PRAGMATIC FEATURES OF TEACHER FEEDBACK IN EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATION.

Elmurodova Guljaxon Ilxom qizi
English Language Teacher
Sharof Rashidov District Specialized School under the Agency for Presidential Educational Institutions
Master's Student, Webster University
Center for the Implementation of Educational Programs of Webster University in Tashkent Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Annotation: Teacher feedback is a cornerstone of effective educational communication, functioning not merely as an evaluation mechanism but as a complex pragmatic act that shapes learner motivation, classroom discourse, and linguistic development. This article investigates the pragmatic features of teacher feedback within contemporary educational settings, examining how speech acts, politeness strategies, pragmatic markers, and illocutionary forces manifest in pedagogical interactions. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach combining classroom discourse analysis and teacher interviews, this study explores the functional categorization of feedback moves and their interpersonal effects on students.

Keywords: Pragmatic features, teacher feedback, educational communication, speech acts, politeness strategies, classroom discourse.

Introduction

Feedback occupies a central role in educational communication, acting as a crucial bridge between teaching and learning. Beyond transmitting informational content regarding academic correctness, teacher feedback is an inherently social and communicative practice embedded in interpersonal dynamics. From a pragmatic

perspective, feedback transcends surface-level linguistic exchanges; it constitutes a series of goal-oriented speech acts designed to modify student behavior, scaffold learning, and manage classroom rapport.

Despite its recognized importance, feedback often fails to achieve its intended developmental purpose. Research indicates that students frequently misinterpret feedback, perceive it as discouraging, or ignore it entirely. These communicative breakdowns often stem not from a lack of subject-matter clarity, but from pragmatic failures—such as inappropriate directness, ambiguous illocutionary intent, or a neglect of socio-emotional face needs. Understanding the pragmatic features of teacher feedback is therefore essential for optimizing educational communication and fostering an environment conducive to learner autonomy and engagement.

Literature Review

The theoretical framework underpinning this study draws from pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and educational psychology, specifically focusing on speech act theory, politeness theory, and classroom discourse analysis.

Speech Act Theory in Classroom Discourse Originating with Austin (1962) and further developed by Searle (1969), Speech Act Theory posits that language is used not only to convey information ("locutionary acts") but to perform actions ("illocutionary acts") and produce effects on hearers ("perlocutionary acts"). In educational contexts, teacher feedback functions as a complex illocutionary act. Evaluative utterances such as "That is incorrect" or "Try looking at paragraph two again" operate simultaneously as representatives, directives, and expressives. Pragmatic analysis of classroom discourse reveals that teachers frequently employ indirect speech acts to soften commands or criticisms, balancing instructional goals with interpersonal harmony.

Methods

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative discourse coding with qualitative thematic analysis to capture the nuances of pragmatic features in teacher feedback.

Participants and Setting The study was conducted across four middle and high school institutions, involving 16 teachers and 320 students across various subject disciplines (Language Arts, Science, and Mathematics). A total of 40 hours of classroom interaction were audio- and video-recorded to capture naturalistic pedagogical discourse.

1. Classroom Discourse Recordings: Unobtrusive recordings of regular instructional sessions focusing on teacher-student interactive feedback loops (both oral and written).

2. Semi-Structured Interviews: Post-observation interviews with participating teachers to understand their communicative intent, pragmatic choices, and perceived constraints during feedback delivery.

3. Student Focus Groups: Small-group discussions with students to evaluate their emotional and cognitive interpretations of specific feedback instances.

Results

In educational communication, teacher feedback is much more than a simple evaluation of right or wrong; it is a complex pragmatic act shaped by context, social roles, and interpersonal relationships. From the perspective of linguistic pragmatics, feedback functions as both a cognitive tool for learning and a social tool for managing classroom dynamics.

Examining the pragmatic features of teacher feedback reveals how educators use language to guide students, manage authority, and preserve learner motivation.

Speech Act Categories in Feedback Drawing on Speech Act Theory, teacher feedback is executed through distinct illocutionary acts (what the utterance *does* rather than just what it *says*):

Expressives: Utterances that express the teacher's psychological attitude or emotional state regarding a student's performance (e.g., *"I am very impressed with your analysis,"* or *"Good job"*). These directly impact student self-efficacy and affect.

