically, general trends and patterns can be identified.

Research context and limitations

This study was done at a Saudi Arabian University; the participants were five supervisors and five graduate students from the Master in Translation Studies program. The selection criteria of the student participants are that they are well advanced in the completion of the thesis, and this is solicited voluntarily from the class of 2022. As to the supervisors, the main selection criteria are delimited to experienced supervisors with more than five years of thesis supervision, with active thesis supervision at the time of the study, and their participation is also voluntary. Once both parties agreed to participate in the study, written permission was solicited and granted by the students, the supervisors, and the university's Graduate Program Committee, for the written feedback data to be used for this study. Confidentiality and personal information protection were also assured for those participating in this research study. The limitations of this study include the number of theses studied, as the data was gathered only from students who had submitted their master's thesis and received feedback, and were available to consent. The limited data necessarily narrows the focus of this paper. Despite needing more consistency in the length and depth of the feedback details, all gathered data are used. This inconsistency is a direct result of the university not having a standard rubric, format, or assessment tool for evaluating master's

theses, as Bitchener et al. (2011) and Bastola (2020) recommended.

Findings

This section shows the content analysis results and provides tabulated data showing how the various foci and language functions ranked with each supervisor.

Table 1. Number of comments focusing on content, language, structure, and presentation in supervisor feedback

| Supervisor | Content | Language | Structure & Presentation |
|------------|------------|-----------|--------------------------|
| A | 7 (46.6%) | 4 (26.7%) | 4 (26.7%) |
| B | 1 (12.5%) | 5 (62.5%) | 2 (25%) |
| C | 24 (61.5%) | 9 (23.1%) | 6 (15.4%) |
| D | 14 (56%) | 2 (8%) | 9 (36%) |
| E | 10 (58.8%) | 1 (5.9%) | 6 (35.3%) |

The content was the dominant focus of the written feedback from supervisors A, C, D, and E (Table 1). Structure and presentation proved to be the secondary focus for supervisors B, D, and E. Followed by language for supervisors D and E. Supervisor A had an equal number of comments focused on language, structure, and presentation. After content, supervisor C focused more on their feedback on language than on structure and presentation. Supervisor B's written feedback differs significantly from the other supervisors, showing a higher focus on language, structure, and presentation, with content only warranting a single comment. However, the inconsistency of these figures could be explained by the brevity of Supervisor B's feedback, eight comments versus 39 comments from Supervisor C, who provided the most extensive feedback.

Table 2. Number of supervisor feedback comments that demonstrated directive, referential, and expressive language functions

| Supervisor | Directive | Referential | Expressive |
|------------|------------|-------------|------------|
| A | 13 (86,6%) | 1 (6,7%) | 1 (6,7%) |
| B | 6 (66,7%) | 3 (33,3%) | 0 (0,00%) |
| C | 33 (84,6%) | 4 (10,3%) | 2 (5,1%) |
| D | 21 (91,3%) | 2 (8,7%) | 0 (0%) |
| E | 13 (76,5%) | 4 (23,5%) | 0 (0%) |

The results in Table 2 show that the directive language function dominated feedback from all five supervisors. For supervisors, B, C, D, and E comments that could be categorized as having referential language functions took second place. Feedback from supervisor A demonstrated one comment that could be categorized as having referential language functions and one that could be categorized as having expressive language functions. Supervisor C provided two comments whose language functions were identified as expressive. None of the comments from supervisors B, D, and E demonstrated expressive language functions.

Discussion

Foci of Feedback

This paper aimed to explore the written feedback provided by supervisors on master's theses, specifically focusing on identifying and codifying common foci and language functions in the data. Through analysis of the supervisors' written feedback, the researcher identified content as the dominant focus, followed by structure, presentation, and language. Table 3 below demonstrates examples of the supervisor's written comments concerning content.

Table 3. Supervisor comments on content

| Supervisor | Comment |
|------------|---|
| A | On p.12 and 13,...you must say more about the typologies you reviewed and explain the rationale. On p.32, for the sub-heading 'Micro-strategy Analysis,' I expected to see an explanation or criteria for identifying... On p.56, in the section 'Function Fulfillment,' there is no mention of Skopos Theory, which makes +your earlier introduction of it irrelevant. |
| B | Chapter 6 needs an implication part in which you summarize all your findings' implications (methodological, theoretical, for models or tools, etc.). |
| C | It is essential to mitigate bias in the dataset collection. Please update your literature review with more recent studies and provide your analysis of recent contributions in this domain. On page 27,... Did you create any guidelines to be followed to classify 81 instances"? If not, then how did you organize them? Based on what characteristics? |
| D | P. 3 "This study was motivated by the current poor state of the Arabic AVT in general (Gamal, 2007). Provide a more recent reference for this claim. P. 33 clarifies the idiom "like the tender white..." |
| E | Page 6, "Regular texts such as novels.." what is Regular text?? P. 59 you also have limitations that relate to the generalizability of your results |

