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Research Paper

Politeness Maxims and Dialogue in the Feedback Discourse of Filipino Language Supervisors

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Abstract

This study explored the role of politeness in the feedback discourse during post-observation meetings between Filipino language supervisors and teachers. The analysis of 120 minutes of supervisory interactions revealed that supervisors effectively employed positive and negative politeness strategies. Pos-politeness enabled supervisors to "lean forward," emphasizing teachers' strengths and contributing to a constructive dialogue. Conversely, neg-politeness strategies were utilized to "lean backward" to avoid potential offenses, preserve the teachers' dignity, and prevent conflicts, reinforcing relational dynamics. Notably, the study highlights that while supervisors aimed to deliver precise and critical feedback, they simultaneously navigated the complexities of maintaining collegial relationships, highlighting how Leech's (2014) Politeness Principle complements the Gricean Cooperative Principle. The data indicated that both parties engaged in an ongoing dialogue, balancing transactional goals and interactional needs. This balancing act is essential as it fosters an environment conducive to teacher improvement while minimizing the inherent tensions of supervisory roles. The research underscores the nuanced utilization of linguistic mitigation strategies, revealing their significant contribution to sustaining dialogue amid potentially confrontational feedback scenarios. Relevant limitations and suggestions for future research were also discussed in the paper.

***Keywords*:** Politeness; Discourse Analysis; Dialogic Approach; Feedback Discourse; Post-Observation Discourse.

1. Introduction

The clinical supervision practice has evolved over the years, especially during the 1980s when alternatives to prescriptivist supervision were proposed (Marzano et al., 2011). There was a shift from evaluative supervision to supervisors as teacher helpers (Vasquez, 2004). Today, supervision is a means to evaluate teachers' effectiveness and offer feedback for their improvement (Cano & Garcia, 2013). Communication and interaction between parties are underscored, and these exchanges usually transpire in the post-observation meeting (Vasquez, 2004).

The shift in supervision perspectives has spawned tensions (Gümüşok, 2017; Vasquez, 2004) or "dilemmas of practice" (Wajnryb, 1994, p. 35). According to Vasquez and Wajnryb, one tension is the emphasis on teacher talk and reflection because some teachers expect the supervisor's expert assessment of the observed teaching, fueling dissatisfaction with the current reflective orientation of supervision (Chamberlin, 2000). Power asymmetry also adds tension to the post-observation meeting (Bailey, 2006; Vasquez, 2004; Wajnryb, 1994). Another question is whether the supervisor is a helper or an evaluator/critic (Pawlas & Olivas, 2008; Wajnryb, 1994). Other sources of tension are differences in world views, espoused theories, mismatches in the supervisor and teacher objectives, and conflicting perceptions on the necessity of supervision (Wajnryb, 1994).

The post-observation meeting represents a context where the supervisor must address competing demands. On the one hand, the supervisor must clearly and effectively convey feedback to ensure it helps the language teacher move toward their "ideal teaching behavior" (Gaies & Bowers, 1990, p. 169). On the other hand, the supervisor needs to maintain a productive working relationship with the teacher. This balancing act—the negotiated dialogue between

supervisor and teacher—must persist for both parties to achieve their respective agendas through the interaction. Harris (2003) pointed out that language serves transactional and interactional functions.

Since the post-lesson conference is mediated linguistically, the strategic use of linguistic elements becomes crucial for achieving this balance. One such tool is linguistic mitigation, which supervisors employ to deliver critical feedback while preserving collegiality (Morallo, 2019). This finding aligns with extant literature (Copland, 2011; Roberts, 1992; Vasquez, 2004; Waite, 1991; Wajnryb, 1994; Yeşilbursa, 2011). However, the role of mitigation in sustaining dialogue between supervisors and teachers remains underexplored. This paper addresses that gap in the literature.

Feedback-giving in post-observation meetings is inherently intense, confrontational, and personal (Wajnryb, 1994). Despite—and perhaps because of—their divergent goals, supervisors and teachers persist in dialogue. Politeness strategies may serve as a mechanism to maintain conversational momentum. Prior studies confirm that supervisory discourse in these meetings frequently incorporates mitigation strategies (Copland, 2011; Morallo, 2019; Roberts, 1992; Vasquez, 2004; Waite, 1991; Wajnryb, 1994; Yeşilbursa, 2011). Yet, how mitigation specifically facilitates dialogic continuity remains unclear. Therefore, using Kecskes' (2016) dialogic approach and Leech's (1983, 2014) politeness model, this study investigates the following questions:

1. What pragmatic maxims were employed by supervisors in providing feedback to language teachers during their post-observation conference?
2. How did the use of pragmatic maxims contribute to maintaining dialogue in supervisory discourse despite the critical nature of feedback?

1.1. Theoretical Framework

1.1.1. Dialogic Approach to Pragmatic Analysis

A dialogic approach to pragmatics is essential to understanding the role of mitigation in maintaining supervisory discourse. A dialogue is a reciprocal conversation between two or more entities consisting of actions, reactions, and a sequence of utterances (Kecskes, 2016). Kecskes further argues that a speech act constitutes a dialogue since it is a highly structured activity involving at least two agents. According to Kecskes, there have been attempts to expand the scope of pragmatic analysis to include both utterances and stretches of discourse, aiming to understand better the meanings conveyed by these utterances. Kecskes also highlights that participants in intercultural discourse demonstrate creativity at the discourse level. Therefore, intercultural interactions require both bottom-up, utterance-by-utterance analysis and top-down, holistic dialogue segment analysis to grasp the meanings intended by interlocutors fully. As a theory of meaning in context, the dialogic approach seeks to identify elements of meaning both within and outside the utterance (Kecskes, 2016), as the meaning of an utterance derives from its lexical components and subsequent responses. In the dialogic approach, communication is inherently dialogic, where interlocutors function as actors (Weigand, 2010), and speakers act as interpreters and reactors to their interlocutors' utterances. According to Weigand, the fundamental principle underpinning the dialogic approach is that humans are dialogic beings who communicate through dialogic interaction by producing utterances, reacting, and engaging in meaning negotiation and understanding. "…[C]oming to an understanding' or 'reaching a joint decision' [is] the general purpose of any dialogic language use. This does not mean 'agreement' but 'negotiating our individual purposes" (Weigand, 2010, pp. 509-510).