Directives/Commissives for Remediation: Feedback often wraps a directive inside an evaluation, telling the student what to do next (e.g., *"That's close, but try looking at paragraph two again"*).

Assertives/Representatives: Statements evaluating the propositional truth of a student's input (e.g., *"That formula is incorrect"*).

Politeness Strategies and Face Management Classroom feedback inherently carries a risk to a student's "face" (public self-image and self-esteem)—particularly when correcting errors. Effective teachers utilize pragmatic politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson's framework) to soften face-threatening acts (FTAs):

Positive Politeness (Solidarity & Encouragement): Emphasizing common ground, praising effort, or using inclusive language to make the student feel valued (e.g., *"We often make that mistake when we first learn this concept"*). Negative Politeness (Deference & Mitigation): Giving students autonomy and avoiding harsh commands by using hedges or indirectness (e.g., *"Perhaps we could consider another angle here?"* instead of *"Your answer is wrong"*). Mitigated Corrections: Shielding direct corrections with softeners to maintain a safe psychological environment for risk-taking.

Discourse Management and Turn-Taking Feedback acts as a critical pivot point in the traditional classroom discourse structure known as the IRF sequence (Initiation by teacher $\rightarrow$ Response by student $\rightarrow$ Feedback/Follow-up by teacher). Pragmatically, the teacher's feedback turn manages interaction by:

- Closing or Extending Dialogue: Evaluative feedback (e.g., *"Correct."*) closes a conversational loop, whereas elicitative or prompt feedback (e.g., *"Can you*

explain why?") forces the student to take another conversational turn, promoting deeper cognitive engagement.

- Reformulation and Recasting: Implicitly correcting a student's error by feeding the correct pragmatic or grammatical structure back to them without explicitly pointing out failure, thereby keeping the communicative flow seamless.

Pragmatic Failure and Intentionality A breakdown in educational communication often stems from pragmatic failure rather than a lack of subject knowledge:

- Sarcasm and Irony: While sometimes used by teachers playfully, sarcasm functions as a high-risk pragmatic failure in feedback. Students—especially younger learners or those from diverse cultural backgrounds—frequently misinterpret sarcasm as hostility, which damages trust and shuts down participation.
- Ambiguous Directness: Overly indirect feedback (e.g., saying *"Is that right?"* when a student is completely wrong) can confuse learners who fail to decode the teacher's implied criticism.

Summary Checklist for Pragmatically Effective Feedback

- Balance Power and Rapport: Use explicit praise (positive politeness) alongside gentle corrections (hedging) to keep authority approachable.
- Match the Illocutionary Force to the Goal: Ensure corrective feedback invites critical thinking rather than shutting down the conversation.
- Contextualize: Tailor the pragmatic style of feedback to the student's age, language proficiency, and psychological readiness.

Discussion

The findings underscore that teacher feedback is not a neutral transmission of objective facts, but a dynamically negotiated pragmatic interaction. The prevalence of indirect speech acts and positive politeness strategies highlights teachers' intuitive understanding of affective filters in learning. When feedback successfully balances

academic requirements with face-saving maneuvers, students are more likely to exhibit positive uptake and engage in self-correction. Conversely, over-reliance on direct, unmitigated evaluations often triggers defensive mechanisms, cutting off communicative engagement.

Furthermore, the study reveals a potential pragmatic gap: teachers frequently assume their illocutionary intent is transparent, whereas students may interpret hedges as uncertainty rather than politeness, or conversely, view mild suggestions as commands. This points to the necessity of explicit Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC), where teachers monitor not only *what* they teach, but *how* their pragmatic choices influence classroom climate and student psychological safety.

Conclusion

Pragmatic features—ranging from speech act selection and politeness frameworks to hedging and pragmatic markers—play an indispensable role in the efficacy of teacher feedback. Educational communication is fundamentally relational; when feedback mechanisms fail to account for interpersonal dynamics and face needs, instructional goals are undermined. Recognizing feedback as a sophisticated pragmatic act allows educators to move beyond mechanical correction toward more dialogic, supportive, and developmentally powerful communication practices.

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