As discussed, this study's operational definition of the content pertains to the ideas and data presented in the master's thesis. These results support Bitchener et al.'s findings in their 2010 study that identified content as the predominant focus of feedback provided by the 35 supervisors who participated in the study. Findings from Ghazal et al. (2014), Gedamu and Gezahegn (2021), and Basturkmen et al. (2014) similarly showed a preference for focusing on content in written feedback. Basturkmen et al. (2014) also found that idea development was almost as highly prioritized a focus as content in their supervisory feedback data. It implies that content is a significant consideration in academic research, and an assessment tool or rubric should be developed with this in mind.

In this paper, structure and presentation refer to the organization and format of the paper, i.e., correct formatting of references, tables, headings, and appendices. Based on the findings of this study, comments focusing on structure and presentation (25%) were the second most prevalent after comments focusing on content (52%). Although there is a wide margin between the two foci, the supervisors emphasized correct presentation and structure. It is per findings from Man et al. (2020), whose results highlighted "format" as a particular focus of supervisor feedback. Swales (2014) mentioned the importance of citation as the most overt evidence of an academic text. The emphasis on structure and presentation in the data implies that it should be considered when creating an assessment tool.

Although fewer comments focused on the language overall, supervisors A, B, and C made more or equal comments on language than on presentation and structure. It indicates that the importance placed on language is either peculiar to the supervisor or perhaps depends on the student's abilities. This result can also be corroborated by the findings of Man et al. (2020), which showed a strong emphasis in examiners' comments on the combined category of "communication and format," including language accuracy. It also supported Gedamu and Gezahegn's (2021) findings, in which students perceived supervisors as dominantly on linguistic accuracy and appropriateness. However, this could be because the study took place in an EFL context with students from the foreign graduate program. While language is a lesser focus in this current study, Man et al. (2020) and Gedamu and Gezahegn (2021) demonstrate that language is an essential focus of supervisors' written feedback. It plays an integral role in building the content and presentation of the thesis.

Language functions

This study's second research question relates to identifying and categorizing language functions in supervisors' written feedback. Table 2 shows the directive to be more prevalent than referential or expressive language functions. Some exemplars of directive language function in supervisor written feedback can be seen in Table 4 below:

Table 4. Examples of the directive language function in supervisor feedback comments

| Supervisor | Comment |
|------------|--|
| A | Avoid it as it is informal in academic writing (p.55). <i>Language</i> On p.12 and 13,...you need to say more about the typologies you reviewed and explain the rationale <i>Content</i> On p. 13,...be more specific and mention the section. [<i>Structure and Presentation</i>] |
| B | Chapter 6 needs an implication part in which you summarize all your findings' implications (methodological, theoretical, for models or tools, etc.). [<i>content</i>] Onp.6, "1.6 Limitations", in this section is better transferred to the final chapter [<i>Structure and presentation</i>] Onp.27 "and the neural NMT," here "neural" should be deleted. [<i>language</i>] |
| C | ...you found 24 more instances to watch the documentary one more time. How did you verify that there are no missing |

| | |
|---|---|
| | instances? For example, if you could watch two more times, the number could be 150, so my question is, how did you verify and ensure that all the collected instances are correct and you did not miss any instances? <i>[content]</i> On p.27, Please add a table and show the instances with three English and Arabic text columns. <i>[structure and presentation]</i> what is ST? The first time should be spelled out. <i>[language]</i> |
| D | Section 1.1. most of this part seems to fall under the problem statement...So this section calls for some re-arrangement. <i>[Structure and Presentation]</i> your discussion chapter requires considerable revision <i>[content]</i> Change verbs such as confirmed, proved, etc., to less assertive ones. <i>[language]</i> |
| E | P. 3 support your claim that "very little research has been devoted to rigorous evaluation of the quality of Arabic translation on these localized websites" <i>[content]</i> PP. 13, 16, 20, 59 (we and our) use I or the passive voice (when appropriate) instead of we <i>language]</i> p.21 delete page number, as you do not have a direct quote here <i>[Structure and Presentation]</i> |

These examples show that even though the focus of the written feedback is varied, the common denominator is the use of the directive language function. Welch (1980, as cited by Hussain, 2011) mentions the use of the directive as the foundation of three mentorship styles, which aim to provide comprehensive advice and guidance to research mentees by using approaches that range from highly structured to semi-structured directive feedback. Interestingly, Straub (1997, as cited by Soden, 2013) found that students were equally receptive to a highly structured, directive approach to feedback from their mentors or teachers, mainly when the feedback is specific and elaborate. Straub (1997, as cited by Soden, 2013) also revealed that the students appreciated directive feedback on grammar and sentence structure. The results of this study showed that the majority of supervisors provided explicit written feedback using directive language in their comments and giving precise details, including page numbers and examples of correct language usage.

