RUNNING HEAD: Responsibility-sharing in feedback processes

Educators' perceptions of responsibility-sharing in feedback processes

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Abstract

Many policies and processes in higher education reinforce a conception of feedback as being the transmission of information, thus placing primary responsibility on educators for delivering this information 'well' whilst neglecting the essential responsibilities of learners. In this study 216 university educators described the responsibilities of students, and of educators themselves, in the feedback process. We analysed their responses using both content analysis and a novel linguistic analysis of the specific words used. The content analysis indicated a clear influence of transmission-based models of feedback on educators' views, with educators seen as responsible primarily for providing comments, and students responsible primarily for processing these comments. Linguistically, educators conveyed greater certainty, and were more likely to use referents to power and positive emotion, when describing their own as opposed to students' responsibilities. These findings underscore the necessity of a cultural shift toward responsibility-sharing in the context of feedback in higher education.

Keywords: higher education, feedback, responsibility-sharing, socio-constructivism, language

Educators' perceptions of responsibility-sharing in feedback processes

Is "effective feedback" merely a process wherein educators give high-quality, useful advice to learners? Or is it a process wherein educators and learners participate in mutual dialogue about goals for improvement, and take actions to respond to and act upon the shared information? In contemporary research on feedback, the latter view is increasingly seen as more appropriate (Carless and Boud 2018; Dawson et al. 2019), and yet the former remains the most common among practitioners in higher education (van der Kleij, Adie, and Cumming 2019; Winstone and Carless 2019). Crucially, these two rather different conceptions of feedback processes carry different assumptions about who should be considered responsible for guaranteeing the effectiveness of feedback. Does the burden rest primarily with educators, or is it shared equitably between educator and student? In this paper we analyse higher education practitioners' attempts to answer this question.

The prevailing conception of feedback has been characterised as cognitivist in tradition. This cognitivist model apportions minimal responsibility to students in feedback processes; their role is simply to 'receive' the messages that are transmitted to them by means of the comments that educators provide on their work. Internationally, this model is reinforced by the measurement instruments that are commonly used to assess students' experiences of assessment and feedback—such as the National Student Survey in the UK, and the Course Experience Questionnaire in Australia—which ask students to evaluate the feedback they have 'received' (Nicol 2010; Winstone and Boud 2019). Because of the prevalence and influence of the cognitivist model, then, responsibility is often placed on educators to 'fix' the apparent problems that are seen in students' experiences of receiving feedback. As Nash and Winstone (2017, 2) put it, *'many institutions have placed responsibility squarely with educators for improving the quality of the feedback they give to students. In many cases, these efforts have involved urging educators to provide more and*

more detailed feedback to students.' Such efforts, whilst laudable, serve to reinforce a conception of feedback processes that positions the educator as carrying full responsibility for their effectiveness.

In recent years, many feedback researchers have called for a shift away from this transmission-oriented, cognitivist model towards a socio-constructivist understanding of feedback, which considers students' engagement with and action upon the advice they receive as crucial parts of the process (e.g., Boud and Molloy 2013; Carless 2015; Henderson et al. 2019; van der Kleij et al. 2019; Winstone and Carless 2019). Proponents of this view place greater emphasis on the learner's role in demonstrating 'proactive recipience' of feedback information, defined as *'a form of agentic engagement that involves the learner sharing responsibility for making feedback processes effective'* (Winstone et al. 2017, 17). The process of proactive recipience implies a responsibility on students to seek, generate, and enact feedback comments rather than just receiving them passively, and to engage in sense-making and decision-making when reflecting on how to achieve these ends (Boud and Molloy 2013; Winstone and Carless 2019). Central to socio-constructivist models of feedback processes, therefore, is the active role of the learner, and such approaches implicitly place shared responsibility at the core of effective feedback processes. In this sense, this viewpoint holds that it is neither the actions of the educator nor the student alone that determine the effectiveness of feedback processes, but rather their joint actions and responsibilities in partnership.

