Student feedback sensitivity and the efficacy of feedback interventions in public speaking performance improvement

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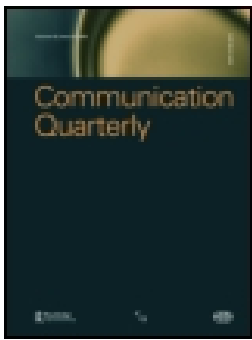
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When Do Students Benefit From Performance Feedback? A Test of Feedback Intervention Theory in Speaking Improvement

Paul E. King

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This study reviews the important role of feedback in instructional communication Feedback Intervention Theory (FIT). FIT proposes that feedback efficacy is related to three primary constructs: message cues (locus of attention), personality traits, and the nature of the task to be learned. In an experimental design, the effect of grading, along with assessment of personality differences in feedback attributional sensitivity and perceptions of feedback utility are examined for their impact on feedback provided to student speakers. Changes in observed behavior for both eye contact and length of introduction are found. In addition, it is noted that traits and message cues function independently in predicting changes in behavior. Suggestions for future research are provided.

Keywords: Communication Education; Feedback; Public Speaking

While feedback is often considered an essential and central concept in the social sciences and while it occupies a distinct space in textbook models of the communication process, its place in theories of communication is mostly limited to being treated as any response to a message (Frandsen & Millis, 1993). Similarly, feedback is viewed in education as a powerful and influential factor in student learning (Mottet, 2008) and perhaps even the single best tool available for enhancing student achievement (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). However, until a recent spike in research (see, for example, the January 2011 issue of *Communication Education*), feedback

Paul E. King (Ph.D., University of North Texas, 1985) is a Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at Texas Christian University. *Correspondence*: Paul E. King, the Department of Communication Studies, Texas Christian University, Box 298045, Fort Worth, TX 76129. E-mail: p.king@tcu.edu

has rarely been a topic of much interest in instructional communication (Quigley & Nyquist, 1992).

One probable factor in the apparent lack of historical interest in feedback has been the ambiguity of the concept. Feedback has been treated as a relatively monolithic construct while, in reality, it encompasses a wide variety of functionally unique issues (Smith & King, 2004) and "offering feedback is a complex and *interactive* task" (Trees, Kerssen-Griep, & Hess, 2009, p. 397). For example, we might say that we use feedback to reinforce appropriate behavior; however, such feedback bears no functional or operational resemblance to correcting deficient behavior or of allowing students to observe performance deficiencies through self-reflection. This issue is exacerbated when we consider that communication scholars have abandoned the interactive model in favor of a transactional perspective in which labeling communication as *message* or *feedback* is completely irrelevant (Darnell, 1978). In summary, feedback is both difficult to understand and difficult to do.

Relief for these difficulties was provided in Kluger and DeNisi's (1996) Feedback Intervention Theory (FIT). FIT offered both conceptual clarification and a set of theoretical propositions related to the efficacy of instructional feedback. This study will briefly review FIT, identify components of FIT common in communication instruction, and test the utility of the theory in predicting favorable outcomes. Specifically, the project will examine the impact of teachers' evaluative information, student perceptions of feedback usefulness, and student tendency to form negative attributions when receiving feedback on behavioral adaptation to instructional feedback.

Feedback Intervention Theory

As previously discussed, the term feedback has suffered from conceptual ambiguity. Even when we limit our focus to feedback in the classroom, definitional problems persist. For example, the terms positive and negative feedback are not mere distinctions in polarity but are conceptually unique constructs. Positive feedback usually refers to the act of providing reinforcement for appropriate behavior while negative feedback usually refers to the act of correcting inappropriate behavior. Geddes and Linnehan (1996) found that the underlying factor structures of positive and negative feedback were distinct, with the structure of negative feedback showing greater degrees of complexity. Jussim, Coleman, and Nassau (1989) asserted a difference in kind in student reactions to negative and to positive feedback.

FIT provided some conceptual clarity to the muddle that feedback had become. Kluger and DeNisi (1996) first proposed that feedback interventions (FIs) were, "actions taken by (an) external change agent(s) to provide information regarding aspects of one's task performance" (p. 255). Of central importance in FIT is the learner's locus of attention. It may be variously focused on task learning, task motivation, or on meta-task processes. Meta-task processes may involve self-related features such as one's feelings, one's relationship with an instructor, etc. The distinctions are

important because FIT posits that feedback is only effective when attention is directed to task learning rather than to meta-task processes.

