

APPRAISAL OF TEACHERS' COMMENTS ON PRIMARY STUDENTS' REPORTS: A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: November 2024 Revised: January 2025 Published: April 2025	<i>This study investigates how teachers employ appraisal attitude resources—specifically affect, judgment, and appreciation—in their written comments on primary students' report cards, using the analytical lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Drawing on a qualitative phenomenological case study design, the research analyzed 30 teacher comments drawn from three subject areas: Mathematics, Language Arts, and Mandarin. The data collection also involved unstructured interviews with teachers to gain deeper insight into their comment-writing practices and underlying intentions. The analysis revealed a marked dominance of judgment resources, with 69 instances noted, which primarily conveyed evaluations of students' capabilities, behaviors, and attitudes toward learning. This was followed by 32 instances of appreciation, used to recognize the quality of students' work or learning outcomes. The least frequent were affect resources, with only 15 instances, indicating that emotional engagement or references to students' feelings were not a central focus in most comments. This distribution underscores a pedagogical emphasis on assessing students through their actions and academic performances rather than their emotional experiences. The study concludes by emphasizing the need for greater awareness of the linguistic resources teachers use in feedback and suggests that professional development in appraisal language could help teachers craft more holistic, meaningful, and student-centered evaluations.</i>
Keywords Attitude resources; Teachers' comments; Systemic functional linguistics; Writing reports; Appraisal attitudes;	
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INTRODUCTION

Writing meaningful comments on student reports is one of the more nuanced and intellectually demanding responsibilities of educators (Zabihi, 2018; Zhang et al., 2021). This task surpasses the mere technical listing of grades or achievements and instead requires a blend of linguistic awareness, empathy, creativity, and pedagogical insight (Xianwei et al., 2016; Yanthi et al., 2024). Particularly for novice teachers, crafting such comments can be daunting, as they may fall back on formulaic expressions or generic descriptors that fail to capture the complexity of a student's learning experience. Yet, report card comments hold the potential to function as a form of personalized narrative, chronicling the academic and social development of each student across a term. When used thoughtfully, they become a powerful mode of formative assessment and a reflection of the teacher's evaluative and relational competence.

The act of writing comments is, in essence, a narrative practice (Youssef, 2021; Vettori et al., 2025). It is rooted in the teacher's observation, interpretation, and representation of the student's academic and personal journey. Syilendra et al. (2024) argue that the narrative is not a linear recount but a constructed discourse that balances evaluation and encouragement. Teachers must use language to highlight not only what the student has achieved but also how they have grown—intellectually, behaviorally, and emotionally. Such reports are most

effective when they show progression: where the student began, what milestones they reached, which struggles were overcome, and what potential remains to be developed (Moloney & Oguro, 2015; Indarti et al., 2023). In this way, teachers act not only as assessors but also as storytellers of learning, framing each student's experience in a manner that is both affirming and instructive.

This narrative function of report writing places significant linguistic demands on teachers. They must be able to select language that is both precise and sensitive—able to convey praise, concern, and constructive critique without alienating or discouraging the student or their guardians (Grenner et al., 2020; Bachisi, 2023). This task is deeply interpersonal and rhetorical: it requires a calibrated tone, appropriate modality, and purposeful lexical choices. For instance, a teacher may need to temper a negative evaluation of a student's performance with an affective statement that acknowledges effort or emotional growth, such as: “Although Maya found mathematical concepts challenging early in the term, her perseverance and willingness to seek help demonstrated admirable resilience.” Such a sentence exemplifies the integration of judgment (of behavior), appreciation (of achievement), and affect (of emotion).

Indeed, from the perspective of systemic functional linguistics (SFL), particularly within the Appraisal framework developed by Martin and White (2005), teacher comments can be analyzed as complex configurations of evaluative language. The Appraisal framework classifies language use into three primary domains: affect (emotions), judgment (ethics and behavior), and appreciation (value and aesthetics). Through this lens, teacher narratives in student reports are not only pedagogical tools but also textual sites of interpersonal meaning-making. They reveal how teachers construct their relationships with students, how they negotiate authority and care, and how they communicate their educational values.

Moreover, narrative approaches in writing—as discussed by Cutler and Graham (2008)—suggest that writing tasks involving personal and creative expression are more effective in developing writing skills and engagement. Applying this concept to teachers' report writing indicates a shift from expository or administrative genres to expressive and individualized genres. Rather than viewing reports as bureaucratic documentation, they can be approached as a narrative writing exercise that allows teachers to reflect upon and communicate the richness of classroom life. Through narrative, teachers not only document student performance but also perform their own identity as attentive, caring, and reflective educators.