Basturkmen et al. (2014) found that supervisors used directive feedback in single questions, suggestions, and combining both when addressing content, coherence, and cohesion issues. It is also true in the findings in this current study; for instance, some supervisors provided simple interrogative questions that are directive in nature, such as "What is ST? The first time should be spelled out." And with longer clarifying and interrogative questions, such as

*"you found 24 more instances to watch the documentary one more time.
How did you verify that there are no missing instances? For example, if you
could watch two more times, the number could be 150, so my question is,
how did you verify and ensure that all the collected instances are correct
and you did not miss any instance?" [content]*

These are just some examples that use a directive function. In addition, most of the written

feedback categorized under content is in the directive function. An explanation for this trend is related to the supervisor's need to address the extensive content, which is complex. It is supported in the studies of Basturkmen et al. (2014) and Saeed et al. (2021) that the nature of thesis content necessitates the use of directive feedback through questions that aim to clarify and evaluate the supervisees' arguments. Saeed et al.'s 2021 study also revealed that the supervisor participants formulated feedback through directives. They are intended to "elicit information, seek clarifications and justifications from the postgraduates, suggest/advise, and order them what to do or not to do in revising" (Saeed et al., 2021, p. 7) their thesis content. Supervisors may also use this directive function to lend substance to their authoritative intervention when providing feedback on the supervisee's thesis. Using questions and instructions in the directive language is also an effective tool in encouraging students to engage with the feedback and maintain this line of communication between supervisors and supervisees (Saeed et al., 2021). It might imply a positive and negative response from the students. This aspect needs to be covered in this study. Thus, this also serves as another recommendation to look into students' responses to this written feedback. However, highlighting the importance of directive feedback, the dominance of the directive function employed by the supervisors may also imply that directive is still a common way of providing written feedback. Whether they may be focused on different aspects of the paper, these directive comments still give instruction and guidance to students. As Saeed et al. (2021) mentioned, statements, interrogating, and clarifying questions may also allow the supervisee/thesis student to negotiate with their supervisor/mentor.

Table 5: Samples of Foci of the Feedbacks Comments

| Focus | Comment |
|----------------------------|---|
| Content | This is why you should state how you made sure that the transcribed texts are error-free (no grammar mistakes, etc.) (Supervisor B) Page 61, You should be confident in your contributions and clearly state how your work adds new scientific knowledge in this domain and how this fills the previous research gap (Supervisor C). |
| Language | On p.1, "machine translation research," this was mentioned in the long form, and in the paragraph above, it was MT. Spell out. (Supervisor B) Audiovisual, rather than AVT (Supervisor E). |
| Structure and presentation | On p. 10,...this info was just mentioned earlier, so it is repetitive. (Supervisor A) P.2 (Grab et al., 2018) (Supervisor D). |

In addition to the directive, the other two language functions were reflected: referential and expressive. In referential function, as discussed in the earlier section of this paper, referential refers to feedback that provides information, corrections, and reformulation. It is more about giving information functions of language. In this study, 14 comments were categorized as referential and ranged in focus from content to language to structure and presentation; examples of these comments can be seen in Table 5. Further data analysis revealed that most of the

comments categorized as referential were written declaratively. The comments focused on giving information, which is the purpose of referential language function, but also subtly implied that there was an error to be corrected.

Although only 14 supervisor comments were categorized as referential, some supervisors prefer using simple statements for corrections or providing information. This finding is reflected in Xu's 2017 study, in which supervisors primarily formulated referential feedback rather than directive feedback as is more predominant in the studies mentioned previously (e.g., Basturkmen et al., 2014; Saeed et al., 2021; Straub, 1997, as cited by Soden, 2013). Basturkmen et al. (2014) had similar results to the ones found in this study: the directive was the dominant function used by supervisors, but when feedback on both language and presentation was broadly referential. Similarly, in this study, most of the comments identified as referential focused on either language or structure and presentation.

As stated earlier, expressive language function in written feedback refers to registering a positive or negative response/comment. Only three identified instances of the expressive were used when synthesizing the results from the written feedback of the supervisors. Cross-referencing these results with those on focus in the written feedback revealed that the three identified expressive comments focused on content. The expressive comment from Supervisor A, "On p.56, in the section 'Function Fulfillment,' there is no mention of Skopos Theory at all, which makes your earlier introduction of it irrelevant," communicates an expression of criticism (more of a negative comment). It offers information and decries the irrelevance of the information the student supervisee provides.

