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Research Paper

Discursive Construction of Master's Students' Scholarly Position During Supervisory Interactions: An Appraisal Perspective

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore various types of positioning used by master's students in supervisor-supervisee dyads. Conducting a mixed-methods conversion design with a multiple case study as its qualitative phase, we collected data by asking three TEFL master's students to share with us all their supervisors' feedback, messages, and supervisory interactions. To track patterns of positioning, in-depth interviews and metalinguistic commentaries were utilized. Analysis of the data using the Appraisal model indicated that two of the supervisors positioned themselves as authoritative and inarguable within the dyad, which caused their supervisees to reposition themselves from novice researchers to passive students. The supervisees, in turn, positioned these professors as unapproachable and irresponsible. On the other hand, while the third professor offered enough space to his supervisee to position herself as an independent scholar, she retained her passive position throughout the process, thereby suggesting that positioning was influenced by both academic discursive practices and non-academic factors. Overall, despite being a *sin qua non* of scholarly identity formation, fruitful supervisory relationships could not be fostered among the present participants. Hence, it is suggested that institutional policy makers and educational departments specify clear-cut road maps defining roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in supervisory interactions.

Keywords: Appraisal Theory; Positioning; Scholarly Position; Supervisory Interactions

1. Introduction

Master's study is an intensive, formative experience, as well as an emotional journey of high and low (Inouye & McAlpine, 2017; Koole, 2013). M.A. students enter the program with varying levels of experience, confidence, and agency; yet, they are meant to exit as independent researchers (Koole, 2013). Master's education concludes with a research task submitted as a thesis (Bui, 2019). This extensive piece of academic work helps students situate themselves as scholars (Wegener et al., 2014) and establish scholarly identity—a sense of independence as a researcher (Pearson & Brew, 2002). Thesis writing, a highly situated, contingent, and constantly evolving process (Pare et al., 2011), does not occur in a vacuum and is influenced by students' real life, both inside and outside the academia (Koole & Stack, 2016) as well as their long-term relationship with their supervisors (Lovitts, 2005; Vekkaila et al., 2013).

As these students interact with their supervisors, they make decisions about who they want to be as scholars (Koole, 2013) and construct an academic identity that is reflected in the quality of their research contribution (Castello et al., 2013; Filipovic & Jovanic, 2016; Guerin, 2013; Koole, 2013). In this regard, their identity formation plays a large part in how they go from a position of seeing themselves as students to scholars (Coffman et al., 2016). Healthy supervisory interactions motivate the learners to focus on improving their work. As a result, they would exhibit greater confidence in their research task (Inouye & McAlpine, 2017) and would, eventually, move from being students to becoming independent researchers (Inouye & McAlpine, 2017).



On the other hand, many cases of poor completion rate in graduate studies have been associated with negative and challenging supervisory relationships (Chiang, 2003). Ideally, a supervisor is expected to help M.A. students move toward competent participation in producing knowledge (Pare et al., 2011). Practically, though, supervisors could be either welcoming and supportive, and thus help these emerging scholars turn into exemplary researchers (e.g., Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2018; Komarraju et al., 2010; Lillis, 2011; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Umbach & Warwzynski, 2005); or, at times, discouraging and disheartening and, therefore, dampening the novices' academic motivation (e.g., Cotten & Wilson, 2006; Cox et al., 2010; Cox & Orehovec, 2007; Grantham et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2014; Kim & Sax, 2009; Richardson & Radloff, 2014; Vianden, 2009).

By nature, the discourse used in supervisory interactions is highly evaluative, interpersonal, and loaded with opinions and emotions (Martin & White, 2005; Stewart, 2015), which leads to supervisory interactions being considered as instances of *positioning* practices (Frankel, 2017). Positioning refers to the way people situate themselves in relation to others using language/discourse and provides a social constructivist framework to examine power and agency in the course of identity formation (Harré et al., 2009). It is through social interactions that people consciously or unconsciously position themselves in relation to each other (Davies & Hunt, 1994; Harré et al., 2009). As rightly put by Harré (2012, p. 193), "not everyone involved in a social episode has equal access to rights and duties to perform particular kinds of meaningful actions at that moment and with those people," which highlights the importance of power dynamic in such relationships.

A surging number of B.A. graduates seek master's program in an attempt to become competent in their fields of study and enjoy other advantages that will be attained as a result of this degree, such as better job applicability, and in some cases, higher social status (Bui, 2019). Studies have explored the learning experiences, academic identities and career paths among doctoral students (e.g., Brooks & Everett, 2013; Drennan & Clarke, 2009; Fazel, 2018; Koole & Stack, 2016); however, very few have focused on these concerns at the master's level. Given that the supervisor-supervisee relationship in master's education directly influences the development of M.A. students' professional and scholarly identity (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013), it is monumental to systematically analyze this relationship. To fill this lacuna, this study aimed at examining the way Iranian M.A. TEFL students (re)position themselves and are positioned by their supervisors given the power dynamic present in this relationship. In this vein, the current study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What challenges and opportunities do Iranian M.A. TEFL students experience as novice researchers during the process of thesis completion?
2. How are they (re)positioned by their supervisors during this process?
3. How do they position their supervisors and how does this positioning affect their own perceived scholarly position?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Studies on Graduate Students' Identity Construction and Their Positioning

Several studies throughout the world have investigated identity construction of university students, in general, and the way their identities, agency, and positioning are constructed in student-instructor relationships, in particular. For instance, in a qualitative multiple-case study, Oppland-Cordell and Martin (2015) assessed how the identity construction of two Latino mathematics students influenced their participation in a predominantly white urban university. Initially, these two participants of color were convinced that their Latino identity was the reason for their poor performance. The study indicated that transformation in the participants' scholarly identity and their performance at college appeared the moment they were willing to take risks and assert more agentive behaviors. As their participation evolved, so did their sense of identity as scholars.

