Investigating Power and Politeness in Institutional Discourse in Post-Observation Meetings in Universities in Egypt: A Report of an Open-ended Questionnaire

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Abstract

A post-observation meeting is a type of speech event of teacher training that takes place within the institutional/educational settings. In this meeting the supervisor offers support and advice about teaching for the teacher's professional development. The asymmetrical relationship between the supervisor and the teacher in this meeting makes it sensitive and fragile. Due to potential anxiety and tension of both teacher and supervisor, they tend to use face saving practices, represented in politeness strategies, to save self-representation during this spoken institutional interaction. This paper attempts to present a report of an open-ended questionnaire reviewing the opinions of ten supervisors from three different universities on the use of politeness strategies in post-observation meetings. Upon analyzing the questionnaire qualitatively, the findings revealed that institutionally powerful supervisors intentionally manipulated politeness strategies to save the face of all participants for different reasons. Analysis highlighted several themes such as providing support and improvement, sharing experience, equality and respect, etc. Finally, the supervisors provided their advice to improve post-observation meetings for more constructive feedback.

Keywords: Post-Observation Meeting; Power; Politeness Strategies; Institutional Discourse; Supervision; Feedback

السُلطة واللياقة داخل الخطاب المؤسسي في المقابلات البعدية للملاحظات الصفية بالجامعات في مصر: عرض نتائج استبيان مفتوح

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المستخلص

تعتبر المقابلات البعدية للملاحظات الصفية نمطاً من أنماط الأفعال الكلامية المتعلقة بتدريب المعلمين الذي يتم داخل الخطاب المؤسسي التعليمي. أثناء تلك المقابلات يقوم المشرف بإسداء النصح بشأن التدريس وهو الأمر الذي يساهم في دعم مسيرة المعلم المهنية. لكن يؤدي عدم تكافئ العلاقة بين المشرف والمعلم أثناء تلك المقابلة إلى إتسامها بالحساسية والهشاشة. ونتيجة القلق أو الضغط المحتملين الواقعين على كلاً من المعلم والمشرف أثناء يلجأ المشاركون لممارسات كلامية تحفظ ماء وجههم أثناء تلك المناقشات. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى عرض نتائج استبيان مفتوح من خلال استعراض آراء عشرة مشرفين من ثلاث جامعات مختلفة بشأن إستخدام إستراتيجيات اللياقة في المقابلات البعدية للملاحظات الصفية. وقد أظهرت نتائج تحليل الإستبيان باستخدام المنهج الكيفي إلى استخدام المشرفين الأكثر سلطة ونفوذ داخل المؤسسة التعليمية لإستراتيجيات اللياقة بصورة متعمدة لحفظ ماء وجه المشاركين في المقابلات وذلك لأسباب متباينة. وقد سلط التحليل الضوء على العديد من المحاور والموضوعات مثل تقديم الدعم والتحسين ومشاركة الخبرات والمساواة والإحترام بجانب غيرها من الموضوعات. ويقوم المشرفون أخيراً بتقديم نصائحهم لتحسين المقابلات البعدية للملاحظات الصفية من أجل تغذية راجعة بناءة بدرجة أكبر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المقابلات البعدية للملاحظات الصفية ، السُلطة/القوة ، استراتيجيات اللياقة ، الخطاب المؤسسي ، الإشراف، التغذية الراجعة

1. Introduction

After the teacher is observed in class by a supervisor, a 30-minute to an hour feedback takes place in a closed meeting in which the supervisor offers support and advice about teaching through assessing the teaching as pass, borderline or fail. Also, teachers are expected to comment on their performance as a method for developing their teaching abilities and reflection (Copland, 2012). These meetings are called post-observation meetings (POMs). A post-observation meeting, also referred to as feedback/supervisory conference, is a type of speech event of teacher training that takes place outside the classroom; yet it is held within the educational settings. During this meeting a teacher meets with a supervisor to discuss specific events that took place during the supervisor's visit to the teacher's class and discusses general issues related to teaching for the sake of teacher's professional development (Vásquez, 2004; Vásquez & Reppen, 2007). Due to potential anxiety and tension, of both teachers and supervisors, which might prevail in such globally face-threatening meetings, participants tend to use face saving practices in order to save self-representation during this spoken institutional interaction (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003; Goffman, 1967, 2005; Murdoch, 2000; Vásquez, 2004).

POMs are characterized by the asymmetrical relationship among participants since workplace interactions are seldom neutral in terms of power (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003). Obtaining such power requires adopting a certain strategy when providing teachers with feedback to help them develop (Murdoch, 2000). In order to save all participants' faces where supervisors are assumed to possess some degree of authority, supervisors tend to use particular politeness strategies to mitigate face-threatening speech acts (FTAs) while providing suggestions, advice or constructive criticism.

In such institutional power-laden contexts, power and politeness are closely related (Chamberlin, 2000; Harris, 2003; Vásquez, 2004). Developing Goffman's (1967) concept of *face*, Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) introduced their *Politeness Theory* in which power is a significant component.

Harris (2003) argued that, although there is a possibility of having *confrontational encounters* in the institutional settings, politeness strategies serve to avoid the "explicit confrontation and possible communication breakdown in such settings" (p. 31). Accordingly, the teachers' professional development, which is the maximum goal and for which these meetings are held, is expected to be reached.

