

**PRAISE AND CRITICISM IN UNIVERSITY SEMINARS: FORM,
FUNCTION AND USE**

Anne McLellan Howard, M.A. (TESOL)
B. A. (East Asian Languages and Literatures)

Department of Linguistics
Division of Linguistics and Psychology

Macquarie University
December 2011

This thesis is presented as a partial fulfillment to the requirements for the Doctor of
Philosophy Degree in Linguistics

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	V
STATEMENT OF CANDIDATE	VII
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	VIII
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION	4
2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE.....	9
2.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	12
2.2 RESEARCH METHOD	15
2.2.1 Using naturally-occurring sources of data	15
2.2.2 Using corpora to examine speech acts.....	17
2.2.3 MICASE and BASE	20
2.2.4 Praise: A working definition	22
2.2.5 Collecting and identifying praise	25
2.2.5.1 Praise and agreement.....	27
2.2.5.2 “Thank you’	28
2.2.5.3 “Okay” “Right” and “Yeah”	29
2.2.2.4 Repetition.....	31
2.2.6 Identifying negative feedback.....	32
3. LITERATURE REVIEW	35
3.1 METADISOURSE	37
3.2 ACADEMIC SPOKEN ENGLISH AS SUPPORTIVE DISCOURSE.....	39
3.3 ACADEMIC SPOKEN ENGLISH: WHAT IS IT “LIKE”?.....	43
3.4 ACADEMIC SPOKEN ENGLISH AS INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSE.....	44
3.5 COMPLIMENTS	47
3.6 ACADEMIC SPOKEN DISCOURSE AND ACADEMIC WRITTEN DISCOURSE	51
3.7 DISCIPLINARY DIFFERENCES EXPLORED THROUGH CORPORA.....	54
3.8 CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN DISCIPLINE	57
3.9 CRITICISM.....	61
3.9.1 The IRF pattern.....	61
3.9.2 Repair and its application in the classroom	74
3.9.3 Face	78
3.10 CONCLUSION	84
4. COMPLIMENTS IN ORDINARY CONVERSATION AND PRAISE IN ACADEMIC SPOKEN DISCOURSE.....	88
4.1 INTRODUCTION	88
4.2 METHOD	90
4.2.1 Total counts.....	91
4.2.2 What is praise?	91
4.3 SEMANTIC ANALYSIS	92
4.4 SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS.....	98
4.5 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS.....	101
4.6 CONCLUSION	104
5. A COMPARISON OF POSITIVE EVALUATION IN SPOKEN AND WRITTEN ACADEMIC DISCOURSE	108
5.1 INTRODUCTION	108
5.2 PRAISE IN WRITTEN ACADEMIC DISCOURSE.....	110
5.3 METHOD	114
5.4 GENERAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SPOKEN AND WRITTEN PRAISE.....	115

5.4.1 Context	115
5.4.2 Audience.....	117
5.5 SYNTACTIC AND SEMANTIC FORMS	118
5.5.1 Syntax	118
5.5.2 Semantics.....	122
5.6 PRAISE AND POLITENESS.....	126
5.6.1 Composition classes: the exception	133
5.7 CONCLUSION	135
6. PRAISE IN UNIVERSITY SEMINARS: DISCIPLINARY DIFFERENCES.....	138
6.1 INTRODUCTION	138
6.2 CULTURAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN DISCIPLINES	140
6.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	143
6.4 METHOD.....	144
6.4.1 Definition of praise	148
6.5 RESULTS OF QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS	151
6.6 PRAISE IN CULTURAL CONTEXT	155
6.7 DISCUSSION	159
6.8 CONCLUSION	160
7. CRITICISM IN ACADEMIC DISCOURSE.....	162
7.1 INTRODUCTION	162
7.2 RESEARCH QUESTION	162
7.3 METHOD.....	163
7.3.1 Research dilemmas.....	165
7.3.2 Research background	167
7.3.2.1 Teaching dilemmas.....	167
7.3.2.2 The university-level discussion: goals and problems.....	168
7.3.3 Looking at face/identity as a factor	171
7.3.4 Conflicting face goals	173
7.3.5 What is criticism?.....	179
7.3.6 The IRF exchange.....	181
7.4 FINDINGS: OPTIONS FOR NEGATIVE FEEDBACK	189
7.4.1 Uptake	189
7.4.2 Direct contradiction or negative feedback	196
7.4.2.1 Ways of mitigating negative criticism	198
7.4.2.1.1 Pairing with praise	199
7.4.2.1.2 Hedges.....	202
7.4.2.1.3 Framing the criticism as the instructor's opinion	203
7.4.2.1.4 Metalanguage	204
7.4.2.1.5 Third-party evaluation	205
7.4.2.2 Strategies using questions	206
7.4.2.2.1 Repeating the same question.....	207
7.4.2.2.2 Asking for elaboration.....	209
7.4.2.2.3 Questioning the R-move's relation to the subject	213
7.4.2.2.4 Multiple questions	215
7.4.2.2.5 Hints.....	218
7.5 ELICITATION TYPE AND NEGATIVE FEEDBACK	221
7.5.1 Face wants, elicitation type, and type of feedback	221
7.6 CONCLUSION.....	226
8. CONCLUSION.....	229