Conceptualising responsibility in feedback processes

In short, we can see two different kinds of models of the feedback process; one cognitivist in orientation, which places emphasis on the responsibility of the educator, and the other socio-constructivist in orientation, which brings into the foreground the responsibilities

of the student. There is a rather considerable consensus among researchers in favour of the latter model. Sadler (2010), for instance, famously argued that feedback as 'teacher telling' is unlikely to be effective, as it is not the mere provision of information that facilitates learning and development. In a similar vein, Nicol (2010) has argued for *'the important role of students in making feedback comments relevant'* (508), whereas Carless (2015) has described the cognitivist model as an 'old paradigm' of feedback, arguing that such approaches to education are, at least theoretically, outdated. In contrast, Carless refers to models that centre on students' engagement and action as a 'new paradigm' of feedback. In this regard, Handley, Price, and Millar (2011) emphasised the importance of building *'students' sense of responsibility and ownership for their learning'* (544), and of students' *'readiness to engage'* (550), through investing effort and a sense of ownership in the feedback process.

Nash and Winstone (2017) characterise the overall responsibility for the effectiveness of feedback processes as being evenly split between educators and students, but with a varying balance between parties for redressing the particular challenges involves. For instance, they argue that educators have primary responsibility for supporting students to appreciate the process and function of feedback, to 'decode' the meaning of feedback comments, and to develop strategies for using feedback productively (in other words, students' 'feedback literacy'; Carless and Boud 2018; Molloy, Boud, and Henderson 2019). In contrast, the balance of responsibility rests more heavily with students when it comes to taking control of putting in the 'hard graft' (to borrow a term from Carless 2015), and being willing and motivated to do so. Crucially, Nash and Winstone (2017) set out ways in which both parties can take responsibility at each stage of the process. For example, students can take responsibility for engaging in dialogue with educators and peers whenever they have difficulty 'decoding' comments; similarly, educators have responsibilities for designing

assessment tasks that permit and encourage students' proactive use of feedback (Nash and Winstone 2017).

Educators' views on responsibility-sharing

Given the apparent dominance of teacher-centred models of the feedback process in practice and policy, and the broad consensus among feedback researchers in favour of shared-responsibility approaches, there is a need to understand more about how individual educators perceive their own and their students' responsibilities in the feedback process. This matter has direct relevance to current research foci regarding the development of student feedback literacy (Carless and Boud 2018; Molloy et al. 2019), and the complementary roles of teachers in seeding this skill (Winstone and Carless 2019). If educators primarily view their role in the feedback process as one of transmitting information, and the role of their students as one of passively receiving this information, then this would indicate that an important challenge for developing student and teacher feedback literacy is to broaden perceptions of responsibility-sharing in feedback processes.

The present study aimed to build upon this understanding, by using two contrasting analytic approaches to explore educators' views about the responsibilities that fall to students, and those that fall to educators themselves, in the feedback process. After asking a sample of university educators about their perceptions, we first used content analysis to identify common themes in how participants described each party's respective responsibilities, and to examine the extent to which their perceptions aligned more firmly with a cognitivist versus a socio-constructivist model. Second, to gain insight into their implicit as well as explicit perceptions, we also undertook a linguistic analysis of participants' responses, to explore the extent to which they used systematically different kinds of language when describing their own versus their students' responsibilities.

Linguistic analysis

Whereas a content analytic approach to data analysis can identify common themes in the content of participants' responses, there is also value to analysing *how* people communicate, through analysis of the language they use to express themselves. Linguists argue that such analysis can offer insight into people's implicit understandings (Tausczic and Pennebaker 2010), and that such an approach therefore *'broadens the methodological repertoire of psychologists'* (King 2018, 7). Quantitative linguistic approaches of this kind have been used to analyse a wide range of data sources, from published books (e.g. Greenfield 2013) to the lyrics from popular songs (DeWall et al. 2011), but to our knowledge have been virtually unseen in the feedback literature thus far.

Our approach here draws upon the linguistic analysis approach developed by Pennebaker and colleagues, grounded in the use of text analysis software ('Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count' or 'LIWC'; Pennebaker, Booth, and Francis 2007). Via this analytic approach, researchers can objectively measure the extent to which samples of text (in this case, educators' written responses) contain words that mirror psychologically meaningful categories, such as future-orientation, or visual sensory details (Tausczic and Pennebaker 2010). Crucial to this approach is the assumption that *'language use provides important clues as to how people process…information and interpret it to make sense of their environment'* (35). In this sense, people's responses are more than semantic representations; the ways in which they express their perspectives are also psychologically revealing. For the purposes of the present study we chose to focus on three specific kinds of psychological foci that we believed could shed light on participants' implicit understandings of responsibility-sharing. These were (1) the extent to which their responses conveyed a sense of conviction, and their expressions of (2) interpersonal influence, and (3) emotion. Examined in combination with our content analytic approach, an objective here was to appraise the extent to which these

differing characteristics of participants' responses offered converging or diverging insights into their perceptions of the feedback process.