This study, therefore, focuses on the discursive strategies employed by teachers in constructing student report comments, with a particular emphasis on the Appraisal system within SFL. It seeks to explore what kinds of attitudinal resources teachers use when assessing student performance: how often they express affect (e.g., “John showed enthusiasm in class discussions”), judgment (e.g., “Lina consistently demonstrates responsibility in group work”), or appreciation (e.g., “Her final project was a well-organized and insightful analysis”). The study also investigates how these choices are linguistically realized and how they align with broader institutional, pedagogical, and interpersonal purposes.

By analyzing authentic teacher comments, this research uncovers the often-overlooked pedagogical and rhetorical work embedded in report writing. It sheds light on how teachers subtly manage the balance between evaluation and encouragement, criticism and care, objectivity and empathy. Furthermore, it examines how the linguistic resources available in English (or Indonesian) enable or constrain these aims. For example, how does a teacher signal improvement in a way that is both truthful and motivating? How are recurring challenges acknowledged without discouragement? Such questions are central to understanding not only the technical aspects of comment writing but also its affective and ideological dimensions.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the linguistic construction of teacher comments through the lens of the Appraisal system in SFL, a perspective rarely applied in the context of educational report writing. While previous research has often examined student writing using SFL or explored teacher feedback in the form of corrective responses, few studies have systematically analyzed the evaluative language used by teachers in formal written assessments like report cards. Furthermore, this study innovatively positions teacher report writing as a form of narrative discourse, thereby bridging the gap between functional linguistics and narrative pedagogy. It also contributes a new understanding of how teacher identity, emotion, and assessment intersect in textual practices. By highlighting the narrative and interpersonal nature of report comments, this research provides both theoretical insights and practical implications for teacher education, particularly in enhancing teachers' linguistic awareness and reflective practice in assessment writing.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This research uses the method of Discourse analysis for research question number one and two. Discourse analysis studies how language is utilized in spoken and written communication as well as other types of social interaction, focusing on the language is used in a social context. As Rosalind Gill (2000) has stated that when performing discourse analysis, you must question your own beliefs and the ways in which you typically interpret the world. The goal and outcome of a discourse analysis may not always be to provide definite solutions to a problem; rather, by examining a topic, it offers a fresher and broader perspective on the issue and exposes the subtle implications that are concealed behind the words, before letting the readers choose how to react to the analysis and ultimately create their own discourse.

Meanwhile, research question number three is analyzed using a phenomenological case study. A technique known as "bracketing" is used to analyze the data in a phenomenological case study. This entails putting aside the researcher's own beliefs and biases to enable a free and objective evaluation of the participant's experiences. When searching for the underlying significance of the phenomenon being investigated, the researchers then look for recurring themes and patterns in the data.

Even Heidegger (1962, p.50) acknowledged that "phenomenology" largely refers to a methodological paradigm. The same statement by Merlau-Ponty (1962) stated that, "phenomenology is accessible only through the phenomenological method" (1962, p. viii). Giorgi (2009, p. 98) is clear on this fundamental tenet of the qualitative research tradition when he emphasizes that "No claim that an analysis is phenomenological can be made without assumptions of the attitude of the phenomenological reduction." As a result, it appears that Husserlian phenomenological inquiry without the epoche.

Data and Source of Data

Primary data of this research is taken from direct interaction through interview with participants or the teachers as the subject. The questions used in the interview are unstructured to maintain flexibility of the subjects to answer the questions. Interviews are recorded with consent and with subjects' awareness. Primary data plays a crucial role in research as it involves the collection of data specifically for a particular research problem. Researchers gather primary data through various methods such as surveys, interviews, observations, or experiments. These data provide direct insights into the research topic and are tailored to meet the specific objectives of the study. In some cases, researchers may have the opportunity to add new data during the collection process, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

The secondary data is taken solely from the teachers' narrative comments. Secondary data of this research is taken from the report comment of the report cards from one international school located in Medan, North Sumatra. The report card is written twice a year or semestral. There are two main parts of the report card. First is the checklist part where the progress of learning outcomes is checked, and the other one is the teachers comment in which the subject teacher describe narratively the students' learning behavior, progress, and motivation statement.