Attention processes themselves are quite limited (Kahneman, 1973), and it is impossible to simultaneously process multiple messages using effortful (or System 2), rather than automatic (or System 1) processing (Kahneman, 2011). Accordingly, locus of attention must be directed to either task issues, such as remedying deficiencies in performance, or meta-task issues such as, "How do I feel?," "What does she think?," or "Will this affect my grade?" FIT asserts that this locus of attention is the primary issue in determining the success of FIs. Before we expand on the reasons that learners may focus on meta-task processes, it is necessary to more completely consider other elements of FIT.

Smith and King (2004, p. 205) summarized the five fundamental assertions made in FIT:

> (1) Goals and standards serve as benchmarks that behavior is measured against after feedback is received; (2) goals and standards are ranked in order of importance; (3) communicators have short attention spans, so feedback that does not fit with what is already believed/understood will be evaluated and considered in any behavior modification that may result; (4) generally only feedback for mid-high ranked goals will be thoughtfully evaluated; and (5) behavior is impacted when feedback interventions result in a change of focus.

One final term is essential in a discussion of FIT: the feedback standard gap. It is the difference between required performance criteria, which may be synonymous with the goal, and current performance. Overtly communicating the presence of a feedback standard gap is the purpose of intervention by an instructor. It is not a form of homeostasis, implicit knowledge of results, or another mechanism through which a learner might choose to alter performance.

Briefly returning to the issue of meta-task processes, the communication of a feedback standard gap usually involves communicating performance that is deficient in some respect. Obviously, deficiencies in performance are ego threatening and may involve problematic attributions (Booth-Butterfield, 1989). Correspondent inference theory holds that, "behavior is seen as corresponding to or reflecting an underlying disposition of the actor, and the consequences it achieves are not only intended but would be characteristically intended by the actor" (Jones, 1990, p. 46). Consequently, when instructors communicate the presence of a feedback standard gap, it is quite likely that learners will attribute the problematic information to source characteristics rather than deficiencies in performance. The notion that successes are attributable to personal ability while failures are caused by circumstances is fundamental in attribution theory. If negative attributions occur, then the learner's focus of attention is clearly on meta-task issues rather than on performance, and FIs are not likely to succeed.

The frequent failure of FIs was documented in a meta-analysis of well over 600 effect sizes (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Of note, approximately 38% of the effects were negative, where learner behavior moved *opposite* the intended direction. Kluger and DeNisi (1996) concluded, "the presence of negative effects of feedback interventions

on performance are robust and not artifacts" (p. 258). A large number of additional effects were non-significant. Given the file drawer bias to not publish findings that fail to confirm the hypothesis, the lack of success with FIs in the published literature is particularly daunting. What, then, are the elements that contribute to successful instructional feedback?

When feedback works, it may be said to be efficacious. Fortunately, Kluger and DeNisi's (1996) meta-analysis identified the features of instructional feedback associated with efficacy. These include message cues, personality traits, and the nature of the task performed. To reiterate the previous point made in this review, these features of instructional feedback impact efficacy through the cognitive mechanism of locus of attention. Very little research has involved the nature of the task performed (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). One exception could be King, Young, and Behnke's (2000) research that found differing reactions to feedback on tasks for which advance preparation was required. Following is a brief review of research involving the remaining features of instructional feedback discussed in FIT: personality traits and message cues.

Personality Traits

A good deal of groundwork exists in the area of personality traits. Much of this is found in general social sciences literature involving single patient/instructor clinical observations, such as in some types of psychological therapy. However, in the communication literature, an emerging recognition of the importance of trait sensitivity to feedback can be seen. The term sensitivity is a very general one and has been used in a number of ways. Generally, being sensitive to feedback involves a greater proclivity to attend to feedback, regard the feedback as important, or react/respond to the threats implied by feedback.