As part of his study on the links between identity and foreign language engagement, Nasrollahi Shahri (2017) unraveled the way two language learners' investment in different voices resulted in the construction of an L2-mediated identity. Using classroom observations, interviews, and learner metalinguistic commentaries, he illustrated how the present and future selves of these learners determined their choice of linguistic devices. The results of his study contribute

significantly to our understanding of the relationship between one's voice and position and their preference for choosing certain linguistic forms

Jung (2019) studied how M.A. students perceived and constructed their identities as emerging scholars. The author focused on students' academic community, practice, and identity. Seventy M.A. students from one research-intensive university in Hong Kong were interviewed regarding their motivations for doing a master's degree. The results indicated that the M.A. students attained their sense of scholarly identities by doing research work, which also served as the reason why they chose to pursue research career in future.

In a different approach, Park and Schallert (2020) set out to investigate how doctoral students' professional identity was formed throughout their graduate studies using a qualitative grounded theory approach. Thirty-four participants were regularly interviewed to track their identity construction. The researchers found four ways in which emerging professional identity was formed: (1) the match or mismatch between present and past identities, (2) development of knowledge was correlated with the development of professional scholarly identity, (3) envisioning a future self, and (4) imagining a future community of practice.

2.2. Studies on Supervisory Relationships

As mentioned above, besides focusing on the development of scholarly identity, some studies have more specifically focused on student-instructor relationships. Cotten and Wilson (2006), for instance, explored the nature of student-faculty relationships. Utilizing focus groups, they reported three main findings: (1) Students have minimal contact with faculty outside the classroom, and do not appear to be aware of the importance of interacting with faculty, (2) academic interactions between students and faculty may have a greater impact on students than purely social interactions, and (3) many students have a limited understanding of faculty roles and responsibilities in a university setting. This ignorance clearly affects students' perceptions of faculty and their ability to interact productively.

Schwartz and Halloway (2012) examined the development of academic relationships between alumnus M.A. students and their professors using a qualitative grounded theory approach. The researchers interviewed 10 matched pairs of students and professors who claimed having a successful meaningful academic relationship at some point during their master's studies. The interviews revealed that successful relationships were, indeed, a successful mix of teaching and learning which resulted in mutual empowerment.

Karpouza and Emvalotis (2018) examined how the teacher-student relationship in graduate education developed and evolved based on the perceptions and experiences of the parties involved. Using the constructivist grounded theory as the methodological choice, the researchers interviewed 20 university teachers as well as 25 graduate students. The data analysis indicated that the teacher-student relationship in graduate education was a highly dynamic process which evolved based on the participants' active role, as they interpreted each other's actions and interactions. The authors pointed out that when the students had previously experienced positive interactions with a certain professor, they felt more comfortable around them and were more eager for additional contact. On the other hand, had the teacher-student interaction required a lot of effort, the two parties' communication was hindered, constituting a long-term obstacle to build a meaningful relationship between them.

Although the above studies have attempted to explore the impact of students-faculty relationships on students' identity construction, they have not specifically addressed the way they are positioned by themselves and their teachers. Koole and Stack's (2016) study, however, could be an example of research focusing on this issue. They explored identity positioning as perceived by 23 doctoral students in online learning environments at a Canadian university. To explore identity positioning, Harré's (2012) social positioning cycle was used. Using in-depth interviews as the primary source of data collection, they realized that nonacademic contexts (i.e., community, society, friends, family, and the workplace) had a significant impact on the doctoral students' identity construction.

In another related study, Sala-Bubaré and Castelló (2016) investigated the relationship between four ecology doctoral students' most significant experiences and their perceived position in the research community. Besides interviews, the researchers used two graphic instruments (i.e., Journey Plot and Communities Plot) to examine their utility for studying students' positioning experiences. Although their findings indicated that both negative and positive experiences were influential in the students' trajectories, the proportion of these experiences was different across the

students. Whereas the supervisors were perceived to be associated with negative experiences, the society at large was considered to be the source of positive ones. They also found relationships between the types of experiences and the way the students were positioned in the community.

Recently, in the context of Thailand, Tian and Dumlao (2020) focused on the relationship between undergraduate students' identity and their positioning, power, and resistance during classroom interactions. After qualitatively analyzing the data, they found that the learners resorted to code-switching to demonstrate their resistance in answering the teacher's questions. They also argued that lack of enough knowledge of English led to the learners' struggling to position themselves in the interactions, thereby making them avoid participating in discussions. Another noteworthy finding of their study was the unique ways in which the learners constructed their identity and positioning in that each learner was found to have their own distinct way of positioning themselves. Based on these findings, they extracted three themes from the data (p. 1436), "(a) learners' choice of code as passive resistance, (b) circulating power in interaction and struggles of power, and (c) multiple positioning in classroom interactions."

Drawing upon previous literature, it seems evident that the construction of students' identity has been the focus of a host of empirical studies in different parts of the world. However, although positioning in particular has attracted the attention of many scholars, to the best of the present researchers' knowledge, almost no study has specifically delved into the way M.A. students' positioning is constructed during supervisor-supervisee dyads. More specifically, Koole and Stack (2016) and Sala-Bubaré and Castelló's (2016) studies centered upon the way doctoral students' positions were constructed while interacting with their instructors rather than during situated supervision practices. Nasrollahi Shahri (2017) and Tian and Dumlao's (2020) studies, on the other hand, despite contributing evidence of the way students' positions are constructed, have primarily attended to classroom interactions. Moreover, whereas the former study recruited private language institute students as the participants, the latter has investigated undergraduate students. Therefore, there seems to be a clear need for studies on the ways through which M.A. students (re)construct their scholarly position during the completion of their theses. Hence, bridging this gap serves as the initial impetus for conducting this study in order to shed light on this underresearched area of enquiry.

