Key Constructs in Language Teaching

Feedback Literacy

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Abstract
This paper introduces the construct of feedback literacy, charts its development and highlights key research findings from applied linguistics. The concept of feedback literacy originated in higher education research and has been enthusiastically taken up in L2 writing and English for Academic Purposes. Feedback literacy involves working with feedback information to enhance performance or ongoing learning. Undergraduate students need student feedback literacy; their instructors need complementary teacher feedback literacy to scaffold student feedback literacy; and university scholars themselves need academic feedback literacy to publish research, manage peer review and enhance their teaching. Applied linguistics research on feedback literacy has focused on various aspects, such as peer feedback and written corrective feedback, and also started to investigate less heavily researched sub-topics, such as feedback seeking and exemplars. The interplay between automated writing evaluation, generative AI as a feedback source and student feedback literacy is addressed. The article concludes with a discussion of limitations and critiques of feedback literacy research and suggests some further research directions.

1 Introduction

Applied linguistics is an interdisciplinary field flourishing through productive relationships with other disciplines like sociology, psychology, anthropology, cognitive science, and computer science (Chong, Nie & Liu, 2025; Widdowson, 2006). A significant value of applied linguistics research lies in its intersection with these other cognate disciplines, particularly the parent discipline of education. The topic of this paper is feedback literacy which emanates from research within the field of higher education pedagogy, and has been taken up enthusiastically within L2 writing and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). In essence, feedback literacy represents competencies to make the most of feedback opportunities of different kinds. These opportunities may arise from self-feedback, peer review, generative AI (GenAI) feedback or feedback from an authority figure: a teacher in school or university, a line manager in the workplace or a reviewer for a journal.

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One of the main goals of the paper is to illustrate the interplay between research in higher education pedagogy and applied linguistics research. The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. I define key terms and explain different feedback literacies: student feedback literacy, peer feedback literacy, teacher feedback literacy, and academic feedback literacy. I discuss feedback literacy research in applied linguistics, noting disjunctions between written corrective feedback (WCF) in applied linguistics and feedback literacy principles in higher education research. I synthesize some of the key applied linguistics research informed by feedback literacy, including work on feedback seeking and exemplars. I chart the development and implementation of feedback literacy scale development. I address the interplay between feedback literacy and student use of automated feedback tools, including GenAI. I conclude with some challenges and future directions for feedback literacy research.

2 Definitions

At the outset, I wish to clarify and define key terms used in this paper. The term 'feedback' carries somewhat different meanings to learners and teachers, depending on their background, experiences and educational philosophies. Is it information about performance provided by a peer, teacher or non-human agent or is it more of a process of considered action leading to the closing of a feedback loop? The feedback as information perspective has its adherents, including no less an authority than John Hattie (e.g. Hattie & Timperley, 2007) but it fails to account fully for what learners do with the information: do they engage with it, or perhaps not even look at it because of emotional responses to the grade? I subscribe to views of feedback as processes through which students generate and make sense of performance-relevant information and use it to develop their work and/or learning strategies (after Carless & Young, 2025). According to this way of thinking, the role of teachers is more than providing information about performance, it places emphasis on them designing learning environments in which students can seek, generate and use feedback. In this conception, information becomes feedback when it involves some kind of considered action by the learner e.g. principled uptake or deliberative decision-making in resolving to adapt, or even reject, a suggestion.

Defining feedback literacy is perhaps somewhat less complicated in that it follows from the above conceptualization of feedback. A well-recognized definition of student feedback literacy is the understandings, capacities and dispositions needed to make sense of information and use it to enhance work or learning strategies (Carless & Boud, 2018). This definition is heavily cited and widely accepted, although arguably it underplays the learner role in seeking and generating feedback information. This leads to a revised definition of student feedback literacy as the capacities and dispositions to seek, generate and use feedback information for enhancement purposes (Leenknecht & Carless, 2023).