Salience, or the relative prominence of signs, can affect a speaker's message meaning in a dialogic sequence (as in Saul's (2002) distinction between speaker implicature and audience implicature) (Kecskes, 2016). Kecskes argues that cooperation and egocentrism (driven by salience) are present in interactions and shape speaker production. He noted that Grice was right to tie cooperation to the speaker-hearer's rationality, but egocentrism, which is driven by salience, should also be considered. In egocentrism, interlocutors activate and use the most salient information to construct and interpret messages. As a result, speaker and hearer experiences can be prioritized, thereby subjectivizing the message production and comprehension processes.

In a post-observation meeting, the supervisor and the language teacher must understand each other's goals. The supervisor provides clear feedback while maintaining a positive relationship, and the teacher seeks constructive feedback for self-improvement. For an adequate account of an interaction such as post-observation meeting discourse, the supervisor and the teacher are not only common ground speakers but also interaction participants with their agenda, prior

experiences, specific saliency mechanisms, and language production systems (Kecskes, 2016). The dialogue participants' underlying interests can be detected through their dialogic sequences.

1.1.2. Politeness

Leech's (1983, 2014) Politeness Principle (PP) is based on the Gricean Cooperative Principle (CP) and regulates human communicative behavior (Leech, 2014). Leech (1983) attaches his PP to the CP to explain instances where the CP seems to be violated. Politeness is a key element that accounts for indirect meaning statements and explains why people deviate from and flout the CP (Shahrokhi & Bidabadi, 2013). Shahrokhi and Bidabadi argue that the CP assumes others' cooperation in conversations and goal attainment, while the PP assumes cooperation through social balance, even in uncooperative discourse (Leech, 1983). For this reason, the PP is seen to have a higher regulatory role than the CP (Leech, 1983). According to Leech, the PP allows interlocutors to avoid communicative discord and maintain communicative concord. Leech explains that politeness is concerned with encouraging concord and avoiding discord in communication, primarily through the meanings expressed or implicated. Leech's goal-oriented approach to communication suggests that maxims represent people's goals of maintaining harmony. Interaction participants, such as supervisors, have illocutionary and social goals. While these goals sometimes align, at other times, they conflict.

Both of these instances involve politeness, and Leech (1983) termed them "pos-politeness" and "neg-politeness" to distinguish them from Brown and Levinson's (1987) "positive politeness" and "negative politeness." "Pos-politeness" places a high value on the interlocutor's positive traits, while "neg-politeness" aims to avoid offense and is at work when the illocutionary and social goals clash. "Pos-politeness" is speaker-oriented, while "neg-politeness" is hearer-oriented. Generally, hearer-oriented maxims are more potent than speaker-oriented ones, except for the Tact Maxim, which is more powerful than its hearer-oriented counterpart, the Generosity Maxim.

The dialogue between supervisors and language teachers can be maintained until a successful outcome is achieved through politeness. As Locher (2006, p. 250) stated, "polite behavior is part of the relational work that is inherent in all human social interaction." Politeness is crucial in managing mundane and professional interactions (Izadi & Jalilifar, 2022), including between teachers and students (Martí & Portolés, 2022). Relational work involves managing and navigating relationships with others during an interaction (Locher & Watts, 2005), and language is a vital means of communication (Locher, 2006). Caffi (1999) asserted that mitigation was a way of anchoring interaction management in the speakers' linguistic choices, thereby smoothing interactional management as it reduces risks for conversation participants.

1.1.3. General Strategy of Politeness

Leech's (2014) model of politeness begins with a super-constraint called "General Strategy of Politeness" (GSP) which posits (p. 90):

> To be polite, S expresses or implies meanings that associate a favorable value with what pertains to O or associates an unfavorable value with what pertains to S (S= self, speaker)

According to Leech, O typically refers to the addressee, although it may also apply to a person or group other than the speaker and the hearer. Leech said this happens if O is present or is somehow associated with the hearer.

In GSP, speech event participants lean backward to avoid offense, which transpires if either of them selfishly pursues his/her agenda through language. They lean forward in "pos-politeness" to highlight interlocutors' favorable traits. This indicates that politeness is employed by speakers such as supervisors and teachers not only to avoid discord but also to ensure dialog continuation despite the need to pursue their agenda. However, this does not preclude the pursuit of their agenda, even covertly. Politeness contributes to the continuation and maintenance of the conversation. Politeness, thus, is a means for interlocutors to convey their meanings under GSP.

Leech (2014) enumerated 10 pragmatic maxims - more "specific realizations of GSP" (p. 91). "Pos-politeness" maxims, which are S-oriented, are odd numbered while "neg-politeness" maxims, which are O-oriented, are even numbered. High value on the list means that O-oriented maxims give high value to O. At the same time, S-oriented maxims take value from S. Maxims higher up on the list are also more potent than those lower down, but this may be culturally variable.

(M1): Give a high value to O's wants (Generosity Maxim)
(M2): Give a low value to S's wants (Tact Maxim)
(M3): Give a high value to O's qualities (Approbation Maxim)
(M4): Give a low value to S's qualities (Modesty Maxim)
(M5): Give a high value to S's obligation to O (Obligation of S to O Maxim)
(M6): Give a low value to O's obligation to S (Obligation of O to S Maxim)
(M7): Give a high value to O's opinions (Agreement Maxim)
(M8): Give a low value to S's opinions (Opinion-Reticence Maxim)
(M9): Give a high value to O's feelings (Sympathy Maxim)
(M10): Give a low value to S's feelings (Feeling-Reticence Maxim)

Leech explains that the degree to which GSP and the maxims are observed depends on 1) vertical distance (relative power of the S and O), 2) horizontal distance between interlocutors (social distance between S and O), and 3) the "weightiness" of the transactions, etc. Interlocutors can observe, violate, exploit, or flout PP.