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

In terms of design, this research was a mixed-methods conversion design with a multiple-case study serving as the qualitative phase, and it was conducted during August 2020-June 2021. To determine the findings' trustworthiness and the accuracy of their interpretations, the results attained from one phase were cross-examined and double-checked with those of the other phase.

3.2. Participants

Three Shiraz University M.A. students of TEFL were recruited as the participants. They were chosen via purposeful sampling procedure based on one criterion: Those who had recently had their proposals approved and were in the process of writing their thesis. These participants were able to finish writing their thesis and had it defended over an 11-month time span. To keep their identities confidential, at the outset of the study, they were asked to choose pseudonyms for themselves.

Nicole

Nicole was 24 years old at the start of her thesis writing process. She had earned her TEFL bachelor's degree from another university, located in one of Fars province's cities. For her M.A. thesis, she was working under the supervision of Dr. X, a competent full professor of TEFL at Shiraz University.

Candice

Candice was 26 at the outset of the study. Just like Nicole, her alma mater was a university in a small city in Fars province. She was working with Dr. Y, another reputable full professor of TEFL at Shiraz University, on her thesis.

Ruby

Ruby was 27 when she commenced her thesis project. Unlike the first two students, she had studied English translation as her bachelor's major in a university located in a small city of Fars province. Dr. Z, a distinguished full professor of TEFL at Shiraz University, served as the supervisor of her thesis.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments and Procedure

Two different types of data were collected in this study which are elaborated on in the following lines.

3.3.1. In-Depth Interviews and Metalinguistic Commentary

Utilizing semistructured interviews (see Appendix), we strived to uncover the construction of the M.A. students' scholarly positions. To this aim, the participants were interviewed several times, particularly after having any form of interaction with their supervisors. Having considered the busy schedule of the M.A. students while writing their theses and for the sake of their convenience, the interviews were held once a week. Before each interview session, we analyzed the supervisors' comments and messages so that they could cross-examine their analysis and interpretation with the supervisees' perceptions of those interactions. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all the interviews were conducted on the phone. As for the average duration of the interviews, the first and last interviews, approximately, took about an hour each, whereas the interim ones often lasted between 30 and 50 min. They were recorded using ACR, a call recorder phone application after gaining the participants' consent. The participants were offered the choice to be interviewed in either English or Persian; however, all preferred to use Persian. All the interviews were transcribed verbatim; pauses, fillers, and vocatives, which were not the concern of the current study, were not represented. Then, we translated the interviews into English by first listening carefully to one part of an interview and, then, translating it while trying to be very cautious about preserving the content, nuances of the language, and the original flavor. To ensure the accuracy of the translations, they were back-translated into Persian by a native Persian speaker who was a competent translator, too. Any discrepancy between the back-translated versions and the original Persian texts was resolved through panel discussions held between the researchers and the translator until mutual agreement was reached. After the interviews, we played back parts of the participants' speech (sometimes, in the form of their interview transcripts) and asked them to comment on what they had said. This was done to shed light on the intention behind their specific choice of words.

3.3.2. Supervisor Professors' Comments and Messages

Tracking patterns of scholarly positioning re/construction throughout the process of thesis completion was also done by scrutinizing the supervisors' comments on the students' written performance. The participants were asked to regularly share these feedback comments with the researchers. All the comments received, except for one, were in English. Besides, all forms of correspondence between the participants and their supervisors were analyzed. To do so, they were asked to report to the researchers all forms of their supervisory interactions. Given the pandemic, one-on-one meetings with the professors were not really applicable; nevertheless, no online meeting was reported by the participants, either. As reported by them, a great portion of supervisory communications were carried out via WhatsApp using primarily text messages and, sometimes, voice messages. The language of all WhatsApp communications was Persian, which were translated into English in the same manner explained above.

3.4. Data Analysis

Given the longitudinal nature of the data collection, the data analysis was done continuously, recursively, and concurrently with data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The analysis was broadly undertaken in accordance with systemic functional linguistics (SFL; Halliday, 1994) and, specifically, informed by the principles of the AT (Martin & White, 2005).

3.4.1. Systemic Functional Linguistics

SFL, the father discipline to which the appraisal framework belongs, is a linguistic theory developed by Halliday (1994) that offers ways to explore meaning in language and relating language use to its social context. Halliday, further, described how language simultaneously achieves three functions in constructing meaning. Whereas the ideational metafunction constructs ideas and experiences, the interpersonal one enacts social roles and power dynamics and the textual one manages the flow of information to make extended discourse coherent and cohesive.

3.4.2. The Appraisal Model (AP)

Having emerged from the interpersonal metafunction of SFL, the AP framework is commonly used to investigate evaluative interpersonal language where opinions and emotions are communicated (Martin & White, 2005; Stewart, 2015). In this study, the students' interviews, feedback comments, and messages provided by the supervisors and the students' reactions toward them were considered as instances of evaluative and interpersonal language. The AP comprises three categories (shown in Figure 1): attitude, engagement, and graduation.

The lexical resources for expressing attitude are affect, judgement, and appreciation. Affect is concerned with language used to express emotions. Judgement is the assessment of behaviors. Appreciation deals with evaluation of phenomena, including things, texts, and processes (Martin & White, 2005).

