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Praise in Written Feedback: How L2 Writers

Perceive and Value Praise

Karla Coca

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Praise in Written Feedback: How L2 Writers Perceive and Value Praise

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ESL writing teachers face the challenge of providing written feedback that is both effective and motivating to students. Thus, many end up making use of praise (or positive feedback) before offering criticism. Past research, however, has not put enough emphasis in how students receive praise. In fact, Hyland and Hyland's (2001) article is one of the few and most recent works to focus on praise above other types of feedback. Yet, they have not accounted for the possibility of different types of praise as Kamins and Dweck (1999) have suggested. In our study, two types of praise (person and performance) have been considered as well as cultural background and L2 proficiency. An original survey was developed in order to analyze these three variants and understand how L2 learners perceive and attribute value to praise in written feedback. A total of 106 participants rated six different samples of praise based on how clear, helpful, valuable, encouraging to revision, kind, and motivating the comment of praise is. In the conclusion, praise type seems to be the most significant variant as participants showed preference to performance over person praise.

Keywords: praise, written feedback, positive feedback, English as a second language, praise type

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Introduction

Teachers across any subject area generally understand that every student needs and wants feedback from the teacher in order to learn and acquire content (Anderson, 1982; Leki, 1991; Saito, 1994; Hyland & Hyland, 2006a; Hyland, 2019). In fact, receiving performance critique, positive or negative, is arguably the foundation of the learning process (Beason, 1993; Brown and Knight, 1994; Biggs, 1999; Orrell, 2007). Therefore, not receiving feedback is detrimental to students because it denies them the opportunity for learning and guidance for improvement.

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory supports this argument by discussing the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which looks at a person's ability to accomplish something alone versus with the help of someone else. The theory of the ZPD postulates that learning occurs during the interaction of an expert and a novice through the novice's adoption of the model provided by the expert (Lantolf, 2000). Feedback is one method used to achieve such adoption because the student (i.e., the novice) learns from or negotiates the commentary administered by the teacher (i.e., expert). This method is commonly adopted in the second language (L2) classroom, in which the student adapts language models provided by the teacher.

Feedback, therefore, needs to be carefully weighed and executed with quality since there is much to consider when formulating a response. One way to investigate the effectiveness of feedback is to analyze the emphasis of the teacher's criticism, such as focusing on content and ideas, grammar correction, or both. These types of focused comments can be analyzed individually, compared, or simply looked at alongside each other and examined for their efficacy (Cardelle and Corno, 1981; Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986; Zamel, 1985; Truscott, 1996; Ferris, 1999; Truscott, 2007; Ferris, Liu, Sinha, & Senna, 2013). This efficacy is often measured by the revisions the student has performed on an assignment after teacher feedback (Ashwell, 2000; Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 2006) or by tests or assignment scores (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron,

2005; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Hartshorn et al., 2010). Some researchers go beyond performance metrics; they use students' perspectives and opinions, measured by interviews or surveys (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Saito, 1994; Hyland & Hyland, 2001), in order to determine how effective a certain type of feedback is.

Another consideration is how feedback can have different purposes other than correction, such as reinforcement or remediation (Hattie, 1999; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Also, the purpose of feedback can be enhanced depending on the function of the comment, e.g., criticism, suggestion, or praise (Hyland & Hyland, 2001). In addition to purpose and function, teachers are also required to choose how to deliver feedback: audio or video recording (Thompson & Lee, 2012; Olson, 2014), student-teacher conferences (Eckstein, 2013), peer-reviewing (Lundstrom and Baker, 2009), self-correction (Quinn, 2015), error identification (Lee, 2004), systematic coding or minimal marking (Sampson, 2012; Hyland 1990), written commentary (Hyland, 1998), or a combination of these options.

In the L2 writing classroom, feedback could be delivered in any of these forms for any of these purposes and functions, but written commentary is a popular choice preferred by students and teachers (Hyland & Hyland, 2006b, p. 3), even when other delivery practices are simultaneously applied. Despite being a popular approach, written commentary can be challenging due to the demands that providing feedback imposes on teachers, such as tailoring their comments for different response purposes, strategies, functions, and writing stages (Hyland, 2019, p. 179). Furthermore, the function of praise is believed to be a force enabling motivation and learning (Hyland & Hyland, 2001), as explained in Hyland (2019): “positive remarks can be motivating and...many L2 learners attach considerable importance to them” (p. 179), and “a lack

of positive comments can affect both students' attitudes to writing and their engagement with the feedback" (p. 180).