2. Literature Review

Feedback politeness is a crucial aspect of post-lesson supervisor discourse. It allows feedback-givers to balance the need for clarity with maintaining comity between the participants. There is a robust line of inquiry into feedback-giving politeness, including responding to it, as this act can signal a face threat. Several investigations have examined this phenomenon, providing insights into how supervisors and teachers have navigated the challenges of feedback-giving and receiving.

Studies on feedback politeness have employed a range of methodologies, reflecting the diverse approaches to examining this complex topic. This has been explored with document and transcript analysis (Roberts, 1992), audio recordings, questionnaires, and interviews (Vasquez, 2004). Later investigations saw the combination of these methods with others, such as video recordings, transcriptions, journal entries, and feedback forms, to analyze peer feedback interactions comprehensively (Agheshteh, 2019; Yeşilbursa, 2011). Thematic analysis was likewise employed to explore post-observation conferences, focusing on student teachers' politeness strategies (Gümüşok, 2017). Audio recordings were sometimes combined with ethnographic methods to investigate face negotiation during feedback interactions (Donaghue, 2021). A study, meanwhile, used a mixed-methods approach with quantitative evaluation to explore the characteristics of constructive feedback (Fong et al., 2021). More recent research has also been observed to use thematic analysis, multimodal analysis through discourse analysis, and quantitative methods to probe how student teachers respond to feedback (Bjørndal, 2020) and to examine the role of paralinguistic features in feedback interactions (Ergül, 2021).

Face negotiation is a central activity in feedback-giving situations, including post-observation meetings. According to Donaghue (2021), face negotiation is a feature of post-observation meetings, and face is at the center of teacher development and evaluation. Donague argues that face threat and face support are critical elements because of the nature of feedback interactions. Since face is at the center of feedback negotiations, it is unsurprising that feedback participants employ various facework strategies to mitigate face threats. Yeşilbursa (2011) found that positive and negative politeness strategies were used in peer feedback to soften face-threat impacts, highlighting that face threats can transpire even in seemingly friendly and collegial contexts such as peer feedback-giving. Facework is also not just limited to linguistic strategies as they can be encoded through paralinguistic means. For example, examining oral corrective feedback in the classroom and mitigation and smiling, Ergül (2021) found that linguistic and non-linguistic strategies like smiling were necessary for managing the face-threatening nature of giving corrective feedback, highlighting a multimodal dimension to the understanding of feedback politeness.

However, the foregoing discussion does not indicate that face-threatening talk should be avoided as much as possible. It has a role to play in certain situations. Copland (2011) found that face-threatening talk was acceptable in generic conventions after feedback meetings but with certain limitations and attendant mitigation during boundary breaches. Copland argues that face and face threats can only be analyzed in ongoing discourse. Since face threats can be acceptable in specific contexts, it can be argued that excessive politeness can also have detrimental effects and pose risks to feedback effectiveness, specifically its clarity. For instance, Vasquez (2004) and Fong et al. (2021) found that excessive politeness can make receivers dissatisfied, resulting in less constructive feedback. According to Fong et al. (2021), constructiveness increases even if feedback is unfriendly, provided that it is specific, indicating that some dislike the

patronizing tone of mitigated comments. Politeness likewise can indicate uncertainty and incompetence (Fong et al., 2021). These findings further highlight the importance of balancing politeness and clarity to ensure effective feedback.

Researchers have also investigated the feedback types given by various individuals. One of the earliest in this area is that of Roberts (1992), who found differences in feedback-giving between novice and experienced supervisors, between "too soft" and "too hard" supervisors (p. 19). Specifically, novice supervisors swung from two extremes: they either use fewer FTAs and be more polite, or they use more FTAs and be more direct and less polite. Culture can also play a role in the types of feedback supervisors use. For example, Agheshteh (2019) found that Iranian supervisors employed above-the-utterance-level mitigation (Wajnryb, 1994) to balance clarity and politeness. Other supervisors also overused or underused mitigation, suggesting supervisory training needed to hone their skills.

There was also interest in how feedback recipients, such as teachers and students, receive feedback. For example, Bjørndal (2020) and Gümüşok (2017) explored how student teachers responded to critical feedback. Bjørndal (2020) found that student teachers used feedback contradiction, withdrawal, competence face repair, and competent self-reflective face emphasis when responding to feedback. On the other hand, Gümüşok (2017) found that they used both positive and negative politeness strategies in justifying criticized acts and showing solidarity with fellow students. These studies underscore the dynamic nature of feedback interactions and the importance of understanding recipients' perspectives on the feedback they take.

Despite the extensive focus on feedback politeness, several gaps remain in the literature. Many studies, such as those by Agheshteh (2019) and Roberts (1992), are context-specific (e.g., Iranian language institutes and Norwegian universities), which may limit the applicability of their findings to other contexts. Future research should include diverse educational settings to enhance generalizability. Cultural differences in feedback politeness have been extensively explored. Studies like Agheshteh (2019) and Gümüşok (2017) highlight cultural contexts. However, comparative studies across cultures can provide a more nuanced understanding of feedback politeness. Additionally, previous feedback politeness research did not use Leech's (1983, 2014) politeness framework and Kecskes' (2016) dialogue approach to pragmatic analysis to investigate this phenomenon and understand how it contributes to interaction. Thus, this study aimed to address this gap by using the frameworks of Leech (1983, 2014) and Kecskes (2016) to investigate feedback politeness in the Philippines, which has not received much attention in the literature.