Engagement is concerned with the space for and interaction with other voices within a text and is divided into monoglossic (when no reference is made to others), and heteroglossic (when it is dialogic). Graduation is concerned with values by which (1) speakers graduate (raise or lower) the interpersonal impact, force or volume of their utterances, and (2) by which they graduate (blur or sharpen) the focus of their semantic categorizations. It has two subcategories of force and focus (Martin & White, 2005):

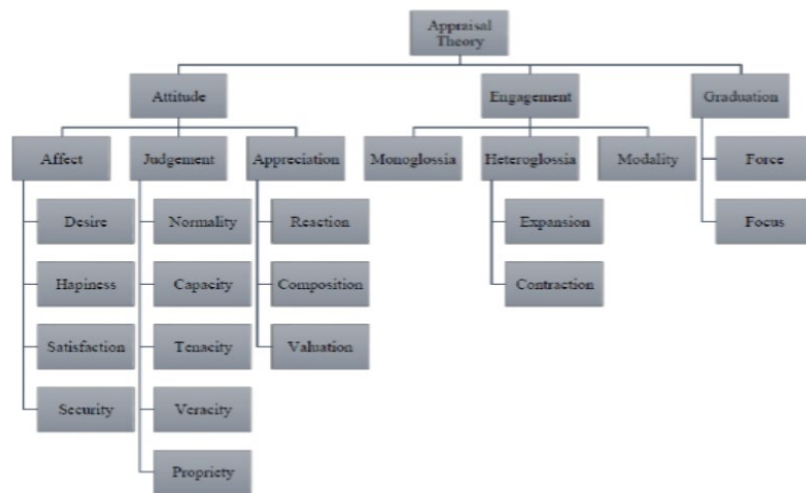


Figure 1. Appraisal Model (Martin & White, 2005)

3.5. Data Analysis Procedure

An iterative thematic analysis was done from the outset of the data collection process to explore how the participants were (re)positioned during the process of writing their master's theses by applying the AP framework to the interview data, the supervisor feedback, and the supervisor-supervisee messages. References to each AP dimension was examined and later quantitatively and qualitatively interpreted (Martin & White, 2005). In terms of the former, the frequencies and percentages of each AP category were calculated and, regarding the latter, all these categories were interpreted in the light of other sources of the data and their analyses.

Analyzing the corpus of the data according to the AP principles was done using the UAM corpus (e.g., O'Donnell, 2008; Stewart, 2015, Tupala, 2019). This tool is specifically designed for doing linguistic research within SFL or related fields with special facilities included for appraisal analysis (O'Donnell, 2008).

To ensure intercoder agreement, one of the researchers, first, coded one sample of comments, a sample of messages, and a portion of a randomly selected interview. Afterwards, the other researcher, independently, coded the same selected data materials. The two sets of codes were compared by running the Kappa measure of agreement and the index was found to be 85.4, which attested the trustworthiness of the coding procedure. Intracoder agreement was also checked by one of the researchers who coded a selected part of the data once and, after a few days, coded the same sample for the second time. The agreement index turned out to be 89.5%, which is acceptable.

3.6. Rigor of the Study

Ary et al. (2019) proposed trustworthiness as an important concept for attaining rigor. To determine trustworthiness, they suggested that the qualitative study be evaluated against the four concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Known by Ary et al. (2019) as a very important method of increasing credibility, member checking was done to ensure rigor of this study. As a result, some interview transcripts were randomly selected and sent to the participants to be checked for their accuracy and resonance with their experiences. All the three participants confirmed and verified the veracity and accuracy of the data. Moreover, the triangulation of the data sources and perspectives, prolonged engagement with the participants, and keeping a researcher journal (to minimize potential biases) were done.

Transferability, which concerns the applicability of the study findings to other research settings (Ary et al., 2019), was ensured by providing thick rich descriptions of the participants and the research process. Dependability and confirmability were checked through audit trail. That is, a complete set of notes about all the decisions made during the research process, meetings, reflective thoughts, sampling, research materials adopted, emergence of the findings, information about the data management, and so on were kept by the researchers.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

The participants' rights were respected by seeking their informed consent for participating in the study, as well as ensuring anonymity of their identities (Ary et al., 2019; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). To maintain confidentiality, they were ascribed codes when transcribing their data. To keep the identities anonymous, the participants were asked to choose pseudonyms. Prior to conducting the interviews, their permission to record their interviews was sought. The participants were granted freedom to withdraw from the study at any point without negative consequences. And, at the end of the study, to preserve reciprocity (Ary et al., 2019), all the participants were offered a 150,000 tomans (\$60) gift card, although one of them refused to accept it.

4. Results

4.1. Challenges and Opportunities During Master's Thesis Completion

Having thematically analyzed the interview data, we extracted the following themes as the challenges and opportunities faced by the Iranian M.A. students of TEFL during thesis writing process.

4.1.1. Lack of Rapport With Supervisors

One major recurring theme in all the three participants' interview data, which was also perceived as a reason for receiving very little supervisory support was the failure to build rapport with the supervisors. For instance, several times in her interviews, Nicole referred to the nature of her relationships with her supervisor (jokingly) as "unrequited love." She claimed she instigated almost all the interactions, and every time she did so, she had to "walk on the eggshells" to avoid "stirring the pot":

- If I don't reach out and remind him that I exist, he would definitely forget about me! And, every time I do, I mean you have seen the way I text him and the way he texts back, right?! I'm all polite and type like one whole paragraph in order not to come out as rude, but he always responds in like two or three words; at most a sentence. I can feel his disdain . . . I wish he had better work ethics. (May 2021)

Candice was an avid learner and liked to become a TEFL researcher. However, she did not receive much support from her supervisor, either: "My supervisor is swamped with other priorities, which my thesis is never one!" (May 2021). She described her perception of the relationship she had with her supervisor in this way:

- My challenge is that my supervisor doesn't support me at all. I feel like he doesn't like me. I'm like a burden for him. He only likes to get rid of me as soon as possible. He doesn't guide me, doesn't respond to me, nothing really! (June 2021)

In a similar vein, Ruby did not experience many supervisory interactions (only some); nevertheless, unlike her peers, she did not have much problem with the way things were. Whereas both Nicole and Candice considered thesis

completing process as a deep-level learning opportunity, Ruby was just “here to get a degree and be done with it” (September, 2020):

- I really haven’t had MANY interactions with my supervisor so far, except for some general instructive voice messages. But I don’t think I need more than this anyway! (August 2020)

4.1.2. COVID-19 Pandemic

Another struggling issue for the participants was the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown which adversely affected their data collection process, and significantly hindered their progress. Candice, for example, described,

- If we weren’t in the lock down, at least I could show up at his office and ask him for some guidance. I need some face time with him. The online meetings aren’t helpful at all. (June 2021)

4.1.3. Developing Coping Strategies

In this study, Candice and Nicole were close friends, so when Nicole started to go to their senior friend (henceforth referred to as A) to review her drafts, Candice followed suit. They both developed this coping strategy in response to the lack of supervisory support. Ruby, on the other hand, did not develop this strategy because (a) she wasn’t in Nicole and Candice’s friend zone, and (b) she was happy with how things were:

- 1) I mean, look, I don’t want my supervisor to be my equal because, look, it’s not as if I want him to be my BFF [Best Friend Forever]. But, when he is less aloof, and friendlier, I can easily go to him with my thesis problems, not avoiding him! (Nicole’s interview, June 2021)
- 2) Thank God for A! Ever since Nicole introduced me to A, my thesis is progressing really smoothly. He is like my supervisor. (Candice’s interview, June 2021)

In another interview, Candice talked about another source of guidance and support,

- Well, from the beginning, my supervisor did not do anything. Every now and then, he would give me some comments, and whenever I asked him to explain those comments, he would not respond. So, if I had questions, I would ask my seniors, and oh yes, of course my B.A. professors from my former university. Because, you know, my supervisor told me that Chapter Four is not well written and I really didn’t know what was wrong with what I had written, so I called one of my B.A. professors from X. University, and she thoroughly explained everything to me. I really don’t understand the role of my supervisor. He only has tortured me mentally! (June 2021)

Seemingly, because of not receiving the needed help and guidance from their supervisors, they had to seek help from other more capable and knowledgeable people around them to partially compensate for this lack of supervisory support.

4.1.4. Thesis Writing as a Valuable Deep-Level Learning Opportunity

Nicole and Candice, in the early stages of thesis writing, genuinely considered thesis project as a precious learning opportunity where they could be mentored by the best professors. Their enthusiasm can be easily detected in their early interviews. Nicole, for instance, in her second interview, right after confirming her supervisor, mentioned:

- I did some research, and then asked Dr. X to supervise my thesis. I like to work on Topic A, and he is such an expert in this field. I have also heard that he is known for being strict, but that is OK. (February 2021)

In another interview, she pointed out the way this learning opportunity is different from taking some university courses:

- Right now, I feel like a grown up. I don’t have to sit down and study like kids and then take an exam. And honestly, I learn better this way. You forget everything after the exam, but if you ask me a question about any of those papers I have read, I can explain it to you very well because I have deeply grasped it. (March 2021)

Candice, too, after confirming her supervisor, told us:

- When I go online, I am just astonished with his works. I really consider myself lucky that he agreed to be my supervisor. I’m going to pay his favor back by writing a perfect thesis. With his help, I’m going to learn a lot from him. I’m really excited . . . (March 2021)

However, Ruby, who was “here to get a degree and be done with it” (September, 2020), never did mention anything about the upsides; she would, for example, say, “this is such a waste of time and money” (September, 2020).

4.2. Construction of Students' Position by the Supervisors

The corpus of the supervisors' data was analyzed using the AP framework and the UAM software (see Table 1):

Table 1. *AP Analysis of Supervisors' Corpus*

			X (Nicole's supervisor)	X	Y (Candice's supervisor)	Y	Z (Ruby's supervisor)	Z
Attitude			positive	negative	positive	negative	positive	negative
Affect	Happiness	Happiness	3	0	8	13	12	5
		Satisfaction	4	6	4	6	11	3
		Security	0	0	0	0	0	0
		Inclination	5	3	3	11	5	3
	Judgment	Normality	0	0	0	0	0	0
		Capacity	0	0	0	0	0	0
		Tenacity	0	0	0	0	0	0
		Propriety	0	0	0	0	0	0
	appreciation	Veracity	0	0	0	0	0	0
		Reaction	12	58	11	78	23	29
Composition		7	24	7	24	9	13	
Value		2	6	5	12	0	3	
Total			33	97	35	134	60	56
Engagement	Heterogloss	Contract	3	15	5	19	8	4
		Expand	2	4	3	5	0	9
	Monogloss	3	46	3	29	9	15	
Graduation	focus	Sharpen	6	59	7	74	9	11
		Soften	11	4	10	13	13	8
	force	Intensification	3	4	7	32	7	5
		Quantification	4	6	3	6	5	3
	Total			21	39	17	66	34

As shown in Table 4.1, there were 97 cases of negative explicit attitude made by X and 134 ones uttered by Y. These were bare negative assertions corresponding the participants' progress with little evidence of obscure language. Also, X and Y's instances of Contract (18 and 24) were higher than Expand (6 and 8). This way very limited dialogic space was given to the participants. Very high usage of [Engagement: Monogloss] seriously confined Nicole and Candice's dialogic space and agentive behaviors. Moreover, the face-threatening nature of the supervisors' feedback caused them to reposition themselves as passive students in order to save face. Some examples of X and Y's comments are provided:

- 1) Very poor overall organization.
- 2) This is just awful!
- 3) Rewrite in good English.
- 4) Ask B to be your supervisor.