Acknowledging the complexity and importance of feedback and considering the factors that influence student engagement with written commentary, this study focuses on the use of praise in written feedback in the L2 writing classroom.

Review of Literature

In the literature, *praise* is defined as "an act which attributes credit to another for some characteristic, attribute, skill, etc., which is positively valued by the person giving feedback" (Hyland & Hyland, 2001, p. 186). In other words, praise is a positive remark that indicates approval of something or someone. In addition, researchers have considered praise to be beneficial when it is used to state something positive before providing suggestions or criticism of any kind in writing (Diederich, 1968; Cardelle & Corno, 1981; Bates, Lane, & Lange, 1993) because excessive criticism could be detrimental to students' self-confidence (Connors & Lunsford, 1993). Therefore, praise is chosen with the purpose of motivating and generating positive outcomes in the writer's development.

Choosing Praise

Teachers often intend praise to serve as a motivational tool by drawing students' attention to their achievements and thus helping them believe in themselves. In Hyland and Hyland (2001), participating teachers admitted being aware of the possible consequences of positive and negative commentary. They reflected on the balance between the two and concluded that praise is of extreme importance because L2 writers need to have their confidence built up in order to receive criticism constructively. As a result, the teachers attempted to comment on the positive

aspects of the writing before focusing on the negative, making praise a common practice used by teachers to soften criticism and balance out negativity.

Another reason teachers choose to use praise is to foster good relationships with their students (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2013, p. 242). The classroom should be a positive learning environment, so it is a justifiable concern for teachers to wonder about the preferences of their students, including students' perceptions of their teachers. After all, written commentary is a complex form of social interaction (Hyland & Hyland, 2001). For example, teachers may find themselves struggling to identify something positive to comment on to preserve the positive connection between student and teacher. Meanwhile, they may also be concerned about coming across as too harsh or too kind, compromising either the relationship with the student or their authority as the teacher.

Clearly, teachers' beliefs and stances play an important role when choosing to use praise. Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis accounts for three non-linguistic variables that may influence L2 acquisition: motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. In other words, acquiring a second language can be more effectively accomplished when the learner does not experience fear, nervousness, or any other feeling that will result in low motivation, diminished self-confidence, or high levels of anxiety (Krashen, 1982). Moreover, Dörnyei (1994) talks about how praise works as an extrinsic reward that, when combined with intrinsic rewards such as pride, leads to learner satisfaction and motivation. Praise should also be reserved for attributing value to effort and abilities and be given regularly to help students experience success and build self-confidence. Such theories and discussions on motivation explain why teachers worry that their criticism, although necessary, may hinder students' experience with language teachers and

the target language itself. Thus, praise becomes an important tool for teachers to address such concerns.

Students Preferences

Several studies have investigated students' perceptions of and preferences for praise (Cardelle & Corno, 1981; Ferris, 1997; Hyland & Hyland, 2001). In Cardelle and Corno's (1981) six-week study, 80 L2 students were randomly assigned to four distinct treatment groups that each received a different type of written feedback on their writing homework: praise, criticism, criticism plus praise, and no feedback at all. Students' L2 knowledge was measured by a 40-question mixed-format pre-test during the first week of the study. The results were later compared with three other post-tests of similar format that occurred at two-week intervals throughout the six weeks. The 11 homework assignments were based on the course textbook and consisted of grammar and comprehension exercises. Finally, a student survey was administered at the last day of classes. At the end of the study, the post-testing revealed that the criticism plus praise group had higher achievement scores. Similarly, the survey showed that 88% of all participants preferred receiving feedback in the form of praise combined with criticism. In fact, from the criticism-only group, only 13% preferred receiving criticism without praise. That is, the presence of praise in the combined form was preferred, not only in general, but also by the group of students who received only criticism. Participants reported that the use of criticism plus praise motivated them to improve their performance after receiving feedback.

Another study was conducted by Ferris (1997) in which 110 pairs of first and revised drafts written by ESL students were analyzed for the types of teacher-written commentary and their influence on students' revisions and improvements. In the analysis of teacher comments, Ferris looked at comment length, comment type, and use of hedges. The impact of each comment

on first drafts was then measured on revised drafts with a 6-point scale, 0 being “no discernible change” and 6 being “substantive change with positive effect”. The study aimed not only to investigate if the teacher comments encouraged revision, but also if said revision helped improve the paper. The analysis concluded that praise was mostly included at the beginning of summary comments, 97% of which led to no changes in student revisions (Ferris, 1997). At first, such a result somewhat contradicted the findings of Cardelle and Corno’s (1981) research, which found praise to be a motivational factor for improvement for their participants. However, it is worth noting that in this study, praise was mostly delivered as “general statements” used as “a note of encouragement” before criticism (Ferris, 1997, p. 327), while other forms of teacher commentary were more specific. Still, praise usually led to no student revisions, which was unhelpful to writers’ development because any type of revisions resulted in improved papers (p. 330). Such negative conclusions made in reference to praise could be the result of teachers using it as “general statements”, instead of the more specific, critical comments.