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

This investigation employed a qualitative design to identify the pragmatic maxims employed by supervisors and how these maxims contribute to maintaining dialogue in the post-lesson meeting. This study reanalyzed the transcripts of more than 120 minutes of eight post-lesson meetings originally used in Morallo (2018, 2019). The study used Leech's (1983, 2014) GSP and its maxims to uncover the pragmatic maxims employed by supervisors in giving critical feedback. These strategies were classified based on Leech's 10 pragmatic maxims. Once the pragmatic maxims were identified, the investigation focused on how utilizing them contributed to maintaining a dialogue between the supervisor and the teacher, characterized by a reciprocal conversation between two or more entities (Kecskes, 2016).

3.2. Data Source and Data Gathering

The current investigation used the supervisory discourse data gathered by Morallo (2018), which is also the basis for Morallo (2019). These data were more than 120 minutes of eight post-observation meeting conversations in two high schools in Manila and one in Paranaque City, Metro Manila Philippines. The Paranaque City high school represented the in-service context, while the two Manila schools represented the preservice context of the study. Before starting the data gathering, Morallo (2018) sought permission from the Paranaque City high school and the concerned department of the Catholic university through a formal letter. After obtaining their permission, the next step was to get the consent of the two in-service and two preservice supervisors involved in the study. The four language supervisors in in-service and preservice contexts were chosen because they fulfilled supervisory functions in their respective schools and had at least three years of supervision experience. The two female preservice supervisors were faculty members of the private Catholic university where they regularly supervised graduating Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English students while on their practicum. Their female in-service counterparts, meanwhile, taught in a public national high school in Paranaque

City and were master teachers with the responsibility to supervise some of their English department colleagues. The experience of these language supervisors in supervising teachers (pre- and in-service) ranged from three years to eight years.

The supervisors assisted in identifying the in-service and preservice teachers who would be observed. Once they had been identified, the researcher sought their agreement to be part of the study through a consent form. The selection of teachers was based on two criteria: 1) they should be teachers or trainee-teachers of English, and 2) they have experience or knowledge of the feedback-giving after classroom observation. Four in-service teachers, two males and two females, were chosen in the high school in Paranaque City. Their teaching experience ranged from 14 to 39 years when the data were gathered. The four preservice teachers, three males and one female, were students of the Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English program at the Catholic university. Two of them had their practicum in a science high school, while the other two had their practicum in a regular high school in Manila. The four preservice teachers had limited experience in supervision, although they were all familiar with it. The administrators and the participants were given a general overview of the study in the letters and consent forms sent to them. However, the specific details of the investigation were not divulged to avoid influencing their behavior during data gathering.

After securing all the necessary documents and the participants' consent, the four language supervisors were accompanied as they observed the lessons of the eight preservice and in-service teachers. During these classroom visits, observation data were gathered. The classroom visits were followed by post-observation meetings between the supervisors and their assigned teachers. Some meetings took place a few minutes after the visit, while others happened a day or two after the lesson, depending on the parties' schedule. Each post-observation meeting conversation was attended by the researcher and recorded using the audio recorder feature of a mobile phone. The recorded post-observation conversations were later transcribed to enable their analysis.

3.3. Data Analysis

The first step in the analysis of transcript data was the identification of feedback incidents (FIs). FIs are stretches of supervisory discourse that contain feedback and use pragmatic maxims. More granularly, an FI is composed of the preparatory language before the feedback, the feedback, and the responses of both the supervisor and the teacher. For the identification of pragmatic maxims, the focus was on each FI. No paraverbal features (Pennycook, 1985) were included in the analysis to narrow the scope of this analysis. Each FI was divided into turns which referred to “one or more streams of speech bounded by speech of another, usually an interlocutor” (Crookes, 1990, p. 185).

Each turn encoding a pragmatic maxim was labeled based on a code that indicated the supervisory discourse and the feedback incident where this turn could be found. For example, a code such as [3.7] meant that the turn could be found in Supervisory Discourse 3, Feedback Incident 7. Once the pragmatic maxims were identified, frequency counting was employed to answer the first research question. For the second research question, the role of politeness in facilitating the conduct of the critical incident was extracted. Since politeness was employed in providing feedback, this investigation looked at employed pragmatic maxims to see the role they played in facilitating the continuation of the dialogue to enable both parties to achieve their communicative goals. During data analysis, the researcher engaged in prolonged immersion in the data. After the initial analysis, two more rounds of analysis and data checking were done, with the second and third rounds of analysis done one week after the preceding round. There was also a conscious effort on the researcher's part to examine his conceptual lens, assumptions, and values and how these affected data interpretation. These were recorded in memo notes written during data analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

This study uses Leech’s (2014) pragmatic view of politeness, which is also based on Gricean grounds like Brown and Levinson’s (1987) model. This study presumes that a Politeness Principle (PP) is in operation during interactions between individuals, and PP constrains individuals to maintain comity and avoid discord during interactions (Leech, 2014). Further, Leech argues that politeness is an aspect of goal-oriented behavior, which means that politeness use is intended to convey politeness toward one’s interlocutor. The first research question asked about the pragmatic maxims employed by supervisors in providing feedback to language teachers during their post-lesson conference. Table 1 below presents the post-observation meeting conference number, the number of feedback incidents found in each post-meeting conference discussion, the number of turns in each post-meeting conference exhibiting the use of pragmatic maxims, and

the pragmatic maxims employed and the number of times each maxim is used in the identified turns. (These maxims are based on whether they encode pos-politeness or neg-politeness, with odd-numbered maxims exhibiting the former and even-numbered maxims conveying the latter.)