On the other hand, overall, Z had 60 cases of positive attitude and only 56 cases of negative ones. The almost equal number of positive and negative cases of attitudes as well as the cushioned tone of his negative comments (only 11 cases of [Focus: Sharpen]) are suggestive of his nonthreatening supervisory approach. He also indicated more uses of [Engagement: Heterogloss] compared to other supervisors, ergo effectively expanding the dialogic space. An excerpt of his comments is provided below:

- You have been able to progress very well. I read your work. I am happy with what you have done. But try to polish the language some more. Your data analysis section also needs some revisions. You have to respond to the first research question with Correlation analysis and the second one using Multiple Regression. But, yeah, overall, it is good.

Having analyzed the supervisors' data, we found that Nicole and Candice repositioned themselves several times in reaction to their supervisors' discursive practices. For instance, initially, and after their very few pre-pandemic in-person interactions, Candice positioned herself as a passionate novice researcher and a protégé; “I looked for a good thesis topic for three to four weeks. I needed to find a good gap” (March 2021). However, her positions were deeply dependent on

Y's discourse. In response to Y's harsh commenting language which was replete with [Engagement: -Monogloss], Candice, first, positioned herself as a thick-skinned student so that she could resist this power dynamic for a while in order to seek some supervisory guidance. However, due to Y's limiting dialogic space and his authoritative and inarguable tone, Candice eventually repositioned herself to a powerless and submissive student, and remained so until the end of the process. Figure 2 shows Candice's positionings throughout the process:

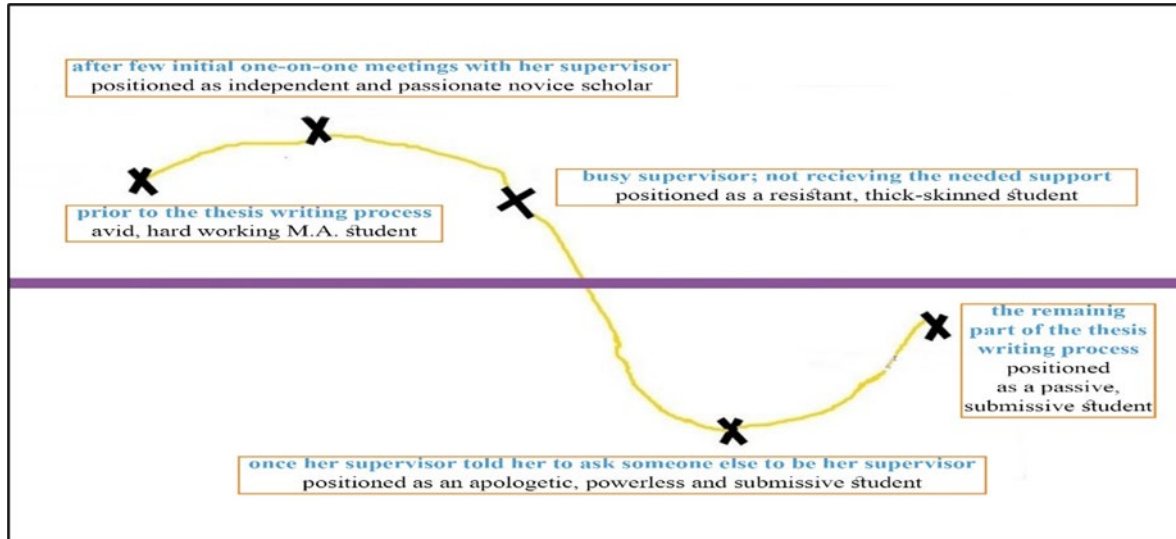


Figure 2. Candice's Positionings

Nicole was an independent learner, too; however, she needed more scaffolding to write a thesis. X's discourse, on the other hand, did not give her enough space to seek guidance from the outset. Therefore, she positioned herself as a powerless submissive student in relation to her supervisor. Nevertheless, outside the supervisor-supervisee dyad, she indicated agentic behaviors by seeking help elsewhere and by referring to A for much-needed scaffoldings throughout the remainder of the process. Nicole's academic positionings are displayed in Figure 3:

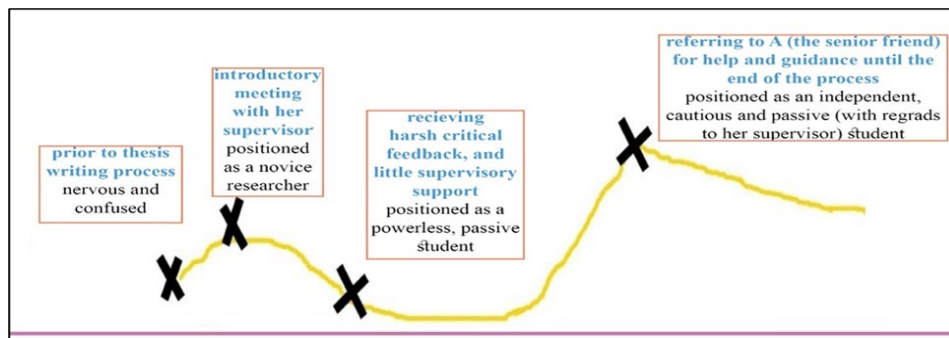


Figure 3. Nicole's Positionings

In this study, Ruby retained her uninterested passive position throughout the study, even though her supervisor gave her enough space to become a scholar. Figure 4 reveals her stable position throughout the process:

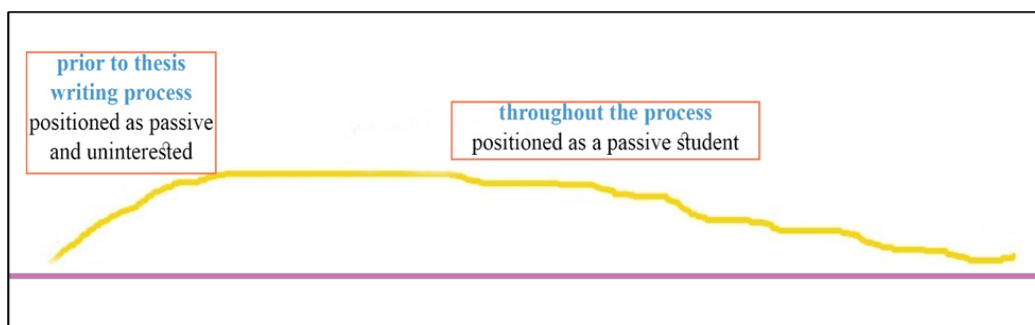


Figure 4. Ruby's Positionings

4.3. Supervisors' Positioning and Its Impacts on Students' Position

In order to answer the final research question, the participants' interview data were analyzed using the AP framework (see Table 2):

Table 2. AP Analysis of Participants' Corpus

		Nicole	Nicole	Candice	Candice	Ruby	Ruby	
		positive	negative	positive	negative	positive	negative	
Attitude	Affect	Happiness	32	129	29	354	65	21
		Satisfaction	21	145	32	306	28	11
		Security	14	95	14	214	12	5
		Inclination	5	3	24	50	32	7
	Total	43	406	99	924	137	34	
Judgment	Normality	23	124	42	365	178	12	
	Capacity	65	85	87	123	45	3	
	Tenacity	12	156	4	9	27	3	
	Propriety	54	147	39	189	96	5	
	Veracity	27	6	25	69	5	0	
Total	181	518	197	755	351	25		
appreciation	Reaction	23	110	13	36	148	29	
	Composition	97	206	6	11	57	8	
	Value	87	178	19	54	174	85	
	Total	117	494	28	101	379	122	
Engagement	Heterogloss	Contract	23	46	45	67	10	7
		Expand	37	59	83	159	24	8
	Monogloss	Total	79	168	41	218	159	95
		Total	139	273	169	444	193	233
Graduation	focus	Sharpen	96	238	24	297	47	12
		Soften	26	103	35	121	35	25
	force	Intensification	55	279	46	255	57	36
		Quantification	97	251	27	98	64	24
	Total	247	871	132	771	203	97	

In Nicole's and Candice's coded output, instances of Attitude used to convey criticism outnumber those of praise. The trend for negative comments was similar between them; frustration about the nature of their work as well as their supervisors' unapproachability and use of harsh critical language. For example, one day Candice told the interviewers: "I know my command of English is poor, but there were at least one thousand other ways he could have phrased his comment, that wouldn't hurt this much" (May 2021). The most frequent instances of critical judgement in their interview data were expressions of the supervisors' unapproachability [Judgement: normality], and poor work ethics [Judgement: propriety]. These negative comments were explicit and often coded as either [Focus: Sharpen] or [Force: Intensified]. As a result, X and Y were positioned as irresponsible and unapproachable authoritative figures.

In words of Ruby, the resources of Appreciation (379) accounted for the highest proportion. The judgmental and attitudinal resources conveyed through her interviews were mainly positive as well, with few negative evaluations which were mostly regarding the whole administration system and not her supervisor per se. Compared to the other two participants, Ruby was more satisfied with the process. Also, unlike the other two, she positioned her supervisor as responsible and an expert.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In applying an analytical framework from the linguistic theory to examine the nature of supervisory relationships, this study provides insights into how the supervisors' discursive practices defined the participants' positions. Whereas numerous cases of negative and direct resources in the attitude system were seen in X and Y's discourse, Z's, on the other hand, was replete with instances of implicit negative attitude cushioned with hedges and adverbs. In this way, Z was able to turn the supervisor-supervisee dyad into a safe space for Ruby to freely practice scholarly behaviors. In the engagement system, X and Y did not allow inclusion of other voices and stances. By eliminating the dialogic space, they conveyed an authoritative position. It was interesting to find that their limited instances of [Engagement: Expand] were directly associated with limited spaces given to the students to practice agentive behaviors.

X and Y, in the graduation system, adopted more up-scaling force and sharpened focus compared to Z's more down-scaling force and softened focus. X and Y did so to highlight their strong negative attitudes toward supervisees' performance. This also helped them indicate their authoritative positions and strongly aligning the supervisees into their preferred value position. The fact that supervisors were able to distribute these rights and positions within the supervisor-supervisee dyad is also indicative of their power stances in supervisory relationships. Findings here are in line with Tian and Dumlao (2020) who, in their study, also witnessed culturally rooted, predefined role/power distributions. As a result, to remain truthful to the Iranian culture of respect, participants in this study instantly positioned themselves as passive learners, but, unlike participants in Tian and Dumlao's (2020) study, they did not resist their supervisors' positioning. Even Candice who tried to negotiate her identity as a novice scholar, did not maintain that position for too long because soon she sensed that it might cause her trouble. Therefore, she positioned herself as a submissive passive learner, too. Finally, whereas Tian and Dumlao's (2020) participants used code to show resistance and power, participants in this study used code to indicate alignment with their supervisors' positioning. This was noticed in the way they texted their supervisors. More, none of the participants, at any point during the process, asked for any elaboration on their supervisors' (vague) comments. Even when they disagreed with their supervisors, they refrained from raising their voices, and simply did as they were told. The major reason for this was the existence of unequal power relationships between the students and their supervisors; as for instance, Nicole said, "the distance between him and I is so much, and he is in charge, I'm only a student here" (May 2021), or for example, Candice was never open to her supervisor because "what if he gets very mad, and stops being my supervisor. Or, he can tell other supervisors in the department not to be my supervisor, and then, how can I graduate without finishing a thesis" (May 2021). As a result, none of the participants were able to develop a sense of scholarly identity. The findings, however, are in contrast with Jung's (2019) and Martin's (2015) studies whose participants were able to develop scholarly positions as the result of becoming more agentive.