These definitions of feedback and feedback literacy place particular emphasis on pro-active roles of individual learners, placing them at the center of feedback processes. In this way of thinking, feedback is not someone else telling us what to do, but a process where our own goals and self-judgements are central. Accordingly, self-regulated learning, metacognition and self-assessment form part of the theoretical supports for student feedback literacy (Yan & Carless, 2022). A notable example of applied linguistics research taking a metacognitive perspective is that of Teng and Ma who developed and validated a metacognition-based student feedback literacy scale. A key contribution of their work lies in its conceptualization of student feedback literacy in academic writing from a meta-cognitive perspective (Teng & Ma, 2024).

3 Student Feedback Literacy

The purpose of feedback is to support the development of student learning so it was logical for feedback literacy research to begin with a focus on students. Sutton (2012) introduced the notion of student

feedback literacy from an academic literacies perspective and defined it as the ability to read, interpret and use written feedback. Carless and Boud (2018) took this starting-point further by proposing an influential student feedback literacy framework of appreciating feedback (perceiving its value), making sound academic judgments (judging quality), managing affect (working with the emotions) and taking action (making deliberative use of feedback information). For learners to be able to benefit from feedback, they need to interpret it, consider it and then use it in enhancing their ongoing work (Carless, 2025). Two key illustrative learning activities to stimulate the development student feedback literacy are recommended: well-designed peer feedback and purposeful use of exemplars (Carless & Boud, 2018).

Theoretical underpinnings for student feedback literacy mainly lie in the related learning theories of social constructivism and sociocultural approaches. Socio-constructivist approaches to feedback place emphasis on co-constructing inferences from feedback information through social and relational interaction (e.g. Wood, 2021). A good example of social constructivist feedback literacy research involved a four-year longitudinal case study of a single learner finding that experiencing successful feedback uptake is a significant factor in enhancing self-efficacy and encouraging the development of student feedback literacy (Carless & Young, 2025).

Sociocultural approaches view learning development as occurring through mediated interaction building on Vygotskyan thought. Relevant research links feedback literacy to sociocultural learning theories both within higher education studies (e.g. Rovagnati & Pitt, 2022) and within L2 writing (e.g. Lee, 2021; Liu & Yu, 2022). Sociocultural approaches to feedback hold that meaning-making of feedback is a collective undertaking mediated via activity within social and cultural contexts, including norms of disciplinary practice (Esterhazy & Damşa, 2019). A notable sociocultural study involves an ecological model of student feedback literacy showing how individual and contextual layers of student engagement with feedback are influenced by various micro and macro factors (Chong, 2021). In EAP, Li and Han (2024) drew on these ecological perspectives to explore feedback seeking of two international postgraduate learners and found that students navigate and adjust to feedback ecologies.

4 Peer Feedback Literacy

Peer feedback is a central plank of student feedback literacy because it is a key element of pro-active student roles in feedback processes (Carless & Boud, 2018). Peer feedback, also known as student peer review, offers a way of engaging with criteria, making comparisons between own work and that of others, and undergoing the rich cognitive process of composing commentary (Nicol & McCallum, 2022). The hope that peers may offer insightful comments is not the main point because clearly teachers, or even GenAI, are better qualified to do that.

Peer feedback has attracted a lot of interest both in applied linguist research and higher education research. Peer feedback is relatively complex to implement because there are a range of student, teacher, disciplinary and contextual factors that impact on its success. In order to benefit from participation in peer feedback, learners need a set of competencies that have been termed as peer feedback literacy defined as learners' attitudes and capacities for productive engagement with providing and receiving peer feedback (Dong, Gao & Schunn, 2023). A longitudinal study undertaken over an 18-week semester examined eleven rounds of peer feedback amongst three EFL case study students, finding that learner agency as exemplified by proactivity and reflection were significant markers of student feedback literacy development (Zhang et al., 2023). A study of the behavioral dimensions of peer feedback literacy conducted with 844 high school students from nine schools in the United States confirmed a moderate correlation between the ability to provide quality feedback and the use of feedback (Zhang, Schunn & Wu, 2024). Methodologically, this study offers a useful contribution to student feedback literacy research in focusing on students' behaviors rather than self-reports, and other studies may want to follow this line of data collection.