This paper has been conducted as a part of a larger study that investigated the usage of politeness strategies in POMs in higher education settings in Egypt in which participants (i.e., supervisors and instructors) play certain institutional roles and possess a certain degree of authority. It attempts to present a report of an open-ended questionnaire reviewing the opinions of the supervisors on the use of politeness strategies in post-observation meeting. It starts with a background to the topic and a review of related literature followed by the paper rationale, the research question, data and methodology and analysis and discussion.

2. Theoretical Background and Literature Review
2.1. Institutional Discourse

Thornborrow (2013) defined *institutional discourse* as a form of interaction that is a consequence of an interchange between the participants' interactional and discursive role on the one hand and their identity and status resulting such interaction on the other. Thornborrow introduced institutional talk as "talk which sets up positions for people to talk from and restricts some speakers' access to certain kinds of discursive actions." (p. 4). One of the characteristics of institutional talk, Thornborrow opined, is that in such talk the participants' institutional identities and discursive resources, that allow them to fulfill certain actions, could be either weakened or strengthened in relation to granted institutional identities. Here, discourse is shaped and affected by the surrounding situations and social structure while it shapes them too. As a result, institutional discourse is engaged in shaping the accountability framework in which its members organize their behaviors in social settings as well as assess and

respond to the others' behaviors (Fairclough, 1993; Mayr, 2008; Miller, 1994).

Habermas (1984) referred to institutional talk as 'strategic' to distinguish it from non-institutional/ conversational talk or 'communicative discourse'. Miller (1994) explained that institutional discourse focuses on the concrete strategies or procedures used by the participants in such setting while they are trying interactionally and textually to create social images when dealing with the others. In complex modern societies, much of social practice is institutional in nature where most communication in business, government, education and law institutions is essentially verbal face-to-face interactions. Language is considered an essential tool in the hands of highly structured organizations that hold most power that controls the way the normal people live and influences the way they think (Bloor & Bloor, 2013).

In order to orient the others to the unfamiliar settings of such institutions, expectations or practices delivered to them are mostly given throughout organizers and/or directors who instruct their subordinates on assumptions, concerns, vocabularies, or interactional patterns associated with settings. As a result, social realities and relations become available between participants (Miller, 1994).

2.2. Power and Institutional Discourse

Power can be defined as "the ability to control others and the ability to accomplish one's goals" (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003, P. 3). Regarding institutional talk, Habermas (1984) described it as 'power-laden' and 'goal-directed' which differs from the communicative discourse that is characterized by the symmetrical engagement between speakers to achieve mutual understanding. Contrarily, institutional discourse is characterized by the existence of different systems, restrictions, organizational interests, power and dominance (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Foucault, 1980).

Institutional discourse has been investigated from different perspectives. Many studies (e.g., Cameron, 2000; Drew & Heritage, 1992; Gunnarsson et al., 1997; Iedema, 2003; Mumby, 2001; Mumby & Clair, 1997; Sarangi &

Roberts, 1999; Thornborrow, 2013) focused on interaction and practices in relation to the triangle of discourse, ideology and power. Other studies (Chouliaraki, 1998; Fairclough, 1993, 1995) investigated the triangle of discourse in relation to language and education. In addition, Wodak (1996) studied communication barriers in institutions. Also, Habermas (1984) distinguished between the *communicative uses of language* that aim at producing and comprehending *strategic uses* that aim at forcing people to do things.

According to Silverman (1997), two aspects constitute institutional discourse. The first is the *institutions' structure* that includes what is said in any given social setting, how it is said and who may say it. The second aspect is *the participants' social roles* or the positions they occupy while manipulating certain strategies to achieve their needs and restrict the others from enjoying the same position in addition to having access to certain types of discursive actions.

2.3. Asymmetry in Institutional Settings

One of the factors that affects interaction and makes it sensitive and fragile is the asymmetrical relationship between interactants (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Wajnryb, 1994). Thornborrow (2013) attributed the reason of such asymmetry to the unequal distribution of social power and rank due to the differential distribution of knowledge. In the educational settings, such distribution grants the professor an institutional rank over the student, for example (Diamond, 1996).

Although most studies linked power to the institutional rank, Diamond (1996) opposed such opinion arguing that power is negotiated between interactants through conversation. She explained that every verbal interaction may be competitive between interactants where certain strategies related to communicative competence are used to resist the roles assigned to these interactants regardless of their institutional ranks. However, Linell and Luckmann (1991) adopted a different viewpoint emphasizing the importance of the existence of asymmetries in institutional discourse between participants since without such asymmetry related to

inequality of knowledge, most kinds of communication among participants would not be needed.

Holmes and Stubbe (2003) mentioned that although it is assumed that power may grant a license to use coercive discourse strategies during interactions, most of workplace interactions have witnessed mutual respect and a concern towards the face needs of interactants. They called such move *politeness* and considered it the main reason for modifying and mitigating the perspicuous imposition of any interactant's wishes on others.

2.4. Politeness

Linguistic politeness has attracted a great deal of attention from researchers over the past three decades (Archer et al., 2020). In the field of pragmatics, politeness is defined as an emphasis on the amount of verbal work that speakers have to perform in their utterances to prevent any sort of potential threats to the hearer's face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). During interactions, when participants try to raise a topic or compete with each other seeking the position of the knowledgeable person, they are restricted by social constraints such as assertion or negotiation of the individual status so as not to display any behavior that might jeopardize or threaten the interpersonal relationships among them (Diamond, 1996).