Source of the data of this research are the three subject teachers. They are mathematics, language arts, and mandarin teachers. All the teachers are Indonesian, and the reports are written in English. The first data is taken from teacher one which is Maths teacher who has 4 years of teaching experience in total. Although graduating with a psychology bachelor, she has a passion for teaching and has spent 2 years teaching preschool and continued to her 2-year teaching at the elementary level. Meanwhile, data two is taken from teacher two, who is a freshly graduated teacher, she has been teaching since 2 years ago. This teacher graduated from a state university with a major in bilingual biology education, while her teaching subject is language arts. Data three, is taken from teacher three which is a mandarin teacher, who has 7 years of teaching experience in teaching mandarin from preschool to elementary level. She can fluently speak in Chinese and English, although these languages are not her mother tongue.

Data Analysis

The researcher begins the analysis by assigning numerical labels or codes to each identified datum, which helps categorize and organize the data into a coherent framework. These codes reflect various categories, themes, or emerging concepts within the content. One critical aspect of the process is data condensation, where only the most relevant information is selected for further analysis. This step involves careful decision-making to sift through raw data and determine which parts are essential for the study's objectives. In this case, the researcher initially took possession of all raw data, a move that may raise concerns about data integrity, as it potentially limits access for others and may introduce bias. After the data collection, a team of educators engages in a selection process, hand-picking the elements they deem significant for evaluation. This method, while intentional, is inherently subjective, as the educators' personal perspectives influence which aspects of the data are emphasized or omitted. As such, their decisions significantly shape the direction and outcome of the evaluation.

The transformation of raw data is another key step, where the information is restructured to yield new insights. This includes converting qualitative feedback into nominal, numerical, or factual categories, aligning with the analytical goals of the research. Once organized, the data is displayed in a systematic manner, such as through charts or tables, allowing for easier interpretation and decision-making. These visual representations support the subsequent analysis, which explores patterns, trends, and relationships within the data. To ensure credibility, the researcher continually revisits the original data during the conclusion-drawing phase, checking for consistency and reliability. This constant verification serves as a quality control measure, minimizing bias and strengthening the validity of the research findings. Through these careful steps, the study maintains both analytical depth and methodological rigor.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

To address each research question related to aspects of attitude in the written teacher's comments, the data were analyzed using techniques adapted from Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's (2014) approach, which involved data condensation, data display, and conclusion

drawing and verification. In this section, the results of the data analysis were elaborated. First research question and second research questions are using content analysis to deeper analyses the teachers' comments. An interactive model is used to answer research question three.

To identify each attitude resource presented in teachers' comments, the sign ":" is used to indicate subsumption, with the entity following it being a subcategory of the entity preceding it. Negative and positive attitudes are notated as "-" and "+", respectively which delineates three resources: Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation from the thirty comments from three different teachers. Words in relation to Affect will be marked as bold, words in relation to Judgement will be marked as *italic*, and Appreciation will be marked as underlined.

Attitude Resources Used in the Teachers' Comments.

The very least number of affect resources comes with only fifteen. As we can see from Graph 1 below. We can see how the three teachers dominantly use judgement in the comments rather than inserting affect. While mostly in teachers' comments, affect should have been more used in praising students especially when they show positive emotional stances in their learning journey.

Lastly, Mandarin teacher also shows a high use of judgement in the comment, such as **he can follow, understands well**, and some negative judgements act as a constructive advice such as **needs to learn, needs to review**, etc. The analysis of the teachers' comments revealed a predominance of judgments over effective expressions. This highlights the need for teachers to consciously incorporate affective language in their feedback, particularly when recognizing and praising students' positive emotional stances. By leveraging affective expressions in their comments, teachers can create a more supportive and motivating learning atmosphere for their students.

Table 1
Distribution of Attitude Resources in Teacher's Comments

Affect	Frequency	Judgement	Frequency	Appreciation	Frequency
Dis/Inclination		Normality		Impact	
Un/Happiness	2	Capacity	24	Quality	3
In/Security	1	Tenacity	5	Balance	
Dis/satisfaction	3	Veracity		Complexity	
		Propriety	2	Valuation	
Total	6	Total	31	Total	3
Positive	6	Positive	26	Positive	3
Negative	-	Negative	5	Negative	

This research found that mathematics teacher uses twenty-one times positive judgement usage of capacity to explain students' learning capability. This teacher willingly expresses the students' competency and ability through the phrases „can multiply“, „can grasp“, „is competent“, mastered reading“, etc. Most of these expressions are massively found in the introduction of the teacher's comments to the body of the paragraph. Moreover, to express the appreciation for quality resources by the usage of phrases „excellent understanding“, „good understanding“, which are mostly placed in the third or fourth sentence of the statement to inform the learning progress.