5 Teacher Feedback Literacy

Undergraduate students often find interpreting and using feedback a challenging undertaking, so there is a realisation that instructors need a set of teacher feedback literacy competencies to support students in becoming pro-active participants in feedback exchanges (Boud & Dawson, 2023; Carless & Winstone, 2023). Teacher feedback literacy is defined as the knowledge, expertise and dispositions to design feedback processes in ways which enable student uptake of feedback and seed the development of student feedback literacy (Carless & Winstone, 2023). Teachers need to design for feedback uptake or have a principled feedback strategy that enables feedback processes to flourish. Importantly, student feedback literacy and teacher feedback literacy mutually interact and ideally need to proceed hand-in-hand (Carless & Winstone, 2023; Matthews et al., 2024).

Teacher feedback literacy has hitherto been somewhat less heavily researched than student feedback literacy but is gaining momentum both in higher education (e.g. Carless, 2023; Tai et al., 2023) and applied linguistics (e.g. Lee, 2021; Lee & Mao, 2024; Wu, Yu & Luo, 2023). Icy Lee takes a sociocultural approach to writing teacher feedback literacy through a tripartite framework of formative assessment, sociocultural perspectives and language teacher competence (Lee, 2021). Multimodal feedback literacy is proposed as an aspect of teacher feedback literacy for L2 writing teachers through designing feedback-mediated communication, recognizing the affordances of multiple feedback-giving modes, orchestrating students' feedback understandings and uptake, and managing feedback ensemble as the outcome of orchestration (Jiang, Lee & Yu, 2024).

6 Academic Feedback Literacy

Academic feedback literacy is defined as the capabilities and dispositions that academics need to self-assess accurately then elicit, reflect upon and use feedback information for enhancement purposes (Carless, 2025). The essence of academic feedback literacy involves perceptive self-assessment informed by feedback seeking to stimulate further development in the multi-faceted domains of academic work. Academic feedback literacy is fundamentally important because higher education professionals are required to evidence their own professional growth in order to meet the high standards, and intensifying demands, of neo-liberal academic institutions.

Research on academics' feedback literacy has so far predominantly focused on handling peer review in relation to submissions for publication (Chong & Gao, 2025; Chong & Mason, 2021; Gravett et al., 2020). Research using interviews and concept maps revealed that authors use peer review developmentally but also engage in 'game-playing' and strategic approaches (Gravett et al., 2020). Through an auto-ethnographic perspective, Chong and Mason (2021) show how reviewers design opportunities for feedback uptake, navigate responsibilities, and reflect on their feedback experiences. Academic feedback literacy for research success beyond peer review merits further attention, including feedback seeking strategies in enhancing articles prior to formal journal submission.

Academic feedback literacy is also pertinent to how higher education professionals enhance their teaching. Relevant strategies include: eliciting, processing and using mid-semester feedback from students; reporting back to students how feedback loops have been closed; significant feedback conversations within informal networks; and generating feedback through purposeful peer observations focused upon targeted areas for development (Carless, 2025). Academic feedback literacy is a new sub-dimension of feedback literacy, inviting further exploration in relation to different aspects of academic work.

7 Feedback Literacy and Applied Linguistics Research

There have been numerous applied linguistics studies that have drawn on or been guided by feedback literacy. In their review of feedback literacy research up to March 2022, Nieminen and Carless (2023) identified twelve studies focused on EAP and academic writing out of a total of 49 studies in their data-set. By a wide margin, the most represented disciplinary context for feedback literacy research was English language studies. In view of this finding, coverage below is necessarily selective rather than exhaustive.

Yueting Xu is one of the pioneers of feedback literacy research in applied linguistics (Han & Xu, 2020, 2021; Xu & Carless, 2017). Teacher feedback literacy was investigated through a case study of an outstanding teacher, revealing two interdependent enabling activities: cognitive scaffolding with criteria and exemplars, and social-affective support in developing trust and reducing peer competition (Xu & Carless, 2017). Multiple-case studies of three Chinese master's students taking an academic writing course showed that student feedback literacy improved at varying paces with cognitive aspects advancing faster than metacognitive or emotional dimensions (Han & Xu, 2020). Case studies of two Chinese undergraduate students' feedback literacy over a 16-week period analyzed learner factors in engagement with WCF, highlighting the contextual, emergent, and situated nature of student feedback literacy (Han & Xu, 2021).