Goffman (1967, 2005) was among the pioneers who discussed these social constraints through introducing what he called the positive self-image or the maintenance of the *face* in direct interactions. He introduced the term *face* as the individual's self-esteem or public self-image that can be lost, maintained or enhanced.

2.4.1. Brown and Levinson's Politeness Strategies

Strongly affected by Goffman's *face* notion, Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) stated that showing respect by a speaker to the hearer's face to avoid any FTAs is universal across cultures. Brown and Levinson (1987) introduced both positive politeness and negative politeness. Positive politeness refers to intimacy and closeness throughout applying 15 mechanisms for claiming common ground,

conveying that interactants are cooperators and fulfilling the hearer's wants. On the other hand, negative politeness refers to performing the threatening acts but simultaneously caring for the negative face of the recipient throughout 10 mechanisms including being indirect and using hedges, nominalization, and apologies, etc.

Brown and Levinson (1987) included *advice* and *suggestion giving* as acts that may threaten the hearer's negative face even if the advisor does not intend to impose on the advisee's freedom. An advice-giving encounter is considered one of the potentially tricky interactions with high sensitivity to power, distance and imposition in which there are several opportunities for injured egos or misunderstandings to appear (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Hudson, 1990). In these interactions, advice could be presented differently by the powerful advisor who has the ability to use several direct and indirect speech acts focusing on what is actually done and how it is done more than who gives it. On the other hand, suggestion is an utterance which is issued by the speaker voluntarily and optionally to give the hearer the option of accepting or rejecting what is suggested (Al-Aadeli, 2014). Brown and Levinson (1987) described making suggestions as FTAs that may threaten a hearer's negative face as the speaker indicates that s/he thinks the hearer ought to do some act. Contrarily, criticism threatens a hearer's positive face as the speaker expresses that s/he does not like or want one or more of the hearer's wants. All these speech acts are common in institutional contexts representing a source of anxiety for all participants involved (i.e., teachers and supervisors) as the hearer attends to the speaker's implied advice and suggestions with the goal of improvement (Wajnryb, 1994).

2.4.2. Politeness Strategies and Power in Post-Observation Meetings

Since the institutional context is power-laden in which power and politeness are closely related, one of the aims of Brown and Levinson was to explore the relationship between power and politeness to interpret what counts as polite

behavior in institutional contexts (Harris, 2003). With the possibility for *confrontational encounters* in institutional settings, adopting a negative politeness strategy, for example, serves to avoid any confrontations or communication breakdown (Harris, 2003). Studying politeness in relation to interaction in institutional as well as educational settings could be truly vital specially in the supervisor-teacher social interaction (Vásquez, 2004; Wajnryb, 1994). Adopting politeness strategies in POMs (as an institutional/educational setting) serves to investigate the dynamics of spoken interaction between supervisors and teachers.

In terms of power, Chamberlin (2000) observed that supervision is characterized by 'a power imbalance'. Holmes and Stubbe (2003) agreed and observed the asymmetrical relationship between participants in POMs stating that educational settings are seldom neutral in terms of power. Although teachers and supervisors work for the same educational institution, both do not possess the same degree of authority as supervisors are always assumed to be endowed some degree of authority which justifies the underlying tension in POMs.

2.5 Supervision and Feedback

Supervision is one of the activities that can lead to deeper awareness of teaching strategies for both the teacher and the supervisor (Chamberlin, 2000). However, POMs are considered one of the trickiest tasks and unpleasant experience to any supervisor providing feedback because of the negative feedback that might be given to the teacher (Bailey, 2006). POMs can be awkward to their participants due to the fragile communication because of the possibility of giving the teacher negative feedback or a decision that impact face loss. Accordingly, the supervisors' linguistic behaviour is looked at as an important factor to avoid any breakdowns during the meetings (Bailey, 2006; Wajnryb, 1994).

As a result, the term *clinical supervision* emerged to focus on collegiality, collaboration, skilled service and ethics conduct and to institutionalize the sequence of the pre-observation conference, the observation itself, and the post-

observation conference (Acheson & Gall 1997; Bailey, 2006; Chamberlin, 2000). As for criticism of teaching, supervisors are advised to inform their teachers that criticism should not be taken personally.

However, such advice is easy to give but hard to follow due to the social restrictions on participants that make the supervisor avoid direct criticism to the teacher (Bailey, 2006). When a supervisor wants to notify a teacher about a problem, the supervisor has first to decide redressive actions as a method to support teachers in POMs and sustain positive working relationships (Bailey, 2006). In order to attend to the teacher's face, the supervisor tends to undercut his/her own authority to reduce imposition on the teacher and redress criticism by using a set of politeness strategies (Wajnryb, 1994). Still, the supervisors' awareness and understanding of the very special nature of POMs is essential in order to achieve the balance between reduce imposition on the teachers while providing them with feedback which could be difficult, but it is not impossible (Bailey, 2006).