Hyland and Hyland (2001) is the most recent holistic study on praise. For instance, the article has been cited over 640 times in less than two decades within its publication, arguably marking it as a landmark. In this study, the authors investigated teachers’ intentions for and students’ perceptions of different types of written feedback, including praise. First, they categorized all written feedback provided to six ESL writers. They then interviewed the two teachers who provided the feedback and conducted think-aloud protocols with them, as well. Finally, they interviewed the students after feedback revisions. In contrast to the results of the other two studies mentioned previously, students in this study evinced mixed reactions to praise. While some students labeled praise as unclear, unuseful, unhelpful, wasteful, insincere, or worthless, others thought of praise as a motivational tool (Hyland & Hyland, 2001, p. 202).

Some students even considered praise to be valuable to their success in writing, and thought that without it, criticism was hard to take. This mixed bag of student perceptions and values could be due to the characteristics of the praise that teachers gave. Tellingly, 64% of praise comments were identified to be superficial, “empty remarks”, or to be directed at ideas instead of text-specific or language-related performance—hinting that the type of praise offered may be an indication of how influential it could be. These types of superficial and empty remarks could even be what Ferris (1997) referred to in her study as “general statements”. In the end, Hyland and Hyland (2001) concluded that praise needs to be carefully and meaningfully used so as not to harm student writing performance or student-teacher relationships.

In sum, teachers and students seem to use or judge praise based on a number of different characteristics or constructs:

Table 1

Six Attributes of Praise

Characteristic	References
Clear	Hyland & Hyland, 2001
Helpful	Ferris, 1997; Hyland & Hyland, 2001
Valuable	Ferris, 1997; Hyland & Hyland, 2001
Encouraging to Revision	Cardelle & Corno, 1981; Ferris, 1997; Hyland & Hyland, 2001
Kind	Hyland & Hyland, 2001
Motivating	Cardelle & Corno, 1981; Krashen, 1982; Dörnyei, 1994; Ferris, 1997; Hyland & Hyland, 2001

In addition, the way teachers praise students can potentially influence how the given praise performs at each construct in the table above. In order to better understand how different types of praise may work, some ideas and theories from the field of psychology are worth discussing.

Types of Praise

The psychology field has explored praise more deeply than the second language field has. Some of its findings and theories can positively contribute to the discussion at hand. For instance, Kamins and Dweck (1999) have essentially recognized two types of praise: *person praise* and *performance praise*. Each type of praise influences follow-up actions and thoughts differently.

Person praise is defined as a type of positive remark on someone's identity or behavior. In the classroom, person praise occurs when the teacher shows approval towards the general authorship of the student. Comments such as "I love your introduction", "You write really well", or "This is a great paper" are examples of person praise in written feedback. Because person praise is often directed towards someone's intelligence and does not address the details of a successful performance, it is nonspecific and considered by some to be shallow. In contrast, *performance praise* is specifically directed at elements of a person's actions or execution. It occurs in language instruction when the teacher shows approval of the student's successful accomplishment of linguistic performance. Performance praise may consist of phrases such as "You've mastered the perfect tense", "Great job at using signal words to show transition", or "You got your commas right." Performance praise could be considered more helpful or valuable to learning development because it tells students exactly what they should continue to do or use as model for future performance.

Dweck's subsequent mindset theory (2006) helps teachers apply the different types of praise in their written feedback as well as interpret the results of Hyland and Hyland (2001). The theory demonstrates how person and performance praise impact learners, and why learners may show certain preferences. Dweck proposes two types of mindsets that will ultimately influence a person's self-perception and perception of others. The *fixed mindset* is the belief that abilities and intelligence are unchangeable, so there is a need to prove value through success. The *growth mindset*, in contrast, is the belief that experiences develop and polish abilities and intelligence, so there is acceptance of criticism and dedication towards improvement. Therefore, the use of performance praise may stimulate growth over fixed mindset because it focuses on the experience of performing something.

