

5.5.3 Macro-class III: Indirectness (see Fig. 5)

5.5.3.1 Indirectness

The third macro-class is indirectness: the use of a circuitous path in the expression of meaning or the avoidance of saying something explicitly. Brown and Levinson define indirectness as 'any communicative behaviour, verbal or non-verbal, that conveys something more than or different from what it literally means' (1978: 139). Central here is the discrepancy between locution and illocution.

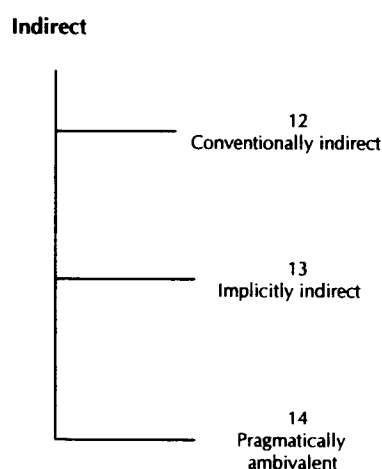


Figure 5: Macro-class III: Indirect

Indirectness is realised through the syntactic and semantic systems of the language. As such, it may be seen as a different order of elements to the other two macro-classes: removed from being a linguistic category *sensu stricto*, it operates through the applications of linguistic elements. When a woman says to her husband 'are you busy?' as a way of asking him for help, she is being less than completely direct. It would have been more direct to say: 'I need your help' or 'help me please'. In this way she avails herself of the structural and semantic resources of the language: she uses the interrogative rather than the declarative or imperative. Her motivation is to express herself more tactfully, less bluntly, than might be achieved through a more direct remark - a politeness that is essentially expedient and self-serving in that it is likely to be more effective in achieving her goal than a more direct remark. Certainly,

the fact that he instantaneously computes her remark as a request for action is not to minimise the inferential path he needs to have paced out to reach it.

Indirectness is an ubiquitous feature of natural language (Ervin-Tripp, 1976; Holtgraves, 1991), 'found wherever securing uptake poses a risk' (McLaughlin, 1984:144). Bavelas et al. (1990b:260) contend that it is 'commonplace'; commend it for its subtlety; and lament its traditional alignment as 'the dirty old man' of communication. Of its pervasiveness, Brown and Levinson write: 'close inspection shows that the majority of ties across conversational turns are indirect and inferential' (1978:217). Indeed, their model has no fewer than fifteen sub-categories of strategies that enable a speaker to be indirect. In belonging to the domain of what is implied rather than stated, indirectness is of central concern to pragmatics, as meaning is typically retrieved from context or, more correctly, from the interface of text and context.

One of the main motivations for indirectness is politeness which serves an important social role in lubricating interactions that might otherwise be abrasive. After all, most of the time the goal of interaction is the maintenance of social harmony. In the context of supervision and specifically in the delivery of FTAs, indirectness furnishes supervisors with an important means of resolving the competing demands of their role - the need to save face vis-a-vis the transmission of bad news messages.

5.5.3.2 A round-about way of delivering a message

Understanding indirectness requires a return to the conceptual framework introduced at the start of this chapter. There it was posited that a tension exists between the competing demands of clarity and politeness. In Brown and Levinson's model, indirectness features at level four of the hierarchy (off- record), one step prior to avoidance. They list the advantages that accrue to a speaker for going off-record (1978:76):

He [sic] can get credit for being tactful, non-coercive; he can run less risk of his act entering the 'gossip biography' that others keep of him; and he can avoid responsibility for the potentially face-damaging interpretation.

Bonikowska (1985) claims that the decision to 'opt out' is itself pragmatically motivated, and involves the same kind of socio-pragmatic and pragma-linguistic judgements (Thomas, 1981) as any other pragmatic choice. The point is a valid one: in Weber's words, 'action is social

insofar as... it takes account of the behaviour of others' (1964:88); and in the words of an anonymous proverb (cited by Basso, 1972:67), 'it is not the case that a man [sic] who is silent says nothing'. Others, too, have commented on this category of equivocation - such as Miller's notion of 'lies of omission' (1983, cited by Bavelas et al. 1990a:153). Certainly, opting out is a recourse with which supervisors are familiar (see Ch. 6)¹. However, the researcher is prevented from a closer investigation of this domain by formidable methodological difficulties: how to analyse text which is not actually delivered, but remains at the 'embryonic' status of discarded thought².

The stratum off-record is reserved for those FTAs which speakers want to go ahead with, but for which they are prepared to be less than completely responsible. The speaker therefore says something other than the clearest expression of their idea. Significantly, as the speaker decreases their responsibility, the hearer increases theirs - being obliged to do inferential work (contextually and textually) in order to recover what was meant but not explicitly said. The part-abdication of speaker responsibility means that some part of the computation of meaning is left to the addressee. Fraser argues convincingly that this increased involvement acts as mitigation (1980:346):

As the specification of the intended act becomes less explicit the active participation of the hearer... is increased. But as the hearer increases his [sic] 'work' to determine the speaker's intentions, he concomitantly increases his responsibility for the conclusions that follow³.

¹ There are two problems with un-given critical feedback. Firstly, the benefits are lost. Secondly, the danger exists that when criticism is suppressed, the form it takes - if and when it is ultimately given - tends to be counter-productive (Baron, 1988; Baron, 1990). The dynamics of this failure to provide effective and timely feedback are discussed in Viega, 1988:152 (Endnote 4); and references in Endnote 10:152). See also App. 3 of this study, story #6. 'Opting out' is also a controversial aspect of medical discourse, where the difficulty of breaking unwelcome news is a central, if tacit and largely unexplored, issue (White, 1993).

² With Shakespearian text as their data, Brown and Gilman (1989) are able to circumvent this problem by using the psychological soliloquy as a window on thought. The soliloquy allows one not only to know that something was not said but that it was thought and suppressed (1989); it is possible then to extricate from the text what was opted out of.

³ Fraser's (1980) behavioural analogy merits paraphrasing: if you build a mousetrap and give it to me at which moment the trap accidentally closes on my finger, I can, in my heart, hold you responsible; but if I have worked with you in constructing the trap and therefore through this co-operation have greater inside knowledge of the possibilities of injury, I have less cause to hold you solely responsible for any accidents that might ensue.

Accordingly, in supervisory talk, indirectness invites the complicity of the teacher in decomposing the supervisor's criticism; such complicity reduces the supervisor's responsibility as it concomitantly increases the teacher's. In this sharing of responsibility for the imputation of meaning, lies the mitigation.

Off-record strategies function by violating a Gricean maxim. What happens is that the speaker invites a conversational implicature via a hint which is triggered by a Gricean breach. So the woman who asks her husband if he is busy invites him to conjecture why she would violate Relevance by asking him about his state of busy-ness. Through the assumption of the Cooperative Principle (CP), he infers that she is being relevant to something not actually stated, but existent in context; that there is a gap between the literal level and the illocutionary level of her utterance. Via this implicature, he computes that she is asking him about his busy-ness because she wants him to help her. The fact that the routine here is conventionalised (Searle, 1975) to the point of being idiomatic only makes the hearer's computation faster.

Recent cognitive theories of communication, such as Sperber and Wilson's (1986) model, which posits that hearers determine the interpretation of an utterance according to a criterion of situational relevance, will not be treated here. As Ziv (1988) has noted, the cognitive approach fails to account adequately for social conventions such as politeness. Following Ziv's lead, which is consonant with Brown and Levinson's, politeness is seen as an essentially social phenomenon, not an aspect of cognition. Mitigation of FTAs such as criticisms falls under the rubric of negative politeness, of which indirectness is a major strategy. In the example cited above, quite evidently, the effect of being less than totally explicit is to make one's request (or imposition on another's negative face) in a minimally impositive manner. And as will be shown in the examples from the data, the purpose and effect of indirectness is to cushion the impact of the FTA so as to make it less damaging to face and therefore less risky to the interpersonal tenor of the relationship.

Like Brown and Levinson, Leech (1977; 1983) sees face as the primary motivation underpinning indirectness, although his framework differs somewhat. Leech (1983) posits a maxim of Tact which is influenced by three different scales appropriate to any given speech situation: the cost-benefit scale, in which the cost or benefit of a proposed action is computed by the speaker; the optionality scale, in which illocutions are ordered according to the degree of choice allowed the hearer; and the indirectness scale which traces the illocutionary path from act to goal. For Leech, indirectness is measured by the amount of inferential work needed

to be done by the hearer to work out the 'force' (intention-level meaning) from the 'sense' (utterance-level meaning) of what is said. In fact, in indirect communications that are interpreted as intended, it might be said that the hearer computes a step-by-step reconstruction of the speaker's intention - rather like rewinding a video. Tact is seen as 'strategic conflict avoidance' and can be measured by 'the degree of effort' invested in the avoidance (1977:19). The more effort expended in the minimisation of face risk, the more a speaker will be seen to be trying to satisfy the hearer's face wants. Hence the convoluted, overbearing pessimism of utterances like 'it wouldn't be at all possible, would it, for me to borrow your car for a little while?'. Some instances from the data are:

- *I would suggest, and um I wonder sometimes if it's an area we shouldn't explore more* [10.2.5]
- *the only other thing I wouldn't mind saying...* [8.11.1]

Whether we choose to see indirectness as off-record strategies inviting conversational implicature (Brown & Levinson, 1978); or as the inductive concomitant of periphrasis, a strategy that computes 'force' from 'sense' (Leech, 1983) is not in fact germane here. Either way, it is evident that the recovery of meaning, being inductive and probabilistic, is intrinsically risky: an indirect path is potentially a less than totally clear means towards the end that is communication. Indirectness, then, like other forms of politeness, is a face-motivated compromise on message efficiency, 'a comforting stand-in' (Lakoff, 1985:6), representing a potential blur on clarity.

5.5.3.3 A scalar phenomenon

In the example above ('are you busy?'), the speaker's indirectness, through being circumlocutory, is less blunt than its more direct counterpart ('I need help'). Unfortunately, the contrast of these two instances may give rise to the misconception that directness/indirectness is a bipolar phenomenon. A more helpful way of perceiving indirectness is as a scalar phenomenon, where instead of opposition one might more profitably speak of degrees of indirectness (Leech, 1977).

When the text of the FTAs was 'combed' as part of the analysis of data for the grounded theory study, each instance of indirectness was given a rank on a gradient of indirectness. In determining what degree of indirectness obtained, the rule of thumb (following Leech, 1983) was to consider what it is the hearer has to do in order to derive 'force' from 'sense' and

compute the speaker's message. In other words, what does the teacher do to compute the supervisor's FTA as criticism?

The case exhibited here is contrived in that various (differentially indirect) versions are displayed and analysed. However, it is derived from an authentic instance in which the supervisor is concerned about the teacher's questioning technique (*'what do you feel about your questioning skill?' [6.1.1]*).

- The most extreme end of the gradient is 'explicit', where the meaning is as direct as it can be. Here, a spade is called a spade and no inferential work is required. Thus, the supervisor might say 'the questioning technique you used was not effective'.
- The next point on the gradient is 'conventionally indirect', where a polite routine (in this case, a question) is used to carry the criticism. Here, meaning has to be retrieved by computing the convention for what it is e.g. 'can you think of another way in which you could have questioned the students?'
- The third point on the gradient is 'implicitly indirect', where the hearer has to infer meaning via a process that links what is said with what is intended. To unpack meaning, the hearer has to delve into the context and the interface of text and context e.g. 'sometimes a question needs to be directed at a particular person'.
- The most indirect point on the gradient is the fourth ('ambivalent') where the critical view of the supervisor is not retrievable from what is actually said. There are insufficient cues in text or context for the hearer to recover with any great certainty the speaker's intended illocution e.g. 'why did you ask that question?'

Exhibit 6: Degrees of indirectness illustrated

Four major degrees of indirectness (Table 4) were mapped on to the gradient, ranging from the most minimal or pragmatically transparent ('explicit') to the most extreme or pragmatically opaque ('ambivalent')¹. The discussion (from 5.5.3.5) details how these points are grounded in the data. However as an overview of the gradient, displayed in Exhibit 6, a contrived example will be used as illustration.

¹ The process is not unlike that described by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), with the notable difference that their data are experimentally prompted (through elicitation), while those of the present inquiry are naturalistic (i.e. naturally occurring speech in authentic, non-manipulated contexts).

CATEGORY	DEFINING FEATURES	EXAMPLE
Explicit	The criticism is built into the surface level meaning of the utterance	<i>'the main problem was getting them to drill in unison' [1.1.1]</i>
12 Conventionally indirect	The criticism is expressed via a fixed linguistic convention eg making a suggestion; asking a question	<i>'can you think of a way that you might have been able to express that better?' [1.6.9]</i>
13 Implicitly (non-conventionally) indirect	The criticism has to be computed via a set of inferences triggered by an interaction of text and context	<i>'I noticed you using back-chaining - getting them to drill the end of the... question - but you didn't go back over the whole question' [1.2.1]</i>
14 Pragmatically ambivalent	Speaker meaning is deliberately indeterminate and not retrievable from the semantics (face-value meaning) or the pragmatics (meaning of utterance in context)	<i>'I noticed you trying to use some of X's suggestions' [1.1.1.]</i>

Table 4: Gradient of indirectness: defining features and examples

5.5.3.4 Provisional comments

Four prefacing points warrant mention. The first point relates to typological restrictions. As will become clear, there are inevitable overlaps with the categories of structural and semantic mitigation, because indirectness is itself realised through structural and semantic means. So, for example, the interrogative, discussed earlier in Code 4 as a syntactic item, will also be discussed within the framework of indirectness, being an important means by which indirectness is achieved. So too, person shift and nominalisation (Code 7) are standard vehicles for indirectness. Semantically, issues like metaphoric usage (Code 10) and vagueness (Codes 11) overlap with indirectness as a means of achieving mitigation. Notwithstanding the overlap, duplication is avoided by limiting the discussion here to matters pertaining to indirectness rather than to issues of syntax or semantics.

Secondly, indirect utterances will be shown to be mitigating by virtue of their indirectness. Aside from their indirectness, such utterances may be otherwise quite bald e.g. *'what do you feel about your questioning skill? [6.1.1]*. More commonly, however, the indirectness works alongside other mitigators (syntactic and semantic) to achieve a collective threat-reducing effect. Thus, following the example given earlier, the woman wanting help from her husband might have said: *'excuse me, darling, are you very busy right now?'*, wherein the words *'excuse me', 'darling', 'very', 'right now'* are all functioning pragmatically as mitigators of the embedded FTA (the indirect request for help)¹.

Thirdly, the classification of indirectness is less refined than other empirical studies, such as those investigating comparative indirectness across languages, or those mapping out phases of acquisition of a second language (Blum-Kulka, 1987; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Faerch & Kasper, 1983; House & Kasper, 1981; Kasper, 1989). Because such studies are motivated by the wish to discover how politeness is realised cross-culturally, or acquired within an interlanguage, they must necessarily take a very close look at subtle shadings of difference e.g. *'I have to ask you to move your car'* c.f. *'you have to move your car'* (Kasper, 1989). By contrast, the present study is interested less in the minutiae of the linguistic realisation of indirectness than in understanding how indirectness is functioning as mitigation. The discussion therefore is weighted in favour of pragmatic interpretation rather than close exploration of form variation.

Lastly, because the study is concerned with utterance-level indirectness, it excludes discussion at the above-the-utterance level, such as may be achieved through manipulation of the generic structure of the SD. While there is some mention of above-the-utterance mitigation in Ch. 7, the recent notion of discourse organisation and conversation management as resources for the realisation of politeness (Bayraktaroglu, 1991; Blum-Kulka, 1990; Kasper, 1990) lies outside the parameters of the study.

5.5.3.5 A gradient of indirectness

Of the four points on the gradient of indirectness induced from the grounded analysis of data, only three are realisations of indirectness. The first point, termed *'explicit'*, is outside the

¹ While there is no doubt that pragmatic force is cumulative (Labov & Fanshel, 1977; Leech & Thomas, 1988), the utterance-level focus of this study excludes discussion of the way unfolding discourse contributes to pragmatic force.

category off-record. It comprises those on-record FTAs which are delivered through the most direct path. For the purpose of this study, these are important not so much in themselves - by definition, they carry no mitigation - but rather as a benchmark of directness against which other instances are calibrated. As stated earlier, indirectness is being measured by the degree of inferential work - a type of communication decoding energy (Miller & Steinberg, 1975) - that a hearer has to do in order to unpack the speaker's illocution. In the case of the benchmark 'explicit', minimal, if any, inferential effort is required. In Geukens' terms, the interpretation of meaning calls only on a 'minimal context, which is the one created by the sentence itself (1978:262).