3. Rationale of the Study

Strategies of politeness introduced by Brown and Levinson (1987) stimulated a few studies to shed light on politeness strategies in POMs with reference to advice and suggestion giving (Vásquez, 2004; Wajnryb, 1994). Regarding supervision, most of the educational literature focused on investigating teachers' and supervisors' perceptions of mentoring (e.g., Jones et al., 1997; Kullman, 1998; Orland-Barak, 2002; Semeniuk & Worrall, 2000). Quite few studies (e.g. Vásquez, 2004; Wajnryb, 1994) attempted to discuss the dynamics (e.g., speech acts) of POMS between supervisors and teachers as one type of speech event. Clearly, most of previous studies focused mainly on teachers' and supervisors' perceptions of monitoring.

The present research has been conducted to complement another study that discussed the usage of politeness strategies in POMs in higher education settings in Egypt in which participants (i.e., supervisors and instructors)

play certain institutional roles and possess certain degree of authority. The entire study has revealed that the supervisors participated in the study manipulated different types of politeness strategies to save the face of both participants. However, there is a need for further research to investigate the opinions of supervisors, as powerful institutional members, regarding the use of politeness strategies with, less powerful, instructors. To the researcher's knowledge, none of the earlier studies have investigated the supervisors' perceptions in higher education in the Egyptian context while using politeness strategically in POMs. This paper is an attempt to investigate how power is manipulated and understood while using politeness strategies for delivering feedback regarding constructive advice and suggestion giving in POMs.

4. Research Question

Contributing to the literature presented in the area of teachers' professional development, the principal research question of the study is to investigate the opinions of supervisors, as powerful institutional members, regarding the use of politeness strategies with, less powerful, instructors.

5. Data and Methodology

To answer the main research question, the study adopted a qualitative explanatory approach that involved analyzing the results of an open-ended questionnaire that was designed for 10 supervisors in five different, undergraduate and graduate, programs in three private universities in Egypt to respond to upon accomplishing the POMs with 27 instructors (see Appendix A). This open-ended questionnaire was a prerequisite to investigate the supervisors' feelings towards the sensitive situation of delivering a non-face threatening feedback to their teachers in POMs using politeness strategies unconsciously. Also, the questionnaire asked the supervisors how to improve POMs as a medium of delivering more constructive criticism as a procedure for professional development for instructors.
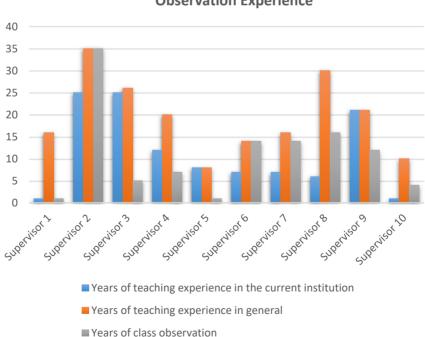
Table 1. Participants' demographics

Sup.	Age	Gender	Nationality	Current position/title	Years of teaching in the current institution	Years of teaching experience in general	No. of POMs used in the study
1	36	Female	Egyptian	Department Director	1	16	3
2	-	Female	Egyptian	Senior Instructor, Program Director, Former Department Chair	25+	35+	3
3	58	Female	Egyptian	Senior Instructor and Program Director	26	27	3
4	44	Female	Tanzanian	Senior English Language Instructor and Program Assessment Specialist	12	20	11
5	40	Male	American	Instructor	8	8	2
6	42	Female	American	Senior English Language Instructor	7	14	1
7	40	Male	American	Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies	7	16	1
8	70	Female	American	Associate Professor/Former Program Director	6	30+	11
9	58	Female	Egyptian	Program Officer and Instructor/ Trainer	21	21	3
10	36	Female	Egyptian	Senior Instructor	1	10	4

Although the participants' nationalities were not a variable in the study, the study included supervisors from different nationalities illustrated in Table 1. The responses were received during the academic years 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. Appendix A shows that the questionnaire consisted of six questions. The questionnaire results were analyzed qualitatively to determine the common themes and response patterns of the participants.

6. Analysis and Findings

6.1. Demographic data

The answers to the first question, *how long have you been a supervisor observing classes and providing feedback to teachers?*, indicated that the supervisors' experiences regarding class observation and feedback delivery ranged from one year to more than 35 years. Figure 1 illustrates the supervisors' years of teaching experience in their current institutions in general as well as years of observing classes.

Figure 1. Number of supervisors' years of teaching and class observation experience

Observing the supervisors' years of experience in teaching and class observation, it can be noticed that such number of years qualified those supervisors to observe classes and provide feedback as the least number of years is eight while the longest is 35 years. Although the number of the supervisors' years of class observation is normally lesser than their years of teaching, either their observation or feedback delivery process have not been negatively affected as both are derived primarily from their long teaching experience. This enabled the supervisors to put themselves in the same foot of their instructors commenting deeply on the instructors' performance as well as what they and their students need.

6.2. Themes

6.2.1. Supervisors' feelings when providing feedback

One of the most common themes observed in response to the second question, *do you feel comfortable while providing feedback to teachers?,* was the feeling of comfort while providing instructors with feedback. Figure 2 illustrates that eight supervisors were comfortable while delivering feedback. Their replies consisted of mixed feelings of comfort, enjoyment and collegiality. Contrarily, two supervisors (3 and 6) expressed their discomfort towards giving feedback considering it as "an element of discomfort" as described by Supervisor 6 without mentioning a reason.
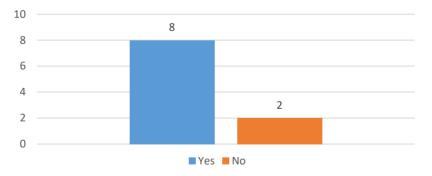

Figure 2. Q2: Do you feel comfortable while providing feedback to teachers?