Table 1. *Number of Pragmatic Maxims Found in Each Supervisory Conference*

Post-Conference Number	Number of Feedback Incidents	Number of Turns Giving Feedback	M1	M3	M5	M7	M9	M2	M4	M6	M8	M10
1	9	43	0	12	0	14	6	6	0	0	28	0
2	4	27	0	7	0	14	6	2	0	0	15	0
3	8	25	0	9	0	11	0	6	0	0	21	0
4	8	35	1	14	0	11	5	5	0	0	25	0
Sub-Total			*1*	*42*	*0*	*50*	*17*	*17*	*0*	*0*	*89*	*0*
5	14	13	0	10	0	1	2	8	0	0	12	0
6	18	18	0	12	0	10	4	10	0	0	32	0
7	13	10	0	10	0	5	0	7	0	0	21	1
8	13	13	0	11	1	6	1	10	0	0	20	0
Sub-Total			*0*	*43*	*1*	*22*	*7*	*35*	*0*	*0*	*85*	*1*
Total			1	85	1	72	24	52	0	0	174	1

Table 1 shows in-service supervisors primarily employed five pragmatic maxims in their post-observation classroom meetings. Based on their frequency of use, these were: 1) Opinion-reticence Maxim (M8), 2) Approbation Maxim (M3), 3) Agreement Maxim (M7), 4) Tact Maxim (M2), and 5) Sympathy Maxim (M9). Based on these data, supervisors employed maxims that placed a high value on the teachers' qualities (pos-politeness) (M7, M3, and M9) and minimized the degree of imposition of the supervisors' goals on teachers (neg-politeness) (M8 and M2) (Leech, 2014).

Here are the turns from the in-service supervisor discourse that exemplify the pragmatic maxims:

(1) Politeness Maxim: Opinion-reticence Maxim (M8)
Type of Politeness: Neg-politeness
Supervisory Conference Number: 4
Feedback Incident: 2
Turn Number: 5
Supervisory Turn:

> Ah, siguro noh para sa akin lang. I don't know kung tama. Kasi parang nabigla ang bata agad gagawa ng story, noh? Siguro medyo ah you could've asked something like or ah sort of a question for them to, to parang as, as a start na ma, ma, ma-ano sila tawag dito. Maybe you could've asked ah, "We, we" para sa akin, if I were to teach lang, siguro sasabihin ko ah, "You are used of ano you are used of or we are used of being told of stories or listen to, to sho, a to short stories." Parang ganun. So, this time you'll be the one to ano you'll be the one to make a short story.
>
> (Ah, maybe this is just for me. I don't know if it's correct. The students were like surprised that they would immediately write a story, right? Maybe ah you could've asked something like or ah sort of a question for them to, to like as, as a start, they could what do you call this. Maybe you could've asked ah, "We, we," this is just for me, if I were only to teach, maybe I would tell them ah, "You are used of like you are used of or we are used of being told of stories or listen to, to sho, a to short stories." Something like that. So, this time you'll be the one to like you'll be the one to make a short story.

In the post-observation conference, the supervisor must adhere to the Gricean Cooperative Principle (CP), which governs how people interact to ensure that the interaction is maximally efficient and effective to achieve a rational interaction (Huang, 2014). The supervisor must also maintain his relationship with the teacher, and this is where the Politeness Principle (PP) complements CP (Leech, 1983). PP maintains the social equilibrium and congenial relations between interactants (Leech, 1983), the supervisor and the teacher in this investigation.

In this example, the in-service supervisor commented on the lack of an introduction to a story-writing activity for students. The level and nature of hesitation that the supervisor was encoding in the language was evident in this turn through the use of syntactic strategies such as the simple past "nabigla" (was surprised), negative transportation ("I don't…"), modal verbs ("could"), conditionals ("…if I were to teach"), hesitation markers ("ah"), duplication/reformulation ("like or ah sort of"), minimization ("I don't know kung tama") (I don't know if it's correct), hedges ("sort of"), among other strategies. Another indicator of the supervisor's hesitation in giving the feedback was the length of the turn because the higher the impositive flavor of the sentence, the wordier the request became (Ackermann, 2023).

(2) Politeness Maxim: Agreement Maxim (M7)
Type of Politeness: Pos-politeness
Supervisory Conference Number: 2
Feedback Incident: 3
Turn Number: 76
Supervisory Turn:

Yun naman parati question naming dalawa. 'Marina, saan ka na?' Kasi we used to talk about the lesson e. "Ma'am, ganito po ako." "E ako din kaaano lang e. Bakit si ganun ano?" Parang meron kaming comparison na…

(That is always our question. 'Marina, where are you?' Because we used to talk about the lesson e. 'Ma'am, I'm here.' 'Me, too, I've just like e. Why is our colleague like?' It's like we have a comparison that…)

The Agreement Maxim was the second most frequently used politeness maxim in the in-service supervisory data. According to Leech (1983), this maxim calls for the minimization of disagreement and the maximization of agreement between the supervisor and the teacher. Agreement is the preferred response to one's interlocutor's utterances (Leech, 2014). In the corpus, an agreement was usually encoded through words and utterances that signaled convergence of opinions such as "oo" (yes) and "hmuh" (similar to ahuh, sound produced as signal of agreement with upper and lower lips closed).

In the example, the supervisor agreed with the teacher's observation that their department colleagues were fast in lesson pacing. The supervisor encoded this agreement by claiming common ground (i.e., having the same question) and using the inclusive first-person plural pronouns "naming" (our) and "we." By expressing commonality and common ground, the supervisor expressed solidarity with the teacher, allowing the two to maintain conversational equilibrium despite the need to convey feedback in the discourse (Leech, 1983).

(3) Politeness Maxim: Approbation Maxim (M3)
Type of Politeness: Pos-politeness
Supervisory Conference Number: 1
Feedback Incident: 4
Turn Number: 116
Supervisory Turn:

Yung reasoning power nila medyo gumagana kahit papaano. Pero you were able to do that naman. But not entirely, in the entire ano questions, hindi mo na ano.

(Their reasoning power is somehow tapped. But you were able to do that. But not entirely, in the entire what questions, you were not able to.)