Theoretically, the most explicit end of the gradient is reserved for performatives (Austin, 1962) in which a verb is used to name the speech act intended by the speaker. Through this device, the utterance (performance) of the verb equates with the speech act. Now while this works for baptisms ('I name thee Matthew'), gambling ('I bet you \$100'), weddings ('I pronounce you man and wife'), graduations ('I admit you to the degree of...'), meetings ('I open/close/adjourn this meeting'), among other related performatives, it does not work for all speech acts. Supervisors in the process of feeding back to teachers are hardly likely to say 'I criticise you for + named infringement'. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a situation where a performative verb + FTA construction operates (Barish, 1991) - perhaps only in settings/contexts where routine politeness conventions are dispensed with, such as punitive settings (e.g. a headmaster's office; a law court).

It follows that the speech act of criticising would predictably be realised indirectly. Accordingly, it is not surprising that through 96 CIs not one performative verb was used in the delivery of criticism. Significantly, efforts were sometimes made, in the form of asides¹, to deny that the speech act of criticising was happening:

- *you've got a similar problem to (what) I have, you've got a high-pitched voice, and if you shout you shriek, when you don't mean to, it's just nature has not endowed us with low-pitched voices. I'm not criticising, I'm just saying, think about it [2.4.2]*

Or to mitigate the extent or gravity of the criticism:

- *don't get me wrong, it's not like it was a great problem [4.1.9]*

¹ This was treated in Code 9.

The category 'explicit' includes utterances in which the FTA is actually stated i.e. built into the language of the utterance. This means that the force of the utterance is directly derivable from its referential sense. Searle (1975:59) expresses explicitness thus:

The simplest cases of meaning are those in which the speaker utters a sentence and means exactly and literally what he [sic] says. In such cases the speaker intends to produce a certain illocutionary effect in the hearer, and he intends to produce this effect by getting the hearer to recognise his intention to produce it and he intends to get the hearer to recognise this intention in virtue of the hearer's knowledge of the rules that govern the utterance of the sentence.

Explicit language offers a neat correspondence among the various levels of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics: thus, declaratives realise propositions and allow assertions to be made; interrogatives realise questions and allow us to ask; and imperatives realise commands and serve as impositives (Leech, 1983). This correspondence allows meaning to be computed directly. It might be said that in explicit utterances, the illocutionary force is indicated in the utterance by grammatical means. Such means are deliberately recognisable, as is clear in the name Searle (1969) gave them: 'illocutionary force indicating devices' (IFIDs). The term IFID follows Thomas' definition: 'any (lexically marked) expression whose sense determines that a literal utterance of a sentence containing a certain occurrence of that expression has a given illocutionary force' (1984:234).

In the FTA of criticising, when the force of an utterance is derivable from its sense via the IFID, the hearer computes criticism directly. It is therefore quite unmitigated of itself (although as mentioned earlier, it may be embellished by other mitigators). An example from the data is:

- *the main problem... was getting them to drill in unison [1.3.1]*

The word 'problem' is linked to the complement 'drilling in unison' via the copula 'was' so that it is clear beyond any doubt that the criticism lies in the fact that the teacher did not do what he should/could/might have done. If any inferential leap is required of the hearer here, it is the knowledge that 'drilling in unison' is considered a good thing. However, as its absence is called a 'problem', this piece of knowledge is readily retrievable from the semantics of the utterance. Hence the force of the utterance is quite directly derivable from its sense. Other examples are:

- *this task I think was too difficult for them at this stage of the lesson [5.1.14]*

- *you don't respond to phonological error, you just ignore that, sometimes, sometimes as if you're frightened of it [5:10:1]*

Since explicit criticism is very face-threatening, it tends to attract a cluster of redressive actions. An example of such co-occurrence of mitigation may be seen in this stroking aside that prefaces a FTA:

- *you tend to respond to grammar and word stress and to pronunciation but... [5.10.1]*

In fact, through the entire data corpus, not one totally bald, unmitigated FTA was delivered.

Having established the benchmark 'explicit', attention will now turn to the three degrees of indirectness, in ascending order of indirectness: Code 12: 'conventionally indirect'; Code 13: 'implicitly indirect'; and Code 14: 'pragmatically ambivalent'.

Code 12: Conventionally indirect

The second point on the gradient, moving away from directness, is the category 'conventionally indirect'. Searle (1975) explained how the utterance 'can you reach the salt?' - which has the syntax of a question and the literal meaning of inquiring after ability - will most likely be correctly computed by the hearer as a polite request for action. Indirect speech acts are instances of language in which one illocutionary act (here, an impositive) is performed indirectly by way of performing another (here, a request for action) (Searle, 1975). In other words, the illocutionary type, as indicated by the linguistic form, does not correspond with the intended illocutionary function (Franck, 1975, cited by Geukens, 1978:261). So, instead of an interrogative being used for a question, it is here used to issue an order, albeit a polite one. Indeed, the circuitous route - employing an incongruent syntactic form - is the politeness. The hearer recognises the indirectness for what it is and understands the meaning as intended. When pragmatic meaning is conventionalised in this way, 'the reasoning from locution to illocution via conversational principles may be said to be by-passed' (Cook, 1990:5).

Of course, more is required than the referential sense of the utterance: 'salient aspects of context' facilitate the transmission of meaning (Brown & Levinson, 1978:218), where 'context' itself is a whole domain of study in its own right (Van Dijk, 1977a; Van Dijk, 1977b). Interactants arrive at interaction not as *tabula rasa* but with presumptions (Lakoff, 1985), and

they call on a reservoir of contextual knowledge¹. There is evidence of a matching strategy: cues activate appropriate scripts and frames which are linked to incoming message information that ultimately generates a 'probabilistic hypothesis' about intended meaning (Willing, 1992:47, and references contained therein). These resources enable interactants to decompose or 'unpack' and thereby interpret each other's intentions.

In English, indirect speech acts are often achieved by making reference to a 'felicity condition' (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) - such as ability or willingness - which is one of the real-world aspects of the communicative event that must be satisfied for a speech act to be successful. Thus, one of the felicity conditions for a command (e.g. 'shut the door!') is that the one commanded has the real-world capacity to carry out the order. In Labov and Fanshel's (1977) continuum of mitigation-aggravation, indirect speech acts that refer to hearer's needs or abilities are shown to be more mitigating than those that refer to the speaker's rights and obligations. Gordon and Lakoff (1975) point out that through reference to felicity conditions - e.g. through a question ('can you shut the door?'); or by an assertion (I'd like you to shut the door') - one may construct easily decodable indirect speech acts. In this sense, the process of conventionalisation might be thought of as 'short-circuited implicatures' (Morgan, 1978) or routine associations that may even be considered idiomatic.

There is no need here to engage in the debate as to whether felicity conditions are 'genuine isolates' or in fact 'particularisations' of Gricean maxims (Brown & Levinson, 1978:300), given that the current concern is not so much the intricacies of the inferential path as the fact that the process is conventionalised, making speaker intention readily accessible. Labov and Fanshel suggest that some conventionally indirect constructions, such as 'would you mind' have 'a frozen mitigating form' which is on a par with 'please' in being devoid of content and having a very high degree of 'transparency' (1977:83). Similarly, Willing asserts that in such cases computation is 'minimal' (1992:46). Ervin-Tripp (1987) argues, from empirical evidence in developmental pragmatics, that in the case of standardised everyday routines, interpretation is context- not language-cued, based on a social script rather than a computation of speaker intention. In effect, for the purpose of this study at least, the only difference between an explicit utterance and a conventionally indirect one is a matter of form (Willing, 1992): in the

¹ This includes, in part: mutually shared background information; cultural awareness; awareness of the discourse history; awareness of the pertaining interactive rules; membership of the same speech community; and 'procedural knowledge', or the ability to apply contextual knowledge (Faerch & Kasper, 1984).

latter, the speaker has gone on-record with a polite form. The negative politeness signals an unwillingness to impose and it is this, rather than any 'hard' inferential work undertaken by the hearer, that functions as mitigation.

The data of the study were analysed to determine which routines have been conventionalised as indirect (polite) criticisms by allowing reference to contextual preconditions (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984) or felicity conditions. Two categories emerged here: asking a question and making a suggestion.

Questions

Questions emerged as an important means of conventionalised indirectness. The interrogative form¹ removes a good deal of the assertive thrust of a declarative and mitigates by making the issue negotiable rather than imposed:

- *can you think of a way that you might have been able to express that? [3.4.2]*

Here the supervisor, instead of asking the more direct (e.g. 'how might you have expressed that?') uses a preparatory question ('*can you think of a way*') which makes reference to a necessary felicity condition (knowing a way). The path is indirect but the routine is conventionalised; and the hearer would need little inferential work to catch the intended meaning. Likewise, in the following instances, the supervisor makes reference to ability as a means of conventionalising the request:

- *can you see how that led to a problem? [3.13.1]*
- *could you pull that experience out of them, work from the base of their experience? [5.7.5]*

While it cannot be said with certainty that the literal level is ignored (Willing, K. 1993, pers. comm., 15 Nov.), the overlap with the polite form generates a degree of imprecision, itself facilitative of politeness.

Suggestions

Suggestions are another important way in which a supervisor may indirectly express criticisms, for they allow the speaker to make reference to felicity conditions through declaratives. As

¹ This was treated in Code 4.

with questions, the mitigation lies in the indirectness, but it is also carried in the notion of optionality (Leech, 1983) which apparently is being accorded the hearer. When the criticism is couched in the frame of a suggestion, its force is diminished and rendered more tentative. Sometimes, the suggestion is made explicitly through the use of a performative verb:

- *I would suggest trying as much as possible to keep that sort of revision activity as a separate item [4.3.9]*
- *I would suggest that you correct less for accuracy and more for phonology [5.5.11]*

In the next example, a totally bald, on-record directive, using a congruent imperative ('get'), is suitably undercut by a prefacing statement of intended speech act:

- *suggestion - get yourself a good grammar reference book [7.5.11]*

More often, the suggestion is realised through conventionalised grammatical means such as an embedded conditional:

- *perhaps if you try to use gestures more until you've mastered this [1.4.1]*
- *if you get them doing it in the drilling then you won't have to worry about that so much in the practice [3.7.7]*

And through modal verbs:

- *you could work more in small groups rather than the whole class [1.4.1]*
- *perhaps the other thing that I would have done too would have been an insistence on 'I'll' [3.7.1]*

And declaratives:

- *one of the really good ploys of doing it is instead of you always asking questions is to get them to ask you question and it takes the threat off them [6.1.5]*

And declaratives referring to felicity conditions:

- *you can turn your hand around and do it like that and it becomes, instead of becoming an accusation, it becomes an invitation [5.14.3]*

Code 13: Implicitly indirect

The third point on the gradient of indirectness is the point of non-conventional or 'implicit' indirectness. Here the inferential path that the hearer must traverse is utterance-specific: it has

not been 'routinised' or 'ritualised' by convention. For each such instance, the hearer has to recover speaker meaning inferentially, using cues within both the utterance and the context. Through the path linking literal meaning with conveyed meaning, the hearer seeks to re-construct intention. Because of their dependence on inferential interpretation, such messages 'leave a wider margin of doubt with respect to the content' (Kasher, 1986:108). The concern here is with what the teacher has to do to compute an implicitly indirect criticism, and the concomitant risk to the message.

The actual processes behind the comprehension of indirectness are not well understood. In terms of its production Brown and Levinson posit that the speaker says something more general (vaguer) than what they mean; or something different from what they mean. In the case of vague language, the utterance contains information that is more imprecise in that 'it rules out fewer possibilities' (1978:216). For example, in the remark 'somebody could have got off his behind and done the dishes,' the speaker avoids naming whom they have in mind, and (in theory, at least) leaves the possible options wide open. Often vagueness is achieved when supervisors use the second person 'you' to blur the distinction between 'you, the addressee' and 'you, people in general'¹. In the case of saying something different from what is intended, a hint or association cue is given in place of what is actually in mind: e.g. 'it's cold in here' (stated) for 'shut the window' (intended).

The hearer has to compute intention by forcing an interaction between what is said and the context in which it is said. An illuminative example from the data occurred in one incident where the supervisor invoked a proverb - '*the proof is in the pudding*' [4.6.1]. He had been trying very gently to bring the teacher to see that a particular activity she had set the class had not worked as intended because the students had failed to respond to her elicitations. The resort to proverb fits in with Brown and Levinson's off-record strategy calling for over-generalisation: because there is no explicit connection between the proverb as stated and the teacher's behaviour, the hearer has to make the connection herself through a text-context interface; and then, in theory, she 'has the choice of deciding whether the general rule applies' (1978:231). A generalisation (e.g. proverbs) provides a means of conventionalisation of criticism, so that it is more 'on' than 'off'-record; however 'as criticism with the weight of tradition, it is perhaps easier on face than other kinds of rule-stating' (Brown & Levinson, 1978:231). Nwoye states that the speaker creates distance between the self and the source of

¹ This was treated in Code 7.

wisdom, which rather lies in an ancestral 'repository of communal wisdom' (1989:272). Furthermore, because the effectiveness of a proverb in accomplishing its goal relies on a shared set of assumptions, the hearer is required to collaborate in the inferential construction of meaning, thereby increasing her 'complicity' or involvement¹.

The category of implicit indirectness overlaps with the first ten of Brown and Levinson's off-record strategies. These operate through conversational implicature involving breaches of the Gricean maxims (1978:216). The inferential process comprises two stages. The first acts as a trigger - a signal that a maxim has been breached - which alerts the hearer that an inference is required, and sets the inferential ball rolling (Brown & Levinson, 1978:218). Thus, hearing 'it's a bit stuffy in here', the hearer computes that Relevance has been breached.

In the second stage, the hearer, operating on the assumption that the CP is in place, asks him/herself 'why did the speaker say that?' and via some mode of inference, arrives at the meaning ('implicature') of what has been said. Thus, forcing a connection between what has been said (in the text) to what is going on (in the context), the hearer manages to unearth what was meant. In this case, the hearer arrives at the implicature that s/he is being asked to open the window.

Grice's example of how the implicature of a criticism may be inferred from the violation of Quantity is the instance of an uninformative reply, where what is inferred about what is not said says more than what is actually said². In Leech's example (1977:135), two people are talking after a concert:

A: Her performance was magnificent, wasn't it!

B: Was it?

The speaker (A) knows that B's question cannot be a genuine request for information and therefore must be an evasive way of expressing criticism. Leech posits the Approbation maxim,

¹ The relationship between hearer complicity and positive politeness is also treated in Code 10 and 11.

² Grice's example was this reference written for a student applying for a philosophy post: 'Dear Sir, Mr X's command of English is excellent and his attendance at tutorials has been regular' (1975:52).

which complements his Tact maxim: 'minimise dispraise of other'. The strategy of implicit indirectness enables one to express one's opinion without violating the Politeness Principle (1977:135)

In an example from the data, the supervisor is commenting on an activity which the teacher had designed as a paired exercise but which, contrary to the plan, the students performed individually. As the goal had been for the task to warm the students up through interactive paired work, the students' lack of co-operation effectively, albeit unwittingly, sabotaged the planned agenda. The supervisor is critical of the teacher's planning: he suggests that the exercise was doomed to fail because it was not designed to stimulate talk. In this scenario, had the supervisor wished to be explicit, he may have said 'the activity didn't work as a warmer because the students worked alone not in pairs and they did this because it required individual rather than paired work'. Had he wished to be equally direct but signal politeness, he could have opted for conventional indirectness, such as 'I suggest that when you want the student to work in pairs you give them an activity that requires them to talk to each other. However, he chose to be implicitly indirect. This is what he in fact says to the teacher:

- *well in a case like that I often think, I try to put myself in their shoes I think well if I'm given an activity which requires the sort of intensive work that you know the sheet (required) then I'd probably want to be doing it by myself [4.1.5]*

Hearing this, the teacher is alerted to the fact that Relevance is being breached; and through asking herself - 'why is he telling me what a student would be thinking?' - arrives at the implicature that the supervisor is being critical of the activity. In a manner typical of the way FTAs evolve through discourse, the supervisor pursued his point by adding a conventionally indirect utterance:

- *so if you are keen as a teacher to have them work in pairs for whatever reason then I would suggest that you know creating an information gap so that they have to exchange the information [4.1.5]*

Sometimes more than one maxim is violated and so the inferential path is more complex. In the following example two are breached:

- *I noticed you using back-chaining or starting to use back-chaining - getting them to drill the end of the sentence, the end of the question - um but then you didn't go back over the whole question [1.2.1]*

The first trigger is the violation of Quantity. By starting to define back-chaining - 'getting them to drill the end of the sentence, the end of the question' - the supervisor is including more information than is necessary; she thereby alerts the hearer to the implicature that the speaker must think that the hearer does not know what back-chaining is: why else would one define one's terms as one is speaking? The implicature, which the hearer computes, is 'you don't know (but ought to know) what back-chaining is and so I'm telling you'.