To elaborate, Supervisor 1 attributed such feeling of comfort to her attempts "to strike the balance of giving the

positive feedback first then the negative feedback in a nice nonthreatening way" when addressing the instructors' needs and areas of improvement. Supervisor 4 considered this question as a tricky one. She explained that she really enjoys working with her instructors and offering them feedback; however, she added that "it sometimes can be very sensitive because… the observed teachers may feel that they are in a lower status or something or may like [sic] intimidated by the situation or … maybe lack of confidence." Accordingly, she tries extremely hard "not to undermine them in any way" and to try "very very hard to use language that does not seem evaluative. It is worth mentioning that Supervisor 4 was classified among the supervisors who used a wide range of both positive and negative politeness strategies which supported her response to the questionnaire. In response to the same question, Supervisor 5 expressed that his comfort resulted from the feeling of collegiality towards his instructors who should support each other. Another reason for the feeling of satisfaction is that his instructors were good enough to receive constructive feedback adding that, with the existence of respect, there is no reason for discomfort. Finally, Supervisor 9 experienced satisfaction as such meetings granted her the opportunity to share her teaching experience with her instructors.

6.2.2. Supervisors' feelings when providing negative feedback

Another specific theme that emerged was the supervisors' feelings whether positive or negative when giving negative feedback to instructors. Figure 3 shows that eight supervisors had positive feelings while providing their instructors with negative feedback. Those supervisors added that some positive aspects maximized such positive feelings such as the instructors' openness towards feedback, the instructors' equality with supervisors and the consideration of such type of feedback as constructive rather than negative.
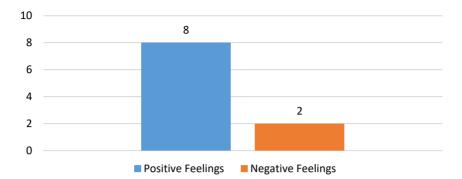
Figure 3. Q3: As a supervisor, how do you feel when providing negative feedback to teachers?

For example, Supervisor 1 mentioned that while giving negative feedback she also focuses on the positive aspects to assist instructors to improve. Supervisor 2 added "I provide constructive feedback to help teachers grow rather than feel defensive and resentful." Supervisor 4 mentioned that she is totally aware that the feedback she would deliver is negative, so she focuses much more on "making a suggestion" especially when noticing a common problem from a less experienced instructor. However, Supervisor 4 added that she might feel a sort of apprehensive as some observed instructors tend to be extremely defensive which results in an unenjoyable experience, as she stated. Supervisor 4 mentioned that she always expects her instructors to be open to her suggestions particularly because she always controls her power to "lessen the possibility of turning into that language that might or more likely lead to defensive responses". Supervisor 5 explained that he does not "feel much" when providing what might be seen as negative feedback. Still, he believes that his instructors, or his colleagues as he described them, are open to such type of feedback especially when it is delivered "respectfully and in a supportive way". Moreover, Supervisor 5 emphasized equality as nobody is a prefect teacher and "we want to know what we can do to improve things" as he stated. Supervisor 7 expressed his comfort while providing negative feedback without explaining the reason behind that. Supervisor 8 stated

that she feels that she is contributing to the improvement of the education of future learners by trying to "be sensitive to the teachers' sense of self and identity". However, she added that she tries to be constructive all the time as her instructors are "extremely desirous of getting constructive feedback from a mentor/supervisor". Likely, Supervisor 9 expressed her feeling of assisting her instructors to improve their performance. Finally, Supervisor 10 mentioned that she does not have a problem to seem humble to provide the feedback as a suggestion in addition to highlighting the instructors' strengths.

Contrarily, Supervisor 3 expressed her discomfort towards providing instructors with negative feedback. However, she mentioned that she always tries to "make it clear that this is constructive criticism which is how teachers grow and develop". On the other hand, and despite her discomfort, Supervisor 4 offered an important suggestion represented in providing training to the mentees on both "giving and receiving feedback so they know that the cool feedback highlights an area for growth".

6.2.3. Using politeness strategies to mitigate face-threatening comments

Another theme observed was the possibility of using any type of politeness strategies to mitigate face-threatening acts that might be directed to teachers. Figure 4 shows that seven supervisors assured using a variety of politeness strategies. One supervisor expressed uncertainty towards the range of linguistic features used in his POMs and two supervisors did not provide clear answers as *yes* and *uncertain*. It was noticed that supervisors admitted using politeness strategies to different extends.
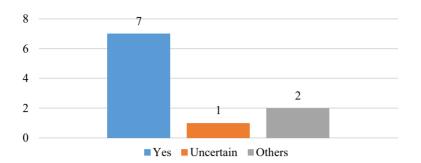
Figure 4. Q4: When providing feedback, do you plan to use any politeness strategies to mitigate criticism directed to teachers?