8.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	229
8.1.1 Praise and compliments	229
8.1.2 Praise in spoken and written academic discourse	232
8.1.3 Praise according to discipline	234
8.1.4 Criticism	236
8.2 DISCUSSION	237
8.2.1 The feedback exchange	238
8.2.1.1 <i>Factors affecting the choice of I-move</i>	241
8.2.1.2 <i>The student's R-move</i>	241
8.2.1.3 <i>Factors affecting the choice of F-move</i>	242
8.2.1.4 <i>Options for student uptake</i>	242
8.3 PEDAGOGICAL APPLICATIONS	243
8.4 FURTHER STUDY	250
8.5 CONCLUSION	252
9. REFERENCES	254
10. APPENDICES	288

ABSTRACT

While feedback in written academic discourse has been extensively studied, it is only relatively recently that the development of several academic corpora has allowed this feature of spoken academic discourse to be closely examined. This thesis consists of four related studies, all of which use discourse samples obtained from the BASE and Michigan corpora to investigate interpersonal issues in the university classroom, specifically those relating to praise and criticism. In a comparison of praise in an academic context with compliments in ordinary speech, praise was found to have different discourse functions. Praise in spoken academic discourse was also compared with positive feedback in various types of written academic English, and it was found that less variation in form was evident in the spoken contexts investigated. A study of the relationship between types of praise and discipline area did not suggest that they were linked. Finally, when negative feedback was examined in the same contexts, it was discovered to take a range of forms, and the data suggest that in this case choice of form may be linked to discipline, context, and type of activity.

Feedback in the university classroom is usually explored as a purely pedagogical phenomenon. By showing the different forms that feedback can take in different contexts, it is hoped that this study will add an understanding of the surrounding interpersonal issues, particularly those involving face. This work also provides categorizations of positive and negative feedback, developing a feedback with applications for teacher development. The findings are potentially useful for non-native English speaking students who need to make a sometimes difficult transition from participating in the IRF sequences encountered in the

language classroom, and acclimatize themselves to academic spoken contexts in the university.

STATEMENT OF CANDIDATE

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled "Praise in University Seminars: Its Form, Function and Use" has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of a requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anne McLellan Howard', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Anne McLellan Howard, 40380017

December 8, 2011

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is my pleasure to acknowledge the many people who have helped me over the years that I have been working on this dissertation. First thanks go to my supervisor Dr. Jill Murray. Jill very kindly took on the work of supervising me at my own request, and was helpful and enthusiastic while unselfishly giving her time and effort. Having made a study of feedback for the past five years, I can say with confidence that hers was always excellent, both useful and encouraging.

I owe a great deal of thanks to my parents, brothers and sister and their spouses who have always supported me even when I spent my entire vacation with them writing in the basement. Special thanks go to my sister Amanda Howard, a linguist herself, who gave many valuable suggestions and also read the manuscript in its entirety.

Although all of the faculty and staff of Miyazaki International College were always supportive, there were several people without whom I literally would not have finished. Two consecutive Deans of Faculty, Bern Mulvey and Micheál Thompson, provided a atmosphere conducive to research. Debra J. Occhi helped me come up with the initial idea and helped me with many of the subsequent ideas as well. Peter Verbeek and Perna Sud were very patient in helping me with the statistics. Janette Ryan and Julia Christmas quietly took on extra work so that I would have time to write. Andrew Gladman and I went through much of the program together and he and his wife, Tehmina Gladman gave me a great deal of support. Much computer help was provided by Micheal Cooper and Anderson Passos. Micheal also read the manuscript through and was always available for late night hysterical Skype sessions.

Finally I must mention my students, who inspired this project, and continue to inspire me every day with their enthusiasm, motivation, and kindness.

My father Raymond Howard was a teacher of Russian and ESOL and had a life-long fascination with languages and language learning. His stories of his own learning and teaching inspired me to try teaching and to continue my studies in graduate school. He died as this thesis was being completed and it is dedicated to him.