The second trigger is the violation of Relevance. In the last part of the utterance - 'but then you didn't go back over the whole question - the hearer, alerted to what is coming by 'but', will compute the relevance of the statement by implicating that going 'back over the whole question' was what he should have done but failed to do.

The data yielded many examples of implicit indirectness, typically involving breaches of Relevance, Quantity and Quality. An example of the breaching of Relevance is: '*it would have been nice for you to introduce the characters*' [3.3.1]; and an example of Quantity being breached, here through a rhetorical question, is: '*do you think perhaps it might have been good if they had known a little bit more about the content of the dialogue?*' [3.4.1].

The risk of implicit indirectness

It is clear that supervisors clothe their criticisms implicitly in order to mitigate, the prime motivation of which is minimisation to face risk. However, because indirectness is achieved through the flouting of the Gricean rules of clarity, supervisors have a delicate juggling act to perform: making sure they drop neither the 'message' ball nor the 'politeness' ball. What is of concern here is the fragility and vulnerability of the inferential process, specifically, the lack of firm guarantees obtaining to the action of tying force to sense. It is reasonable to suggest that the more 'buried' the criticism is, the more difficult the 'unearthing' required of the hearer to reconstruct speaker meaning. Blum-Kulka writes of degrees of 'cognitive burdening' (1987:145). Given that the path from literal meaning to conveyed meaning is perilous, much can go wrong.

Two inter-related factors make the inferential path perilous. The first is a universal human problem, what Brown and Levinson call 'the vulnerability of mutual knowledge' (1978:217): the difficulty of knowing with any great degree of certainty what is in one's interlocutor's head.

The second problem is an off-shoot of this, a specific element anchored firmly in the context of supervisory discourse; and discussed further below.

It has been shown how implicit meaning is conveyed through a forced interaction between text and context. By 'context' is meant not only the physical and psychological setting of the conference but also the assumptions about what is known and what is shared by participants. Contextual information 'pre-sets the probabilities of interpretations' (Ervin-Tripp, 1976:58). Given the purpose of the meeting, a good deal of these shared assumptions are connected to knowledge about teaching - what will be termed here 'professional' knowledge. Thus in the example cited above, part of the professional knowledge that is being called on in the computing of meaning is the knowledge that a back-chained drill starts at the end of an utterance and works its way back to the start, rather than starting at the beginning and working forward. In this case, the supervisor assumed that the teacher had this knowledge - in her head, even though it was not demonstrated in her teaching (hence the criticism). However, the fact about back-chaining is not itself explicitly stated; thus, the assumption needs to be inferred by the hearer through an interaction of text and context.

The vulnerability of this process becomes even more evident when one considers the knowledge status of a student or beginning teacher. Given the teacher's inexperience, one might conclude that relatively few assumptions about shared 'professional knowledge' (Peterson & Comeaux, cited by Herbert & Tankersley, 1993:26) can be made with full confidence. Increasingly, research is exposing the perils of imprecise communication founded on unshared premises. Calderhead's (1987) study concluded that supervisors and teachers frequently lack 'a common language' or 'set of understandings' on which to base meaningful professional discussion (cited by Moon, Niemeyer & Simmons, 1988:7), a situation that can lead to a lack of congruence or integration¹. Similarly, Moon, Niemeyer and Simmons' (1988) case study revealed that in a professional world where beginning teachers are newcomers, the language of supervision needs 'bridges' to be built rather than gross assumptions to be made (1988:20). Their study, involving close examination of participants' language and 'images', concluded that student teacher supervision is clouded in ambiguous uncertainty, itself counter-productive to effective practice.

¹ This is akin to the notion of semantic-information distance (Jablin, 1979) in management contexts.

Given that the interpretive work of the hearer begins not with the utterance but with the presumed context of interpretation (Ervin-Tripp, 1976), and given that with students and neophytes we cannot be certain of these presumptions, the least we can learn here is a warning about the risks in being overly dependent on implicit indirectness. The strategy of indirectness, while understandable in terms of face advantages, is nonetheless more hazardous for being more implicit. The notion of pragmatic risk is taken up in greater detail in the next section.

Code 14: Pragmatically ambivalent

The fourth point on the gradient is the pole of extreme indirectness, here called ‘ambivalent’. An utterance is ambivalent when the hearer cannot be certain of its intended force, as this force is not derivable from the sense or the context or a combination of sense and context. Speaker intention is indeterminate and not retrievable in the way it is in the implicit utterances, described above. Ambivalent utterances are the opposite pole on the continuum to explicit utterances whose illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs) readily signal speaker intention.

The instances of pragmatic ambivalence in the data correlate with the last five off-record strategies in the Brown and Levinson hierarchy (1978). Through their imprecision, these all breach the maxim of Manner. As the following examples illustrate, questions seem to lend themselves particularly well to the function of disguising illocutionary force:

- *most of the comprehension questions... were at the literal level of the text. Was that a conscious decision?* [10.2.3]
- *do you think the kids like the book?* [10.3.1]
- *did you have any particular things that you were hoping they might say?* [9.3.1]
- *how comfortable do you feel with the English language just the rules and regulations* [7.4.1]
- *what do you feel about your questioning skill?* [6.1.1]
- *you tend to use capitals a lot when you write* [5.12.3]
- *do you remember the question you asked?* [3.3.3]
- *how much feedback do you get from the kids’ ‘we don’t understand’?* [2.7.1]
- *were you happy with the language analysis?* [1.8.1]

It is illuminating to explore an example in greater depth. In one conference [SD1], the supervisor commented on the fact that the student teacher had used ideas in his teaching that had been suggested in a recent lecture (given by X) to the trainees:

- *I noticed you trying to use some of X’s suggestions* [1.1.1]

This could mean:

- exactly what it says and no more i.e. a neutral observation of fact;
- praise - it is good that you are trying to use suggestions being made on the course; this shows that you are willing to try out new things;
- criticism - I noticed you trying but failing to succeed in using these suggestions;
- a combination of praise and criticism - it is good that you are trying to use these suggestions but you still need to work at it.

It emerges in the unfolding discourse [1.1] that the intention is the last and it takes a few turns to reach it, during which the student teacher tries to make the meaning less imprecise and more determinate, initially by being self-critical¹:

- | | | |
|---|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | S | <i>well I noticed you trying to use some of X's suggestions</i> |
| 2 | T | <i>I'm glad you used the word 'trying' ((both laugh))</i> |
| 3 | S | <i>what, you didn't feel it was successful?</i> |
| 4 | T | <i>ah, no, it's difficult, it's not my voice on the tape, so what they're hearing on the tape and what I'm saying back to them, I don't know, it's probably a different stress [mm] and the intonation is probably slightly different</i> |
| 5 | S | <i>had you listened to the tape and practised it beforehand?</i> |
| 6 | T | <i>I listened to it a couple of times</i> |
| 7 | S | <i>and practised?</i> |
| 8 | T | <i>I'd been trying! ((both laugh))</i> |
| 9 | S | <i>I thought, I thought it worked well ah but it wasn't always consistent</i> |

Indeterminacy of meaning

It is necessary now to distinguish utterances such as the one above ('I noticed you trying...' [1.1.1]) which is termed 'pragmatically ambivalent', from other types of indeterminacy of meaning, primarily grammatical ambiguity and pragmatic ambiguity. Thomas points out that grammatical ambiguity relates to ambiguities in the surface structure of an utterance, leading

¹ This conforms with Schegloff's (1988a) thesis on the guessing factor in bad news messages.

to the possibility of assigning more than one referential sense to an utterance: e.g. 'some British tourists have found biting flies a problem' (Thomas, 1987:6). Apart from some notable exceptions (such as poetry and jokes), grammatical ambiguity is unintended. On the other hand, pragmatic ambiguity, which may have a grammatical origin, occurs when a speaker intends only one force, but another force is possible (Thomas, 1987:9):

A: Have you got something to drink?

B: Yes, thanks

A: No, not do you want something - I want something

Here, B computes A's question as an offer while it is intended as a request. What both ambiguities have in common is the following: only one meaning is intended; the ambiguity is an accidental performance error; and the speaker is often not aware of the availability of another meaning until it is pointed out (Thomas, 1987).

In contrast, pragmatic ambivalence (Leech, 1977; Brown & Levinson, 1978) involves an utterance which is deliberately indeterminate, wherein a speaker expresses his or her meaning in such a way as to allow a number of illocutionary meanings to be possible. 'Is that the phone?' may be a straight question or a request to the hearer to answer it (Thomas 1987:9). Indeed, as Leech points out, 'the rhetoric of speech acts often encourages ambivalence', with utterances like 'would you like to come in and sit down' hovering on the uncertain boundary of invitation, request and directive (1977:99). Of course, contextual variables allow for various interpretations, and what may be an invitation in one situation is a directive in another. The central point to be made about pragmatic ambivalence, however, is that the speaker's intention is unclear, and deliberately so. The exploitation lies in the deliberativeness: both speaker and hearer understand that more than one interpretation is possible, and both understand that the motivational origins of ambivalence lie outside the linguistic system (Bavelas et al. 1990b; Thomas 1987).

Pragmatic ambivalence is a normal, pervasive and necessary ingredient of human communication. It facilitates the negotiability of interactions to the point that Pocock states that 'communication rests upon ambiguity' (1973:33). Because it is so hard to know with complete certainty what is 'inside the head' of one's interlocutor, we need language to have a 'slippery' quality: the facility to ease us in and out of our apparent meanings, to give us deniability (Bavelas et al. 1990b:14), to help us avoid causing offence or socio-conversational breakdown. Pragmatic ambivalence provides this facility and allows us to use language with

expediency (App. 22). In the terms of Bavelas et al. (1990a; 1990b), it gives us the notion of 'equivocation' that lies in the murky waters somewhere between truth and falsehood.

Motivation for indeterminacy

The motivation for pragmatic ambivalence, lying outside the linguistic system, is strategic (Leech, 1977): it is employed deliberately for a goal-oriented purpose. A number of explanations are possible, and these are discussed separately below. However it may be that more than one motivation for pragmatic ambivalence may exist at any one time and that multiple concurrent motivations may co-exist to varying degrees in various supervisors in various situations to varying degrees of conscious awareness.

A key one is the 'clash-of-goals' explanation: the need to say something face-risky but at the same time the need to minimise risk to face. The conflict that supervisors feel in relation to their roles (assessor/helper) is palpably evident at times of giving criticism where there is the tension between enabling better instruction and supporting morale. Going off-record by clothing criticisms ambivalently allows both goals to be pursued. Bavelas et al. contend that equivocation is a means of 'saying nothing while saying something' (1990b:57).

Another explanation is the need for an 'out': where the speaker, uncertain of the terrain he or she is traversing, is apprehensive about the reaction an intended utterance might provoke. Ambivalence enables 'deniability' and therefore ensures an 'out' if this is what turns out to be required (Weiser, 1974): it allows one to 'retract' or 'amend' what turns out not to 'meet with hearer acceptance' (McLaughlin, 1984:144). Especially in cases of supervisors encountering a resistant teacher, or inexperienced supervisors lacking confidence in the role, or supervisors troubled by the contradictions of the role, it helps to be able to 'back down' a little. This is only feasible if the initial criticism has been expressed ambivalently. Supervisors quickly learn the wisdom of leaving a path open for retreat.

In one conference [SD4], the supervisor felt¹ that the teacher had been quite sceptical of the points of criticism he had been making; he retreated somewhat up the path of deniability with '*don't get me wrong, it's not like um it was a great problem*' [4:2.3]. He was able to do this

¹ These views were expressed in a subsequent interview.

because the criticism he had voiced earlier was not directly explicit. Thus indirectness served him well by providing him with the manoeuvrability of 'pragmatic space' (Leech, 1977:23).

In another instance [SD9], a supervisor created this pragmatic space through deixis, by distancing her concerns through tense switching. She repeatedly prefaced her FTAs with 'I was worried that you...'. The ambivalence derives from the fact that it is never clear whether she meant 'I was worried but am no longer' or 'I was worried and continue to be worried'. In the following extract, she makes a startling, albeit unwittingly illuminative, admission (as underlined):

- 1 S *yeah um did you have any particular things in mind that you were trying you said you were trying to get, get them to tell you what was polite [mm], like did you have any particular things that you were hoping that they might say?*
- 2 T *oh just, not really not, just [nod] just general politeness tags [nod] whatever would come out would be [nod] dealt with, but no particular sort of set words or phrases [nod]*
- 3 S *yeah that was just, that was really quite an honest question [mm] because you know either you did or you didn't um... [9.3]*

A third explanation for ambivalence is the desire by the supervisor to elicit rather than impose: to have the criticism come from the teacher rather than from themselves¹. Supervisors felt that gentle, leading questions (which often are pragmatically ambivalent) can lead the student teacher toward the point of self-awareness, which, they argue, is more effective than when it is other-imposed (see Ch. 6)². This is consistent with research that shows that suggestive supervision is preferred over directive supervision (Pajak & Glickman, 1984).

Investigation of an instance of pragmatic ambivalence

To unpack the thinking that underlies the 'decision' to be pragmatically ambivalent, an instance of pragmatic ambivalence that seemed typically motivated by face concerns within

¹ In interviews with supervisors in the ethnographic stage of the research (Ch. 6), this motivation emerged as a conscious strategy.

² Other motives may (co-)exist. There is the impact of 'instrumental rationality' (Thomas, 1987:37) where a speaker is assured by previous experience of the expedience of indirectness. Also, Lakoff (1990) points out that indirectness may suggest intimacy by signalling shared understanding. There is, too, the sheer fun of 'verbal playfulness' (Lakoff, 1990:171), either for its own sake or promoted by the wish to compliment one hearer's intelligence.

a SD was selected (App. 23). Then, the supervisor and the teacher were interviewed, separately, about their language and motivations. The interviews took place a few days after the event¹. Stimulated recall, based on a transcript of the supervisory dialogue, was used to elicit informants' comments on the language. This blend of post-event introspection based the informant-initiated data (the transcripts) makes the study more reliable than introspection used alone (Nunan, 1992a:132).

Introspective methods of gaining access to invisible processes such as decision-making are fraught with difficulty (Linde, 1988; Nunan, 1992a; Nunan, 1992b). The first is the question of conscious and sub-conscious strategies. A major difficulty was that in order that informants might shed some light on the thinking/decision-making that underpinned their language, they have to reflect on processes that in large part had occurred below the level of conscious awareness: i.e. they have to retrieve intention. A second difficulty is the threat to validity presented in the time lag between the event and the report.

Despite these difficulties, introspective methods have the advantage of being able to offer rich insights into otherwise largely inaccessible processes, and therefore were considered a useful instrument. In their favour is the fact that criticism has an affective 'cargo' which takes it out of the routine and lends it salience. The fact that it was probably not experienced 'mindlessly' - and may have involved rehearsal and planning, therefore making it effortful - offers greater promise of retrievability (Fairhurst, Green, & Snavely, 1984; Kiesler & Sproull, 1982; Tracy et al. 1987).