The Approbation Maxim banks on the maximization of praise and minimization of dispraise of the interlocutor (Leech, 1983). This resembles Wajnryb's (1994) stroking aside, which buttresses the teacher's ego to protect it from critical conference feedback. Through approbation, the receiver's confidence is strengthened, and the teacher thus can better receive the feedback. The approbation provides a preemptive balm to soothe the impact of critical comments. It may also be given after stinging feedback.

The role of approbation in buttressing the teacher's face can be seen in the sample turn above. In this, the supervisor gave the teacher compliments in two ways: 1) the students did what was expected of them, which was an oblique praise of the teacher as whatever students could do was reflective of the teacher's ability, and 2) the explicit praise

given in “Pero you were able to do that naman” (But you were able to somehow do that). However, the critical flavor of the comment was still evident with “naman” (somehow) and more explicit in the following sentence, “But not entirely, in the entire ano questions, hindi mo na ano” (…you were not able to). In this example, the supervisor stroked the teacher’s ego before delivering the critical comments. The stroke allowed the teacher to withstand the onslaught and the conversation to continue.

(4) Politeness Maxim: Tact Maxim (M2)
Type of Politeness: Neg-politeness
Supervisory Conference Number: 8
Feedback Incident: 12
Turn Number: 27
Supervisory Turn:

> I like the questioning strategy. You know how to ask questions. You know how to ask reflective questions. But try not to stretch it too much. It will eat up what’s supposed to be discussed for the day, alright?

The politeness of the Tact Maxim stems from cost minimization and benefit maximization for the teacher (Leech, 1983). In this maxim, the “other-centeredness” (Leech, 1983) is encoded by deprioritizing what the speaker (supervisor) wants through indirectness and tentativeness (of requests) to give the interlocutor a chance to refuse. This window for refusal lessens the imposition of the speaker’s message.

In the turn above, one can see the strategies employed by the supervisor in deploying the impositive, “But try not to stretch it too much.” First, within the imposition itself, “try” created a suggestive tone where the addressee seemed to be encouraged not to stretch the questioning of students too much. Second, the first two sentences encoded the approbation maxim by praising the preservice teacher’s questioning ability. This compliment stroked the ego of the addressee to enable it to withstand the imposition’s sting, which was attenuated. This demonstrated a typical pattern in the data: a combination of pragmatic maxims to encode multiple ways of achieving conversational equilibrium, similar to Yeşilbursa’s (2011) observation. Finally, the last sentence had a similar function to what Ackermann (2023) called a supportive move. By explaining the need for the imposition, the supervisor made it more acceptable to the preservice teacher.

(5) Politeness Maxim: Sympathy Maxim (M9)
Type of Politeness: Pos-politeness
Supervisory Conference Number: 4
Feedback Incident: 5
Turn Number: 25
Supervisory Turn:

> Okay din yung ano, yung ah mga so yu, yung mga reporters, are, ah are they the same people na laging nag-ano sa una, hindi? Nag-iba? Kasi yung iba parang, nahihiya pa noh? Siguro mga first time, mga first timer.
>
> (What you did is also okay, the ah, so, the, they reporters, are, ah, are they the same people who like at the beginning, not? They change? It’s like other students were still shy, right? Probably, it’s their first time, they’re first-timers.)

The Sympathy Maxim maximizes sympathy between self and other (Leech, 1983), who in most cases is the addressee but in others can be people outside of the conversation (Leech, 2014). According to Leech, it is polite to demonstrate that one shares the feelings of others.

In the supervisory turn above, pos-politeness was done through the supervisor’s expression that she understood what students who were not in the conversation but were associated with the teacher felt during the activity. The politeness also came from the cover provided by the demonstrated understanding of the supervisor. There was a reason for the students' performance, and the supervisor understood it; thus, the performance was not entirely attributable to the teacher.

(6) Politeness Maxim: Sympathy Maxim (M9)
Type of Politeness: Pos-politeness
Supervisory Conference Number: 5
Feedback Incident: 14

Turn Number: 33
Supervisory Turn:

So congratulations. That's a very good ah lesson, and I think you can do more okay because I know you're being, you're full of many ideas you're very creative. That's a very good way, a very good characteristic of a teacher is to make the lesson interesting and to make the students interested.

In this other example of the sympathy maxim, the preservice supervisor congratulated the preservice teacher for the observed lesson. Congratulating is a way for people to show that they share their interlocutors' feelings. Through the felicitation, one signals to the other party that he/she highly values what the interlocutor is feeling, which might indicate pride or happiness that one's class observation is done.