The other two examples came from Supervisor C, "Strength: This study addressed a critical and interesting topic in subtitling the verbal-visual components...." and "Strength: the author examines the strategies used in rendering the verbal-visual components." It is immediately apparent that these were expressive comments as they both start with praise, demonstrated by the word "strength." The lack of explicit function in the supervisors' feedback indicates that most do not give much weight to either praise or criticism, depending more on the directive and referential directive language functions in feedback. The results of this study run counter those uncovered in Bastola's 2020 study, which concluded that of the data gathered on written feedback, most comments could be categorized as expressive, followed by referential and then directive. However, the results on this aspect of the current study are corroborated by the findings of other studies (Basturkmen et al., 2014 & Saeed et al., 2021), which found that the directive served as the principal language function in the supervisors' feedback. In the study of Xu (2017), it was not the expressive function that ranked first but came second to the referential function that mainly was used based on the findings, then "directive" came last. The findings of this study and the corroborated findings of other studies suggest differences in perception on giving evaluation on a thesis/research. It can be attributed to different factors, such as the divergent supervisor-supervisee relationships in research supervision (Ali et al., 2016; Xu, 2017; Bastola, 2022;). It includes linguistic resources employed by the supervisors (Starfield et al., 2015), supervisors' supervision practices (Nurie, 2018), supervisors' reliance on institutional or personal assessment (Killey & Mullins, 2004, as cited in Man et al., 2020) and more. This aspect, particularly in investigating these factors, also forms part of the recommendation of this current study.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study explored supervisors' written feedback on the master's thesis, particularly on the focus of the written feedback and the language functions used by the supervisors. The two results were also cross-referenced in the discussion section and revealed that supervisors primarily focused their comments on the content, structure, presentation, and followed by language. It also revealed that supervisors mostly used the directive language function in comments, followed by the referential language function with only minimal expressive use in the written feedback. This study concludes that the supervisors emphasize giving their written feedback, particularly on content, in the directive to engage supervisees with questions, request clarification, and provide suggestions of dos and don'ts of thesis writing. Supervisors use directive comments when focusing on the content and commenting on language, structure, and presentation to elicit the same level of engagement. It can also be concluded that the supervisors of this study, bar one, are not inclined to use expressive in their comments, limiting their abilities to either approve or disapprove.

Moreover, it was also underscored that although the supervisors have similar focus (content, language, structure, and presentation), it was still notable that the varied presentation of their comments resulted from the institution not having a standard assessment tool or rubric. Further, it can be concluded that a written feedback assessment tool/rubric would allow supervisors to provide a more uniform presentation of feedback that encourages them to read into aspects of the student's thesis that they might have overlooked.

Based on these conclusions, some of the key recommendations are:

1. The academic institution of the locale needs to design a formal, academically approved set of written feedback assessment tools or rubrics emphasizing the focus and manner of feedback comments in the formative and summative evaluation of the thesis. It includes the guidelines in feedback provisions for different parts of the thesis. The aim is to ensure consistency and coherence across constructive feedback and summative evaluations of students and their learning development. It is supported by Ghadirian et al. (2014), who also suggested that more attention and proper planning are needed for modifying related rules and regulations and improving qualitative and quantitative research in mentorship training of the supervisors to align their feedback understanding, approaches, and practices. It includes the need for developmental training or mentoring of thesis supervisors to arrive at a mutually agreed upon set of fundamentals in providing feedback and evaluations to the student within the institution's regulations.
2. In addition, a conducive research environment by bettering the research atmosphere and effectively monitoring and evaluating the supervisory field is needed to provide the entire student-centered research support. It calls for student and academic support, meeting facilities, and research supports availability and accessibility.
3. Furthermore, the limitations of this study may also serve as areas for further studies. Thus, this current study recommends more comprehensive studies on the response of graduate students to written feedback through a larger pool of assessor- assessee participation. It includes researching factors affecting supervisors' written feedback, a more significant sample of supervisors' written feedback, and a more extensive sample of theses within and across disciplines to be studied further. The supervisees' responses to feedback would be essential in directing the format of the feedback rubric, both

requiring how the feedback foci should be weighted; and how supervisors should structure that feedback. These recommendations are reflected in the studies by Bitchener et al. (2011) and Bastola (2020), whereby supervisees needed more input on the structure and presentation of their theses as positive expressive feedback was more helpful and encouraging than directive or referential feedback.

4. A more constructive approach is based on Soden's (2013) recommendation of developing a system for feedback delivery that engages other senses through visual exemplars and dialogue as audio feedback. It is supported by Biber et al. (2011) research demonstrating the effectiveness of feedback for individual writing development. Their meta-analysis revealed that written feedback positively affected students' writing development. It should be further researched into and established in all graduates' research programs for supervisors and student researchers.

In conclusion, this paper has attempted to discover more about the supervisory's feedback to the master thesis. The limited findings provided another perspective on the mechanisms and research environment needed to better support students' research development.

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