Feedback literacy concepts have been readily applied to L2 writing, not least in the journal *Assessing Writing*. Yu, Di Zhang and Liu (2022) defined L2 writing student feedback literacy as students' knowledge, beliefs and skills in appreciating, evaluating and using feedback. L1 writing feedback literacy was found to have a positive effect on L2 writing feedback literacy amongst English majors in a Chinese university, and exerted an indirect influence on L2 writing performance (Lu et al., 2024). Student feedback literacy development in L2 academic writing is underpinned by foundational knowledge (linguistic, genre, disciplinary, and emotional) and is enabled through social scaffolding from teachers and peers (Yu & Liu, 2021).

There is a dearth of research linking the analysis of exemplars to the development of student feedback literacy. The recent qualitative synthesis of research on the potential of exemplars in EAP to scaffold the development of student feedback literacy is therefore particularly useful (Curtis, Chong & Kong, 2025), not least because it exemplifies an argument made at the outset in developing synergies between applied linguistics and education. These authors relate the concept of 'noticing' (Schmidt, 1990) to exemplars in that learners identify useful features in exemplars and transfer them to their own work. An important recommendation from the higher education pedagogy literature is that teachers are encouraged to require students to produce a draft or outline prior to exposure to exemplars so that students develop some ownership of their work and feel less inclined to copy unproductively from exemplars (Carless, 2022). Further research at the interplay of exemplars and student feedback literacy is highly recommended.

Student feedback literacy represent has been more extensively researched than teacher feedback literacy, yet there are also worthwhile studies of how teachers develop their feedback practice. An innovative attempt at researching teacher feedback literacy involved gauging perceptions and experiences of a teacher and her students in their co-construction of feedback processes in the same postgraduate academic writing class (Xu et al., 2024). This study exemplifies an important dimension of mutual interaction in the co-development of student and teacher feedback literacy (cf. Carless & Winstone, 2023; Matthews et al., 2024).

Applied linguistics research has also explored the analogous topic of assessment literacy, particularly language teacher assessment literacy. Feedback literacy can reasonably be seen as a sub-component of a broader notion of assessment literacy. Teacher assessment literacy for language teachers is a vibrant and flourishing research area (e.g. Levi & Inbar-Lourie, 2020; Vogt, Bøhn & Tsagari, 2024). The essence of teacher assessment literacy is the knowledge of principles and the practical skills that teachers need

to design and implement assessment effectively. The topic of student assessment literacy in language education is sorely under-investigated, although the pioneering work of Butler, Peng and Lee (2021) shows the potential of young learners to elaborate their views of assessment. There is an urgent need for more research on student assessment literacy in applied linguistics because students' understandings of assessment standards, task types and criteria are fundamental to test performance, success in assignments of different types and broader learning development. Research in higher education pedagogy offers some starting points in suggesting the power of students applying criteria, evaluating exemplars and self-assessing accurately (Smith et al., 2013; Zhu & Evans, 2022).

8 Written Corrective Feedback and Student Feedback Literacy

Feedback research in applied linguistics has tended to be dominated by written corrective feedback (WCF). More than a brief treatment of this topic is beyond the scope of the current paper but a few observations are in order. The effectiveness of WCF has long been questioned, at least since the seminal paper by Truscott (1996) but it seems to attract long-standing interest from applied linguistics researchers, and is clearly a commonly used strategy amongst English language educators in many parts of the world, perhaps particularly at school-level. Teacher correction of student grammatical errors positions the learner rather passively, incongruent with the pro-active roles envisaged by student feedback literacy research.