First, Edwards (1990) and Edwards and Pledger (1990) provided evidence of the existence of varying levels of sensitivity to feedback in interpersonal communication. A number of independent factors related to this sensitivity were uncovered, including unique factor loadings for sensitivity to positive feedback and sensitivity to negative feedback. We have previously argued that positive and negative feedback are distinct concepts. Booth-Butterfield (1989) found that some students (high trait communication apprehensive students) generate a greater number of negative attributions and a greater blaming of external features related to feedback than others. A direct test of the presence of sensitivity to feedback by Smith and King (2004) utilized a version of Edwards' (1990) sensitivity scale adapted for an instructional context. By experimentally manipulating the feedback provided to students to reflect higher vs. lower levels of direct confrontation of the participants' needs for improvement, it was concluded that participants differing in levels of feedback sensitivity reacted very differently to the messages.

More recently, a feedback orientation index has been developed, tested, and used in instructional communication research (King, Schrodt, & Weisel, 2009). The

instrument has since proven helpful in understanding individual differences in learners' approaches to feedback (Trees et al., 2009; Witt & Kerssen-Griep, 2011) while the Edwards scale has been used in contexts of a more interpersonal nature (Martin & Mottet, 2011). An examination of the scale items on the sensitivity factors for both instruments make it abundantly clear that the sensitivity involved in receiving feedback manifests itself in the tendency to form, or refrain from forming, negative attributions. Hence, we will refer to this concept in the present study as attributional sensitivity.

The concept of individual differences in processing feedback is appealing. After all, communication researchers regularly assume a range of trait differences in most communication-related constructs, such as conversational sensitivity, perceptions of communication load, argumentativeness, nonverbal sensitivity, communication apprehension, receiver apprehension, etc. Since learner responses to feedback involve the issue of whether adaptive behavior will or will not occur, the issue is a very important one. Measures of learner predispositions toward feedback, such as the feedback orientation instrument, present the appealing prospect of allowing instructors to craft messages that function in such a way as to increase the likelihood of a favorable pedagogical outcome. But, how do instructors accomplish this task, practically speaking?

Message Cues

A partial answer may be found in Kluger and DeNisi's (1996) category of message cues. For example, instructors may choose to provide feedback on writing such as, "your paragraphs lacked consistency with each sentence appearing to be unrelated to the common topic," or "your ideas will have more impact if you begin with a topic sentence that describes what the entire paragraph will involve and then check to make sure each sentence is related to that topic." The first example presented a focus on that which was wrong and the second on features requiring improvement. Similarly, word choice can vary tremendously in providing student feedback. There is a great difference between *poor* and *needs improvement*, while both may refer to the same student behavior. Booth-Butterfield (1989) argued that feedback messages should, where possible, be focused on providing objective information about performance rather than evaluative information. For example, "you were looking at your notes about 40% of the time and we would like to reduce that to about 10%" may be an objective approach to telling the student that, "your eye contact is horrible." Of critical importance, of course, is the central goal of directing the locus of student attention toward the task and away from meta-task issues.

An interesting and useful line of research in the area of message cues involves instructors' facework (for a review, see Witt & Kerssen-Griep, 2011). Operating under the general principles outlined in politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), a good deal of attention has been given to individual reactions to face threats. By way of explanation, threats to positive face may involve challenges to positive

self-image such as, "I'm a good public speaker." Such threats to the psychological self can seem as real as physical threats. Additionally, threats to negative face can impede future freedom of action such as, "I don't want to spend the time to rewrite this speech." Typically, scholars differentiate examples of communication based on potential threats to the face of the listener. So, for example, a *bald on record* statement from an instructor would point out the feedback standard gap as frankly and directly as possible, for example, "Your talk seemed to lack any organization." In contrast, politeness strategies would function as face mitigation tactics, seeking to reduce the threats to ego and self-image. An example would be the statement of a compliment: "I really liked the points in your talk. Do you think you could number them so that your listeners can write them down?"

Face threat mitigation tactics can include the uses of hedges and qualifiers in describing feedback standard gaps or may involve the communication of solidarity, affinity, or empathy. The use of face threat mitigation tactics has been shown to influence learners' perceptions of both the quality and usefulness of feedback (Trees et al., 2009); their satisfaction with mentored relationships with teachers and perceptions of the supportiveness of the learning climate (Kerssen-Griep, Trees, & Hess, 2008), issues of intrinsic motivation and involvement (Kerssen-Griep, Hess, & Trees, 2003), as well as perceptions of instructors' credibility (Witt & Kerssen-Griep, 2011). In some of this research, including direct proof in the 2011 study, student perceptions of feedback functioned as a mediator between instructors' facework cues and the evaluation of instructors' credibility. However, these mitigation tactics can only supplement, not replace, a potentially face threatening form of FI—instructors are required to give grades.