Some background information is necessary. The teacher, who had had about three years' classroom experience, was new to Australia, having trained in England and worked in South America. The supervisor's impression was that the teacher was still adjusting to the new client-students (young Asian adults) and that her lesson-planning, especially choice of materials and design of tasks, was not quite appropriate. This judgement had been formed in the staffroom and was confirmed when he watched her lesson, which he felt reflected her current stage of cross-cultural adjustment. Overlaid on this impression was his sense that she herself

¹ This procedure, referred to as triangulation by Cicourel and Jennings (1974, cited by Adelman, 1981b) is used by Adelman (1981b) as a means of eliciting 'honest accounts' from key protagonists in a research project (1981b:78). As with the present study, such triangulation 'resuscitates intended meanings (as well as) the significance of talk for the talkers' (Adelman, 1981c:7). Speech acts are seen as 'incomplete', requiring interpretation to fulfil meaning in context (Adelman, 1981b:80).

was unaware of what he privately called her 'culture shock'. Furthermore, he was sensitive to the fact that she saw herself as successful and competent, and not in need of induction or supervision. He was also aware that teachers with some experience behind them, tend to be less willing to accept criticism than students or neophytes (Cervi, 1991). The fact that she was new to Australia, to the school, and to this type of client did not shake her apparent confidence in herself and her teaching. Thus, over and above the usual reticence that accompanies the delivery of criticism, was his awareness of how these additional elements might impact on the conference. It is little wonder, then, that, cautiously, he poised his language on the indeterminate border of innocent inquiry and critical remark. He asked her:

- *Are you still adjusting to teaching Latin American students? [4.4.1]*

The teacher's reaction to this indicates that she has chosen to interpret the illocutionary force as innocent inquiry - an open, information-seeking question carrying no negative judgement:

- *No, I don't think so, well not in the sense that I'm really I'm still not always comparing [4.4.2]*

On interview, the supervisor stated that he had expressed himself ambivalently out of fear of offending her and then having to deal with the resultant unpleasantness. He recognised that the topic (cross-cultural difficulty) was a delicate one and that he had to tread warily in this terrain. His guarded approach was born of his assessment of how she might react to this topic.

That his assessment was absolutely correct emerged on interview with the teacher. She admitted that the question (even put to her ambivalently) raised shackles: 'I didn't like it, I thought it was irrelevant'. It turned out that his choice of strategy - extreme indirectness - was well-founded. On interview, the teacher said that had the supervisor expressed himself 'more baldly', she would have 'taken offence' and reacted verbally. Indignantly, she said: 'I would have said "you don't know what you're talking about!"'. It was clear she was offended at the very notion that she might need time to make necessary cultural adjustments.

It emerged during the separate interviews that a great deal was happening in the invisible pragmatic space afforded by the ambivalence of the remark. Indeed, it seems that the interaction is happening on two concurrent levels of operation: the utterance level and the computing-of-intention level. The participants, at any given moment, are engaged in a surface level interaction; but because of the indeterminacy afforded by pragmatic ambivalence, they

are also aware of a juggling of illocutionary options happening between the lines or behind the scenes or at any case at a level that is not readily able to be pinned down. The conversation has a certain 'bi-partite' quality. Certainly, as Nofsinger shows (1983), interlocutors orient themselves to utterances as symbolic acts - part of a goal-oriented tactical plan which goes beyond the utterance itself and takes into account stretches of talk.

In asking the question *'are you still adjusting to teaching Latin American students?'* the supervisor clearly has to prepare himself for a number of possible responses, some of which are outlined here:

A: She might interpret it as an open question, in which case he can leave it at that for the moment, content that he has 'planted the seed', confident that he can return to the topic and raise the matter at a later time.

B: She may react to it as an open question (as in A); but at the same time recognise the ambivalence as a signal of his wish to be negatively polite in respect to a FTA. This is probably Gibbs' 'authorised' inference' (1987:580) - what Grice (1968) called 'm-intention', or 'a speaker's intention to produce an effect in the listener by means of the hearer's recognition of that intention' (Gibbs, 1987:580).

C: she might react to it as a negative criticism, in which case he can either pursue the matter and support his case by presenting evidence; or he can retreat through denial - saying that she has misinterpreted him and clarifying his supposed non-critical intentions.

D: she might challenge him to own up to his illocutionary force, with a question such as 'what do you mean by saying that?', to which he has a number of options (see C above)

E: she might react verbally to the remark as if it were an 'innocent' question, while actually knowing/sensing that something else is intended; in this case she might 'play innocent' until the supervisor goes more public (perhaps with an IFID); or she may wait until such time as she feels ready to respond to the criticism; and all the while that she is considering these options, she knows that he probably knows that she is doing so, as well the fact that she knows that he knows this¹.

While these thought processes are happening, the conversation continues at a relatively innocent level. The supervisor, gaining heart from the fact that his first tentative foray into this difficult terrain has been successful (i.e. yielded no locutionary defensiveness), moves out of the ambivalence slightly, by adjusting his indirectness up one notch on the gradient and trying out a strategy of implicit indirectness:

¹ In fact, she responded according to E. Note that B differs from E in being compliant and deferential whereas E is a response in which the listener is simmering with emotion just beneath the calm, surface, on-line response.

- *I just imagined that for example that vocabulary activity with a (Spanish-speaking) class I can see them all jumping around and having a lot of fun [4.4.3]*

To this the teacher responds, again at a surface level:

- *well it depends, well they work together much more readily I think that's the thing, they work together [4.4.4]*

Still moving cautiously, but gaining confidence from the teacher's concession - which itself forces some complicity - that there is some difference between the two types of students, he continues, again with implicit indirectness:

- *...whereas our sort of classes need to be warmed up [mm] I think that you know to me that while it was a very well constructed and interesting um way of presenting the vocabulary I didn't see it as warmer [no, no?] and I don't I didn't see that as warming up in any way [no] and I think that our students really, particularly in that first lesson of the day and particularly with the lower levels, they really need warming up you know [4.4.5]*

All the while, the teacher is listening and producing phatic acknowledgment cues that encourage him to continue. This cautious progress - stepping warily and gingerly from pragmatic ambivalence toward gradually increasing explicitness - is a recurring pattern in the data.

A pragmatic analysis such as this exposes the staging of degrees of indirectness. In addition it highlights the fact that the conversation is driven by two concurrent yet discordant imperatives. There is, firstly, a social imperative that carries the interaction along in a face-attending manner, with interactants 'working to create social order out of potential conflict' (Good, 1979:166). This appearance of mutual agreement and amicability suffices - for face, as the word suggests, is largely a matter of surface appearances rather than deeply-felt sincerity. There is an enormous pressure on participants to maintain the flow, to avoid what Weiser calls 'flow-breaking responses' (1974:727). Indeed, she posits this as a Grice-like maxim - 'maintain smooth flow' - derived as are the other maxims from the over-arching Co-operative Principle.

Surface-level harmony can operate even while a great deal of less-than-amicable thinking is going on in the pragmatic space around what is said. The teacher feels discomfort and the supervisor knows he is treading on thin ice; yet the quest for social harmony compels them both to pursue an amicable route even while they both are entertaining thoughts of

illocutionary forces other than the ones to which they appear to be responding in their surface utterances.

However, as well as the pressure to follow the conversation, participants are also driven onward by their own goal-oriented imperative, which may or may not be in harmony with the surface level, socially-driven goal. In an instance, such as the one analysed here, where there is a discordance between the two imperatives, the attendance to the social imperative is still predominant. It carries the conversation forward (Weiser, 1974); and therefore gives the participants time to consider their own next move. Also, by keeping the wheels of the conversation oiled, it fuels hope that the individual's own goals may yet be met, something that would not happen if the communication broke down prematurely. So, even while the social imperative and the goal-driven imperative may be essentially discordant, the strategy for addressing both is the same - maintaining (at least for the moment) flow and amicability at the surface level. The pragmatic space in which these imperatives jostle and compete is beautifully afforded by the slipperiness of pragmatic ambivalence.

The risk of pragmatic ambivalence

Indirectness allows interactants to navigate a socially acceptable course in pursuance of their own goals. In this way it serves supervisors strategically in expediting their oft-conflicting roles of helper and assessor, allowing them to resolve the competing tensions of clarity and politeness. Yet, as 'no failsafe algorithm exists for verbal communication' (Gibbs, 1987:569), a central issue here is the level of risk involved - i.e. the likelihood of pragmatic failure. Thomas applies 'cross-cultural pragmatic failure' (1983:91) to any communication between two people in any particular domain where a gap in their shared background assumptions lead to some degree of mis-communication.

Dascal and Berenstein (1987) define success in communication as measurable by the addressee's ability to reach the pragmatic interpretation being conveyed by the speaker. The more indirect the communicative act, the more complex the listener's task in creating their own 'construal of the speaker's meaning' (1987:141). In this regard, the listener faces a bundle of unknowns, termed 'layers of significance' which must be unearthed and clarified. They cite Fillmore's terms (1976) in which the addressee has the duty to answer four questions about the speaker's meaning: 'What did he [sic] say? What was he talking about? Why did he bother to say it? Why did he say it in the way that he did?' (1987:140). Dascal and Berenstein add

another: 'Why did he [sic] choose *me* as an interlocutor for this particular subject matter? (1987:142). They posit that there are 'two distinct modalities of pragmatic interpretation' - 'comprehending' and 'grasping' (1987:148). While Fillmore's four questions have to do with the addressee's mode of comprehending, the last question requires a mode of grasping i.e. recognition of which game rules are governing the interaction.

Success in communication, therefore, is a two-way street; and the onus has much to do with how the hearer handles their 'side'. The more indirect the speaker's language, the more work is required of the hearer; and the less assured the speaker may be of end-product success. There are, in fact, two risks¹. The first has to do with the intended perlocutionary effect (reduced offence through a softened FTA), which ultimately is 'in the hands (or ears) of the hearer' (Fraser & Nolen, 1981:96). Of this risk, Fraser writes (1980:349):

To mitigate is to bring about a consequent psychological effect within the hearer, and success in doing this is problematic at best... Ultimately it is up to the hearer to determine whether or not an unwelcome effect has been softened.

The second risk is whether the trade-off in face has in fact worked; or whether the one goal has succeeded at the cost of the other - in other words, how 'intact' is the message? As Maseide shows in his analysis of doctor-patient interaction, 'delivered messages require a receiver in order to have any communicative function' (1981:161). Pocock, similarly, cites communicative constraints: 'all verbalised action is mediated.... In performing a verbalised act of power, I enter upon a polity of shared power' (1973:33).

Blum-Kulka (1987) would argue that a third risk lies in a point on the gradient of indirectness where 'indirect' becomes 'impolite'. She defines politeness as 'the interactional balance achieved between two needs: the need for pragmatic clarity and the need to avoid coerciveness' (1987:131). Thus, an overly indirect speaker may impose on the hearer by the sheer weight of the cognitive burden involved in the inferencing of indirectness. Fairhurst et al. (1984) may argue that there is a further risk. Because people in authority positions have difficulty asking purely informational questions (Goody, 1978), sub-ordinates may interpret apparently fact-finding questions as blame-loaded, thus prompting defensiveness which itself may curb or distort the flow of information (Gibb, 1969).

¹ c.f. the person and process risks outlined in Ch. 3.

That the process is fraught with peril is supported by evidence from experimental social psychology, which contributes to our understanding of how people interpret each other in face-to-face interaction. For example, Swann and Read (1981) investigated the influences of people's self-conceptions on how they solicit and respond to feedback during social interaction. The findings suggest that there is a systematic tendency for people to solicit self-verifying feedback. The conclusion is that within interaction people operate as 'active agents, who, after fashioning images of themselves, behave in ways that tend to bring their social environments into harmony with these images' (1981:1127). A later study (Swann, 1987) investigated the negotiation of identity that happens at the point of interaction; and uncovered a set of 'self-verification strategies' (1987:1039) by which people process feedback in ways that make the responses seem more supportive than in fact they are .

Such evidence suggests that teacher-supervisees are not passive recipients of imposed messages, but rather co-constructors of their own social reality. It is part of the contention of this thesis that lack of supervisory explicitness runs the danger of fuelling mis-conceptions: it leaves interpretation relatively open to chance, and by so doing, perhaps lubricates the wheels of meaning construal by which teachers, given the option, would rather not take up a negative appraisal. This would facilitate a process by which central pedagogical issues that should be on the supervisory agenda may be skirted, camouflaged, down-weighted and ultimately ignored.

Apart from the issue of contentious topic and conflict avoidance¹ the literature reports ample support for the notion that messages delivered indirectly are risky. For example, Pajak and Seyfarth refer to habits of 'intellectualising' and obliqueness by means of which supervisors diminish teacher defensiveness but increase the chance 'that the teacher will fail to understand exactly what the supervisor is criticising' (1983:22). Further, they write (1983:22-23):

Supervisors who dilute their messages... can come across as unclear, and they leave teachers confused about how concerned they really ought to be about the problem... too much indirectness can result in a loss of clarity. Being direct is not only clearer; it is also frequently more humane.

¹ This is discussed at length in Ch. 2.

This is corroborated by Cervi's findings on feedback in which he asserts that supervisors often erroneously conclude that a point of criticism they have made has been understood whereas, in fact, 'the student teacher may not have heeded this as criticism' (1991:109).

Thus, the issue of message vulnerability and therefore risk of failure is a very real one. When supervisors deliver criticisms in a less than explicit way, student teachers are required to make certain intermediary inferences in order to understand the FTA *qua* criticism and recognise the operant issues. While the human mind is astounding in what it can compute at the delicate interface of form and context, there is no doubt that journeying along the gradient of indirectness away from the pole of explicitness is a journey in the direction of pragmatic risk. As can be seen in the analysis of the 'Latin American' incident, an assumption may be 'manifest' to a person to varying degrees (Leech & Thomas, 1988:52). There it was shown that although the text of the interaction skirted the issues, the teacher computed the criticism *qua* criticism but chose not respond to it at this level¹. Even beyond this, however, there may also be a point at which the teacher may not compute the criticism *qua* criticism at all - at any level. At such a point, where it might well be said that the teacher has missed the message, one may reasonably speak of 'pragmatic failure'.

5.6 Concluding the linguistic study

5.6.1 A qualitative outcome

Chapter 5 has been dedicated to developing a data-driven typology of mitigation in the language of TESOL supervisors. The guiding aim has been to characterise - identify and describe - the multifarious means by which mitigation operates at the utterance level of supervisors' language.

As outlined in Ch. 4, data were collected and analysed until the categories of the typology began to stabilise through saturation. At this time, the typology became the coding instrument by which the intensive analysis was implemented. A second iteration, or 'combing' of the entire data corpus, sought to classify each instance of mitigation into one of the fourteen coded sub-classes. The purpose of the coding 'wave' was to confirm the exhaustiveness of the

¹ One may well question the value of this type of awareness within a supervisory context: after all, if it is not firmly 'on the agenda', it is being tangentially addressed at best.

typology by ensuring that every item of mitigation in the data base was accounted for within the typology. A by-product was the generation of quantitative findings about the patterns of distribution of mitigation. Before discussing and displaying these, some caveats are warranted.

5.6.2 Caveats regarding quantitative conclusions

The aim of the linguistic prong was essentially qualitative: to understand the distribution and operation of mitigation in supervisors' talk. The purpose was not to quantify, either at an absolute level (as, for example, measuring how mitigated one supervisor's language is), or at a relative level (such as comparing different supervisors' language for degrees of mitigation, or correlating this to other variables). While the quantitative findings displayed below are worthy of mention, they are expressed with caution and are not further explored - being outside the intended goal of the project, they rather have the status of by-product.

Quantification in this area is at best problematic (Brown, 1980; Craig et al. 1986). Brown and Levinson warn of the intrinsic difficulties of 'trying to obtain quantitative measures of politeness strategies in naturalistic interactional data' (1987:22). Quantification is impeded by the need to make separate assessments, in each case, of the P, D and R factors of which politeness is a function. In supervisory dyads, P probably remains fairly constant; however, R would depend on the severity or threat of the FTA; and D would have to take account of variables like age, gender, class etc. Because these concerns were beyond the parameters of the present inquiry, information pertaining to them was not considered relevant at the data collection stage.