WCF may lead to superficial revisions without deep understanding, cause cognitive overload, fail to promote long-term accuracy, demotivate learners and hinder broader development of macro aspects, such as content and organization (Karim & Nassaji, 2020; Lee, 2020; Lee, 2024). WCF as a teaching strategy fails to account for feedback as a learning resource within the goals and individual characteristics of language learners in that they only benefit from WCF if they seek, process, and use it (Papi et al., 2020). Distinctions are made between focused WCF targeting specific language forms and comprehensive WCF aiming to address all perceived errors. Focused WCF might be potentially beneficial in enhancing students' written accuracy and promoting students' engagement in revising work, as well as encouraging development of teachers' feedback literacy in broadening their feedback practices (Lee, Luo & Mak, 2021).

The concept of student feedback literacy has potential for advancing WCF (e.g. Boggs & Manchón, 2023). These authors recommend increased focus on the role of L2 students' feedback histories and previous experiences of writing and feedback, including as an L1 writer. Students' feedback histories have also been discussed in the higher education literature in emphasizing the diversity of students' prior feedback experiences affecting how they view and approach feedback (Rovagnati, Pitt & Winstone, 2022).

A multiple case study approach explored feedback literacy and engagement (cognitive, behavioral, affective) with WCF among three beginner Japanese as a Foreign Language learners during a first-year university course in the United States, finding that participants drew on L1 writing experiences to address errors, using WCF to reflect on and adjust learning processes (Takahashi, 2025). This research is one of relatively few applied linguistics studies of student feedback literacy within languages other than English.

Feedback literacy research takes a contrasting perspective to WCF in that it places learners at the center of their own development. How feedback literacy is aligned, reconciled with or inharmonious with WCF remains an open question? Low-level error correction is somewhat incongruent with the definition of feedback provided at the outset of this paper. At the risk of challenging the status quo, is WCF an over-researched topic, and is it perhaps time for applied linguistics to move beyond WCF? Whilst it is important for learners to achieve grammatical accuracy as part of precise communication, laborious teacher error correction is not sustainable or even fully desirable, and content is surely even more

important. Furthermore, there are a range of automated feedback tools available, including AI-driven platforms, such as Automated writing evaluation (AWE) and Grammarly (Ding & Zou, 2024). Perhaps there is a certain amount of cultural influence or even inertia maintaining WCF but arguably it needs less, rather than more, research. There are a number of more productive, learner-centered approaches worth exploring, drawing on feedback literacy principles, including feedback seeking. Accordingly, various applied linguistic publications led by Mostafa Papi recommend a shift from WCF to feedback seeking which we turn to next.

9 Feedback Seeking

An aspect of the pro-active learner roles envisaged by student feedback literacy research is feedback seeking. The concept of feedback seeking has a long-history in organisational fields, such as the workplace, and is attracting increased interest in higher education (Leenknecht & Carless, 2023). Feedback seeking involves purposely seeking information about performance, interpreting it and applying it (Anseel et al., 2015).

Feedback seeking strategies are conventionally conceptualized as inquiry or monitoring: inquiry is based on eliciting feedback through asking purposeful questions to others; and monitoring involves inferring cues from the learning environment (Leenknecht & Carless, 2023). Monitoring is more commonly carried out by students because it entails less cost to self-image or emotions than inquiry (Leenknecht, Hompus & van der Schaaf, 2019). Judicious sequences of combined monitoring and inquiry seem particularly useful as a feedback literate strategy in reducing limitations of relying predominantly on either monitoring or inquiry (Zhou, Carless & Nieminen, 2025).

A three-year longitudinal inquiry into oral feedback seeking of a single case study learner used sociocultural discourse analysis to showcase interthinking, and the interweaving of cumulative and exploratory talk in transcripts of interaction on work-in-progress (Carless & Young, 2024). Oral feedback is potentially more engaging, negotiated and personal than written feedback. A review of oral feedback in L2 classrooms demonstrates that there are a range of interpersonal factors that influence student engagement with oral feedback, including trusting relationships and management of emotions (Yu, Wang & Teo, 2018). Working with emotions productively forms part of student reflective feedback literacy: considered analysis of experience in preparing for, participating in, and following-up feedback seeking interactions (Carless & Young, 2024). Oral feedback research from a feedback literacy perspective seems ripe for further investigation, including analyzing transcripts of oral feedback interactions.