In this study, the participants had their own unique voices which, as a result, affected their positioning and their sense of scholarly identity formation. Ruby's voice was that of an uninterested learner. Candice was initially highly invested and engaged. Her investment was, in part, due to her interest in pursuing future academic careers and studying in a good university overseas for her Ph.D. studies. In other words, her investment and engagement were fueled by her future self. It is worth noting that the participants' voice was not stable, but subject to change in response to supervisory discursive practices. Overall, these findings were in agreement with Nasrollahi Shahri's (2017) which revealed that investment in certain voices resulted in construction of learners' identity and academic positioning.

Moreover, similar to Sala-Bubaré and Castelló (2016), and Koole and Stack's (2016) study where the participants' positioning was determined by different academic and nonacademic experiences, Nicole and Candice associated negative supervisory experiences to their failure of developing scholarly identities and the sole cause of turning into passive learners. Throughout the process, Ruby, on the other hand, maintained her passive voice. Her position was influenced by her nonacademic community. Even though she did not experience any negative supervisory experiences and had a supportive supervisor, she did not develop a researcher identity, either. As for her, indeed, she never intended to become a scholar in her field in the first place; the only thing she sought was a degree in order to enjoy its social status. Therefore, it seemed that the university's microcontext had no major influence on her already shaped identity and position.

This study provides a glimpse of how supervisory practices influence supervisee's academic identity. As such, there are implications for pedagogy. It was obvious that Candice and Nicole were both highly motivated and invested individuals; nevertheless, due to poor supervisions, they became passive, which indicates the importance of attending to

healthy supervisory relationships. On the basis of these findings, training programs for educators focusing on improving the efficiency of supervisory interactions can be developed.

In this study, not developing rapport with the supervisors, and as a result, not being able to seek guidance from them, was considered a serious and challenging issue for the participants. This piece of finding, therefore, serves important application for institutional policymakers and educational departments to come up with clear-cut road maps defining roles and responsibilities of all the parties involved in supervisory interactions. Also, to overcome the scarcity of supervisory support, the participants in this study sought their seniors' help and guidance. This suggests the importance of creating research networks and communities for graduate students where they can learn from their peers and promote their awareness of challenges and issues *en route* thesis completion.

The present study is not without limitations. Due to the limited scope of the study, the supervisors' view toward the nature of supervisory relationships could not be probed. Moreover, only the academic community of the participants was scrutinized. It is believed that by tapping into students' social community and its effect on their academic (re)positioning, more valuable insights would be yielded.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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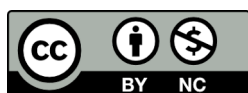
Appendix

Guiding Interview Questions:

- *Please choose a pseudonym for yourself.
 - *Please introduce yourself and talk about your educational background.
 - *As a master's student of TEFL, what qualifications and capabilities are you expected to have? Do you have those qualifications and capabilities? Why/why not?
 - *In your opinion, what is/are the main purpose(s) of writing a thesis? What are you supposed to learn as a result of doing your thesis study? Do you think you will acquire them at the end?
 - *How does your supervisor try to help you achieve those goals? Besides the supervisor, are there any other factors that could be helpful/harmful?
 - *What were your expectations from the process of writing a thesis? To what extent have they been met? How have you been experiencing the process so far?
 - *Was your supervisor professor supportive or not? Do you think that the overall interaction was successful?
 - *What difficulties are you experiencing regarding your thesis progress?
 - *Can you communicate openly with your supervisor professor?
 - *Are you trying to deal with any challenges?
 - *How do you feel about your thesis now?
 - *What do you intend to do now?
 - *Could you describe your feeling?
 - *Do you think your supervisor is being fair in their expectations?
 - *Do you think their comments and feedback are reasonable?
 - *Have you ever disagreed with your supervisor's comments on different drafts of your proposal or thesis? If so, what did you do? Did you express your disagreement and your own opinion? Why/why not?
 - *When you see your supervisor's comments on your proposal/thesis, what do you usually do? Do you apply all those comments or decide not to change some parts and try to convince your supervisor that you are right and nothing should be changed? Why/why not?
 - *Have you ever found some of the supervisor's comments vague or misleading? What do you usually do in such situations?
 - *How does your supervisor usually check whether you have applied the comments or not?
 - *How do you describe your supervisor's review of/contribution to your study/proposal/thesis?
 - *Do you feel like completing your thesis is getting easier or more difficult?
 - *What specific challenges are you experiencing in the process of writing drafts?
 - *How do you characterize your relationship with your supervisor? What support, if any, do you get from him/her? Do you think the relationship is positive and constructive?
- etc.

Guiding Questions About Students' Reactions Toward Their Supervisor's Feedback Comments and Messages:

- *What do you think of this comment/message?
 - *How did you feel while reading/seeing this comment/message for the first time?
 - *What do you think of your professor's perception of your knowledge and ability based on this comment/message?
 - *In your opinion, is the language of this comment/message supportive, polite, etc.?
 - *Did you find any of these comments/messages vague or misleading? What do you want to do?
 - *Are you going to apply/have you applied all the comments made by your supervisor? Why/why not?
- *etc.



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