Quantification is also impeded by the fact that individual markers of mitigation cannot be counted up as if they were single, equally weighted units, as 'politeness is implicated by the semantic structure of the whole utterance' (Brown & Levinson, 1987:22). Yet precedents exist for a quantitative approach to face issues (Bavelas et al. 1990a; Bavelas et al. 1990b; Brown & Gilman, 1989; Kline, 1981, cited by Fairhurst et al. 1984; Linde, 1988). The fact that quantification underpins the scores discussed below is a measure of the caution needed to interpret them. In addition, even were the other quantification issues to be resolved, the numbers involved in this study are insufficient to make unequivocal assertions linking mitigation with such elements as supervisory experience or training. Yet the concerns are

deserving ones and despite their shortcoming, the findings here may point the way to further research¹.

5.6.3 Findings and discussion

Eyeballing the findings (App. 26), and bearing in mind the caveats above, a number of comments may be offered from the secondary, quantitative phase of the study. These pertain to six variables: supervisor experience, supervisor gender, supervisee status, supervisee gender and supervisor training. In the case of each variable, scores for the number of CIs (FTA index) were matched against the number of mitigators (face work index): the number of CIs is an index of how many FTAs supervisors chose to deliver; while the amount of mitigation reflects the effort invested in strategic face work. In all cases, the FTA index positively correlated with the face work index: i.e. supervisors who chose to deliver more FTAs also opted for greater face work. Given what has been said of the competing pressures of message clarity and face attention, it would seem logical to expect that higher scores on both indices would suggest greater tension in the language.

Even so, it needs to be reiterated that the scores discussed below do not derive from controlled experiments: thus, for example, in scores for the variable 'supervisor experience' other factors (e.g. supervisee status/gender or supervisor gender) have not been held constant, as this was not consonant with the research paradigm. Further research is needed to control for these factors, as far as this is compatible within qualitative paradigms involving human subjects in naturalistic settings.

Eschewing definitive conclusions then, the following broad strokes are tentatively sketched (Table 5).

5.6.3.1 Supervisor experience

Scores on the indices of FTA and face work were compared for two sub-groups: highly and minimally experienced. On both indices, the amount of face threat and face work was in inverse proportion to the amount of supervisory experience: less experienced supervisors tended to deliver more face threats and engage in greater mitigation than their more

¹ This is explored further in Ch. 8.

	a		b		c		d		e	
	Supervisor experience		Supervisor gender		Supervisee status		Supervisee gender		Supervisor training	
	high	minimal	male	female	student teacher	neophyte	male	female	+ training	- training
FTA Index (mean core of FTAs)	8.75	12.5	7.5	11	7.5	12.25	10.6	8.6	9.25	10.25
Face work Index (mean score of mitigators)	167.75	282.5	177.25	251.25	170.25	247.5	221.5	142.0	213.5	240.5

Table 5: Quantitative findings for face threat and face work per 5 variables

experienced colleagues. This would suggest that their conferences may be more prone to tension than those of experienced supervisors who seem to be more selective about what they choose to criticise and overall feel less need to mitigate. This corroborates Robert’s finding (1991a) which compared degrees of face risk associated with the ‘requests for action’ in the context of the supervisory conference. If experience is indeed the major contributing factor, and if the assumption of less-tension-is-better is valid, then it would seem that supervisory training for beginning supervisors may be in order: this may leave less to fate and the passage of time the processes by which supervisors are successfully able to resolve the clash-of-goals intrinsic to conferencing.

5.6.3.2 Supervisor gender

The female supervisors scored nearly 50% higher on both the FTA index and the face work index. This suggests that the language of their conferences would engender greater tension than those of male supervisors. This finding raises issues beyond the scope of this study, needs far greater numbers and control, but may be considered worthy of continuing interest, given the numerical female-intensity factor in TESOL.

5.6.3.3 Supervisee status

Nine of the 10 supervisees were in either category ‘student’ or ‘neophyte’. Here again, there was a positive correlation between high FTA and high face work. Neophytes received nearly twice the amount of criticisms that students did, and nearly 50% more face work. Lower scores for trainee teachers may be explained by the latitude that supervisors often provide given the

factors of anxiety and unfamiliarity. That these special allowances - what Goffman calls 'rules for beginners' (1961:139) - are not accorded neophytes - where the 'maladroitness' (Goffman, 1961:140) of apprentices may also be expected - may be explained by the private enterprise settings which obtain in these cases: these teachers were salaried staff in EFL colleges and their observations were 'tainted' by quality control measures¹. In other words, the supervisor's role was to bring the teacher through a period of induction to a satisfactory standard of professional competence. Criticism, therefore, being intrinsic to the terms and conditions of the institution, was considered entirely in order.

5.6.3.4 Supervisee gender

The 10 SDs were equally split between dyads with male and dyads with female supervisees (although across supervisor/supervisee, these were variously homogenous [m/m; f/f] or mixed [m/f; f/m]). The dyads with male supervisees scored 20 per cent higher on the FTA index, and 64 per cent higher on the face work index, suggesting that the dyads with female supervisees had less face-related tension. However, on examining the composition of the dyads, it appears that the gender of the supervisee may be less important than the gender mix of the dyad. Of the male supervisee dyads, three of the five involved female supervisors (and therefore mixed dyads). Of the five female supervisee dyads, again three of the five involved five female supervisees (therefore homogenous dyads). Within the limitations of such low numbers, these figures tentatively suggest that mixed dyads accrue greater tension than homogenous dyads. Why this should be so is difficult to know, and certainly beyond the scope of this study.

5.6.3.5 Supervisor training

Seven of the supervisors had had some training in supervision (although none were trained in issues pertinent to politeness theory). However, of the three who did not have training, it cannot be inferred that they were unaware of the clash-of-goals. For example, one of the three supervisors was in fact extremely articulate about the very issues with which the study deals. The scores revealed that those with no training engaged in slightly more face threat and face work than those with training. This is probably a result of the fact that what is at issue here is reflective awareness, rather than formal training. The former can be achieved with or without the latter; the latter may be undertaken with or without the former resulting. It may

¹ This was discussed in Ch. 1.

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¹ This was discussed in Ch. 1.

also be that a self-selecting influence is at work here: the sort of supervisors willing to participate in the research may already be of the 'reflective practitioner' type.

Overview

Conclusions regarding mitigation and supervisory discourse - specifically relating the findings back to the research question pertaining to fragility - are held over to Ch. 8. Discussion there will also focus on the implications of mitigation for the notion of 'message risk'.

The focus now broadens from supervisory talk to supervisory context, with the spotlight shifting from language to users of language, and the research method switching from discourse analysis to ethnography. Chapter 6 presents a portrait of supervision.

Chapter 6

An Ethnographic Portrait of Supervision

Disclosures of human lifeworlds are instances of knowledge as understanding
(Van Manen, 1977:215).

*We don't always say what is on our minds - somehow the articulate becomes
lost in the words we use in professional conversation* (Fox, 1981:163).

*My experience is that what we create in our heads about what we are going
to say is always tighter, harder, sharper than what we end up saying*
(supervisor informant #30).

Overview

The purpose of the second prong is to explore supervisors' 'participant meanings' through an ethnographic inquiry into their perceptions of feedback. Being part of the triangulation protocol, this pursuit was not fully open-ended and exploratory but rather began with certain a priori hypotheses, generated from the linguistic investigation, which the study sought to corroborate. Notwithstanding this pre-existing framework, the ethnographic pursuit had most of the other hallmarks that characterise this type of qualitative research. These are the significance of context to the event in question and 'the centrality of the subjective belief systems' of those involved in the research process (Nunan, 1992a:71).

The ethnographic report comprises three sections. The first examines the naturalistic conditions under which the data were collected: the subjects, sites, settings, contexts and purposes that drove the experiences which form the recollections that the informants report. This description is an essential element in qualitative research for it provides the basis of reliability allowing 'working hypotheses' to be generated from one context and serve as a basis for 'relatability' to others. The second section presents the findings harvested from the data, organised according to the main descriptive topics and conceptual issues yielded by the data. The aim here is, through rich and thick description, to create a 'portraiture' of

supervision, while synthesising and condensing central concerns. What is sought is a balance of the particular and the interpretive: the former is designed to allow the reader to 'vicariously experience' (Merriam, 1991:199) the setting and the lived reality of participants, often through their own words; the latter is designed to position the researcher vis-a-vis the data and to draw together the threads of the tapestry into a meaningful whole. The third section rounds off the ethnography by summarising findings as a set of grounded propositions (following Battersby, 1984 and Spradley, 1979); and by weaving these working hypotheses back to the over-arching conceptual framework and research issues that steer the investigation.

6.1 The context of setting

The 30 supervisors¹ who make up the data bank have in common the supervisory experience of observing and feeding back to teachers. Underpinning their experience is a wealth of commonalities and recurrent themes which together form the substance of the ethnographic portrait. While sharing the central experience of supervision, they nonetheless come from widely different backgrounds, and during the interviews, call on experience from a wide range of supervisory settings and purposes.

As part of the process of accessing participant meanings, the investigator sought that time-honoured strategy of ethnographers - immersion (Spradley, 1979). This involved in-depth exposure to informants' perspectives during which time lengthy notes were taken on the details of contexts in the effort to remain faithful to the concrete level of reporting. Over a twelve weeks period, the processes of interviewing, logging and coding took place. This included, towards the end, an intensive period of 'mining' the coded data, during which the urge to begin writing could be suppressed no longer.

Out of the period of immersion, the investigator emerged cognisant of a peculiar tension generated by the data bank. This arose from the existence of two related phenomena: the enormous heterogeneity of sites, settings, backgrounds and contexts of experience (affording data triangulation: Denzin, 1970; Mathison, 1988); and the over-riding homogeneity of the experience of feedback, differing in respect to detail but surprisingly uniform in spirit. This

¹ They are referred to by a same-sex pseudonym and/or a code number.

uniformity in the context of a multiple site study suggests that the reliability of the study is high.

6.1.1 The supervisors

The informants (App. 27), of whom just under two-thirds were women, ranged in age from late twenties to early fifties, with the mean age of 44 years. That most were mature and experienced teachers is to be expected given the premise of experience that supervision generally assumes. Their experience ranged from just a few observations and feedback conferences (e.g. #8, #20) to many hundreds (e.g. #4, #28): 23% had experience of less than 10 feedback conferences; 27% had experience of between 10 and 30 conferences; and 50% had experience of more than 30. Altogether, through the interviews, they were calling on an experiential reservoir of no less than, and possibly well in excess of, 640 conferences.

Of the 30 supervisors, some four emerged as key informants. Different reasons prompted this status. Rose (#28) was one of the oldest and most experienced in the group, with a wealth of varied and interesting experiences in and a passionate dedication to teacher education and to professional standards within TESOL. The experience she called on was largely (though not exclusively) pre-service TESOL teacher preparation in the context of secondary schools. Maria (#12) was a relatively young supervisor, whose work in a taxing position (in-servicing often resistant teachers) had made her very aware of the issues, which she herself had explored in a recent research project of her own. Susan (#26) had a reputation for excellence, a disposition of reflectivity and a long-standing connection with the researcher, characterised by good faith and trust. She called on both pre-service teacher preparation (adult TESOL) and in-service teacher support (secondary school). Colin (#5) had worked closely with the researcher for a number of years and on a number of TESOL training projects; there was excellent communication and a great deal of goodwill. His supervisory experience was totally within the adult context and included both pre-service and in-service. All four of these informants were enthusiastic about sharing experiences; were keen to reflect upon and refine their own awareness and skills; and generously gave their time, knowledge, accrued wisdom and co-operation to the project.

6.1.2 The sites

The 30 supervisors call on experience of supervision from a very large variety of sites - at the bare minimum, 30 different sites where they were working or had worked recently. The precise number of sites is difficult to ascertain, as the experience informants call on derives not only from their current place of work but from previous sites as well. One supervisor was quite atypical in having worked for twenty years at the same school; in contrast, most had diverse and colourful backgrounds, with both local and international experience. Because of the nature of their work and the nature of English as a world language, TESOL professionals tend to be well travelled¹.

Included among the sites, there are 13 private language schools (largely EFL); 10 teacher training programs (TESOL), mostly adult but also secondary; eight sites of Adult ESL programs (public sector); and eight sites of secondary ESL in both public and private schools. Some of the supervisors had also worked in staff development with non-ESOL teachers; and some called on experience with staff development in non-teaching institutions. Four had extensive experience in various aspects and contexts of human resource management and, in responding to questions, they called on these areas, as well as their earlier TESOL-based supervisory experience.

From quite early, it was apparent that the picture of supervision emerging from sites as dissimilar as a private language school and a government disadvantaged schools literacy project was roughly the same in regard to the core issues; likewise, other variables - the age of the student (secondary/adult); the teaching subject (e.g. ESL, EFL, English, Maths, Geography, etc.); the status of the teacher (student, neophyte, experienced); the teaching or non-teaching context - did not yield substantial difference to the underlying key issues.

¹ Such diversity had not been planned. The investigator set out, with some naivety, to explore supervision within the domain of TESOL as it was here that her own experience was grounded and here that she wished her research contribution to have an impact. It was quickly discovered that, because of the nature of both TESOL and its practitioners, the notion of domain homogeneity was both illusive and elusive.

6.1.3 Contexts of supervision

Three clear contexts of supervision emerged: pre-service, in-service and 'quality control' (Wajnryb, 1993a). Pre-service teacher supervision involved the supervisors' participation in the practicum. Sometimes this would involve the supervisor (as co-operating teacher) and student teacher developing a relationship over a number of weeks during which time the supervisor would observe and feedback to the teacher about his or her teaching. In other settings, the supervisor was the teacher trainer/educator. Here the relationship also varied: sometimes it had built up over time; in other situations, the observation/feedback was a one-off experience between virtual strangers. Pre-service contexts, therefore, varied widely in the details of supervision but were bound in commonality by the existence of assessment during or at the end of the practicum. Some programs tried, for stress-related reasons, to down-play assessment; others, for reasons beyond the scope of this study, gave it a high profile.

In-service supervision involved observing and feeding back to teachers who are already qualified and are engaged in some form of teacher development. This was sometimes entirely voluntary, as in the case of teachers undertaking a post-graduate qualification; or involved in peer observation/feedback in an action research project, or within the context of school-based support. Sometimes it was less a matter of personal choice, but rather was a mandatory part of working conditions, being linked to staff appraisal. In such cases, it overlaps with a quality control orientation where the purpose is often to standardise teaching across an institution.

Quality control measures in observation and feedback sometimes occurred as part of the recruitment process; sometimes as part of probation with neophytes; and sometimes as linked to on-going employment or promotion prospects. Among the 30 supervisors some had experience of all three and some had various combinations (see App. 27). In calling on their experience of supervising, they often differentiated among the various purposes in answering the interview questions.

6.2 A portrait of supervisory concerns

Chapter 4 outlined in detail the steps by which the primary source material - the 30 interview logs - were accessed so as to make meaningful and logical sense of a huge amount of data. Coding of blocks of text proceeded in successive 'waves' or iterations as data collection and

analysis continued simultaneously through the first phase of the inquiry, threatening on a number of occasions, as is the way, to swamp the researcher in a deluge of words, anecdotes, cases, narrative vignettes, episodes, recollections and mini-portraits. In this way a very large and unwieldy number of codes - about 50 - was reduced to a more manageable number, 20 (App. 28).

At this point, decisions had to be made as to what to include in the report and what to omit¹. This was settled by revisiting the central purposes of the investigation - understanding teacher supervision as a face-threatening event and exploring supervisory discourse as a realisation of attitudes to feedback. The selection criterion for codes was their pertinence in respect of the major concerns of the investigation. On this basis, fourteen were selected as the basis for the report.

It was clear that the codes demanded differential treatment. The easiest to depict and describe are the 'cluster codes'. There are six of these, each picking up simple, emergent themes. In each case, a code is represented in the text by a number of key words that echo the refrain of the theme. Separate from these relatively simple patterns, are eight 'conceptual bins' of more complex concerns, created by collapsing and subsuming codes, and re-grouping categories, as generated by Guba and Lincoln's (1983) card-sorting procedure. Of course, as the report will reveal, there is an inter-weaving of themes and concerns throughout, this being a closer reflection of the nature of human experience than the neat, separate categories that analysis suggests. Together the six cluster codes and eight conceptual bins, outlined below, provide a set of 'interpretive repertoires' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987:149) - recurrently used systems of terms used for characterising participants' meanings. They provide the layers of rich description and interpretive gel that form the heart of ethnography.