Feedback seeking has been introduced into second language education by Mostafa Papi of Florida State University, offering a further example of inter-disciplinary transfer to applied linguistics. Feedback seeking in second language education is defined as learners' strategic attempts to gather and use feedback information on their L2 performance (Papi et al., 2020). Questionnaire data from 287 college students studying foreign languages in the United States found that learners make calculated decisions regarding whether to seek feedback, by what method, and from what source, based on their own perceptions of the costs and values associated with different feedback-seeking strategies, which are, in turn, largely predicted by language learners' mindsets and achievement goals (Papi et al., 2019). A mixed methods study of foreign language learners in North America shows that language learners' trust in their teacher shapes students' beliefs about the costs and benefits of feedback seeking behavior, thereby influencing their engagement in feedback seeking (Mahbodi, Papi & Wolff, 2025). The feedback seeking strategy of monitoring enhanced content, organization, language use and overall essay quality, whereas WCF only improved language use, so it seems that the quality of students' feedback seeking plays a role in the effectiveness of WCF (Papi, Abdi Tabari & Sato, 2024). Integrating feedback seeking with WCF could be a useful way of resuscitating WCF e.g. students pro-actively request feedback or correction of their own self-selected linguistic challenges.

This work is illustrative of a point I made at the outset. Applied linguistics is well-served when it takes an interdisciplinary concept (in this case feedback seeking) and integrates it into second language education research. There are also emerging beginnings in integrating feedback seeking, feedback literacy and EAP. Based on a qualitative study of two EAP international master's students' feedback seeking, it is suggested that feedback seeking behaviors may influence student feedback literacy (Li & Han, 2024). This conceptual linkage aligns with views that feedback seeking and feedback literacy are interdependent and mutually reinforcing in that regular and principled feedback seeking develops feedback literacy capacities, and conversely that feedback literate individuals are more disposed to seek feedback (Leenknecht & Carless, 2023).

10 Measurement Scales and The Development of Feedback Literacy

Once feedback literacy was established as an important area of research and practice, scholars started to think about how to measure it and how it can be enhanced over time. Following the chronology of feedback literacy research sketched above, scale development first focused on student feedback literacy. Several scales for measuring student feedback literacy have been developed, and the most promising ones in higher education research seem to be Zhan (2022), developed and validated with 555 students from mainland China; and Dawson et al. (2023) which focuses on what students do with feedback rather than what they think they should do. In applied linguistics, there are two promising examples of L2 student feedback literacy scales (Yu, Di Zhang & Liu, 2022; Zhu, Balloo, Medland & Hosein, 2025).

There is also a scale for peer feedback literacy developed in the context of English academic writing in North East China (Dong, Gao & Schunn, 2023), and used in recent research. Peer feedback literacy development was evidenced in a 12-week L2 writing course for Chinese undergraduates through design elements in the peer feedback intervention, such as training and use of assessment criteria, and positioning group peer review as collaborative rather than a personal critique (Liu & Luo, 2025). A mixed methods study of English majors over an 18-week semester demonstrated peer feedback literacy development in terms of appreciating peer feedback, negotiation agency, feedback-related knowledge and abilities, and capacities in revising work (Zhang et al., 2025). Although there are some concerns about proliferation of literacies (Nieminen & Carless, 2023), peer feedback literacy is probably an attractive area for further research.

Given the chronology of feedback literacy research and that scales have only recently become available, research measuring the development of student feedback literacy over time is only just beginning to gain momentum. Responding to a modified version of the Zhan (2022) questionnaire, students reported improvements in their feedback literacy over a 16-week semester, having experienced well-designed feedback activities: peer feedback training, explanation of assessment criteria, peer and teacher feedback and opportunities to revise work (Zhang & Mao, 2023). This study offers insights into developmental mechanisms for student feedback literacy through a deliberate instructional design that scaffolds the learning process in staged feedback processes. A semester long intervention with Chinese EFL learners reported in Zheng, Boud and Dawson (2025) focused on the behavioral dimension of student feedback literacy using the Dawson et al. (2023) scale, identifying learner agency through reflection and proactivity as being influential factors in student feedback literacy development.