1. S: Tapos, ah yung ano natin, Sir, yung pagco-correct natin sa students while ano, sa palagay mo hindi makaka-apekto yun sa ano natin? (Then, ah, our ah, Sir, our correction of students while ah, do you think that will not affect our ah?)
2. T: Like what, Ma'am?
3. S: Kasi… (Because…)
4. T: Yung… (The…)
5. S: Diba you let them ano, you let them read. Tapos isa-isa. Kaya lang napansin ko sa'yo every time na may mistake siya, may error kino-correct mo. Oo ang bata parang di kaya parang ah… (You let them like, you let them read, right? The one student at a time. But I noticed with you was that every time a student made a mistake, an error, you correct it. Yes, the students maybe might not ah…
6. T: Parang nahihiya na siya.. (Like they become shy…)
7. S: Nahihiya na siya oo. What can you say about that, Sir? (Yes, they become shy. What can you say about that, Sir?)
8. T: Hindi, Ma'am. I have to, I have to correct them right, right… (No, Ma'am. I have to, I have to correct them right, right…)
9. S: Right there and then?
10. T: Yes, because if, if I don't, when?
11. S: Oo (Yes)
12. T: That's why it's reading, Ma'am, e diba? Pero not to, not to humiliate naman siguro. I'm just, I'm just parang re-echoing what is. Parang ini-echo ko lang po yung what is, what supposedly the correct pronunciation of the word. (That's why it's reading, Ma'am, e right? Pero probably not to, not to humiliate them. I'm just, I'm just like re-echoing what is. I am just like re-echoing what is, what supposedly the correct pronunciation of the word.)
13. S: Are they aware of that? Na ganun ka lang? (Are they aware of that? That you are just like that?)
14. T: Yes, Ma'am.
15. S: So para walang, hindi sila parang mahiya naman sila na…mahiya na sila magbasa kasi parang. (So, there's no, they will not become shy to, shy to read because maybe.)
16. T: Ah hindi naman po. (Ah not necessarily)
17. T: Ah hindi naman po. (Ah not necessarily)
18. S: Maco-correct naman (They will be corrected again.)
19. T: At least maa-ano naman nila yun. They're aware of that. So orientation palang namin I told them na ano you will experience ano ah correction. (At least they can like. They're aware of that. As early as our orientation I told them you will experience like ah correction.)
20. S: Hmuh
21. T: Especially because this is an English class because they themselves know that they do not speak well so they have, na parang ano na po nila yun na ay iko-correct ako ni Sir in terms of, in terms of pronunciation, in terms of fluency [mumbles] (Especially because this is an English class because they themselves know that they do not speak well so they have, like they like expect that I will be corrected by Sir in terms of, in terms of pronunciation, in terms of fluency.)
22. S: Good for them kasi you were able to tell them. (Good for them because you were able to tell them.)
23. T: Yes, Ma'am.
24. S: Yung tungkol dyan sa mga rules mo about that. Kasi minsan may mga batang, if ever naco-correct sila, parang ayaw na nila mag-participate. (Regarding your rules about that. Sometimes, they are students, if ever they get corrected, the like don't like to participate.)

25. T: Ay hindi naman po. Kasi sinabi ko sa kanila the reason why they are in school is to parang this is a parang a training e. (Ay not necessarily. Because I told them the reason why the are in school is to like this is like a training e.)
26. S: Hmuh
27. T: Every mistake will be experienced. Even, even, even si teacher magkakamali parang ganun. All of us will [mumbles], and all of us will correct each other. (Every mistake will be experienced. Even, even, even teacher will make mistakes like that. All of us will [mumbles], and all of us will correct each other.)

4.1. Role of Pragmatic Maxims in Dialogue Maintenance

The second research question asks how pragmatic maxims contributed to maintaining dialogue between supervisor and teacher despite the tension in the discourse. A sample interaction from one of the post-lesson meetings was utilized to demonstrate this role. The excerpt above shows how the supervisor commented on the teacher's (over) correction in class in the post-observation conference.

In this exchange, the supervisor raised the issue of the teacher's frequent correction of students' mistakes in class in turn 1. However, the use of opinion-reticence in the turn, as shown by the hesitation markers such as "ah" and the use of "ano" (whatchamacallit), is apparent. In addition, the reticence was also shown by the supervisor's question, which was a sign of deference to the teacher's explanation of events. In turn 2, however, the teacher clarified what the supervisor meant instead of taking the line that the supervisor had given. By asking the question, the teacher signaled to the supervisor that the feedback had a sting, and he wanted to clarify what she meant. In turn 5, the supervisor again explained this through opinion reticence, confirming what transpired with the teacher. There were also reformulations, "Kaya lang napansin ko sa'yo every time na may mistake siya, may error kino-correct mo" (But what I noticed with you was every time he/she made a mistake, made an error, you correct it). In the last part of the turn, the word "parang" (like) was used, which signaled uncertainty on the supervisor's point. In turn 7, the supervisor agreed with what the teacher said in the previous turn, using the agreement maxim. Then, it was followed by another question, again registering opinion reticence through deference to the teacher's explanation. In turn 8, the teacher declared that students would not hesitate to communicate in class due to his error correction, openly contradicting what the supervisor was indirectly telling him. He explained that correction was needed. This was followed by another question about the necessity of correcting students immediately. Again, the supervisor's response was a question that used opinion reticence. In the next turn, the teacher directly answered the question with "Yes, because if, if I don't, when?". At this point, the teacher was assertively defending his practice in class. The supervisor knew this was a delicate issue and employed pragmatic maxims in the previous turns. In turn 11, sensing the heightened defensiveness of the teacher, the supervisor said, "Oo" (Yes), signaling that she understood what the teacher was communicating using the agreement maxim. However, as the exchange continued, this did not mean the supervisor had already ceded the matter to the teacher. Using the agreement maxim, which is a pos-positive maxim, the supervisor highlighted a positive characteristic of the teacher to diffuse the tension and lower the teacher's heightened defensiveness.

Taking the signal of agreement in the previous turn, the teacher in turn 12 further explained his practice. He explained that his intention was not to humiliate the students. He used a less intense lexeme than "correct" in this utterance, "echo." In his correction, he did not directly tell students about their mistakes. Instead, he was "echoing" for everyone the correct way of reading or pronouncing. In turn 13, the supervisor used opinion-reticence again through her questions, and the teacher answered in the affirmative in the next turn. In turn 15, the supervisor shared that correction, especially over-correction, could make students hesitant to read and participate in class. However, although this was the kernel of what the supervisor wanted to convey in this feedback incident, she shared her insight hesitantly, again encoding opinion-reticence. Turns 16 to 19 showed the two nearing an agreement on the event's interpretation, with the teacher signaling agreement in turn 20. The teacher continued his explanation in turn 21, followed by turn 22, where the supervisor used the approbation maxim. The teacher agreed in turn 23. In turn 24, the supervisor explained her point on some students becoming unwilling to participate in class if they were (overly) corrected. This was again marked by hesitation and reticence. In the next turn, the teacher again defended himself and told the supervisor that this did not happen in his classes since he explained the purpose of correction to students. The supervisor agreed again in turn 26, and the teacher continued his justification in turn 27.