6.2.1 Simple emergent themes: cluster codes

The six cluster codes are uni-dimensional, emergent themes: these are echoed repeatedly in the interviews and around them cluster a certain configuration of language items or key words.

¹ The agony of such decisions is described in Lofland, 1971. In deciding what to include and what to omit, we face the ethnographer's paradox: at the altar of readability, we end up 'editing, abridging or deleting the very material that is the basis of our endeavour... thereby leaving to faith that instances we report reflect discernible patterns observed during fieldwork' (Wolcott, 1988:30).

They serve the ethnography by keeping the description closely aligned to the words and sentiments of the informants. They are each described briefly below, under metaphoric headings, and with sample key words and expressions included.

6.2.1.1 Face as fragile

There is an overwhelming sense of power asymmetry in the relationship between supervisor and teacher, an imbalance that gives one party the power to 'destroy' the other. As Rose says: 'fragile egos can be hurt. A stray unthoughtful word can be so discouraging' (#28). Metaphors of fragility and destruction are a pervasive refrain. Their language clearly shows that most supervisors are cognisant of their power and uncomfortable with it:

destroy; dump on; crumble; knock down; dash them on the rocks; smash them to bits; shoot them down; rub their nose in it; sock it to them; crushing; sensitive; vulnerable; a raw experience; pick up the pieces; chop down; bruise; erupt; attack; devastate; shatter; annihilate; confront; put down; stabbing to the heart.

6.2.1.2 Juggling

Aware of the power they have to dent the teacher's positive sense of self, yet aware of the role obligations that compel them at times to be critical, supervisors reveal themselves to be constantly juggling the issues so as to resolve the competing pressures in their role. One issue they juggle is how much criticism the teacher can take and how direct they can afford to be in their delivery. This involves 'sizing up' the teacher and 'reading' their responses, verbal and non-verbal. It includes an awareness of 'bristling' and 'flinching' (#19). Another issue is weighing the good and the bad, the positive and the negative, the praise and the criticism. There were many instances of supervisors searching for good things to report - extending, exaggerating, elaborating, embroidering, foregrounding - so as to balance the criticism. Some said they would stop short of fabricating; others said they might even fabricate so as to save the teacher's face. Another issue was the image they projected to teachers, something that required attention as much to language as to tone, warmth, proxemics and kinesics. Chris (#20) spoke about his efforts to achieve a balance between assuring the teacher respect and confidentiality yet not being an impersonal or threatening figure. Certainly, the metaphor of the ever-alert juggler is a powerful one:

it's delicate; constant juggling; always checking myself; you're on your mettle all the time; you're sizing them up; you can get any range of reactions; it's a balancing thing; you need to negotiate; you tailor it; you have to know how far you can go; you gauge their reaction; you temper it according to their response.

6.2.1.3 Weighing words

The juggling is realised especially in the care with which supervisors speak. There is a sense of words being chosen judiciously, weighed and balanced before delivery:

careful what you say; think before you say it; weigh it up; be diffident; hesitant; structuring what you're saying and what you're going to say next; know the weight of your words; sifting through it in my head; I pause and think about how to formulate it; the wording is important; I prepare my sentences.

6.2.1.4 Soft-pedalling

A concern for the impact of their words often leads supervisors to err on the side of caution. Some see this as a conscious strategy, arguing that teacher morale is more important than the supervisor's instructive message; others are not aware of soft-pedalling but are aware of feeling 'wimpish' in the face of the duty to deliver criticism. Soft-pedalling is defined (Chambers, 1988:1396) as the effort to subdue, tone down, avoid emphasis or allusion. One supervisor, Ann, prides herself on having mastered the skills of soft-pedalling, defining it as 'getting what you want without antagonising your listener' (#18):

diplomatic; buttering up; down-play; taking an oblique approach; sneaking it in; back-off; trade-off; pussy-foot; soften; dilute; appease; make it palatable; digestible; easy to take in; wrap it in cotton wool; tactful; make it seem minor; I say 'by the way' and then drop it in; sweeten the pill; cushion the blow; make it sound less critical; I try to smile while I say it; I change my tone to make it gentler.

6.2.1.5 Shooting from the hip

The opposite of soft-pedalling is shooting from the hip or speaking bluntly or hastily, without reflection or preparation or without caring about the consequences. Supervisors showed

themselves to be very aware of this style of feedback and its consequences. All opted to avoid operating this way. Some said they were frank and up-front in their language, but revealed highly developed management skills for cushioning the impact of their approach:

up-front; blunt; straight; direct; honest; frank; realistic; brusque; go for the jugular; call a spade a spade; call a spade a shovel; be clear; use a sledgehammer approach; get the message across; confronting; saying it like it is; giving them the truth; taking the gloves off; delivering a whammy.

6.2.1.6 Biting the bullet

The conflict supervisors perceive in the act of delivering criticism is often expressed as a reluctant fulfilment of duty. Often supervisors concede, albeit reluctantly, that as the aim is to turn out sound teachers, the issue of 'person' has to be subordinated to the issue of criticism (#28):

you can't shirk the responsibility; it's got to be done; it's got to have some teeth in it; I feel a responsibility to get the message across; you can't let them keep on doing it; they have to know; what's the point if you don't tell them? you've got to think of the students; students have the right to good teaching; you have to ensure they get quality; they won't thank you in the long run.

6.2.2 Complex themes: conceptual bins

Some of the issues that emerged as pervasive themes were multi-dimensional: they were too complex to be characterised by the cluster code method but rather lent themselves to a more complex description through a subsuming process that created conceptual bins. There are eight of these (Fig. 6) and they are described below.

6.2.2.1 Purpose of feedback

Supervisors' perceptions of the purpose of feedback fell neatly into two categories - the instructive and the affective. On the instructive side, perceptions might be mapped onto a gradient at the one end of which was a view of feedback as information transmission, telling 'what went right and what went wrong and why' (#10). It was the time to explain their judgement and provide supporting evidence (#14). Lucy argued that trainees expect and are impatient for the feedback from one they perceive to have expertise and authority (#16).

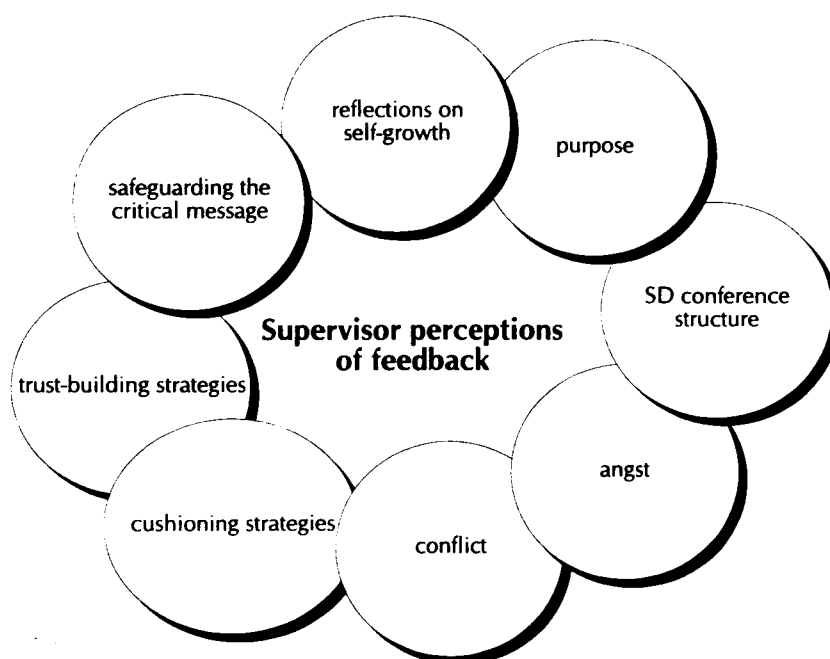


Figure 6: Supervisor perceptions of feedback: conceptual bins

Malcolm said: 'it's a learning thing', a place for training and giving input (#13). Adam said: 'if you don't tell them they don't know' (#6). Paula saw it as an opportunity for 'directed reflection', and for her to offer advice and insights from her own experience (#10). Referring to the supervisor's role of recognising error and picking up on problems, Peta said, somewhat pathologically, that there is a need to 'catch it early so it doesn't fester' (#11). Jim thought that at times you have to tell a teacher what it is that may be 'impeding' their teaching (#2). Somewhat gentler, Jane saw feedback as a time to 'draw boundaries', 'portion out knowledge' and 'create stepping stones' towards learning (#1).

Closer to the other end of the instructive gradient were those who saw the supervisor having a less directive, more subtle role to play during feedback with the overall instructive aim of clarifying, broadening and deepening insight. Jim implied that the challenge of supervision was 'finding effective ways of imparting knowledge' (#2). Some described feedback as a time to provide alternatives for the teacher to reflect upon (#22). Others spoke of the need to bring teachers towards a more autonomous point in making their own self-assessment, in part bound up with providing a more realistic view of their own performance (#17). Some saw themselves in a facilitative 'mirror' role, allowing their observer presence and feedback to give the teacher an opportunity to see classroom processes from a different angle (#18) such that may help them put a different interpretation on classroom events (#17). With neophytes, often understandably locked into the teaching role, some supervisors sought to enable the shift to

a more learning-focussed orientation (#4). With more experienced teachers, Maria saw 'negotiating the pedagogy' as a means towards triggering the teacher's own growth (#12). Susan said that teachers were so involved in 'the details of the lesson' that they often missed seeing 'the whole' (#26). Some saw their role as gently guiding the other towards their own 'learning discovery', towards an 'ah-ha' experience (#20), the more potent because it feels like it is coming from within. Eve spoke of the satisfaction a supervisor can derive from observing 'the dawning realisation' that often triggers learning (#27). Many supervisors agreed that a non-directive approach was perhaps more manipulative than 'straight' information transmission, but justified it through the benevolence of their intentions¹.

On the affective side, all supervisors saw the purpose of feedback as encouraging teachers and reinforcing strengths. It is a question, said Andy, of convincing them that they can be the agent of others' learning 'even if right now it isn't happening' (#19). Malcolm said that with neophytes it was important not to besiege them with negativity but limit your objectives to manageable chunks, bearing in mind the impact on their morale; they had to leave the conference wanting to keep on trying (#13). Jane said that it was a question of creating an adequate 'support net' and ensuring that they went away with 'a bit of success' and 'a piece of dealable strategy' (#1).

6.2.2.2 Schematic structure of the feedback conference

The supervisors' views of the schematic structure of the conference displayed a high degree of consensus. This complied roughly with the SSSS model: Sympathise, Select, Summarise, Study (c.f. Gaies & Bowers, 1990; Smyth, 1984a; Wajnryb, 1993c; Zahorik, 1988). Roy expressed the shape of the conference visually when he described it as 'a wooden bannister - broad in the middle' (#14).

For most, there were three very broad stages, often with quite blurred edges. Supervisors clearly had very conscious strategies for the first stage which was largely affective in function, designed 'to bring them down' (#15). Typical of the responses was Andy's: 'I start with a light-hearted pleasantry about something neutral' (#19). Paula said that this comment, by being unrelated to the teacher and non-judgemental in tone, served to distract and relax the teacher

¹ This is not unlike the view, expressed in the literature of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (e.g. Laborde, 1983), which finds its expression in the term 'influencing with integrity'.

(#10). Some made a point of referring to a shared moment in the lesson but one 'outside' the teacher, like 'isn't so-and-so a good student?' or 'wasn't such-and-such difficult today?' Some consciously used humour at this point; one pointed to food (a cup of tea or coffee) as a great equaliser; another said he helped the teacher with the 'physicalities' of ending a lesson - re-organising furniture, putting back equipment - allowing the movement and casual chit-chat to wind the teacher down and so avoid an overly premature 'eyeball confrontation' (#19).

The second stage was essentially in 'report-back' mode (#26) which in its most formal structure fell into two sub-parts: the supervisor reporting back ('judgement') and the teacher then commenting ('defence') (Waite, 1990b; Waite, i.p.). All the supervisors commented that they started by eliciting from the teacher their own impressions or feelings. (This strategy is discussed further, below). The format of the report-back varied. Some supervisors (#23) had prioritised a series of points and proceeded to tell these, always beginning with the good ('praise and reinforce') and then moving on to key critical points ('as much as they can take on board'- #11). Some took a set of points and commented (with praise and criticism) about each one (#16). Some preferred to follow 'the story of the lesson' as recorded in their observation notes (#10) (c.f. Smyth's 'historical map', 1984a:41). Others were less directive. Jack said he preferred the teacher to set the agenda: 'I'd rather respond to what the teacher is concerned about' and then followed up with any major considerations. Gina (#17) extended the early elicitation phase to form the whole report-back; she preferred the teacher to take the active role here which then propelled the supervisor into a 'confirm or deny' role that she claimed was easier (on both parties) than herself 'playing judge'.

The last stage was closure. All the supervisors stressed the importance of reiterating strengths and allowing teachers to leave 'with face' (#11). Elements of criticism, it was emphasised, ought to be turned into objectives for follow-up lesson, to the point of sometimes blurring the distinction between a post-lesson conference and pre(next)lesson conference (#6). Many emphasised the importance of the supervisor's ensuring that the teacher leaves the meeting confident of strategies on which to work. Lucy consciously wound up the conference by moving out of a professional to a more social tenor (#16). Chris made a point of following up the conference with another short meeting, a few days later, ostensibly to take the teacher personally though the written report but also to monitor delayed reactions (#20).

6.2.2.3 Supervisor angst

Another emergent theme was the anxiety experienced by many supervisors and the range of issues in feedback that concerned them. Despite the stereotypical image of the supervisor as cold, heartless, ruthless, power-hungry and cavalier (Blumberg, 1980; Terrell et al. 1986), that which emerged from the data of this study is quite the reverse¹.

The supervisors on the whole were deeply concerned about the impact of their power and the potential for abuse. There was an abiding awareness of teaching as public performance ('every time you go out there you could die' #20), and how closely teaching, and therefore criticism of teaching, are bound up with self and face. Chris drew attention to the word 'criticism' as inherently negative, requiring a positively connoted adjective such as 'constructive' or 'supportive' to render it acceptable. The threat, he argued, came in the pass/fail paradigm which criticism inevitably, invariably evoked (#20).

A primary concern was that the criticism might negatively impinge on the teacher's morale. There was a perceived need to affirm and support the teacher's strengths and to help the teacher see the feedback positively. For some (#1, #27), this was expressed as an ethical constraint: 'no one has the right to demoralise' (#1). Alison contrasted the fragility of a teacher's ego with the years it takes to acquire confidence (#25). Gina said that most of teaching had to do with believing in yourself and that the supervisor's job was to support that belief (#17). The fear of inflicting hurt is conveyed in the metaphoric thrust of their language, discussed earlier.

Many supervisors expressed fear at the range of extreme emotions that what they said might generate in the teacher - shock, anger, dismay, abuse, aggression - and their concern that having unleashed such affronted emotion², they may lack the management skills to deal with it appropriately. This is consistent with politeness theory (Brown and Levinson, 1978) which highlights the interdependence of face threat. Hilary said that the first reaction to being criticised is emotional: 'fight, flight or freeze' (#30). Some sought to avoid this: 'I worry', said Lucy, about 'how I am going to handle it so they don't cry' (#16). Another said: 'I'm glad

¹ An accounting of this is included in the conclusion to this chapter; and a discussion of the research method issue of 'observer effects' is included in App. 29.

² c.f. Goffman's notion of 'flooding out' (1961:55), introduced in Ch. 2.

when it's over. You're on your mettle all the time, constantly aware of their reaction' (#5). Another experienced the trauma of litigation following a critical feedback (#27) (c.f. Hazi, 1994). Another was concerned that because she has difficulty reading teachers' responses when they 'go inward' and become silent, she may not make appropriate decisions about how much or how little to say: 'I just don't know if they've taken it on board' (#26). Another was uncomfortable with some of the strategies that an emotional reaction foisted on the participants: she recalled one who emerged from the classroom with such damning self-indictments that the supervisor was thrust into the role of supporter and care-giver, and was henceforth, throughout the feedback conference, frustrated by her inability to voice anything short of praise (#17)¹. Some supervisors (#13) cite neophytes as fragile because both their low-inference skills (e.g. classroom technical skills) and their high-inference skills (e.g. decision-making prowess) are at a minimum (c.f. Richards, 1990a), rendering them more performance-vulnerable at the chalk-face. Others (#23) dread supervising the experienced teacher who at the same time as having more 'on the line' in the way of face to preserve and reputation to guard, also often believe they have less to learn (c.f. Cervi, 1991). In an interesting twist, one supervisor (#26) cited fear of her own reactions as a cause of angst: she knew she reacted badly to what she calls a tendency to 'blame the victim' in teachers who looked for external mitigating circumstances to justify classroom events: the weather, the kids, the syllabus, the parents - 'anything but the teaching'.