In the L2 writing classroom, person and performance praise affect students' mindsets. "Person praise will tell the [student] how good of a writer he or she is, praising their intelligence, but performance praise will inform them of the excellence of their writing, praising their abilities" (Coca, 2019). Students who have a growth mindset welcome performance praise because it details what they should continue to do. They are also open to criticism and often desire it which could explain why certain instances of praise are rejected by students.

Motivation and Research Questions

There are three main conclusions that can be drawn from past literature. First, praise is an aspect of written feedback that cannot be ignored because it can potentially influence students' revisions, either positively or negatively. Second, because praise elicits mixed reactions from students, preferences towards praise may influence how effective it is. Third, there are different characteristics of praise itself that divide praise into two distinct categories: person praise and performance praise. These three conclusions are an important starting point, but even though the

conversation on praise is underway, there are still gaps to be filled in the research, especially when it comes to students' preferences.

Hyland and Hyland's (2006a) state-of-the-art article compiled an extensive number of studies done on feedback at the time. In their compilation, they dedicated an entire section to students' views on teacher feedback. Several observations were made about students' preferences for feedback delivery and type as a result of years of research based on student surveys; however, praise is not mentioned in this section at all. In fact, praise is sparsely mentioned in the section of teacher stances and feedback practices. Furthermore, students' mixed views on praise (Hyland & Hyland, 2001) may depend on the type of praise, person or performance, being utilized by the teacher, although there hasn't been any specific attempt to investigate such an issue. Thus, further research is needed on not only how students view different types of praise, but also their preferences.

Besides praise type, there are two other factors that should be taken into account, one of them being language proficiency. For example, Hedgcock and Lefkowitz (1994) noted that more advanced L2 writers do not want or need grammar feedback as much as content feedback. However, they did not identify if certain functions of feedback, such as praise, are wanted or needed by L2 writers to a greater or lesser degree depending on their writing proficiency. In addition, Bell and Youmans (2006) discuss the importance of "recognizing differences in understanding of academic rhetoric between L1 and L2 students" because of "the language acquisition process, the issues associated with writing in a second language, cross-cultural communication issues, and the potential effects these issues may have" (p. 9). That is, L2 language proficiency may influence how much the L2 learner can understand certain rhetorical functions of negotiation and collaboration, such as praise. Other authors have also observed the

need to further investigate how proficiency levels affect students' preferences when it comes to written feedback (Yu, Jiang, & Nan, 2020), which also means little or no research has been done specifically about praise and language proficiency.

Finally, an amalgam of distinct cultures is seen in the ESL classroom; cultural background can also influence how students perceive feedback, including praise. Fithriani (2018) identified from previous research three cultural characteristics of Eastern countries that may affect feedback views: hierarchical relationships, face-saving strategies, and absence of negotiation. To begin with, the power hierarchy between teacher and student is very distant, placing the teacher noticeably above the student because teachers are seen as knowledge holders and the only authority in the classroom (Miao, Badger, & Zhen, 2006). Also, students from Eastern cultures commonly avoid standing out or calling attention to others in order to face-save and preserve group harmony (Carson & Nelson, 1996; Carless, 2011). Therefore, due to these cultural classroom characteristics, these students rarely engage in negotiation of feedback and instead receive it without reservations (Hu, 2002). Some L2 learners may even find praise to be inappropriate for feedback due to cultural understandings that they have about the function and purpose of praise itself and, consequently, end up miscommunicating with the feedback giver (Bell & Youmans, 2006). Therefore, L2 writers from Eastern cultures may not value or expect praise as much as those from Western cultures.

The gap in past research is clear when closely examining Cardelle and Corno (1981), Ferris (1997), and Hyland and Hyland (2001). In these previously outlined studies, there is no comparison of students' interview or survey responses based on background factors such as language proficiency and culture. Not only that, but praise type was also not considered when researchers classified what types of feedback were employed by the teacher. Thus, the following

research questions were generated in order to aid ESL teachers and educators in understanding, from the learner’s perspective, the value of praise in written feedback:

- (1) To what extent do L2 learners perceive person and performance praise in terms of the six attributes (clear, helpful, valuable, encouraging of revisions, kind, and motivating)?
- (2) To what extent does language proficiency affect students’ perceptions of praise?
- (3) To what extent does cultural background affect students’ perceptions of praise?