Method

Participants

A total of 216 academic staff involved in teaching and student assessment at UK Higher Education institutions took part in the study, by responding to a web-link that was advertised through national distribution lists for educational and professional organisations. Our questions about responsibility-sharing were embedded within a wider survey study; participants were informed that the study was about approaches to feedback in higher education, and they completed it online. The basic demographic characteristics and teaching backgrounds of the final sample are summarised in Table 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Procedure

After reaching the survey and consenting to take part, all participants were asked to report their age and gender, the type of university in which they worked, their subject discipline, and to report or estimate the number of years for which they had taught in Higher Education (see Table 1 for the response options given). They were also asked whether or not they had any teaching qualifications, and/or had been awarded Fellowship or higher of the Higher Education Academy.

Our two questions on responsibility-sharing were then both presented on the same survey page. The questions were:

1. What is the responsibility of the educator in the feedback process?
2. What is the responsibility of the student in the feedback process?

All participants were asked these two questions in the same order, and beneath each question appeared a large text-box within which they were encouraged to write an open-text response. Participants were required to respond to both questions in order to complete the study; however, we did not impose any requirements over the minimum or maximum length of their responses. After responding to both questions, participants were thanked for their time and they exited the survey.

Content analysis

To begin, one of the authors repeatedly read through all of the responses, with the goal of identifying common themes and ideas that had been raised. The data for each of the two questions were examined separately during this process. After identifying several common themes through an inductive coding process, these were refined iteratively through discussion between the authors, to narrow down a smaller set of broad themes for each of the two questions that would form the basis of our content analysis. This final set comprised five themes describing educators' responsibilities, and six themes describing students' responsibilities. These themes are described shortly.

After deciding on the final themes, one of the authors examined each individual response, and judged whether or not the response contained or did not contain a reference to each of the five or six themes that were applicable for that question. Each response could therefore be coded under more than one category, and so the frequencies across the various categories sum to more than the total sample size of 206.

To assess the reliability of the main coder's judgments, a random sample of 22 of the responses to each of the two questions (~10%) were also coded by a second coder. Across

both questions, the main coder assigned 66 themes across these 44 responses; the second coder concurred with 61 of these assignations, and there were four additional instances in which the second coder assigned a theme that the first coder had not. Put differently, based on all 242 judgments (i.e. 22 participant's x 11 themes), there was 96.3% agreement between coders, Cohen's $\kappa = .91$. Because inter-coder agreement was high, we used the main coder's judgments for analysis.

Linguistic analysis

To objectively assess and compare the linguistic features of participants' responses, we used the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) software (Pennebaker et al. 2007). As well as assessing basic descriptive properties of a text excerpt, such as the number of words, adjectives, or personal pronouns it contains, LIWC also uses dictionaries of various different types of linguistic properties that convey various psychological dimensions of interest. Using these dictionaries, LIWC straightforwardly and systematically assesses the extent to which these psychological dimensions are communicated within a text. For instance, LIWC 's dictionary of 'positive emotion' words enables users to electronically input a text, and to automatically calculate the proportion of the words within the text that convey a positive emotion.

For the purposes of our linguistic analysis, as described above, we chose to focus on six specific linguistic properties from the wide range that are available within LIWC (Pennebaker et al., 2007). These were *certainty*, *tentative language*, *power*, *causal language*, *positive emotion*, and *negative emotion*. We reasoned that these six properties could be organised into three pairs that communicate different kinds of psychological intents, and therefore opted to organise our analysis in this way. Specifically, the first pair of properties

(certainty and tentative language) both assess properties of language that communicate signals of conviction in a person's belief or knowledge. The second pair (power and causal language) both assess properties of language that communicate the influence of one thing or person upon another. The third pair (negative emotion and positive emotion) both assess properties of language that communicate signals of affect or that describe positive or negative characteristics and actions.

All of these six linguistic properties occur at a relatively low rate in language, and participants' responses in this study were also short. Therefore, rather than assessing the prevalence of each linguistic property in our dataset as a proportion of the overall number of words, we instead coded whether or not each individual response contained any non-zero quantity of each property. That is to say, our analyses focus on the proportion of responses that contained any single word that reflects each property.