Grades as Problematic FIs

Grades are problematic as a form of feedback. First, teachers and students hold starkly different perceptions of what grades mean (Goulden & Griffin, 1995). Students overestimate their performance and, in line with the self-serving bias in attribution theory, punish teachers who give lower grades through student ratings of instruction (Griffin, 2004). Associating grades with FI efforts is most likely to distract students from task improvement and lead to negative attributions. FIT would clearly assert that the communication of grades attenuates task performance by changing locus of attention to meta-task issues (e.g., personal evaluation).

On the other hand, grades (theoretically a secondary reinforcement mechanism) have become an outcome goal in and of themselves for many students (Bell, Mladenovic, & Price, 2013). In addition, the studies included in Kluger and DeNisi's meta-analysis largely came from sources that involved coaching, therapy, counseling, or other clinical approaches involving feedback. Few appear to have been rooted in the classroom. Perhaps the importance of grades to students would override normal proclivities and result in concentration on reducing the feedback standard gap.

While the initial description of FIT suggested that any feedback that directed the locus of attention away from performance and toward meta-task issues attenuates the

efficacy of feedback, it is possible that feedback valence (higher vs. lower grades) can have a significant impact on performance. Kluger has argued that both symmetrical (direction of feedback/grade is irrelevant) and asymmetrical processing systems work simultaneously: "Indeed, the more positive is the direction of the feedback-standard discrepancy (overshooting vs. undershooting the standard), the higher is the result-ant pleasantness and the amount of nontask thoughts. These effects are assymetrical about the standard. In contrast, the larger the absolute size of the feedback-standard discrepancy (regardless of direction) the higher the resultant arousal and the amount of task related thoughts" (Kluger & DeNisi, 1998, p. 69; see also, Kluger, 2001).

Because testing of FIT in communication processes has used descriptive feedback and not grades, despite the fact that instructors are required to use grades, consider-ation of grades as an independent, message cue variable is warranted. Scholars need to understand the effects of grades, operating as part of a FI, as a necessary first step in mitigating the face threat challenges that a grade may pose. In addition, because multiple aspects of FIT have rarely been tested together, an investigation of both message cues and personality traits is warranted. Based on the proceeding discussion of FIT, the following research question and hypotheses are posed:

> H1: By focusing attention to meta-task processes, communication of grades will reduce the effectiveness of instructional feedback in performance improvement.
> H2: Grades with greater negative valence will reduce the effectiveness of instructional feedback to a greater degree in performance improvement.
> H3: Level of feedback attributional sensitivity will be inversely related to the effective-ness of instructional feedback in performance improvement.
> H4: Level of perceived feedback utility will be positively related to the effectiveness of instructional feedback in performance improvement.
> RQ1: What is the nature of the relationship between use of grades and participant attributional sensitivity in explaining the effectiveness of instructional feedback in performance improvement?

Method

Participants

Eighty-three (36 male and 47 female) undergraduate students enrolled in the required, basic speech communication course at Texas Christian University served as participants in the study. A sample of this size provided adequate statistical power (0.97) for a study requiring three groups, experimental and control, anticipating a moderate effect size (Cohen, 1988, p. 316). The expected power for the interaction (RQ1) was lower at 0.63 (calculated using G*Power; Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). Students who volunteered for the project received credit under a course policy requiring participation in communication research or a suitable alter-native in the form of a critical essay of a communication study. Classification of research participants was 37% freshman, 29% sophomore, 22% juniors, and 12% senior. Students represented 10 different majors, as well as a number of pre-majors.

Informed consent was obtained and procedures for ethical treatment of participants, including vetting through the university IRB, were followed.