This exchange revealed how the supervisor's use of pragmatic maxims diffused tension at crucial moments, aligning with the literature on facework and communicative strategies. The data also showed that the participants in the exchange, especially the supervisors, engaged in facework (Goffman, 1955). This facework allows interaction participants to maintain the balance of conversation and keep it going. Additionally, facework contributes to individual relationships (Domenici & Littlejohn, 2006). In the exchange, the use of pos- and neg-politeness by the supervisor allowed her to maintain concord and avoid discord, which contributed to their relationship. Donaghue (2021) emphasizes the importance of face support in institutional interactions, such as post-observation conferences, where speakers strive for communicative concord. Speakers deploy strategies that allow them and their interlocutors to maintain face (Tseng & Chen, 2022). For instance, after detecting defensiveness in turn 2, the supervisor employed opinion-reticence, deferring to the teacher's confirmation of events to clarify her earlier point. The use of politeness to maintain concord was evident throughout this turn. Copland (2011) likewise demonstrated that using mitigation in situations where boundaries had been breached could ensure the continuation of conversations. This is because politeness, viewed from a dialogic perspective (Kecskes, 2016), is akin to grease that keeps conversational gears turning. Using pragmatic maxims allowed the supervisor and the teacher to engage in meaning negotiation and reach an understanding despite differing views on student correction. Weigand (2010) notes the negotiation of "individual purposes" in such interactions. Supervisors and teachers may disagree on the wisdom of (over)-correction of students, but they can articulate their purposes. However, the use of politeness also carries some potential risks and drawbacks as it is a constraint on the Cooperative Principle (Leech, 2014). Vasquez (2004) and Fong et al. (2021) warned about the possible loss of message in attenuating one's message. In the data, the teacher maintained his rationale for (over) correction of students even at the end of the feedback incident. As these studies noted, politeness through mitigation might have affected the clarity of the supervisor's message in the exchange. It might have also masked the urgency of the witnessed event as the tentativeness of the feedback might have sent the inadvertent message that the issue was not that serious (Vasquez, 2004).

6. Conclusion

This study examined pragmatic maxims in supervisory feedback during post-observation conferences. The discourse analysis revealed that supervisors employed pos-politeness to emphasize favorable traits and neg-politeness to avoid offense and reduce imposition (Leech, 2014) to improve teaching through feedback (Goldsberry, 1988, as cited in Bailey, 2009). The second research question of the study focused on how politeness maintained supervisory discourse dialogue. Analysis of a post-lesson conference revealed the supervisor's strategic use of pragmatic maxims to reduce tension, an example of Goffman's (1955) facework, which fosters relationship-building. In institutional interactions like supervisory conferences, politeness maintains conversational equilibrium (Donaghue, 2021). From a dialogic perspective (Kecskes, 2016), pragmatic maxims contribute to the overall feedback-giving discourse, acting like "grease" to keep the conversation moving while participants pursue their agendas. This study supports the importance of face in feedback interactions (Donaghue, 2021; Morallo, 2018).

Overall, the study found that speakers avoid discord (Leech, 2014) and enable the talk to continue so that they can pursue their agenda, even covertly, through the speaker's egocentrism (Kecskes, 2016). This also supports face's central role in feedback interaction (Donaghue, 2021; Morallo, 2018). Through both pos-politeness and neg-politeness, this study shows, as Donaghue (2021) claimed, that face support is an essential aspect of post-observation and not just face threat, which has been the focus of attention in the literature. According to Vasquez (2004), supervisors employ positive politeness to address the power asymmetry between them and teachers. Power asymmetry is a supervision "dilemma of practice" that spawns tensions (Bailey, 2006; Vasquez, 2004; Wajnryb, 1994). In the case of this investigation, both pos-politeness and neg-politeness (Leech, 1983, 2014) were employed to avoid offending the teacher despite having institutional power over him/her. This is needed as face is emotionally charged, and attacking it may result in negative emotions (Hosseini, 2022). Pos-politeness "lowers" the supervisor by making him/her highlight the positive characteristics of the teacher, and this lowering reduces power asymmetry. However, politeness might imperil communication clarity as warranted by the Cooperative Principle. As noted earlier, the attenuation of a message through politeness maxims dilutes the message (Fong et al., 2021; Vasquez, 2004). Its contents become subject to negotiation and challenge, which might inadvertently diffuse the urgency of addressing the raised concerns in the conversation. It might also make the supervisor appear incompetent or uncertain.

This study investigated the politeness maxims employed by supervisors in their feedback-giving and the contribution of these maxims to dialogue and conversation maintenance. However, there are still areas waiting for research mining. Other institutional discourse can also be investigated for pragmatic maxims employed by interlocutors using a dialogic approach to pragmatics (Kecskes, 2016) to shed light on politeness patterns across discourse types. For example, politeness across professional settings can be investigated as different practices across fields may lead to misunderstanding and over-politeness or impoliteness (Izadi, 2022). Cross-cultural and cross-lingual studies of pragmatic maxims are crucial for identifying universal politeness principles and their cultural variations. These investigations could lead to an intercultural framework of politeness. More empirical investigations can identify the politeness boundary level that is considered constructive or too much in feedback-giving. Future research could investigate the politeness maxims teachers use when responding to feedback. Controlling the time lapse between observation and post-lesson conferences should also be considered, as this can impact the quality of feedback. This study did not account for this, potentially affecting the analyzed feedback. Another limitation was the lack of analysis on the mitigating impact of code-switching, which is common in multilingual countries like the Philippines. Utterances were coded based on their politeness strategy, irrespective of language.

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Author Contributions

NA

Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

Declaration of AI Use

During the preparation of this work, the author used Grammarly to check the grammatical accuracy and improve the phrasing of sentences in the manuscript. After using this tool/service, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed, and he takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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