Regarding the supervisors who expressed positive attitudes towards using politeness strategies in POMs, Supervisors 3, 7 and 9 declared that they always employ politeness strategies in their POMs without further elaboration. Supervisor 4 assured using these strategies; however, she refused using words like criticism or weaknesses. Instead, she preferred using the phrase 'questions for discussion' through having open conversations in which the observer and the observed instructor are partners in the process they are discussing and sharing and learning together. She elaborated the technique she uses for giving feedback by starting out with allowing the instructor to ask the supervisor how the lesson went as a good strategy to listen to the instructors talking about things that they think did not go so well or could have been done better rather than turning the delivery process into "business of defensiveness or feeling hurt" as she described. Supervisor 4 added that she often tries to let her instructors feel that both the supervisor and instructor are learning together during this process. She concluded that she does not tell her instructors 'you need to…', 'you should have….'; instead, she allows them to participate as much as possible in that discussion. Here the response of Supervisor 4 concerning her attempts to show equality between the observed instructor and the supervisor is consistent with the huge number set of varied politeness strategies she manipulated throughout her POMs. Supervisor 6 acknowledged softening cool feedback. She elaborated that

she usually starts her POMs with allowing the instructor to talk first about what he or she felt, what went well and what could have gone better to assist the instructor identify areas for growth. She explained that she starts her meetings with the positive aspects of the instructors during the class using expressions such as: *I think this aspect of the lesson went well….*, *when you did this…. students became very engaged*, or *this part of the lesson could have gone smoother if….* As for Supervisor 8, she stated that she always tries to start her meetings with the positive aspects to praise the instructor even if later on she would offer 'severe' criticism. Supervisor 8 added that when it is time *"to dole out the criticism"*, she tries to balance the *"straight-talk with hedges depending on how serious the areas to be criticized are"*. Supervisor 10 assured that it is really important to her to respect experience, as she always works with elder professors.

Supervisor 5 was the only supervisor who expressed his uncertainty towards the range of the linguistic expressions he uses while providing criticism. However, he added that he has never asked a teacher to do something but simply suggested it for consideration later. Moreover, he added that one of the strategies he deploys for politeness is sharing his own teaching experience and problems which are similar to the problems that were faced by the observed instructor in the classroom.

Both Supervisors 1 and 2 did not provide clear and obvious answers such as *yes* or *no* as expected. Supervisor 1 stated that her instructors are treated very politely and respectfully without any threats. Supervisor 2 mentioned that she does not provide 'criticism' to her instructors; instead, she provides *"warm constructive feedback followed by suggestions for more effective teaching"*. After that, she elicits from the instructor how he or she himself/herself thinks that something could be more effective in his/her teaching.

6.2.4. Reasons behind using politeness strategies

Another theme that was extracted from the questionnaire was the reasons of the supervisor who should be considered a powerful institutional member behind using

politeness strategies with teachers who might be considered less powerful. This question was directed to answer the research question. Apparently, replies to this question varied to reflect many codes such as support, improvement, having a religious purpose, and sharing experience, equality, respect, keeping balance, giving confidence, age/experience and sympathy.

In response to this question, Supervisor 1 mentioned that she deals with all instructors as brothers and sisters as a method of encouragement in addition to *"flavoring"* work with instructors. Supervisor 2 did not consider herself a *"powerful institutional member"* assuring that all institutional members are equal peers. She stressed on the importance of establishing *"a relaxed non-threatening atmosphere of mutual respect"* if the supervisor seeks after an effective and successful meeting. Supervisor 3 focused on the idea of keeping balance between the idea of de-emphasizing the negative sides by not making the teachers feel terrible while avoiding the idea of sugarcoating these negative aspects at the same time. Instead, Supervisor 3 added that clarity is the best method as *"it is a chance to learn from mistakes and that feedback is essential for growth and professional development"* besides minimizing the tension *"to make the teacher aware of the problem without hurting feelings"*. Similarly, Supervisor 4 pointed out that she does not like the idea of being in a position of authority explaining that *"this just leads to the other persons losing their voice, losing their autonomy, taking away their own ability, taking away their own life"*. Supervisor 4 added that she is totally against using abusive power to show more superiority to others and supervisors should go for reducing pain as much as they can. Supervisor 4 stressed on the importance of using politeness strategies if *"we want the other person to feel valued and appreciated and that they matter"*. She concluded that *"we're on equal basis even though in reality we know that, hierarchically, we might not be"*. Supervisor 5 stated that he tries to use politeness strategies whether the instructors are in *"a position of less or more power"*. He added that since

supervisors and instructors are colleagues, these strategies are essential as they *"try to position speakers as more-or-less equals with each other"*. He concluded that strategies are *"important not just in interactions but in getting things done"*. Supervisor 6 mentioned that as a supervisor she tries *"to focus on the actions the teacher took, so it does not feel like a personal attack"*. She explained that this *"helps the teacher be more receptive to investigate the areas for growth that have been identified"*. Supervisor 7 tackled the question from a religious viewpoint that differed significantly from the other supervisors' answers. His reply stressed on the concept of equality elaborating that *"Jesus (pbuh) taught that the powerful should serve the weak. That the powerful should take on the role of the servant, and that in God's Kingdom it is those who serve, and put others before themselves, they are the ones that reflect the heart of God"*. Supervisor 8 referred to enhancing the instructors' self-confidence to maintain the foundation of a continued relationship. Supervisor 9 stated that politeness strategies are used to provide instructors with support and strength. Finally, Supervisor 10 declared that since she always supervises older professors, clear appreciation should be shown to their knowledge and experience. As for the instructors, she always sympathizes with them due to the technical and financial hardships they usually face. She concluded that she considers herself as *"a service provider"* rather than a supervisor.
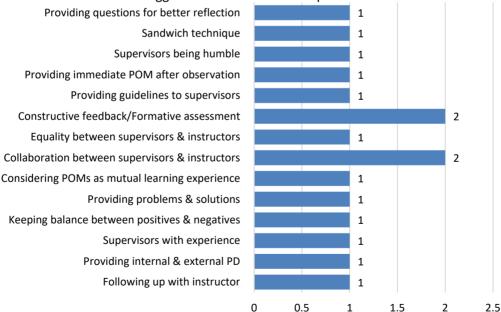
6.2.5. Methods of improving POMs for more constructive feedback