Results

Content analysis

Educators' responsibility

We identified five themes in the responses to the first question, as follows in descending order of frequency:

***Provision of comments* (*n* = 149).** The most common theme, expressed by around three-quarters of participants, was that educators are responsible for providing comments on students' work, aimed at informing them about how they have performed and/or how to improve. For example, one participant wrote *'Provide detailed and accurate feedback that highlights the positive and negative elements of the student's work. This should include key aspects of the student's work that they should look to improve for future assessments.'* (P278)

***Facilitation of students' development* (*n* = 102).** Around half of participants commented that educators are responsible for enabling students to develop as learners through the feedback process. An example of this theme is *'Help them to grow as a learner so that they are improving on their journey through the course understand where their strengths are and where they might need some additional support. Enable them to do their best.'* (P19)

***Follow policy and procedures* (*n* = 50).** Many participants noted that educators are responsible for adhering to their institutional and/or departmental policies or guidelines on assessment and feedback. One, for example, simply wrote *'To return feedback by the date specified - this is a matter of respect as students are given penalties for late submission.'* (P1)

***Affective awareness* (*n* =31).** Some participants said that educators need to show consideration of the potential impact of feedback processes on students' emotions. An illustrative example is *'To respect the learner and acknowledge that emotions are involved in the assessment process.'* (P14)

***Grade justification* (*n* = 19).** Finally, a smaller group of participants expressed that educators' responsibilities involved communicating, within their feedback, the reasons why they have awarded a particular grade. These participants' comments included *'To provide meaningful comments which justify the mark awarded.'* (P54)

Students' responsibility

We identified six themes in the responses to the second question, as follows, in descending order of frequency:

***Process comments* (*n* = 153).** For most participants, students are perceived to hold responsibility for processing and internalising feedback information. Participants' responses

included comments such as *'To engage with the feedback received and try to understand what they need to do make themselves better.'* (P188)

***Enactment of comments* (*n* = 132).** A large proportion of participants also commented that students are responsible for deciding how to take action on the basis of feedback information. Comments such as *'To choose whether and how to make changes in their future work as a result'* (P31) are indicative of this theme.

***Seek clarification* (*n* = 56).** Around a quarter of responses mentioned that students should ask for further explanation if the meaning of their feedback is not clear. One example of such a response is *'If something isn't clear, or they're not sure how to follow up, or they disagree with it, contact me for a face-to-face discussion.'* (P148)

***Engage in reflection* (*n* = 56).** For many participants, there was a belief that students are responsible for actively reflecting upon the feedback information they receive, and considering what this information means for their future learning. For example, *'Resist a defensive reading of feedback and use it to reflect on how best to improve performance.'* (P9)

***Engage in developmental dialogue* (*n* = 51).** Some participants mentioned that students are responsible for initiating and participating in dialogue with their tutors and/or peers, as a means of eliciting further feedback information and interrogating this information. An example of this theme is *'Have a commitment to working with the tutor but to not expect that tutor to always give the specific answer'* (P196). We note that we decided to treat this theme as distinct from 'Seek clarification' because, although both themes involve seeking dialogue, it seemed important to distinguish between the substantial number who saw dialogue as being required solely for redressing uncertainty, and those who saw other, more developmental functions to such discussions.

***Follow guidelines* (*n* = 14).** Finally, a small group of participants commented that students are responsible for ensuring that they adhere to the guidance and criteria that are provided to them. For instance, *'Read the module guide and attend seminars that are designed to clarify the parameters of the assignment. Familiarize themselves with the marking criteria. Complete the assignment following the instructions provided and attempting to meet the criteria.'* (P312)

Statistical comparison of themes

It is noteworthy that among participants' responses about both educators' and students' responsibilities, the most common themes reflected 'old paradigm', transactional understandings of the feedback process (Carless, 2015). In both cases also, the second most common themes reflected more 'new paradigm', developmental understandings. Nevertheless, a statistical comparison showed that when describing educators' responsibilities, participants were significantly more likely to mention 'Provision of comments' (an old paradigm indicator) than to mention 'Facilitation of students' development' (a new paradigm indicator), McNemar χ^2 (1, N = 216) = 14.20, $p < .001$. Likewise, when describing students' responsibilities, participants were significantly more likely to mention 'Processing of comments' (an old paradigm indicator) than to mention 'Enactment of comments' (a new paradigm indicator), McNemar χ^2 (1, N = 216) = 3.89, p = .02.