Instruments

Feedback attributional sensitivity and feedback utility were assessed using the instructional feedback orientation scale (King et al., 2009). The instrument has demonstrated excellent concurrent and discriminant validity and has been used successfully in more recent studies (see, for example, Trees et al., 2009; Witt & Kerssen-Griep, 2011). Operationalized on a 5-point, Likert-type scale, the attributional sensitivity factor includes items such as, "My feelings can be easily hurt by corrective feedback from a teacher," "Corrective feedback is intimidating," and "I tend to dwell on the negative feelings that result from corrective feedback." The utility factor includes items such as, "I will usually reflect on a teacher's feedback," "I pay careful attention to instructional feedback," and "Feedback from teachers is a waste of time." In the present study, alpha reliability was 0.86 for the attributional sensitivity factor and 0.88 for the utility factor.

Procedure

In an initial research session, participants were asked to compose and deliver an informative speech of 5–7 min. All participants had previously delivered such a speech in their basic speech class, providing some uniformity for the assignment. The speech was delivered in a conference room and video recorded with a researcher present as the sole audience member. It should be noted as this point that a post-test-only experimental design (rather than change scores) was used. Videotaping of the initial session simply allowed participants to feel comfortable with the equipment. At the conclusion of the presentation, the researcher provided the participant with oral feedback to be used in modifying the presentation. Based on findings from King et al., (2000), we chose to utilize feedback requiring both composition planning (expanding the length of the introduction) and behavioral planning (increasing eye contact by looking up from notes more frequently). Accordingly, the conceptual variable of performance improvement was operationally defined in the current study by two behavioral measures: comparing frequency of eye contact and length of introductions between experimental and control groups. In addition, to provide greater contextual realism, the researcher asked participants to pause after delivery of the thesis statement and to provide some additional information when citing sources as a means of drawing more attention to the use of evidence. These same four points of instructional feedback were provided to all participants using standard phrasing.

Immediately after providing participants with corrective feedback, an experimental manipulation was induced (stimulus texts are available from the first author upon request). Based on random assignment, participants were told, "If these speeches were being graded, based on the speech that I heard you deliver today, I

would assign a grade of A-," or, "If these speeches were being graded, based on the speech that I heard you deliver today, I would assign a grade of C+." For control, a third group was given no evaluative information. Finally, participants were asked not to discuss any portion of the experiment with others until after a second recording session was held.

Two days later, a second session was held with participants. Seven participants from an initial pool of 90 chose to withdraw from the study. During the second session, participants' presentations were video recorded again. Following the recording session, participants completed a brief survey including demographic questions, the feedback scale items, and were asked to recall the grade mentioned in the first session. The feedback items were administered at the conclusion of the data collection out of concern that earlier administration might create issues of internal validity bias.

Manipulation Check

Only 1 of the 26 participants in the "C+" condition failed to recall the grade that had been suggested to them. Three students (out of 28) in the "A-" condition failed to recall the grade. No grade was assigned for the students in the control group. No significant differences in recall level were noted for the two experimental groups, $\chi^2 (1) = 1.15$, n.s.

Analysis of Data

Two coders independently viewed the video recordings for the purpose of timing length of introductions and counting the number of efforts to look up from notes and establish eye contact. Adequate inter-coder reliability was observed for both variables (Cohen's kappa for introduction length was 0.87, for eye contact, 0.77). This level of agreement is considered very good (Landis & Koch, 1977). For the few observed cases of disagreement, a mean was calculated and used in subsequent analysis.

Results

Because the research question implies relationships among the independent variables of grades and attributional sensitivity, we began with RQ1. Since observed differences in experimental conditions (graded conditions vs. control) on changes in behavior (amount of eye contact or expanded length of introduction) could potentially be mediated by a predilection to form negative attributions, we wished to test feedback attributional sensitivity as a covariate in a factorial ANOVA.

Using general linear model procedures, we tested the magnitude of the interactions of independent variables. No significant interaction was detected between feedback attributional sensitivity and condition on frequency of eye contact, *F* (2,

83) $= 0.092$, n.s. For the second dependent variable, introduction length, the interaction term was, again, non-significant, F (2, 83) $= 0.937$, n.s.

H1 suggested a relationship between experimental conditions and the dependent variables. For eye contact, a significant relationship was found, F (2, 83) $= 20.03$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.424$. Post hoc Scheffe tests showed means ranging from 19.38 in the "C+" treatment and 24.82 in the "A-" treatment to 29.03 in the control group. All three groups were significantly different, $p < 0.05$. For introduction length, similar relationships were found, F (2, 83) $= 13.09$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.249$. Means ranged from 31.84 in the "C+" treatment, 39.57 in the "A-" treatment, to 47.2 in the control condition. Again, all three conditions were significantly different in the Scheffe procedures, $p < 0.05$. In both cases, grades with greater negative valence (C+vs. A-) were associated with reduced levels of performance, providing support for H2.