Some worry that, because they know they tend to soft-pedal in the face of delivering bad news, the teacher might miss the point: 'I worry that I'm too soft. There's a great risk that the message won't get across because it's couched so gently' (#7). Another concern - echoed by many as they reflected on their early experiences of supervision - that one's judgement may not be valid, that one may have missed something, or given undue attention to something else (#10). This discomfort in the role of 'expert' was a frequent refrain². Another was concerned that his perception of the lesson would differ from the teacher's and that the difference would make for conflict (#24). Another said that visiting a classroom inevitably meant that there was much about the immediate context that was unknown to you and that may lead you to misjudge (#10). She also feared that ignorance of context might result in her riding roughshod over issues and sensitivities integral to the local 'ecology'.

¹ See App. 3.

² c.f. Goffman, 1961; Welker, 1991. This notion is explored below, in 6.3.1.

Many supervisors saw supervision within a teaching/learning paradigm and they worried that the delivery of criticism might set up learning blocks that would impede progress. One said that damaging morale was counter-productive to learning (#1). Another said that criticism had a way of 'hemming you in' and blocking off access which made it difficult for the supervisors to find 'the best way in' to enable the teacher to learn (#26). She also was keenly aware that the supervisor has to begin with what the teacher is doing right, use this as a 'grounding' or spring-board and link improvement to an extension of strength.

Angst also came from efforts expended to resolve conflict (detailed more extensively in the next section). The central intra-personal conflict experienced by many supervisors - their instructive/'critiquing' role versus their helping/supporting role - caused them not insubstantial angst. Typical of this, Ann said: 'I don't want to hurt the person but I want to improve the situation' (#18). One supervisor, operating in a peer appraisal scheme, cited her fear of damaging interpersonal relationships in the workplace by voicing a criticism that might generate the reaction (verbalised or left unsaid): 'who the hell are you?' (#21).

6.2.2.4 Supervisors' perceptions of conflict

A number of concerns about conflicts emerged. The central one is the conflict between the instructional goals and the supporting/nurturing goals of supervision. One key informant, Rose referred to this as an 'interactional paradox': in exasperation she asks: 'how on earth can I be negative, insistent, supportive and nice at the same time?' (#28). She answers her own rhetorical question by citing 'oblique language' as the only way to resolve the paradox: 'I do deliver criticism but I couch it as suggestions'. Says Pam: 'I find it hard to be direct and be nice and not be crushing, and that's when you tend to say little things like "don't worry about it; it's not really that important", when it was important' (#3). A colleague said: 'you've got to tell them about it so that they don't go along thinking everything is fine. But if you're really hard, then you discourage them totally so they're never going to pass' (#4). Alison expressed her distaste for giving criticism in this way: 'it hurts them and it hurts you to give it' (#25)

There was a general impression that attention to 'soft language' ran the risk of affecting supervisee perceptions, namely lowering the apparent gravity of the criticism. Hilary said that mitigating language may lead to a situation where 'people are not clear what it was you had the discussion about' (#30). Margaret, who called herself a 'wimp' in the face of giving criticism, said 'there's a very great risk they won't get the message because it's couched so

gently' (#7). Alison feared she might 'over-compensate by going the other way' (#25). Roy described this as a necessary trade-off - the price of having the teacher 'feel good' (#14). Darren (# 23) made the point that diluted criticism often created the conditions whereby teachers could intentionally or unintentionally miss the point; and even though at times you suspected that it was intentional, you allowed it to pass you by for the very reason that you allowed it to happen in the first place - face. He argued that supervision put a conflicting burden of duty on the supervisor: the requirement towards empathy ('you have to visualise the teacher's position') and the requirement to be cool, detached and objective enough 'to be helpful' (#23).

One of the key informants, Maria, told of the conflict that she saw as being central to her job as a consultant in inner-city disadvantaged schools where she worked with teachers in an in-service capacity. Maria's background in linguistics and her work in literacy development meant that she was unusually perceptive about language. In her context of setting, she viewed the relationship of the participants in the conference as equals: two experts - one in language and literacy (herself) and one in the subject-discipline area (the teacher) - working together for a common goal, namely more effective teaching towards improved student literacy. Given this perspective, she tended towards a more suggestive and collaborative model of supervision (Gebhard & Malicka, 1991). However, this moved her in the direction of 'gentler' language (e.g. low modality, options not orders). She was aware of the danger that the mitigation (made necessary by 'the interpersonals') would spill over into the 'expertise' domain, rendering her, in the eyes of the teacher, apparently less certain of her own field of expertise, undermining the value of what she had to offer and compromising her authority. The conflict for her was this: she wanted to mitigate so as to avoid creating defensiveness but she did not want the mitigation to compromise her authority or the value of the 'goods' she had to offer (#12)¹. One suspects that this conflict exists in many supervisors, albeit perhaps subliminally.

Different supervisors had developed different ways of dealing with the intra-personal conflict. Some, like Roy, saw it as inevitable, 'coming with the territory', something 'you live with'. Similarly, Andy saw it as part of the conventions associated with the speech event of feedback. He argued that the 'script' that accompanied the activity of feedback meant that teachers arrived at the conference with the expectation of receiving criticism, hearing suggestions and

¹ Kress and Hodge (1979:127) make a similar point on the impact of modality in the speech of an interviewee in which 'the speaker translates uncertainty about status in the power situation into uncertainty about the status of his utterances'.

alternatives, and profiting from his experience. Such a bundle of expectations, he argued, sanctioned him as criticism-giver; the mandate then relieved him of the sense of conflict between the critic and helper sides of his role. Additional anecdotal evidence of Andy's feedback style suggests too that he is not burdened by a sense of conflict. It is hard to know whether, or to what extent, this is a *post hoc* rationalisation, projected as a means of dealing with conflict. A propos the notion of expectation, Gina reported that many teachers arrive at the conference under an umbrella of 'dread' but otherwise with a poorly conceived notion of what to expect. Another view of the feedback conference was put forward by Sally (#26); she argued that the act of taking someone aside and having a private talk with them lay outside the cultural conventions of a learning/teaching paradigm and rather fell within the paradigm of a power-based, disciplining situation which had threatening repercussions for the teacher.

Other supervisors put forward other tactics they had developed for dealing with conflict. Paula went to great lengths (from weighting of marks to matters of nomenclature) to 'play down assessment' in the minds of supervisees. Peta argued that there was no way around the conflict other than biting the bullet (#11). Jim's way was to acknowledge the conflict, make a 'policy' decision ('to call a spade a spade') and trust that it is for the best (#2.) Colin overcame the conflict by prioritising his functions: 'the main job is an instructive one; human support is subsidiary, a close second' (#5). In one institution, criticism had been deliberately written out of the supervisory brief. Partly as a result of industrial opposition to staff appraisal, partly through the inability to resolve the conflict, this institution assumed an ideologically-based 'praise only' policy: the role of the observing teacher was to reinforce the positives, make people 'feel good' about what they were doing, 'make smiles not waves'. One described the process as a 'white-wash' (#25); another said the process 'had no teeth' (#22); and a third said about a post-observation conference: 'it was pre-arranged that nothing was to be criticised' (# 21). In an extreme case, Bill was so upset by the conflict he endured as a supervisor that he resigned: 'I put myself at the door' (#29). He described it this way: 'I am aware of reaching an imponderable. As soon as I start to speak about the lesson I simply cannot carry the load of the question I have to ask... I have no idea how to introduce a topic on which the teacher has absolutely no insight'.

Most of the other perceptions of conflict are in some way related to the central one. Hilary suspected that it was at base a cultural issue: 'our society has an equation that says feedback equals failure' (#30). Jane spoke about the way criticism violated face in social situations: 'you're breaking a lot of social rules', she said, citing the fact that with relative strangers we

do not normally say unpleasant things, raise taboo topics (e.g. personal style), or talk about feelings (#1). She also referred to the conflict supervisors experience between the wanting to be liked and the occasional need to deliver unwelcome news. Others talked about social constraints: 'there's a natural tendency to want to get on with people (#17); 'I worry about my future relationship with them (#21)'; 'we have to share the same staffroom (#22)'; 'you have to look them in the eye the next morning' (#15).

For some supervisors the conflict was one of loyalty and responsibility. Jim saw it as a conflict between his response to the developing teacher and his duty of maintaining quality control for the institution. Working in a private enterprise context, he argued that poor standards would affect the school's reputation, and this affected jobs, his own included. Others argued that ultimately you have to put aside any bad feeling you may have about the teacher because your responsibility is to the students - their right to quality teaching (#1, #11)). This is not an easy conundrum for some who sense a loyalty to the fee-paying teacher trainee and a responsibility to the profession to maintain standards: 'there's a lot of guilt in failing people and guilt about passing them too' (#4). Some (e.g. #28) saw professional standards as the bottom line, forcing them to subordinate the feelings of the individual to the good of the profession. One teacher training institution had resolved the issue by having a zero failure rate¹. It was difficult for the researcher - through lack of access and institutional unwillingness to discuss the matter - to ascertain whether this policy was articulated as a reactive step to the angst of failing teachers. It seemed, on the available evidence, to be non-negotiable if only by being tacit.

Other conflicts emerged. Hilary argued that criticism inevitably meant a clash of perceptions (#30). Jim said there was a trade-off between short-term unpleasantness and long-term benefit: 'it's worth being hard for the long-term effect because opportunities for insight are so few' (#2). Those who experienced discomfort in the garb of 'expert' considered their opinion as subjective and as valuable as the teacher's (#17). For Jim, the conflict was not epistemological ('I have a very strong sense of my own rightness', but methodological: a matter of 'finding effective ways' of getting (one's) message across' (#2). Darren said he was torn between the need to help the teacher improve and the more administrative consequences vis-a-vis

¹ Unfortunately, lack of access and institutional unwillingness to discuss the matter made it impossible for the researcher to ascertain whether or not this policy had been formulated as a reactive step to the supervisory angst of failing teachers. The matter appeared to be non-negotiable if only by being tacit.

employment and career prospects that accrued from his (quality control-oriented) judgements. Roy spoke of the conflict between on the one hand the supervisor who genuinely wants to help the teacher to improve and on the other hand, the more cynical teacher who puts out 'appeasing behaviour' (#14), and whose interest is confined to grades and immediate consequences. Bill referred to the discomfort of supervising teachers who openly resented 'being cast in the role of student teacher' (#29). Many supervisors made reference to the performative side of teaching - being 'in the spotlight' (#25) - and some cited (in the context of the taboo on 'talking personal', mentioned earlier) the difficulty experienced in the effort of separating the teaching from the teacher. Bill made this point by quoting Yeats (1969:245): 'how can we know the dancer from the dance?' Susan, who works in an in-service capacity, spoke of the conflict between her perception of her role (as supervising, visiting consultant) and the powerlessness of the lived reality: 'they don't see me as supervising them; they think I've come to fix the kids' literacy problems' (#26). She further cited the conflict involved in giving criticism to in-service teachers whose professional ego is all bound up with being 'in control'. It was clear that the issue of face in this context is crucial: being seen to 'not know' is a sign of weakness, and what is even more depressing, Susan argued, was its institutional base: 'everything (in the school system) conspires to keep it this way' (#26).

6.2.2.5 Cushioning: strategies for the management and delivery of criticism

Given the centrality of face concerns and the problematical link between face and criticism, it was hardly surprising to discover that supervisors had developed an impressive set of management procedures intended to cushion the blows that lay in wait. In nearly all cases this amounted to strategies they put in place in advance of criticism, or alongside the criticism or within the language used to convey the criticism. In one rare case, it followed the delivery of criticism: 'I go for the jugular and then pick up the pieces' (#15). Such cushioning procedures fall into a number of sub-categories all of which might be grouped under the rubric of supervisor decision-making.

Not one of the supervisors interviewed gave the impression that they conducted the feedback conference spontaneously. On the contrary, a number of decisions seemed to govern the structuring of the conference. This is evident in the decisions implicit in the adherence to an overall schematic structure, discussed earlier. Locating the conference in place (the ideal sought was a space offering quiet and privacy) and time (immediate or delayed) showed supervisors' concerns about successful outcomes. Interestingly, a case was made both for non-

delayed and delayed feedback. Experience had taught Kate to put some time between the lesson and the conference: this allowed the teacher to 'come down'; it defused an emotional situation; it provided opportunity for reflection; and it enabled the teacher to de-focus from the personal, trivial and immediate to more fundamental concerns (#4). On the other hand, Alan argued that immediate feedback meant that he stayed in tune with the lesson and 'all the collateral stuff' within which the lesson was embedded; delay meant removing himself from a sympathetic, involved and personal mind-set to a cooler, more distant and more critical stance (#6). These supervisors had evolved different strategies; what binds them is the contemplative decision-making process.

Other structuring decisions had to do with the kind of discourse that would ensue, specifically its turn-taking opportunities. Chris took steps to ensure that the conference was structured as a discussion, dialogic and interactive in nature. He spoke about leading the teacher, in a 'gentle guided discovery' mode, towards finding out, for themselves, what the real issues were. Peta argued that if they are allowed to discover it for themselves, they would 'own' it, a necessary preliminary stage to finding and owning a solution (#11). Darren (#23) similarly tried to reduce supervisor talking time. Jack argued that leading them to the point of criticism ensured you did not 'drop it on them out of the blue' (#24). Jane saw the discussion as an opportunity to foreground and contextualise, so that the teacher would be less shocked when the critical point emerged. Maria saw discussion as the necessary means by which the supervisor and teacher could collaboratively 'deconstruct' the shared experience (#12).

Establishing a discussion mode was generally facilitated by 'allowing the teacher to open the batting' (#19). Indeed, by far the most agreed upon and well-articulated structural strategy, one that seemed both intuitively harmonious and well-considered, was that of beginning the conference by eliciting from the teacher their own impressions of the lesson¹. Some cited cathartic reasons for this (#20, #23), as it allowed the teacher to release tension, so 'clearing the field' for planting. Darren said that holding back one's own view means you avoid 'flashing red lights' too early in the proceedings (#23). Andy used a kite metaphor: 'I can test the wind with their reactions' (#19). Such 'barometer checking' (or 'sizing up' - #3) allowed the supervisor to adjust and correctly pitch their subsequent remarks. Jane saw it in an instructive light: you are trying to 'draw out the teacher's own awareness' to help them gain

¹ This conforms with Maynard's (1989b) thesis on 'perspective-display' sequences in conversation whereby in situations warranting cautiousness in opinion-giving, speakers precede their own report by soliciting the other party's opinion.

insight and ultimately autonomy (#1). For many, the initial elicitation phase was an important tactic for its impact on the roles of the participants. Jack said that student teachers were invariably overly self-critical, and allowing them to vent this took him 'off the hook' (#24). Alan preferred the less impositive role: 'it's better to let them arrive at it themselves, have them say it and you taper it down'(#6)¹.

Decisions on structure also touched what the supervisors did about the positives and the negatives. A primary concern, as has already been discussed, was to build up morale and reinforce strengths by focussing on positives. This meant beginning with the good, ending with it, and making sure they leave with a sense of progress (#16). Supervisors' concern for positives meant in some cases that they 'go looking' for it (#8), incurring the risk of 'damning with faint praise' (#23). The minimum that was sought was a balance of good and bad, but usually the tilt was closer to 80/20. Peta argued that this imbalance was important because whatever bad is mentioned assumes a disproportionate significance in the perceptions of the receiver: 'your mind is totally running on the negative' (#11). Some supervisors (#29) were modest in what they thought teachers could take on board ('five tricks of the trade per year'), yet optimistic about the outcomes ('this would transform their teaching').