Linguistic analysis

On average, participants wrote 26.4 words (*SD* = 19.5, range = 2-119) in response to the 'responsibility of educators' question, and 22.7 words (*SD* = 16.7, range = 2-139) for the 'responsibility of students' question. Incidentally, there was a statistically significant difference between these two means, $t(215) = 3.24$, $p = .001$. However, we do not attribute

any particular importance to this finding, given that the ordering of questions was not counterbalanced: participants may have simply been less motivated to give a detailed response by the time they completed the second question. Table 2 contains illustrative quotations of participants' responses to each question, with each of the linguistic features highlighted in bold wherever they occur.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

The results of our main analysis are illustrated in Figure 1. Because each individual response could contain any number of the six examined properties, the totals across properties sum to more than 100%. In terms of conviction, participants were significantly more likely to use signals of certainty, and less likely to use tentative language, when describing educators' responsibility in the feedback process than when describing students' responsibility (for certainty, McNemar χ^2 (1, N = 216) = 20.01, $p < .001$; for tentative language, McNemar χ^2 (1, N = 216) = 19.85, $p < .001$). In terms of influence, participants were more likely to use linguistic signals of power and causal language when describing educators' responsibility than when describing students' responsibility (for power, McNemar χ^2 (1, N = 216) = 102.72, $p < .001$; for causal language, McNemar χ^2 (1, N = 216) = 11.01, $p < .001$). Finally, participants were more likely to use positive emotional language when describing educators' responsibility than when describing students' responsibility; however, there was no significant difference in the likelihood of using negative emotional language (for positive emotion, McNemar χ^2 (1, N = 216) = 21.01, $p < .001$; for negative emotion, McNemar χ^2 (1, N = 216) = 0.80, $p = .37$).

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Discussion

In this study we explored the perceptions of educators working in higher education institutions, with regard to the responsibilities of educators and students in the feedback process. Our data clearly indicate that the predominant view of responsibility-sharing in feedback processes still reflects a transactional, cognitivist approach to feedback, in line with what Carless (2015) calls an old paradigm focus. Specifically, even though around half of our participants mentioned that their own responsibility involved facilitating students' development (a new paradigm view), perceptions of responsibility that emphasised the provision of comments were mentioned significantly more often. Similarly, whereas around half of participants mentioned that the responsibility of students includes enacting comments (a new paradigm view), once again these kinds of views were mentioned significantly less often than were views representing an old paradigm, transmission focus, wherein students' responsibilities predominantly involve them processing comments. The dominance of a cognitivist transmission model among higher education practitioners is perhaps unsurprising, given that this model is reinforced by key student satisfaction metrics and policies (Nicol 2010; Winstone and Boud 2019). Nevertheless, this dominance is problematic because the impact of feedback is unlikely to be fully realised if students do not play an active role. As Price, Handley, and Millar (2011, 894) argue, *'feedback without engagement is completely unproductive'*. These findings therefore indicate that the significant shifts toward new paradigm viewpoints among higher education researchers have not yet been fully mirrored among practitioners more broadly.

Our linguistic analysis adds a further dimension to these findings, providing novel insights into how educators mentally represent feedback processes. There we first saw that

descriptions of educators' responsibilities in these processes were more likely to convey signals of certainty, and less likely to convey tentative language, than were their descriptions of students' responsibilities. This finding can be construed as mirroring those of our content analysis; insofar that participants seemed to place primary responsibility on educators in the feedback process. Specifically, our participants may have expressed greater certainty when describing the responsibilities of educators because, as educators themselves, knowledge about these responsibilities is more concrete, accessible, and familiar to them. This finding may therefore indicate a tendency among educators to give relatively little consideration to the roles that students might play in feedback processes. If educators are indeed unclear about what roles students should be playing in this process, then this lack of clarity might represent a significant barrier to the development of students' own feedback literacy, and their awareness of the importance of their proactive participation.