H3 suggested an inverse relationship between attributional sensitivity to feedback and the observed performance behaviors. The hypothesis was supported ($p < 0.01$) for both eye contact, r (83) $= -0.465$, $r^2 = 0.216$, and for introduction length, r (83) $= -0.288$, $r^2 = -0.083$.

H4 suggested a positive relationship between feedback utility and the dependent variables. This hypothesis was also supported for both eye contact, r (83) $= 0.266$, $r^2 = 0.07$, $p < 0.05$, and for introduction length, r (83) $= 0.353$, $r^2 = 0.125$, $p < 0.01$.

Discussion

As hypothesized (H1), the communication of evaluative information reduced levels of performance on both dependent variables: eye contact and introduction length. The choice of these variables is important because they represent markedly different kinds of speaking behavior—introductions are a more effortful cognitive activity, while eye contact (although it may be planned to a degree) is a psychomotor behavior (King et al., 2000). Moreover, as suggested in Hypothesis 2, more critical evaluations (communicating a grade of C + rather than A-) further attenuated the performance to a significant degree. As an additional finding, both attributional sensitivity to feedback and perceived utility of feedback affected the dependent variables under study as proposed in Hypotheses 3 and 4. Analyses of effect sizes indicate that the relative impact of attributional sensitivity was greater than that of utility.

Taken as a whole, confirmation of the hypotheses provides fairly robust support for two of the primary tenets of FIT. First, feedback that directs attention to meta-task processes in the form of a grade was associated with attenuation of performance. In fact, superior levels of speaking performance were observed when no evaluative information at all was provided in the control group. Second, FIT posits that some trait, or personality, differences should explain reactions to FIs. In the present study, both the participants' attributional sensitivity to feedback and the perceived utility of feedback were consequential in predicting behavior. This not only supports FIT but also provides some degree of validation for the feedback orientation instrument. The

instrument was developed under the assumption that individuals react very differently to instructional feedback, and that those reactions occur along a predictable few perceptual dimensions (e.g., utility, sensitivity, confidentiality, and retention; King et al., 2009).

The current study did not seek to vary the nature of the task beyond the use of two very different dependent variables. However, this final major component of FIT should cause readers to view the current results with some reservation. Grades are very important to students. For several reasons, including concerns about ethical treatment of research participants, actual grades could not be used as a variable in the study. Participants were aware that the assessment of the researcher would have no impact on actual grade in the class. If the participants had perceived that the C + evaluation could have adversely affected standing in the course, perhaps they would have been motivated to focus on instructional feedback despite negative feelings—thus reducing the magnitude of the effect sizes that were observed. This potential criticism should not overshadow the findings. After all, the control group with no grade information did outperform the group that was given a relatively positive (A-) assessment by the researcher. Instead, the findings appear to vindicate the FIT position that any communication directing attention toward meta-task issues, even if relatively positive, reduces the attention given to corrective feedback. In fact, this was observed in Kluger and DeNisi's meta-analysis when, in a large number of studies, the presence of feedback actually caused deterioration, rather than improvement, of performance (1996).

At the same time, Kluger's (2001) more recent hypothesis that FIs are concurrently processed in symmetrical and asymmetrical cognitive systems also received support. This was noted in the significant higher levels of adaptation to feedback in the A- condition compared to the C + condition. The symmetrical processing was demonstrated in that both graded conditions underperformed the control condition. Our findings are consistent with the claim that evaluative information changes the learner's locus of attention to meta-task issues.

The present project can be of value in a number of ways. First, the current study provides a rather direct test of FIT in the context of the improvement of communication behavior. The project provides support for two of the three primary sources of feedback effectiveness posited by FIT: message cues (locus of attention) and individual trait differences.

Second, the present study utilized behavioral outcomes. Exclusive reliance on self-report measures could be subject to halo effects. In addition, attitudes and actions are often confusing, at best, and contradictory at worst. FIs were administered at a separate time from recording of the final, corrected behavior and also separated from administration of the feedback orientation instrument, thus providing some support for the internal validity of the design.