However, there are found three times negative tenacity of judgment. It seems while the teacher needs to highlight further suggestions on students learning, she uses phrases of „should pay attention“ and „needs help“. She hopes that the next semester, the student will highlight her recommendation for things to improve in the future. This research found that

none of the appreciation resources both composition and valuation in the teacher's comments, which means that the mathematics teacher did not use the words of simple, transparent, realistic, valuable, powerful, etc in the comments.

Table 2
Distribution of Attitude Resources in Language Art Teacher's Comments

Attitude Resources					
Affect	Frequency	Judgement	Frequency	Appreciation	Frequency
Dis/Inclination		Normality		Impact	
Un/Happiness		Capacity	9	Quality	19
In/Security	1	Tenacity	10	Balance	
Dis/satisfaction	1	Veracity			
		Propriety		Complexity	
				Valuation	
Total	2	Total	19	Total	19
Positive	2	Positive	9	Positive	19
Negative	-	Negative	10	Negative	-

As reported with the data above, the language Art teacher on the other hand, have a similar number between judgement and appreciation. Through 10 paragraphs of her teacher comments, there are 19 times of appreciation resources used in language art teacher's comments. It is found that this language mostly places numbers of the appreciation resources in the introduction statement of the comments. Mostly with a use of the word **good**, for example, **good understanding, good progress, good at, strong understanding**, etc.

This research found that through the same number of appreciation, there is a slight similarity number usage of judgment in tenacity and capacity resources, with 9 and 8 times on the teacher's comments. This teacher uses some phrases of judgement capacity such as „**can coordinate, can write, could identify, ready to learn, and made a good progress**“ in explaining students' learning progress in the body of the paragraph. On the other hand, there are 9 times negative judgment of tenacity found in this teacher's comments, and all them are placed in the last sentence of the paragraphs. She specifically writes the materials or topics needs to practice and relearn to almost all her teacher's comments, which also means that all the students receive the materials or topics to focus on their future learning. Forexample, G1 **should consistently** apply punctuation and capitalization insights through her writing, or she mentions H **needs to practice** writing capitalization in sentences.

Table 3
Distribution of Attitude Resources in Mandarin Teacher's Comments

Attitude Resources					
Affect	Frequency	Judgement	Frequency	Appreciation	Frequency
Dis/Inclination		Normality	9	Impact	
Un/Happiness	2	Capacity	15	Quality	10
In/Security	4	Tenacity		Balance	
Dis/satisfaction	1	Veracity			
		Propriety		Complexity	
				Valuation	

Total	7	Total	24	Total	10
Positive	7	Positive	16	Positive	10
Negative	-	Negative	8	Negative	-

Compared to the mathematics and language teacher, the mandarin teacher has a highest number of affect resources, with 7 times of usage. Over her comments, she uses 4 times security resources such as „confident or self- confidence“ through the comment, 2 happiness resources such as „cheerful or enthusiastic“ in the opening of the comments, and the is one inclination resource found in the comment. She used a word of „kind“ after mentioning the student’s likes helping peers and teachers in the opening of comments.

Still has the higher number of judgment resources compared to the language teacher’s comments, this mandarin teacher comes up with 24 times of judgment usages. The most significant usage in positive capacity comes with 12 times, positive tenacity 4 times, while the negative appear 6 times. All the negatives did not write in negative statements or using a word of not or prefix in, but in positive statements intended to mentions some topics to learn more in the next grade. Different from other two teachers, this mandarin teacher mention once of a word seldom to highlight a student ability to finish a student’s task while learning.

However, the number appreciation resource is found not as much as the language art teacher. This teacher comments appear only 10 times of quality mentioning the students’ good understanding or great understanding, or as an attentive learner, active speaker. All the appreciation resources are placed in the first sentence of comments along with some affect resources.

The Realization of Attitude Resources in the Teachers’ Comments.

In addition to this, the three teachers who participated in this study may use different attitude resources in their writing. To analyze in a closer look, the samples of comments were used to make a comparison between the three attitude resources.