Our linguistic analysis also focused on power and influence. When considering responsibility-sharing in feedback processes, the role of power dynamics in educator-student relationships is particularly pertinent. Educators typically occupy positions of relative expertise and authority in the assessment process as a result of the duality of their responsibility to assess and judge students' work (Higgins, Hartley and Skelton 2001). This power imbalance can arguably affect students' agency within the feedback process (Boud 2007). The finding that participants were more likely to use causal and power-related language when describing their own responsibilities than those of their students is therefore insightful. On the one hand, this result could imply that educators tend to see the effectiveness of feedback as being primarily within their own control – yet another symptom of an old paradigm approach. If so, this perception would conflict with those of researchers who argue that students' learning and development hinges heavily on the actions they take to translate feedback information (Henderson et al. 2019). On the other hand, this result could

simply point to a prevalent belief among educators that whereas they can influence their own behaviour, it is hard to influence their students' behaviour. Both of these interpretations of the data could highlight further barriers to convincing educators of the importance of training students' feedback literacy (Carless and Boud 2018).

Finally, we found that these educators' accounts of both their own and their students' responsibilities were much more likely to contain positive emotional language than to contain negative emotional language. Indeed, few participants' responses contained any negative emotional language whatsoever. We might interpret this difference as signifying an 'approach' rather than 'avoidance' mind-set among educators in handling students' emotional responses to feedback (Elliot 1999). That is to say, participants' language suggests they were more focused on fostering positive experiences than on avoiding or preventing negative experiences. The fact that positive emotional language was more common in accounts of educators' responsibilities than in those of students' responsibilities might perhaps reflect a belief that educators are those best positioned to set the emotional and relational tone of the feedback experience. This interpretation, if correct, would indicate good recognition of the relational dimension of feedback recipience, and of educators' own degree of control over this challenge (Pitt and Norton 2017; Ryan and Henderson 2018). It may, however, indicate a relative neglect of the importance of students themselves managing the positivity of their responses to feedback, to guarantee these are constructive (Nash and Winstone 2017).

Shifting perceptions of responsibility-sharing

The framework for responsibility-sharing proposed by Nash and Winstone (2017) acknowledges that whereas some elements of feedback processes are more strongly within the control of educators, others are more strongly within the control of students. Thus, rather than one party holding overall control and power over the effectiveness of feedback

processes, each have specific roles to play. Delivering this approach is likely to require a significant cultural shift in perceptions and practices, as it represents a move away from dominant teacher-driven models of assessment in both compulsory and higher education. Achieving this shift may be particularly challenging in Confucian educational cultures where power differentials are even more pronounced (e.g., Tian and Lowe 2013). How, then, can this cultural shift towards genuine responsibility-sharing be enacted within educational institutions?

First, as our data have indicated, common perceptions of 'shared' responsibilities in feedback processes are transactional in nature: Educators provide comments, with an expectation that students will, on some level, process the comments. Our finding that student action on the comments was less likely to be recognised as part of this process indicates that an important part of developing student and teacher feedback literacy is to broaden perceptions of responsibility-sharing in feedback processes, and to emphasise the importance of student action in facilitating the impact of feedback. More transformational approaches to responsibility-sharing, where the actions and responsibilities of students are brought to the fore, may be achieved through designing feedback processes in such a way that student action is built into the process (see Winstone and Carless 2019; Pitt 2019).

Second, the predominantly transactional representation of responsibility-sharing in feedback process that is represented in our findings speaks to the need for productive dialogues between educators and students to negotiate the ways in which responsibility will be shared during the course of that module or unit. This is particularly important given evidence that views of feedback held by educators and students are often misaligned (e.g. Adcroft 2011; Mulliner and Tucker 2017). The effectiveness of such dialogues in empowering students to play a greater role in feedback processes is likely to be facilitated where local feedback cultures are characterised by mutual trust, and where the unhelpful

impacts of power differentials are kept to a minimum. Our linguistic analysis indicates a perception that power and control rest more strongly with educators than with students in feedback processes. An important shift towards a culture of genuine responsibility-sharing, then, requires a more symmetric perception of agency and control, where the actions of both parties are crucial to the effectiveness of the feedback process. This may be facilitated by the development of a strong working partnership between educator and student, akin to what Telio, Ajjawi, and Regehr (2015) describe as the 'educational alliance'. The alliance is dependent upon the development of shared goals; in the context of feedback, this would require agreement of the roles and responsibilities of each other in achieving the goal of learning through participation in feedback processes.

