

***Written corrective feedback information in a digital environment: Can corpus linguistic methods uncover patterns of differentiation by recipient ethnicity?***

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Attainment disparity between Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) and White students is an ongoing concern within the higher education (HE) sector. Our work seeks to better understand institutional practices and policies that may contribute to ethnic attainment disparity, specifically in relation to written feedback given to students. We previously developed a new functional framework to investigate whether this feedback can be differentiated according to the variable of discipline (Alsop and Gardner 2019). Our framework is comprised of five functions ('advice', 'critique', 'observation', 'praise', 'query'). Each function is subdivided three times, firstly by focus (e.g. 'advice' splits into 'suggestion' and 'instruction'), then by orientation ('specific' or 'general'), and then by aspect ('future' or 'present'). We found that it was possible to differentiate feedback nature based on discipline. In this paper, we use this framework to investigate whether a relationship exists between students' ethnicity, grade attained, and language patterns within the written feedback they receive. To do so, we applied our framework to 50 texts written to students from different ethnic backgrounds within a single discipline in a post-92 HE institution in the UK. We will discuss findings from the analysis of this small dataset. Preliminary results indicate that little differentiation is evident in terms of the categorisation of feedback at the highest level of overall function in relation to binary self-identified ethnicity (BAME and White), but more granular investigation of function indicates some language differentiation. Overall, there is greater language differentiation at the level of particular functions within BAME populations than between White and BAME populations. We do not propose a direct causal relationship between the language of written feedback and student ethnicity, but rather suggest that feedback may constitute one means by which certain (already disadvantaged) groups of students are further, and cumulatively, disengaged by higher education practices.