Finally, the present study appears to indicate that individual attributional sensitivity to feedback and individual perceptions of feedback's general usefulness do not subsume, or even overlap, the negative effect that the presence of evaluative information causes (RQ1). In other words, individuals who tend to react negatively

to feedback benefit less from feedback that is evaluative. But also, individuals who do not tend to react negatively to feedback benefit less from feedback that is evaluative. Notably, Martin and Mottet's (2011) findings, using a very different approach and variables, provided support for this same conclusion. This finding is important for both practical and conceptual reasons. Practically, it provides evidence that the feedback orientation instrument is a useful instrument because the perceptions that are captured by the instrument have some predictive value for a wide range of the population. Conceptually, the finding is important because it serves as evidence that the two important features of FIT, locus of attention and trait differences, are independent predictors of feedback efficacy. On a cautionary note, power for the test of this interaction was considerably lower than a priori power estimates for the hypotheses (0.63 compared to 0.97), so it is possible, though still statistically unlikely given the very small effect size, that a type II error occurred. This issue should remain open for future examination.

A promising avenue for future research involves the discovery of means to maximize the effectiveness of feedback by minimizing the negative reactions observed in the present study. For example, the proper negotiation of facework has been shown to reduce the negative reactions that can occur when feedback standard gaps, such as inferior performance, are communicated (Kerssen-Griep et al., 2008; Witt & Kerssen-Griep, 2011). Similarly, Martin and Mottet (2011) suggested that nonverbal communication, such as enhanced teacher immediacy, can be a useful means in defusing the potential adverse effects of presenting evaluative feedback. Dannels, Housley Gaffney, and Martin (2011) suggested the creation of a new dynamic between teacher and student by acknowledging feedback as both relational and dialectical. In their view, feedback can be enhanced by openly discussing the "feedback intervention space" created by the teacher/student context (p. 111). Openly discussing the tensions and the relational implications created by the giving and receiving of feedback can empower students to overcome perceptual barriers and concentrate fully on performance improvement.

A few additional comments should be directed toward the use of facework in managing corrective feedback. As discussed earlier, this issue has received substantial attention in recent years, and there is much support for the utility of facework in improving FIs. The purpose of the current study was to test the elements of FIT alone: the individual reactions to feedback (FOI) and the presence or absence of evaluative conditions likely to cue meta-task processes—in the present study, grades. For that reason, messages used in the study were stripped of the wording normally employed in teacher/student communication that could be seen as effective or ineffective management of facework. These facework-rich messages could have complicated the results as intervening variables.

This does not mean, however, that the study does not have implications for the facework literature. For example, results in this study indicate (a) that some students who are more feedback sensitive may require more attention and effort at avoiding threats to face, and (b) that grades are inherently problematic at FIs directed toward performance improvement—even good grades—because they direct attention away

from task, as predicted in FIT. Assuming that good grades are not a threat to face, then effective facework alone is insufficient to mitigate the problems associated with these attentional issues.

Unfortunately, traditional education has so intimately linked performance improvement to grades that the two are difficult to disentangle. For example, in oral communication performance, it is common to use rating sheets that indicate the worth, or point value, of specific behaviors related to a total grade. Teachers would be well advised to separate evaluative information from efforts to coach better performance. This may mean passing back rating sheets with a grade, managing facework with students, and then later going over a list of specific issues (not the rating sheet) without implications of evaluation, directed toward performance improvement alone.

Fortunately, there is a good deal of academic literature that can provide practical avenues for managing conversations that must include an evaluative component. For example, research in negotiations (Wilson, 1992), in finding effective means of dealing with power distance issues that can impact face (Merkin, 2006), and in maintaining face in everyday talk (Arundale, 2010) can be helpful in properly framing, and distinguishing, corrective feedback and evaluations. Finally, a good deal of literature, reviewed earlier in this manuscript, deals directly with the practical aspects of issues raised in this study (for a review of further work, see Sabee & Wilson, 2005).

Clearly, much has changed since the days when scholars considered feedback to be merely a response to a message. Future efforts directed at improving feedback efficacy have great potential to effect behavioral change of several kinds—including improved communication performance. Openly recognizing the fact that students vary greatly in their perceptions of feedback and recognizing the potential hazards of associating evaluation with information intended to improve performance is a significant first step.

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