Limitations and future research directions

Several limitations to our approach temper the conclusions we can draw from our findings. First, we only sampled educators, and not students. We predict that, given the dominance of transmission-focused narratives in higher education, students would also express greater certainty about the role of educators, rather than their own responsibilities in feedback processes. Extending our approach by also exploring students' perspectives, and how they might develop over the course of a degree programme, represents an important area for further research. Indeed, it would be interesting to track educators' views using longitudinal forms of data collection, as a means of detecting shifts in perceptions over time at institutional, national, or international levels. It is also important to acknowledge that, as a self-selecting sample, the views of our respondents may different to the wider population of university educators. In particular, these participants might represent a sample of educators who are rather more invested in teaching and learning practices relative to the population at large; if so, then their responses might offer an over-optimistic view of the extent of 'new paradigm' thinking among higher education practitioners.

As an additional limitation, we have drawn conclusions here from short-answer survey responses rather than in-depth interviews. We chose to adopt content analysis as an appropriate analytic approach because other, more firmly qualitative, approaches may not be appropriate for use with short-answer responses (LaDonna, Taylor, and Lingard 2018). Nevertheless, future research could explore perceptions of responsibility-sharing in greater depth through the use of interview methods. In keeping with the principle of responsibility-sharing, joint interviews or focus groups, bringing together educators and students may be particularly illuminating. This might involve asking respondents specifically about the principle of responsibility-sharing, and how educators and students might work together more meaningfully in feedback processes, rather than asking indirectly about different parties' responsibilities as we have done here.

Our data highlight the potential value of linguistic analysis as a complement to content analysis of short answer responses. We recognise, though, that analysing language use in this way has the potential to separate meaning from the context in which it was presented. For example, when analysing references to "influence" in this kind of analysis, there is no distinction made between a participant who mentions having power over another, and a participant who mentions having *no* power. We believe that the approach to analysis we took here, by combining the linguistic analysis with a content analysis, helps to mitigate some of these concerns. However, provided that researchers find some comparable means of remaining sensitive to context, we argue that linguistic analytic techniques can offer significant potential within educational research, both for generating and for testing theoretically informed predictions.

Conclusion

Experts' perceptions of feedback processes in higher education are shifting. Rather than seeing feedback as the transmission of comments to students, there is increasing consensus that it is the actions of students in response to feedback information that afford learning and skill development (Carless and Boud 2018; Dawson et al. 2019; Winstone and Carless 2019). The development of students' feedback literacy, particularly pertaining to recognition of their active role in feedback processes, is likely to depend on educator's own feedback literacy in terms of their representations of reciprocity in feedback processes. Our findings indicate that if we are to see this approach work effectively in practice, then there is still a considerable need to persuade educators of its merits, and indeed, of the merits of developing feedback cultures where the roles and responsibilities of educators and students are discussed, negotiated, and enacted.

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Table 1. Characteristics of the study participants.

Characteristic	**Response**	**Number of respondents**
Gender	Male	86
	Female	127
	Other/No response	3
Age	25-29	6
	30-39	52
	40-49	54
	50-59	74
	>60	30
Nature of University	Teaching-focused	97
	Research-intensive	81
	Not sure/no response	38
Discipline	Arts/Humanities	36
	Health/Medicine	26
	Social Sciences	68
	STEM	85
	No response	1
Years of experience in HE	≤ 5	50
	6-10	48
	11-15	34
	16-20	26
	>20	57
	No response	1
Teaching Qualification/HEA fellowship (or higher)	Yes	146
	No	70

Table 2. Examples of participants' responses to each question that contain each of the six linguistic properties of interest (highlighted in bold)

Linguistic property	**Educators' responsibility**	**Students' responsibility**
Certainty	*Be open and honest, frank without being offensive, but **absolutely clear** on the poor as well as the good aspects of a student's work. This **must** include guidance on how to improve the work for the final submission*. (P62) ***Always** consider how the feedback relates to both current and future performance and development Be appropriately critical Make feedback a dialogue, **never** a dictate **Never** use language that makes value judgements about a student* (P197)	*Lecturers shouldn't be held responsible for **all** aspects of the feedback process. Students **must** take responsibility for their own learning.* (P134) *Taking into consideration **all** comments provided alongside the mark. Understand the feedback processes, **especially** at the formative stages* (P187)
Tentative language	*Provide effective feedback-timely, focused, **generally** positive* (P134) ***Mainly** to indicate to the student where they went wrong and give **some** indication of how they **might** improve.* (P176)	*It **depends**. **Sometimes** feedback can be so generic that it is not worth the paper it is written on. But if it is good, thoughtful feedback then the student needs to engage with it and **try** and understand what it is saying* (P1) *They **should** take action on their feedback, **most probably** in their next assignment.* (P281)
Power	*Make **judgement.** Explain **judgement**.* (P41) *Set clear objectives and criteria for the work; **teach** students the knowledge and skills they need to undertake the work (bearing in mind what they should already be able to do); provide clear feedback.* (P207)	***Respect** that a big expectation from academics is that clarification is always available.* (P65) *They should also be **taught** to understand that marks and feedback are about assignments, not them as individuals.* (P288)
Causal language	***Create** trust* (P43) *To **lead** the feedback process and **enable** the student to make sense of and use feedback as part of his/her learning and development.* (P72)	*Read and process all feedback given. Act upon this to **enable** future learning and development.* (P216) *Read, **react**, **respond** and research on how to improve using others around them.* (P119)