A final theme examined the methods of improving POMs to deliver more constructive feedback as a procedure for professional development for teachers. A number of codes emerged such as timing, immediate feedback, ignoring hierarchy, professionalism, keeping balance, clarity, mutual experience, purpose of observation, using guidelines, assessing the observee's awareness, following up and providing development.
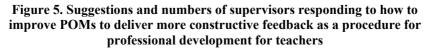
To elaborate, Supervisor 1 stated that following up with the instructor is essential to ensure that the feedback

provided during POMs is being taken into consideration. Moreover, providing instructors with internal and external professional development in addition to departmental focus groups are other methods to discuss any issues or concerns that impact the educational process both directly and indirectly.

Supervisor 2 mentioned that professional supervisors have the experience of improving methods to deliver their feedback; otherwise, they should not be placed in their positions. Supervisor 2 did not comment further on how to improve feedback delivery.

Supervisor 3 assumed that feedback should depend on *"praise and probe"*. She elaborated that the feedback meeting should not focus only on the negative sides as the positive sides should be highlighted too. She added that it is important to identify the root cause of the problems to suggest proper solutions. She concluded that feedback should be specific and clear for better guidance for teachers towards the skills they are good at or need improvement in.

Figure 5. Suggestions and numbers of supervisors responding to how to improve POMs to deliver more constructive feedback as a procedure for professional development for teachers

Supervisor 4 offered two suggestions to improve feedback. The first suggestion is to consider observation as a mutual learning experience for discussing questions or thoughts of both participants in the meeting to enhance the reflective nature of observation. She mentioned that the observer/supervisor may learn something from the observed teacher which could be an ongoing learning model throughout the teacher's career. The other suggestion is to allow the observees to start off the meeting with sharing their own thoughts about how the lesson went for developing their own self-reflective skills.

Supervisor 5 stated that development is based on the equality between the supervisor and the instructor. Referring to the hierarchy in his department, he, as a program director, supervises instructors; however, he added, his institute does not consider directors as *"bosses of the instructors within the program"*. Accordingly, he does not feel any asymmetries regarding power.

Supervisor 6 mentioned that observation should be a part of formative assessment, with no points or scores, rather than a summative one that tends to evaluate the teaching levels of the teachers, in order to make it relaxing to both the supervisor and instructor. This process should be learning rather than evaluative to the instructor. Also, when there are a set of procedures for pre, during and post observation, both the supervisor and the instructor are aware of what to expect.

Supervisor 7 stated that POMs at an institutional level has to be fair and clear. In addition, instructors must receive the feedback expected from the supervisors. Also, all participants should be aware that negative or *"cool feedback is part of the process of development"*.

Supervisor 8 mentioned that having *"guidelines for the mentor"* would be really helpful. These supervision guidelines, as Supervisor 8 called them, should start with asking the instructors to talk about how they have felt about the session then asking them about what worked well and what did not during the session. Supervisor 8 assured that it is important to *"assess the stage of awareness of the*

mentee/novice teacher" who is usually able to identify his/her own strengths and weaknesses. In general, these comments assist the supervisor to have an opening for comments. Supervisor 8 added that keeping the tone of constructive feedback not the judgmental one is essential as the purpose of the supervisor is to *"improve the standards of the profession and to improve the learning environment of current and future generations of learners".*

Supervisor 9 referred to another important point which is having an immediate POM after the observation to get the most benefit of the observation *"as the situations are still in the observer's mind and can recall them easily".*

Finally, Supervisor 10 offered three suggestions. The first suggestion was being humble as a supervisor. Second, using the sandwich technique that depends on mentioning points of strength first to be followed by a critique as a suggestion then the supervisor restates what has been mentioned. The last suggestion was providing the instructor with more questions that would encourage him/her to reflect on what the supervisor has said as an attempt to reach suggestions at the end of the meeting. Supervisor 10 concluded that collaboration is vital because although supervisors are the experts who provide instructors with educational tips, still instructors are the ones who will implement them in reality.

7. Discussion

In these POMs, which have been classified as a complex type of institutional discourse, both supervisors and instructors play certain institutional roles with certain degree of power/authority. The study revealed that supervisors, who are supposedly more powerful than their instructors, manipulated different types of politeness strategies to save the face of all participants. The paper reinforced Brown and Levinson (1987)'s point that showing respect by a speaker to the face of the hearer to avoid any FTAs is universal across cultures. Still, there is a need for further investigation about the reasons behind using these politeness strategies by the

supervisors who are looked at as powerful institutional members with their less powerful instructors.