Mathematics Teacher

The mathematics teacher, which next will be addressed as Teacher 1, has judgement with the highest number of appearances in the teacher’s comment (thirty times). Followed by affect that only appears six times in the overall comments and appreciation with the lowest, which is only three times. In a closer look, the samples below are presented to analyze how the judgements are written on data 8 and 10.

Data 8 (Teacher 1 Comment)

Ar is a *patient* (+judgement: tenacity) student in learning math. While there was a group discussion, Arya would wait for his peer’s opinions without interrupting. He is now *competent* (+judgement: tenacity) in working with the division board and is *capable* (+judgement: capacity) of explaining its concept. Sometimes, Ar *needs a teacher* (-judgement: tenacity) to encourage him to focus and finish his task. Hopefully, he can accomplish the task independently and on time in year 2. Keep practicing, Ar!

Data 10 (Teacher 1 comment)

S is a quick *learner* (+judgement: capacity) and copes easily with new mathematic problems. She always *gives her best* (+judgement: capacity) when explaining the way, she does her work. S shows progress when working with the multiplication board and *can explain* (+judgement: capacity) the multiplication concept. In grade 2, I hope S *can work carefully* (-judgement: tenacity) on her worksheet. Keep your spirit, S!

Language and Arts Teacher

The Language and Arts teacher, which next will be addressed as Teacher 2, surprisingly uses appreciation almost as frequently as judgement, with a number of judgements being the highest, which is twenty, and appreciation appears eighteen times. The number of appreciations appears almost as high as judgement as the teacher also includes the word *good* when praising their students. Which then make the praises turn to a positive appreciation rather than just a judgement. Affect, being the lowest comes as a surprise as Teacher 2 does not use it in their comments. There is almost no discussion about students' emotional stances in the body of the comments. Below are the two samples that were analyzed on data 16 and 17.

Data 16 (Teacher 2 comment)

H has a good enthusiasm (+appreciation: quality) for learning language arts. *She understands* (+judgement: capacity) to read words by breaking them up into syllables. H also has a good understanding (+appreciation: quality) of identifying the differences between statements, commands, questions, and exclamations. Next semester, H *needs to practice* (-judgement: tenacity) writing capitalization in sentences. Keep improving, H!

Data 17 (Teacher 2 comment)

M showed great interest (+appreciation: quality) in learning metaphors and similes in language art class this semester. He is good at presenting (+appreciation: quality) the difference between metaphors and similes in a sentence. M is also very good at understanding (+appreciation: quality) the six types of punctuation that we have learned. M *will communicate* (-judgement: tenacity) his group work thoughts more confidently in the next grade. Keep progressing, M!

Mandarin Teacher

The Mandarin teacher, which next will be addressed as Teacher 3, has at least twenty-four judgements expressed in the comments both positive and negative, most of the judgements are in area of capacity and tenacity. This is also similar to the previous two teachers who also comment mostly on capacity and tenacity. Ten appreciations, and only six affects appeared in the overall comments. Below are the two samples on data 24 dan 29.

Data 24 (Teacher 3 comment)

S is a cheerful learner (+affect: happiness) who likes to help and always greets her friends and teachers. This semester, she has a good understanding (+appreciation: quality) of speaking in Chinese, For example, asking for help, how to say done, goodbye greeting, morning greeting, etc. S always *tries her best* (+judgement: tenacity) to learn Mandarin and completes the homework and any responsible required, which is well appreciated. Nevertheless, S *needs to practice more* (-judgement: tenacity) in learning Mandarin, from the basic characters, strokes, and phrases. Well done, S!

The comment above also shows a similar pattern to the first comment. Teacher 3 begins the comment with a positive effect, showing the student's emotional stances through the phrase "S is a cheerful learner." This indicates how the teacher would like to acknowledge that the student is known to be a happy and cheerful individual. In the next sentence, Teacher 3 highlights the student's quality through a positive judgement that says "She has a good understanding of speaking in Chinese."

Data 29 (Teacher 3 comment)

G is an **enthusiastic** (+affect: happiness) student who shows interest in Mandarin. He *can follow* (+judgement: capacity) the teacher's explanations very well and has a good understanding (+appreciation: quality) of Mandarin lessons. *He actively works* (+judgement: tenacity) in-class activities such as answering questions, reading, sharing ideas, and making phrases. G *needs to keep practicing* (-judgement: tenacity) reading and writing. Keep

studying hard, G!