Existing studies over the period of a single semester are somewhat limited in their analysis of the longer-term development of student feedback literacy in that sustained progress transcends a single course. Further mixed methods research offering a judicious combination of quantitative and qualitative data over a longer time period are highly recommended. Quantitative longitudinal studies of feedback literacy development at three or more time periods would also be useful, in that longitudinal research is normally defined as involving a minimum of three waves of data collection (Ployhart & Ward, 2011).

There is also emerging interest in measuring teacher feedback literacy, more so in applied linguistics than general education. The development and validation of a scale on L2 writing teacher feedback

literacy involved three factors: perceived knowledge, values, and perceived skills (Lee, Karaca & Inan, 2023). A writing assessment feedback literacy scale for EFL teachers has also been developed (Wang, Derakhshan, Pan & Ghiasvand, 2023). The development of these two scales seemed to proceed roughly concurrently and were published within a month of each other in April-May 2023.

Finally, and leading it to the next section, a 39-item student feedback literacy scale for the GenAI context has also been developed (Cui, Meng, Qian & Tang, 2025). The scale comprises four main dimensions: cognitive (feedback knowledge and appreciation), behavioral (prompting skills, judgment, and enacting), affective (emotional recognition, engagement readiness, and commitment to change), and ethical (feedback ethics). This scale aims to evaluate students' competencies in engaging with feedback in AI-supported learning environments, including highlighting ethical considerations in AI-mediated feedback, such as identifying bias and considering fairness (Cui et al., 2025). I now turn to automated feedback and student feedback literacy.

11 Automated Feedback Tools and Student Feedback Literacy

Automated tools, such as AWE and GenAI are increasingly common sources of feedback. The role of AWE as a tool for error-correction and the development of academic writing is a subject of considerable interest, particularly in the context of EFL in mainland China, including two recent review articles (Ding & Zou, 2024; Fu, Zou, Xie & Cheng, 2024). AWE systems carry potential for enhancing academic writing through instant, personalized feedback that promotes revisions and cognitive engagement (Barrot, 2023). L2 students' digital literacy effects student engagement with AWE feedback on L2 writing and involves an ability to evaluate digital information, and a willingness to use digital technologies for peer collaboration (Zhang & Hyland, 2025). A key challenge for AWE lies in superficial engagement, in which students correct errors without understanding the underlying rationale (Koltovskaia, 2020). This kind of scenario represents a barrier for automated forms of WCF in that student feedback literacy is needed to enhance student engagement beyond superficial compliance.

Teacher feedback literacy in relation to AWE could support the development of student feedback literacy but as yet there is little relevant research. Case studies of two L2 writing teachers working on a combined human-AWE tool illustrated that teacher feedback literacy evolved when innovative pedagogical designs prompted critical reflection, reinforcing that teacher feedback literacy is an ongoing developmental process molded by situated social practice (Wu, Yu & Luo, 2023). A tighter coupling of AWE with teacher and student feedback literacy is a potential ongoing research direction.

An increasingly common source of feedback is GenAI, not least in view of its ready availability as a personal tutor or dialogue partner. There is a rapidly developing literature related to student feedback literacy for GenAI, in both applied linguistics and higher education pedagogical research. In comparison with AWE, GenAI distinguishes itself by providing more sophisticated, context-aware, higher-level feedback (Kohnke, 2024). A study of Iranian EFL students demonstrated that an experimental group using the AI-based writing assistant Wordtune showed significant improvements in writing outcomes, engagement and feedback literacy compared to the control group (Rad, Alipour & Jafarpour, 2024). Other applied linguistics research has touched upon the issues of digital feedback literacy. For example, a study of pre-service TESOL students in Germany demonstrated how a screencast feedback intervention stimulated the development of digital student feedback literacy in terms of enhanced understandings and appreciations of feedback potentials (Schluer, 2022). Digital student feedback literacy does not yet seem to be clearly defined, but appears to indicate students' cognitive and technical competencies in generating, evaluating and using digital information.