Methods

Participants

A total of 106 students from three intensive academic English programs participated in this study. Table 2 below summarizes their demographic information:

Table 2

Participants’ Demographics

	N	%
Total	106	100
Romance First Language	76	72
Spanish	54	51
Portuguese	13	12
French	8	8
Italian	1	1
Asian First Language	30	28
Japanese	13	12
Thai	7	6.5
Chinese	6	5.5
Korean	4	4

Gender			
	Female	54	51
	Male	52	49
Age Average		24	
Age Range		18-30	

The study was conducted at three different, yet similar, ESL programs from three universities in the Interior West of the United States: Brigham Young University, 84 (80%) participants; Utah Valley University, 12 (11%) participants; and the University of Utah, 10 (9%) participants. All three institutions are full-time academic English programs in which students are required to maintain international student status. Each program contains between six and eight levels, with proficiency varying from beginning to advanced, each with their own labeling systems. In all instances, placement examinations are exclusive to each program and occur prior to the first week of instruction. For these reasons, participants self-reported which writing class and proficiency level they were currently enrolled in within their respective programs. Using the level descriptors available on each program’s website, participants were separated into two main groups of writing proficiency, as described in Table 3.

Table 3

Participants’ English Writing Proficiency

Proficiency	Descriptor Summary	N	%
Intermediate	Use of basic vocabulary and syntax to write about personal and some abstract topics.	58	55
Advanced	Use of academic syntax and vocabulary to write about personal and academic topics at different genres.	48	45

Instrument

In order to collect the data, an original survey was created in Qualtrics. The survey had two parts: demographics and sample rating. The demographic questions consisted of the self-reporting of age, gender, native country and language, and L2 writing proficiency. Meanwhile, the second part included six samples of student writing accompanied by a positive teacher response. Of those six samples, three teacher responses were person praise: comments directed towards the students' intelligence (e.g. "You are a really logical person."). On the other hand, the other three responses were performance praise: comments directed at the students' writing execution (e.g. "I like the way you've used modals to express your opinion.").

For each sample, the participant had to look at a brief fragment of a student's writing that was paired with a teacher response as demonstrated in Figure 1. Both the student writing and the teacher response were developed to resemble authentic writing. For this study, it was unproductive to select samples of papers of real students because the samples needed to be relatable to all participants. In addition, the samples needed to fit into the Qualtrics format for maximized distribution of the survey. Nevertheless, each sample of student writing and teacher response was crafted after a collection of real students' first drafts; thus, mirroring the writing and feedback dynamic of the ESL writing classroom.

After looking at the sample, participants had six follow up rating questions. All questions exclusively focused on the teacher response and not on the student writing. Moreover, each one of the six questions corresponded to one of the six attributes of praise (Table 1) and asked participants to rate the teacher response relative to the attribute on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very much*). For instance, question 6 in Figure 1 asks, "If you were the student, would this

comment lead you to change the sentence?”. In other words, this question seeks to know how encouraging to revision the rater judges the praise comment to be.

Procedure

Through Qualtrics, an access link was generated for the survey. Each program director from each school previously mentioned was then contacted via email to request their help in recruiting students of intermediate level of proficiency or above. The email to the program director included an attached message to students which recruited their participation and provided the access link to the survey. All that directors had to do was redirect that message to current students at the requested proficiency level. The survey was available for a period of four weeks.

Analysis

The collected data was exported from Qualtrics into an Excel spreadsheet. First, the demographics were accounted for and converted into percentages to be used in the report above. Next, the rating responses for each sample were coded for the six attributes of praise (*clear, helpful, valuable, encouraging to revisions, kind, and motivating*). Additionally, each response was also coded into one of three different factor groups: *Romance* or *Asian* for participants' native language; *Intermediate* or *Advanced* for L2 writing proficiency; and *Person* or *Performance* for praise type. Using the software Jamovi (2020), 2x2x2 analyses of variance (ANOVAs) tests were used to examine each factor and construct individually as well as their interactions (Bitchener et al., 2005).

Results

After running the ANOVAs, we found no presence of interaction effects in any of our combinations. Table 4 shows the overview of the results based on the *p*-values of each attribute

for each factor: praise type, language proficiency, and first language. In the table, (*) indicates that p was less than .05, (**) indicates that p was less than .008, and blank indicates that p was greater than .05. Praise type is clearly the factor with the most significance; therefore, our analysis focused on examining each construct by mainly comparing praise type and language proficiency, as well as comparing praise type and first language.

Table 4

Results Overview

Construct	Praise Type	Proficiency	First Language
Clear	*		
Helpful	*		
Valuable	*		
Encouraging to Revisions	*		
Kind		**	*
Motivating		*	

Note: * = $p < .05$ and ** = $p < .008$

Praise Type

The first research question focuses solely on contrasting the two types of praise:

- (1) To what extent do L2 learners perceive person and performance praise in terms of the six attributes?