Teacher 3 begins their comment with a positive affect showing happiness stated in the phrase "G is an enthusiastic student who shows interest in Mandarin." Again, teacher 3 highlights how happiness or students' mood needs to be highlighted before their skills in classroom setting. Followed by a positive judgement highlighting the student's capacity, we can see it from the phrase "He can follow the teacher's explanation very well." The word *well* would be an indicator or another options of word other than *good*.

In the same comment, we can see "and has a good understanding of Mandarin lessons" act as a positive appreciation in quality. Finally, we can see both positive judgement and negative judgement in the latter part of the comment. "He actively works in-class activities" shows a positive judgement on how the pupil works actively in the class, and what needs to improve, which appear in the phrase "G needs to keep practicing reading and writing." The word *need* should clearly highlight which area that the teacher would like the student to improve.

Realization of Attitude Resources in the Teachers' Comments

This section reveals how the three cohorts of teachers speak about their reports comments. The interview was done on the school premises and was audio-recorded with the teachers' consent. The interviews are unstructured. Vagle (2014) claims that unstructured interviews are the most popular interview method when conducting phenomenological study, for it is conversational and open. The interview answers are presented raw without amendments to grammar and sentence structure to reflect their originality.

Bitter Medicine

Although it is the truth, it is not easy to take advice while someone is pointing out the weakness. Based on the interview results conducted with the correspondents, mentioning the specific feedback as positive judgements is considered crucial. Especially when used to specify whether a person's capability needs validation. In the educational context, a positive judgement is healthy for student although it is seen as something unpleasant information given to parents of students. Additionally, the written reports then be discussed during a conference between the parents and teachers to further discuss the students' achievements throughout the semester. Usually, parents of the students will be asked to read the comments first and the conversations will be based on the comments. In this case, when teachers are explaining then it should be based and linear to what is written in the beginning and body of the teachers' comments as seen in teacher 1 comment;

Data 8 (Teacher 1 comment)

Ar is a *patient* (+judgement: tenacity) student in learning math. While there was a group discussion, Arya would wait for his peer's opinions without interrupting. He is now *competent* (+judgement: tenacity) in working with the division board and is *capable* (+judgement: capacity) of explaining its concept. Sometimes, Ar *needs a teacher* (-judgement: tenacity) to encourage him to focus and finish his task. Hopefully, he can accomplish the task independently and on time in year 2. Keep practicing, Ar!

Compared to the interview with teacher 1 as seen below; Data 31 (Teacher 1 interview answer)

"Because as a 6-year-old child, being patient is so obvious. It is different from other students. When there is a group discussion, while his friends share their opinion he patiently waited the time for him to talk without interrupting. He keeps on trying to control himself waiting his turn to talk, even if his friends often interrupt him, he keeps waiting his turn again."

Appreciation is the Icing

The response of appreciation evaluation in the teachers' comment is different from mathematics teacher and language teachers. While both of the language teachers use

appreciation resources more, mathematics teacher considers it is unnecessary. Found only 3 times using appreciation of quality resources like „excellent understanding, good understanding“ in the body of the paragraph, it is not the main focus in the comment making. Through this question, it can be seen the reason: Would you prefer to describe your students as skillful? As seen by the word “competent” and “quick learner” or would you prefer describing your student as someone who is capable (seen in the phrase “is capable” or “gives her best”), when you write your teacher’s comments? Elaborate why?

Data 32 (Teacher 1 interview answer)

“in some comments, I do use the word competent to describe a student who finally masters a topic compared to his/her previous progress, and I also used quick learner to describe a student who has the ability to grab the lesson quickly. In the classroom, I always notice who has the ability and who does not. In math lessons, I always make an observation list to describe my students’ abilities, progress, and achievement while they are working on math. According to me, everyone is capable of learning and we as a teacher can encourage it.”

Data 32 describes the reason Teacher 1 uses the words “competent” and “quick learner” which are judgment in tenacity. We could see that Teacher 1 has an *observation* list and it includes the abilities, progress, and achievement of the students, making it clear that abilities are mostly described by *judgement* of tenacity, progress is described by judgement of capacity while achievements are usually in a form of appreciation in quality. Emotional stances are rarely discussed by Teacher 1 in the body of the comments, as teacher 1 values students’ approach in learning and their capabilities in grasping knowledge and concepts rather than students’ personal feelings that might have effects on their study.