Positive Emotion	***Support*** *students to take their feedback forward in order for them to develop in the future.* ***Care*** *how the feedback they give is received by students* (P188) *Create* ***trust*** *…* ***Honest*** *feedback* (P43)	*Be* ***open****, take ownership, ask for clarification and disagree (with rationale) when they do indeed disagree with the feedback) in a* ***fair****, clear and* ***respectful*** *way.* (P147) *Treat feedback with* ***respect****, on the assumption that the marker is genuinely seeking to provide* ***support*** (P14)
Negative Emotion	*Acknowledge the* ***anxiety*** *that may be experienced by the student.* (P65) *To project the student as a learner and not make them feel under* ***attack*** (P1)	*act upon feedback in future work indicate when they are* ***confused*** *or* ***lost*** (P225) *The problem is that too many students arrive at university deeply unprepared to understand that receiving constructive* ***criticism*** *or being* ***disappointed*** *are part of life.* (P288)

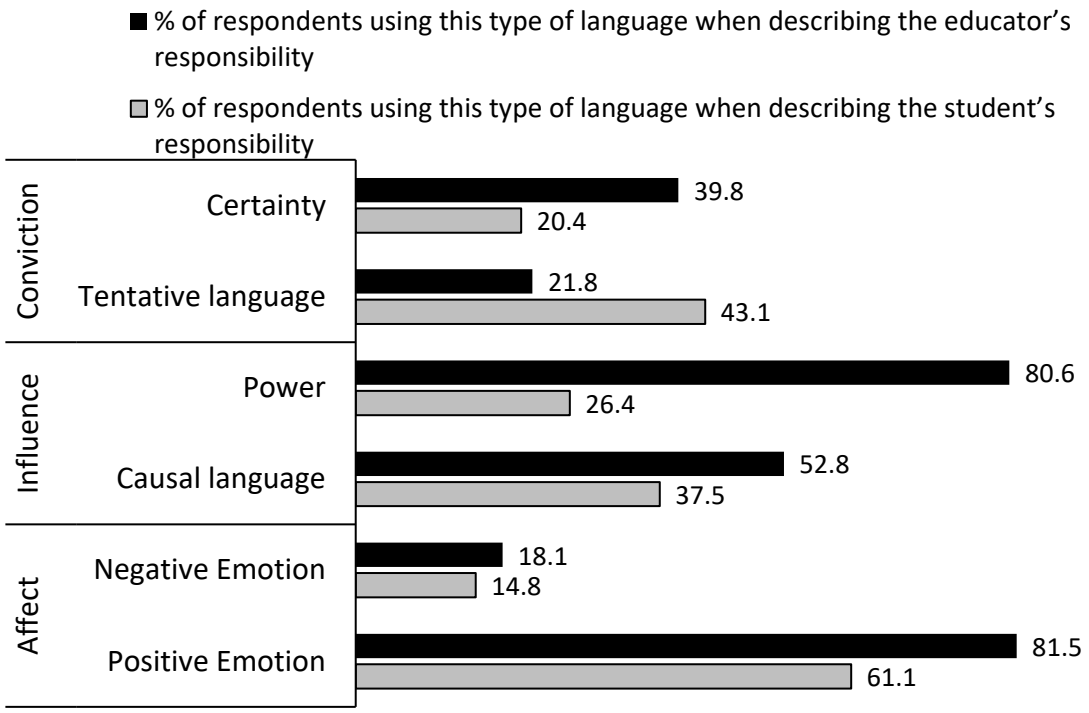

Figure 1. *Proportions of participants whose responses contained at least one instance of the linguistic properties of interest.*