Table 4 reveals how only four out of the six attributes matter when it comes to praise type. Further confirmation is found in Table 5, where the p -values indicate that praise type affects how *clear*, *helpful*, *valuable*, and *encouraging to revisions* comments of praise are. On

the other hand, the attributes *kind* ($p=.124$) and *motivating* ($p=0.269$) are greater than .05, and therefore do not show any significance for praise type. Also, the effect sizes confirm the significance or lack of significance of each construct. The partial eta square value for both *kind* and *motivating* are too small (.01) to be taken into consideration (Draper, 2020), while the other four constructs present values equal to or greater than .02. Moreover, out of these four attributes, the means show how performance praise was rated higher for *clear*, *valuable*, and *encouraging to revisions*, and how person praise was rated higher for *helpful*.

Table 5

Praise Type ANOVA

	Praise Type	N	Mean	SD	F	p	η^2p
Clear	Person	106	3.86	1.34	10.94	0.001	0.05
	Performance	106	4.49	1.08			
Helpful	Person	106	3.90	1.47	8.33	0.004	0.04
	Performance	106	3.28	1.28			
Valuable	Person	106	3.41	1.52	6.64	0.011	0.03
	Performance	106	3.98	1.31			
Encouraging to Revision	Person	106	2.58	1.64	4.37	0.038	0.02
	Performance	106	3.10	1.15			
Kind	Person	106	4.75	1.55	2.39	0.124	0.01
	Performance	106	4.98	0.91			
Motivating	Person	106	4.23	1.3	1.23	0.269	0.01
	Performance	106	4.39	1.07			

Praise Type and Language Proficiency

The second research question concerns not only praise but also the influence of language proficiency:

- (1) To what extent does language proficiency affect students' perceptions of praise?

Table 6 reports the results concerning the constructs and the language-writing proficiency of participants. The four attributes that showed significance in Table 5 (*clear*, *helpful*, *valuable* and *encouraging to revisions*) are no longer significant here; only *kind* ($p < .001$, $d = .06$) and *motivating* ($p = .013$, $d = .03$) present a p -value smaller than .05 and an effect size greater than .01. For these two attributes, advanced writers showed greater means than intermediate writers.

Table 6

Language Proficiency ANOVA

	Proficiency	N	Mean	SD	F	p	η^2p
Clear	Intermediate	116	4.15	1.33	0.40	0.526	0.002
	Advanced	96	4.34	1.14			
Helpful	Intermediate	116	3.49	1.35	0.73	0.395	0.004
	Advanced	96	3.61	1.46			
Valuable	Intermediate	116	3.62	1.35	0.58	0.445	0.003
	Advanced	96	3.78	1.53			
Encourage Revision	Intermediate	116	3.05	1.51	2.60	0.108	0.013
	Advanced	96	2.73	1.71			
Kind	Intermediate	116	4.54	1.11	14.76	<0.001	0.060
	Advanced	96	5.13	0.88			
Motivating	Intermediate	116	4.11	1.22	6.3	0.013	0.030
	Advanced	96	4.57	1.12			

Table 7 adds to the data by comparing the means of person and performance praise with the language proficiency groups. Even though the interaction effect was not significant, the descriptive data displays some interesting conclusions; for example, almost all attributes have higher means for advanced writers than intermediate writers, with the exception of *encouraging to revisions*. Even more interestingly, all means are greater for performance praise than person praise, without exceptions. Such results indicate that students seem to recognize more of the six

attributes in that performance praise rather than person praise no matter the students' language proficiency level.

For instance, for the attribute *kind*, the means for advanced writers are 5.04 (person praise) and 5.23 (performance praise), compared to 4.52 and 4.78, respectively, for intermediate writers. *Motivating* also shows similar results, since the means for advanced writers are 4.5 (person praise) and 4.56 (performance praise) compared to 4.01 and 4.26, respectively, for intermediate writers. For both attributes, advanced writers have higher means, and performance praise always outperforms person praise.

Table 7

Language Proficiency versus Praise Type

Construct	Proficiency	Person	Performance
Clear	Intermediate	3.88	4.41
	Advanced	4.04	4.63
Helpful	Intermediate	3.24	3.74
	Advanced	3.33	3.88
Valuable	Intermediate	3.4	3.84
	Advanced	3.5	4.05
Encouraging to Revisions	Intermediate	2.82	3.28
	Advanced	2.51	2.95
Kind	Intermediate	4.52	4.78
	Advanced	5.04	5.23
Motivating	Intermediate	4.01	4.26
	Advanced	4.5	4.56

Praise Type and First Language

Finally, the last research question investigates praise and the influence of cultural background:

(2) To what extent does cultural background affect students' perceptions of praise?