Logic Before Emotion

Acknowledging the students’ feeling is obviously essential as it will improve their enthusiasm in learning, but it is the priority. Mathematics teacher, in her interview explains that explain the reason why she does not often describe student's emotional state in your comments.

Data 34 (Teacher 1 interview answer)

“Because according to me when I describe emotionally, it's not necessary because their emotion can be affected by anything (morning mood, friends, family, lack of sleep, and so on).”

Data 34 is talking about the reason why Teacher 1 does not include many words that describes a pupil’s emotional stances in the classroom. This correlates with one of the attitude resources which is Affect (Halliday, 2004). Teacher 1 does not include many Affect in their comment and this reflects to the interview where Teacher 1 says that moods/emotional states would be too unpredictable in the class as students are easily affected by external factors, meaning that Teacher 1 prefers to highlight students’ ability to grasp concepts and knowledge in the class rather than describing students with the word “happy,” or “cheerful.”

Double-edged Sword

Giving feedback is a situation or course of action having both positive and negative effects. It might be understandable or can be a critic war. However, these all teachers are wise, because all of them turn the students’ weakness of material or topics to a statement that the student should practice again or pay attention to their future learning. This research found that the finding on the teachers’ comments is aligned to the interview. Looking at the first reason of mathematics teacher when being asked the reason why it is necessity of pointing out an area of students’ learning.

Data 33 (Teacher 1 interview answer)

“Yes, it is necessary. It is based on the daily observation. From the comment I made when I always point out the area, he/she needs to improve. I hope it will help them on knowing what things/topics/areas they need to improve in the next level.”

Data 33 explains that Teacher 1 always put negative judgment in tenacity in a form of constructive criticism or simply explains which area of the students that need improvement at the end of the comments. It is stated that it is necessary, in the hope that students would reflect on their study and parents will be notified.

This also correlates to a sandwich method, where someone, upon providing a constructive criticism, should then begin the feedback with some statements of praise, before providing some feedback that serves as a room for improvement. As teacher 1 says *I hope it will help them on knowing what things/topics/areas they need to improve in the next level*, means that the entire purpose of the constructive criticism is to evaluate students' possible weaknesses, to inform the respective parents and to encourage students to be able to improve their performance in the future.

Discussion

This study foregrounds the application of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)—specifically the *attitude resources* within the *Appraisal framework*—to analyze how teachers write comments on student report cards. Within the attitude system, there are three principal resources used to evaluate and express meaning: affect, judgement, and appreciation. These categories provide a linguistic lens through which one can assess how emotions, evaluations of behavior, and evaluations of value or quality are encoded in language. Among these, this study identifies *judgement* as the most prominent resource used in teachers' written comments (Qian & Pan, 2019). Judgement, in this context, refers to the evaluation of a person's behavior or character against social or institutional norms. In education, it is particularly tied to how teachers assess students' competencies, achievements, responsibility, effort, and general conduct.

The data reveal that judgement is most commonly manifested in positive evaluations that validate students' abilities. Teachers employ expressions such as “can write fluently,” “is able to understand the concept,” or “can follow lessons well.” These statements are not just linguistic structures; they represent affirmations of students' academic and behavioral performances. Through these positive judgements, teachers are aligning their feedback with educational values that uphold motivation, responsibility, and academic engagement. According to Abuhasan (2021), such positive judgements are integral to academic feedback, especially in written comments that are shared with parents. These comments often serve as the foundation for subsequent parent-teacher conferences. Hence, it is crucial that the oral elaboration of students' performance aligns with the written comments to maintain consistency and credibility in assessment communication.

Judgement in teacher comments is not only evaluative but also communicative—it plays a role in affirming the student's progress and potential. It is in line with Oyadiji (2020) who inform that positive judgements help in recognizing a student's efforts and guiding them toward continued success. They also serve a motivational function. When students see their abilities validated in writing, they often feel more confident and supported, which can lead to higher academic engagement and self-efficacy (Fatmawati & Ningsih, 2024). For parents, these comments are equally valuable. They provide reassurance that their children are developing well, both cognitively and behaviorally. Such feedback strengthens the trust between school and home, reinforcing collaborative support for the child's learning journey.