What might be the feedback literacies that students need for effective use of GenAI as a feedback source? Zhan and Yan (2025) suggest a five-component framework for student feedback literacy for GenAI: prompt engineering for writing and fine-tuning prompts; evaluative judgment of GenAI outputs;

emotional reflexivity in adjusting extent of trust in GenAI; metacognitive skills for self-regulation; and ethical decision-making in using GenAI feedback. A recent study of GenAI feedback literacy discusses how university-level Chinese EFL learners interpret, evaluate and apply automated feedback, suggesting that frequency of GenAI use is a significant facilitator of GenAI feedback literacy (Liu & Deris, 2025).

To make the most of GenAI, learners need to ask purposeful questions and follow-up as appropriate; verify and think critically about GenAI outputs; avoid over-reliance on GenAI; and use GenAI ethically and transparently. We might call these learner capabilities: feedback literacy for GenAI use, and they seem likely to be a sustained future research endeavor.

12 Challenges, Critiques and Future Research Directions

There has been a spate of studies in both higher education and applied linguistics since the publication of the seminal Carless and Boud (2018) paper. What are some key challenges and future directions for feedback literacy research in applied linguistics and beyond? Below I offer some updates to the critical review of the first stage of feedback literacy research by Nieminen and Carless (2023).

Carless and Boud (2018) took a humanist perspective in highlighting the agency of participants to make the most of feedback opportunities of different kinds. As Gravett (2022) points out, however, this position tends to assume more agency than students and teachers typically possess because social, material, spatial, temporal and institutional factors often constrain agency in relation to feedback. Studies that take this sociomaterial perspective are starting to gain momentum in higher education (Gravett & Carless, 2024; Tai et al., 2023; Wood, 2024), and offer food for thought for applied linguistics.

What kind of future research is needed to advance feedback literacy studies? More theoretically ambitious work would be welcomed, including a broader array of theoretical lenses beyond well-established sociocultural and social-constructivist learning theories. A wider theoretical toolbox could include more studies deploying activity theory, cultural historical activity theory, theory of practice architectures, actor-network theory or self-determination theory. Deeper understandings of the interplay between human and non-human feedback sources are also needed. In particular, to what extent might GenAI feedback supplement or even replace some aspects of teachers' marking and feedback roles? The ability to offer nuance, for example, seems to be a distinguishing marker of human as opposed to GenAI feedback. Recognition of agency and mutual vulnerability represents a uniquely human element of feedback (Corbin, Tai & Flenady, 2025).

To advance the field further, increased rigor and depth of research methodologies would be useful. In view of the purpose of feedback to advance student learning, emphasis on what the student does seems well-justified. Students' perceptions of feedback are valuable but it is necessary to understand more about how students generate feedback; what they do with feedback inputs; and how they make decisions as to what to do. Increased focus on students' behaviors in feedback literacy research seems a worthwhile endeavor. A parallel increased depth or variety of research methodologies is also recommended. For example, Li and Han (2024) contribute to the toolbox of research methodologies in feedback literacy research by using stimulated recall based on students' essays and related feedback reports to initiate discussion of how students understood, perceived and acted upon feedback information. More feedback literacy research using stimulated recall, think aloud protocols or artefact data analyzing how students use feedback, would be useful.

Fine-grained qualitative longitudinal research would also be valuable, particularly ethnographically-oriented studies of the development of student feedback literacy. A parallel line of investigation could explore how and why teachers enhance their feedback literacy over time, and the inter-relationships between development of student feedback literacy and teacher feedback literacy. These kinds of slower, more thoughtful research designs are worthwhile but perhaps impeded because of pressure to publish often and frequently. For full development of feedback literacy and other research fields, we need sophisticated rather than rushed analysis.

13 Conclusion

This paper has discussed the concept of feedback literacy and illustrated some of its main applications in applied linguistics and general higher education. I recommend more applied linguistics feedback literacy research on feedback seeking, the use of exemplars, and GenAI as a feedback source and corresponding less on the outdated topic of WCF. One of the main conceptual contributions of the paper is to demonstrate the benefits to applied linguistics of borrowing and adapting educational concepts that arise outside language education.

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