The investigation has been conducted through an open-ended questionnaire. Regarding the questionnaire results, the demographic data analysis revealed that all supervisors have extensive experience in teaching while most of them have long experience in supervision which indicates their full understanding of the roles given to them against their instructors. Their role is represented in the institutionally-given authority granted to the supervisors which may be considered as a burden on their shoulders to reduce the asymmetry of the relation and undercut their own authority for more insightful POMs (Vásquez, 2004, Wajnryb, 1994).

Concerning the theme of feelings when providing negative feedback, the questionnaire results showed that most of the supervisors were comfortable while delivering negative feedback. This result could be attributed to their heavy usage of politeness strategies that reinforced the feelings of comfort, enjoyment and collegiality they always have while delivering feedback. On the other hand, only two supervisors expressed their discomfort without any further explanation. Although they did not elaborate on their feelings, their minimal usage of politeness strategies in their POMs reflects consistency with their replies and explains the challenges that face them as well as the vital role of such strategies in reducing the tension in these sensitive meetings.

One of the themes shown is the theme of using politeness strategies to mitigate directing criticism to teachers. Seven supervisors emphasized using varied politeness strategies, one supervisor expressed uncertainty towards the range of linguistic features used in his POMs, and two supervisors did give cutting-edge responses such as *yes* or *no*. Still, it was obviously noticed that all supervisors admitted using politeness strategies; something which goes consistently with the results of the entire study. However, to ensure the quality of POMs as well as the politeness strategies manipulated in such meetings, it was suggested to train

supervisors on the different types of politeness strategies as well as their vital role in mitigating criticism.

Referring to the theme of the reasons behind using politeness strategies by powerful institutional members with less powerful instructors, the supervisors' replies varied to include different justifications such as providing support or/and improvement, having religious purposes, sharing experience, equality and respect, keeping balance, and giving confidence and sympathy. The replies of the supervisors indirectly shed the light on the term *clinical supervision*, the observation itself, and the post-observation conference (Acheson & Gall, 1997; Bailey, 2006; Chamberlin, 2000).

Concerning the theme of the methods of improving POMs for more constructive feedback, multiple replies were received including time management, immediate feedback, ignoring hierarchy, professionalism, keeping balance, clarity, mutual experience, purpose of observation, using guidelines, assessing the observee's awareness, following up and providing development. Apparently, these replies emphasized several points: the perspective of using *clinical supervision* mentioned earlier, full awareness towards the asymmetrical relation between participants, the distance between them and the fragility/sensitivity of the POMs. Also, these replies supported the argument proposed by Diamond (1996) that, in the educational settings, power possessed by any participant (i.e., supervisors in the present study) is political and rhetorical when bringing across reform or leading to a discussion in which power can be negotiated between interactants through conversation.

It can be deduced from all responses that despite their awareness towards the authority granted to them, supervisors used "extensive strategies due to the institutional role rather than the individual act" (Harris, 2003, p. 45). Finally, supervisors were fully aware that successful meetings should be non-threatening as well as growth oriented (Roberts & Blasé, 1995).

8. Conclusion

Supervision is a unique activity that plays an essential role in increasing awareness towards teaching for both the instructor and the supervisor. In relation to supervision, POMs are classified as a complex type of institutional discourse that is characterized by being power-laden and goal directed including different types of feedback that might threaten the instructor's face (Habermas, 1984; Mayr, 2008). Interaction between participants in POMs is described as fragile due to the asymmetry between participants (Wajnryb, 1994). In such type of discourse, supervisors must balance the competing demands of addressing teachers' face wants while providing guidance to foster teachers' professional growth. When POMs are not managed carefully, the instructors, who expect the POMs to be reflective rather than evaluative, might be dissatisfied with the feedback and could lead to negative impact to the extent of changing their teaching career.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no studies have been conducted to investigate power and supervision in the educational context in Egypt. The results of this paper revealed that supervisors were keen on keeping the balance between the competing demands of addressing their instructors' face wants while providing guidance through multiple politeness strategies. Still, the study findings seek to make the researchers aware of the role of power inside institutional discourse as well as the importance of saving the teacher's face through the level of politeness included in the feedback given in the higher education in Egypt. Finally, the results would fill possible gaps related to different understandings that might emerge between instructors and supervisors about what exactly is meant by some terms such as *power*, *institutional discourse, politeness strategies*, *clinical supervision* and *constructive feedback*.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire for Supervisors

Dear Supervisor,

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Please be aware that your participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Should you decide to participate, you will be assigned a pseudonym in the written results of the research. The information you provide for purposes of this research is anonymous and confidential. Your answers to this questionnaire do not have to be terribly lengthy; 3 to 4 sentences per question should be sufficient. Of course, you are certainly welcome to write as much as you wish to write).

Demographics:

  Age:
  Current position/title:
  Years of teaching in the current institution (if any):
  Years of teaching experience in general:

Observation Questions:

- How long have you been a supervisor observing classes and providing feedback to teachers?
- Do you feel comfortable while providing feedback to teachers?
- As a supervisor, how do you feel when providing negative feedback to teachers?
- While providing feedback, do you plan to use any politeness strategies to mitigate criticism directed to teachers?
- In case of using politeness strategies, why do you, as powerful institutional members, use politeness strategies with, less powerful teachers?
- From your own point of view, how to improve the post-observation meetings to deliver more constructive feedback as a procedure for professional development for teachers?