However, while the study emphasizes the use of positive judgement, it also acknowledges the necessary role of negative judgement in academic feedback. Though used

less frequently, negative judgements are employed to draw attention to areas that need improvement. These may pertain to academic challenges, lack of effort, or behavioral concerns. When used appropriately, negative judgements can serve as constructive feedback that guides both students and parents toward understanding the steps necessary for improvement (Fatmawati & Ningsih, 2024; Anwar et al., 2024). Rather than being harsh criticism, these judgements are presented in professional and empathetic language, allowing for a more balanced and reflective form of assessment. In this way, feedback becomes a tool for both celebration and intervention—supporting student growth through affirmation and targeted suggestions.

The study also highlights another critical aspect of teacher commentary: appreciation. Appreciation refers to the evaluation of things, processes, or phenomena—including the quality of work, behavior, or outcomes. In the context of student reports, appreciation is seen when teachers commend the value of a student's effort, creativity, or learning outcome. Statements like “produced a well-crafted project” or “demonstrated excellent critical thinking” fall into this category. During the interviews conducted as part of the study, teachers consistently expressed the belief that positive appreciation significantly influences students' academic motivation. One teacher noted that negative feedback, even if justified, often lingers longer in a student's memory and may hinder their progress. In contrast, positive appreciation can uplift students and inspire them to strive for excellence (Oyadiji, 2020; Anwar et al., 2024). It instills a sense of accomplishment and encourages intrinsic motivation.

Teachers agreed that using positive language not only benefits students but also positively impacts parents. When parents read affirming comments about their children's work or progress, they feel assured that their children are in a nurturing environment. This emotional reassurance is crucial in fostering parental support and engagement with their child's education (Fatmawati & Ningsih, 2024; Anwar et al., 2024). Moreover, when parents perceive that the teacher genuinely values their child's efforts and growth, they are more likely to participate constructively in educational discussions, support homework, and attend school events. The use of appreciation, therefore, serves as a bridge that strengthens the triadic relationship between students, teachers, and parents.

The results from the interview phase underscore the collective commitment among teachers to use language that supports student well-being and advancement. Teachers reported being cautious about how their words might impact students emotionally. Their deliberate preference for positive appreciation reflects a pedagogical stance that prioritizes empathy, encouragement, and development over punitive evaluation. This aligns with modern educational paradigms that advocate for strength-based feedback—focusing on what students do well, rather than solely on what they lack. The goal is to create a positive feedback culture where students feel seen, valued, and guided.

The use of judgement and appreciation within teachers' report comments reflects a sophisticated use of language to perform multiple functions: assessment, communication, encouragement, and relationship-building. Through the lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics, particularly the Appraisal framework, this study reveals how evaluative language constructs meaning beyond surface-level feedback. Judgement validates capability and builds confidence, appreciation fosters motivation and connection, and the careful balance of both contributes to a holistic assessment practice. This linguistic and pedagogical insight highlights the critical role of teacher comments not just as evaluative tools, but as influential narratives that shape a student's academic self-perception and learning trajectory.

The novelty of this study lies in its application of the Appraisal system within Systemic Functional Linguistics to analyze teacher-written report comments—an area often overlooked in linguistic and educational research. Unlike studies that examine grading patterns or feedback in writing instruction, this research explores how affective and evaluative meanings

are constructed through language in a real-life, high-stakes communication genre: the school report card. By examining how judgement and appreciation are used in authentic teacher discourse, this study provides new insights into the interpersonal dynamics of teacher-student-parent communication and contributes to both educational linguistics and assessment studies.

CONCLUSION

The result shows a number of the three attitude resources appeared in the teacher comments written by a cohort of three different teachers in one of the international schools in Medan, Sumatera Utara. This leads to the conclusion that the three teachers, who may not be familiar with the terminology, have utilized the three resources effectively to offer feedback for students to reflect on their academic performance. The number of judgements dominating the teachers' comments with a total of sixty-nine, both positive and negative. Followed by positive appreciation with a number of thirty-two, and lastly, the number of affect which is only fifteen.

The study found that teachers at an international school in Medan, Sumatera Utara, used three main attitude resources—*affect*, *judgment*, and *appreciation*—in their written feedback to students. Although unfamiliar with the specific terminology, the teachers effectively applied these resources to encourage students' reflection on their academic performance. Judgments were most prevalent, especially regarding students' capacity and tenacity, with comments on ability and perseverance being common. Appreciation was next, focusing on the quality of students' work, while affect was the least used. Teachers typically began with positive feedback, followed by constructive criticism to motivate improvement.

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