Due to the comparison of Eastern and Western cultures in past literature and the data collected for this study, cultural background was related to first language: Romance or Asian. Table 8 shows the results of collected data in regard to first language. In this case, almost none of the six attributes are meaningful for first language. In fact, only *kind* presented a significant *p*-value, $p=.047$, while all the others are too high to be considered. All effect sizes are small, including the attribute *kind* ($d=0.01$). In sum, with the exception of *kind*, all other attributes in Table 6 show no statistical significance. Therefore, looking only at the means for *kind*, Romance language writers present a slightly higher mean (4.99) than Asian language writers (4.68), meaning that although Romance writers have a slightly greater perception of praise being *kind* than Asian writers do, the difference is too small to be deemed valuable.

Table 8

First Language ANOVA

	First Language	N	Mean	SD	F	p	η^2p
Clear	Romance	152	4.31	1.26	2.39	0.124	0.012
	Asian	60	4.03	1.21			
Helpful	Romance	152	3.50	1.46	0.62	0.433	0.003
	Asian	60	3.64	1.24			
Valuable	Romance	152	3.71	1.48	0.02	0.884	0.000
	Asian	60	3.66	1.32			
Encourage Revision	Romance	152	2.95	1.70	0.63	0.429	0.003
	Asian	60	2.80	1.36			

Kind	Romance	152	4.99	0.98	3.99	0.047	0.010
	Asian	60	4.68	1.13			
Motivating	Romance	152	4.32	1.22	0.01	0.930	0.000
	Asian	60	4.29	1.12			

In addition, Table 9 reports the descriptive comparison of the means of person and performance praise with the first language. In general, it seems that Romance language writers present higher means mostly across the table, with a few exceptions. More specifically, under *kind*, the means for Romance writers are 4.88 (person praise) and 5.08 (performance praise) respectively compared to 4.44 and 4.73 for Asian writers, which supports the results of Table 8 that lead to the conclusion that Romance writers attribute more kindness to praise. Moreover, both Romance and Asian writers see performance praise as being kinder than person praise.

Another observation is that Table 9 shows, in several instances, means less than 3.5. For example, under *encouraging to revisions*, Romance writers rated person praise at 2.74 and performance praise at 3.16. Similarly, Asian writers rated person praise at 2.53, and performance praise at 3.07. Since the rating scale ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very much*), any mean equal to or less than 3.5 could be interpreted as neutral or not valuable, not encouraging, etc. Therefore, no matter the cultural background nor the type of praise, praise does not generally encourage students to make revisions, as expected by Ferris (1997).

Table 9

First Language versus Praise Type

Construct	First Language	Person	Performance
Clear	Romance	4.07	4.56

	Asian	3.68	4.38
Helpful	Romance	3.29	3.71
	Asian	3.24	4.04
Valuable	Romance	3.5	3.91
	Asian	3.32	3.99
Encouraging to Revisions	Romance	2.74	3.16
	Asian	2.53	3.07
Kind	Romance	4.88	5.08
	Asian	4.44	4.73
Motivating	Romance	4.27	4.37
	Asian	4.12	4.45

Discussion

A careful examination of the previous tables reveals how each factor presents similar interpretations, yet different results depending on the construct. Thus, this section is organized with the purpose of discussing how the construct ratings are compared to each factor and, consequently, the meaning or implications behind them.

Praise Type

When it comes to praise type, person or performance, the results suggest that there are four attributes that are statistically significant: *clear*, *helpful*, *valuable*, and *encouraging to revisions*.

Performance praise outperforms person praise in most attributes. Even though effect sizes and difference in means are small, the report indicates that participants interpret performance praise as being slightly more *clear*, *valuable*, and *encouraging to revision*, while person praise is more *helpful*. The fact that performance praise is not considered to be more *helpful* may seem odd; however, it is important to note that participants were using their own definitions and

interpretations for the six attributes which limits the discussion at hand. Nonetheless, the results still suggest the preference towards performance praise.

Person praise, on the contrary, seems to be less popular among participants. Ferris (1997) has specifically stated that praise is not as valuable as other types of feedback because it does not inspire revisions. In the same paper, however, she also reports that praise was used as generic positive statements at the beginning of summary comments, which by Kamins and Dweck's (1999) definition might possibly be classified as person praise. The results for this particular section show how person praise is a little less encouraging to revisions, even if not significantly so, as later seen on Table 9. Also, students have previously reported praise to be unclear and worthless at times (Hyland & Hyland, 2001, p. 202), this current report suggests that to be truer for instances of person praise due to its lower ratings. So, although person praise is generally seen as more helpful, a result that needs to be further explored and explained by future research, performance praise seems to be preferred by students.

Language Proficiency

The objective of examining the factor of language proficiency was to investigate if and how L2 proficiency in writing would affect participants' responses. The data in Table 4 shows that only the attributes *kind* and *motivating* are significant and, as a result, possible influencers on how participants perceive praise. For both constructs, the means of advanced-level writers are higher than the means of intermediate-level writers. In other words, results suggest that advanced writers might identify praise as making them feel good about their performance (Hyland & Hyland, 2001) and feel the desire to keep striving (Cardelle & Corno, 1981; Dörnyei, 1994). In addition, Table 5 reports that students see performance praise as slightly kinder and more motivating than person praise. Such inferences support the likelihood that the more linguistically

advanced L2 learners are, the more they can recognize non-verbal nuances of the language such as kindness and motivational words (Bell & Youmans, 2006). Or perhaps the more able they feel to make changes based on statements of praise.

First Language

For first language, the aim was to see if cultural background would influence participants' answers and preferences. There were two main language groups used to analyze cultural background, based on the comparison between Western and Eastern cultures: Romance and Asian. According to Table 6, only *kind* showed statistical significance at this criterion. Although the difference in means between Romance language writers and Asian language writers is small, it still shows that the first group recognizes comments of praise as being kind more often than the second group. This report implies what the past literature has pointed out, that Eastern or Asian-language cultures have a harder time attributing kindness to praise (Bell & Youmans, 2006), and students from Western or Romance-language cultures are more likely to feel good about their abilities as writers when teachers praise their work (Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Kamins & Dweck, 1999; Dweck, 2006). It is also worth mentioning that, according to Table 7, if Asian students recognize kindness from praise, it is slightly more probable to be at occurrences of performance rather than person praise.

Conclusion

Even though the results reported small statistical significance, they demonstrate how performance praise is favored by students because it is more clear, valuable, encouraging to revisions, kind, and motivating than person praise. While person praise is not disliked by students, performance praise has generally been attributed better ratings for most attributes. Thus, if teachers find themselves in the position of including praise when providing written

feedback, performance praise would be more appropriate, no matter their students' language or cultural background. They should, however, be aware that the function of praise may be less straight-forward for Asian students and harder for lower proficiency level students to interpret.

This study still has limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, procedures could have better taken into account participants' language and cultural background. For example, instead of using an outside measure of language proficiency, participants were asked to self-report their own language proficiency. Pre-testing, TOEFL scores, or a vocabulary questionnaire would have been more accurate methods to establish such background information. Including participants from more diverse ESL and EFL programs would also have helped with the cultural analysis. Another limitation was the instrument itself. The samples used for ratings were de-contextualized passages and designed to imitate authentic writing. The next step to this study would be to have students read feedback on their own writing and observe how the implications may or may not change. The survey could also include specific definitions for the six attributes of praise, so that ratings would be less subjective to participants' interpretation.

At the conclusion of this study, there was never a question that all feedback is important to the development of writing skills. Written feedback is a popular preference despite its many functions, such as praise. If second language teachers choose to employ praise, they should consider praising students' abilities over their intelligence, due to students' perceptions of and preferences towards performance praise.

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Appendix

Figure 1. A sample of the survey

Please look at the student's writing and the teacher's response.

"My third reason for enjoying summer is tat it is warm. It also nice to see people outside doing their business and to walk the dog."

I like that you've included a number of reasons to support your topic. You've done careful thinking.

Now, consider the teacher's response when answering the following questions.

	Not at all 1	2	3	4	5	Very Much 6
1. How clear is the teacher's comment?	<input type="radio"/>					
2. How kind is the teacher's comment?	<input type="radio"/>					
3. How much would the teacher's comment help the student reflect on the writing?	<input type="radio"/>					
4. How much would the teacher's comment build student's confidence as a writer?	<input type="radio"/>					
5. How valuable do you think the teacher's comment is for the student's development as a writer?	<input type="radio"/>					
6. If you were the student, would this comment lead you to change the sentence?	<input type="radio"/>					