Special caution was reserved for the delivery of criticism and here a number of overriding tenets (10 in all) emerge. The most important, as has already been suggested, is to keep it minimal so as to avoid overload (#1,#10,#12). Maria said: 'if they've stuffed up, they already know; you don't want to rub their nose in it' (#12). A second point was to keep it simple. Jane argued that like all teaching, the 'pitching' of the criticism has to be at the receiver's level of understanding (#1). It also had to be expressed in language that the teacher found comfortable and familiar (#26). The third point was keep it specific. Generalised criticisms - what Werbinska refers to as 'cosmic judgements' (1993:19) - are dangerous because they come across as personal attacks (#11, #30) and because they do not help the teacher make the right connections (#23)². Related to this was the next point: ground the criticism in evidence from

¹ These views contrast sharply with Starratt's (1992) who condemns the approach as vacuous, condescending and alienating.

² Research into feedback in management settings (Larson, 1989) suggests that mitigation can be achieved through seeking focus and specificity in criticism. However, research in social psychology (Folkes, 1982) found that, in order to avoid hurting the other's feelings, subjects offered impersonal and generalised reasons for rejecting offers of dates. It may be that the central issue is the degree of 'personal affront' borne by the criticism - the more personal, the more likely it is that mitigation will be achieved though distancing rather than approaching the issue.

the lesson. Darren distinguished between citing poor instructions as a criticism and working towards that point by raising the teacher's awareness of the outcome of giving poor instructions (#23). The fifth point is to link the criticism to strategies for improvement, which involved providing alternatives as well as supportive networks: 'they can't be chopped down without something to hold them up'(#1). Often this meant casting the critical points as future objectives rather than past misdemeanours on the grounds that it is always better to strive towards what is possible in the future rather than lament over what is past. A sixth point involved demonstrating or modelling desired behaviours. This has a number of advantages. It reduces the face-to-faceness (# 20); it conveys the message visually, not just aurally (#1); and it demonstrates the supervisor's involvement with the teacher, a more convincing message than that of passive 'arm-chair judge' (#19). A seventh point is to approach the point obliquely, via the third person. In this regard, Jim frames his critical stance through the eyes of the learners, delivering a line such as: 'I try to imagine that I'm a student again and I think about how I would have responded to that activity' (#2). This has the advantage of distancing the perspective from a 'you and I' frame to one that involves a third party. Linked to this is the eighth point which is about de-personalising the criticism. Many referred to teaching as performative and called on the need to differentiate the teaching from the teacher. For this reason some supervisors take notes on the 'story' of the lesson - what happened in terms of stages and activities - rather than what the teacher did. This helps to distance the doing from the doer, a difficult step, some would say impossible. Bill, for example, claimed that this was merely a question of semantics designed as a 'social lubricant' to defuse and render more calm a fraught scenario (#29). The ninth point has to do with staying human. Many supervisors (#6, #7, #8, #10, #12) talked about sharing from their own experience or drawing on vicarious experiences, especially things they did wrong, to make themselves seem more human and approachable¹. They argued that this helped normalise and humanise the situation. The last point - make allowances - is related to setting up realistic supervisory expectations. It is grounded in an empathetic view, requiring that one remember that the situation is a fraught one, set up for failure (#6): teachers on display are invariably self-conscious; student teachers by definition are in the very process of learning (#6, #13).

Not unexpectedly, the supervisors showed themselves to be very aware of the impact of their words on teachers. The fact that they all come from the discipline areas of language and linguistics would also account for the high degree of self-awareness they displayed. Jim

¹ c.f. deflecting asides, in Code 9, Ch. 5.

probably spoke for many when he said: 'I'm constantly checking myself to see that I'm not being too negative'(#2)¹.

There was a general sensitivity to the danger of presenting subjectivities as verities; and an awareness that low or medium modality would be perceived as gentler and less forceful. Maria talked about 'gently challenging through pragmatic prefacing' (#12). Malcolm and Roy both spoke of down-playing and softening (#13, #14). Lucy and others spoke of making adjustments through 'perhaps' and 'might' and 'could' (#16, #27). Portia spoke of 'splattering' her language with 'lots of softeners' (#15). Peta called such devices 'social lubricants' (#11). Iris was aware that expressing something conditionally diluted the blow (#8).

Stroking the listener, affirming and building up - giving 'comforting messages' (Burleson, 1985) - emerged as constant bed-mates to the delivery of criticism. Hilary referred to the self-discipline involved in changing her tendency to say 'yes, *but...*' (which 'denies' and 'puts down') into 'yes *and...*' (which affirms and builds on) (#30). Some supervisors deliberately built a layer of reassurance into their criticism. Alan who worked with pre-service trainees said that alongside any criticism, he made a point of saying: 'with a little bit of experience you won't find that difficult', and that this took the edge off it (#6). Others said tone of voice, especially introducing a rising tone (#7) helped remove the sting.

Critical points were deliberately delivered alongside praise, so much so that often a critical point was preambled with praise, a not unproblematic matter in itself (Maslach, 1986). Eve worried about using praise to sweeten accompanying criticism: the dangers were firstly, that the critical message may not be 'taken in'; and secondly, that its very proximity to praise may mean it is greeted with disbelief and confusion (#27).

A number of supervisors showed themselves to be alert to the impact that a shift in person can have. Bill (#29) said he had learned through experience to either personalise himself ('am I making sense?') or distance the point ('does this makes sense?'), but never to confront through the second person ('do you understand?'). Similarly, directives were deliberately diluted through being distanced: from 'I want you to...' to 'the learners need...' (#8). In a similar vein,

¹ However, because so much of what we do with language operates below the conscious level, and especially because much of the relational side of language use is non-salient, it is not surprising that the range of strategies articulated did not measure up to the breadth and depth of the typology of mitigation outlined in Ch.5.

Peta said that in delivering criticism about teaching, it was better to avoid 'I statements' (which 'get people's backs up'), but rather to talk about the effect of the teaching on the learners (#11). Gina was aware of generalising through nominalisation: instead of 'you drilled in such-and-such a manner', she would refer to 'the drilling' (#17). The tempering effect was achieved through generality and neutrality. A number of supervisors were aware of the implications of using inclusive language ('we', 'our') to de-fuse the confrontation. While alert to this, Hilary argued that there was also a case for the appropriate use of exclusive language in order to demarcate boundaries and indicate ownership; she had learned through experience not to take on the other's issues as her own; and she claimed that language helped here (#30).

An equal awareness was given to the different degree of impact rendered by statements and questions. Supervisors were aware that using a question opened up a topic as a negotiable commodity and set a collaborative tone, whereas delivering a statement was more a hard-and-fast judgement. Questions also allowed them to offer suggestions rather than directives: 'have you ever tried...?'; 'do you think this would work?'; 'what do you think about...?'.

One supervisor said that she was aware of deliberately using disfluencies in conjunction with criticism. This included pausing, rising tone, tentative language and an overall diffident manner: 'I am conscious of going into a hesitant mode. It's slightly play-acting. I think it helps them to accept the criticism if it is not presented in a very definitive, lecture-type mode but more in a diffident, let's-think-about-this, I'm not quite sure but let's maybe, how about this...' (#10). This echoes Brown and Levinson (1978:177) who interpret verbal disfluencies as well as prosodic and kinesic devices as strategic hedges on speaker language. The same supervisor - acutely aware that criticism can hurt yet unwilling to compromise her message with too much mitigation - has another strategy: providing an outright warning that criticism is forthcoming. She says that she gives out three messages: that the teacher is basically on-track; that the teacher should 'hang onto' that positive sense of herself no matter what; and the warning that she might be hurt by the upcoming critical point. Typically, she preambles a critical point with: 'look, you're going to be a bit hurt by what I'm going to say, but hold on to it, you're ok' (#10).

One very experienced supervisor, who moved from supervision to management, and then to management training, including specific sessions on feedback, said that much of the language used in feedback conferences was instinctive and derived from attitude: 'I am conscious that once you have "programmed" the fundamentals, the language takes care of itself' (#30).

6.2.2.6 Strategies for building trust

A common motif through the interviews was the need for the speech event of feedback to take place in the context of trust. Underpinning many supervisors' capacity to bite the bullet was the awareness that the relationship which bound them was a trusting one. Trust, of course, is not a simple commodity - bottled, bought and dispensed as needed. It is inherently complex and fragile; it requires a great deal of attention to create, maintain and nurture; and it is easily fractured, an event which may trigger quite extreme emotions linked to suspicion and betrayal.

The informants made conscious use of trust-building strategies before, during and following the feedback conference. An important consideration was the attention they paid to the teacher's affect, integral to which was the notion of empathy. One very experienced supervisor used 'creative visualisation' prior to a conference as a strategy to allow her to imagine what it would be like to receive the news she was about to break (#30). Similarly, another said she tried to keep firmly in her mind her own remembrance of receiving feedback (#12). Another said that 'it keeps your feet on the ground to keep thinking what it's like for them' (#15). Alan argued that it was important that the supervisor 'feel the teacher's discomfort without taking it on board'. This involved actively dealing with it: for example, by acknowledging the nervousness that student teachers experience and validating it ('it's OK to be nervous, it's normal' - #6); and making allowances ('I put everything in the early sessions down to nerves' - #9). Another supervisor (#5), whose conferences with student teachers had been taped as part of the primary phase of the research, consistently (though not consciously) used very validating language in his meetings with student teachers. This created the effect of punctuating their comments with his own supportive, affirming reinforcers: 'yes!' 'that's right!' 'exactly!' 'precisely!' 'I agree with you!', 'you're right!' 'absolutely!' Empathy was also a consideration in decisions about the schematic structure of the conference, discussed earlier, such as starting out by relaxing the teacher and eliciting their impressions; and working from the strengths and positives towards criticism rather than the reverse. Likewise, empathy was a factor in the decision to reduce the number of critical points to the amount it was felt the teacher could handle; or to grade the complexity of tasks set the teacher, in order to build into the whole event the experience of success (#1, #7, #16).

Many supervisors referred to the context of the relationship as the key factor generating trust. Hilary said she consciously worked on building trust by 'framing intentions' at the outset of

the conference and holding to this image through the meeting, if possible, making it a shared intention (#0). Karen deliberately worked towards building intimacy through what she called a 'jokey relationship' (#4) in which, through humour and familiarity, she 'could get away' with the bad-news breaking side of her job. Some (#11) said that the relationship which bound the people, like the trust factor, was larger than the conference itself, pre-dating it and following it ('you can't close with a combat situation' - #15). Supervisors clearly worked at building this rapport: by making themselves available outside of hours (#5, #7); by getting closely involved in the lesson they were observing (#6); by 'sharing about myself' (#12). The impact of language is, of course, crucial and has been discussed at length earlier. In this regard, Susan cited her attempts to monitor her own language so as to exclude the use of terminology that may create defensiveness in the teacher (#26). Non-verbal messages, too, were heeded: 'whether you scowl or smile makes a huge difference' (#3); 'my trainees say that I can say quite hard things quite nicely - I do it with body language' (#4).

A recurrent motif connected to the relationship of the two people was the deliberate effort supervisors made to 'flatten the hierarchy' (Waite, 1992b:328): tilting the power imbalance, equalising the roles, making the interaction more 'democratic' (# 21). There were four main facets to this. Often it manifested itself as a concern to minimise the threat of their physical presence: Maria said 'I try to give the message that I'm not here to judge' (#12); Iris recalled that she tries to smile a lot in the classroom, and not appear 'aloof' (#8); Ann made deliberate efforts (e.g.in the proxemics of the seating arrangements) to de-formalise and equalise the relationship (#18). Paula (#10) said that she does not refer to her notes during the conference so as not to appear threatening. Darren (#23) said that in the case of teachers with whom he had not had the opportunity to develop a relationship, he paid more than the usual attention to the cordialities of the situation: arriving punctually, attending to face, behaving politely, generally treading warily (#23).

Secondly, redressing the power imbalance sometimes happened by handing over control. A number of supervisors (#6, #20, #27) referred to the tenor of negotiability that they deliberately injected. The attempt here was to make themselves flexible and non-prescriptive, and hand over ownership of the experience by allowing the teacher to make as many of the choices as possible.

A third element in the wish to democratise the relationship was visible in the efforts some supervisors made to reduce their own status from 'expert' to 'human being', or from extra-

ordinary/infallible to ordinary/fallible. Alan said that he tried to show that the decisions a teacher makes, like the problems they face, vary little with experience. Some drew parallels between the teacher and themselves (#15), often highlighting their own weaknesses. This 'humbling of self' emerged repeatedly as a deliberate equalising tactic; it aligns with the conscious 'bumbling' to which Brown and Levinson refer as a universal politeness strategy (1978:190-1).

A fourth element in trust-building relates to interpersonal respect. One supervisor (#4) argued that the respect accorded you must be earned, and not positional: the student teachers have to see that you are competent in what you do as well as say. For Alan, respect had to go both ways, with the supervisor showing respect by creating a safe learning space in which the student teacher could risk-take with impunity. Supervisors have to bear in mind, he argued, that the experience itself, the decisions to be made and the outcomes that ensue all belong primarily to the teacher (#6). Respect for others also came down to recognising the uniqueness of every teacher (#15) and not having 'imperialist' expectations - hoping to clone those you supervise in your own image. Said Hilary: 'not everyone wears the same size shoes' (#30).

6.2.2.7 Safeguarding the critical message

Juggling their concern for the teacher's face and their concern that the instructive message be heard and heeded, supervisors showed that there was a need to be vigilant about whether the message did indeed 'get across'. Explaining the phenomenon of soft-peddling, Hilary said: 'my experience is that what we create in our heads about what we are going to say is always tighter, harder, sharper than what we end up saying' (#30). It emerged in interview that many supervisors had evolved mechanisms for shoring up their message, safeguarding it from threats to its integrity.

An oft-mentioned procedure was monitoring reactions (#5, #24). Portia said she actively searched for evidence of a shift in perceptions from the start to the end of the conference. Susan, who said that knowing whether the teacher had taken the point on board was both vital and elusive, looked for evidence of it in their language: 'when they start to give, to contribute, by rephrasing it or incorporating it in their own language, when they start to think it through and apply it' (#26). Some supervisors (#6, #11) said that they tried to approach observation and feedback as staged episodes over a longer time frame; in this way you could monitor the

progress, and check that one lesson's critical points emerged as the next lesson's objectives. Paula used her reading of trainees' journals to monitor reactions over time (#10).

Many supervisors built the safeguard into the summary stage with which they closed the conference. Some deliver the summary themselves (#12); some elicit it through a concept-checking procedure (#6, #11, #16); and some (#17) have the teacher write it ('then you get an idea of how much has got through' - #17). Hilary, who initiates proceedings by 'framing intentions', said that through the conference she constantly 'paraphrases and clarifies and questions' whether her intention has been met; and will not reach closure without forging a shared agreement between the parties (#30).

Some pre-service teacher education courses built a 'message safeguard' into the course structure. The most common way was to follow the face-to-face verbal conference with a written report: 'it's easier to put it in writing' (#13). This usually had a summary section in which the strengths and weaknesses of the lesson were listed. Darren said of the report: 'I ensure that the key points are drawn out so that they can look at that in the cold light of day and that might off-set any soft-peddling I've done during the feedback'. One training course had built in a half-way, one-to-one tutorial with trainees. The agenda was derived from a completed form summarising the strengths and weaknesses of the trainee's progress. Both parties had completed the same *pro forma* and they exchange copies at the start of the meeting. Karen commented that this procedure allows her to be 'honest and frank and realistic'(#4); Pam said: 'in writing you have fewer qualms than in saying it' (#3). Being 'down there in black and white' allows the meeting to be focussed and productive. The strategy was introduced 'to avoid all the misreading that goes on because of vague tutorials where you (just) have a chat' (#4). A comparable procedure was followed in another course: at the end of the conference, the trainer and trainee write a short summary of their understanding of the meeting and then they exchange copies (App. 30). One of the supervisors here said: 'we want to make sure that they fully understand what we say to them because we believe that even though we think sometimes that they are clear as to what we've told them, that's not always the case'(#55)¹.

¹ In another domain, medicine, where breaking bad news is notoriously mishandled, an attempt to overcome this was reported on Channel 7's 6 p.m. news broadcast (11.11.93): to avoid misunderstandings, some medical centres have begun giving patients an audio-taped recording of the consultation in which news of their terminal illness is given.

6.2.2.8 Supervisor reflections on self-growth

The interviews also tapped supervisors' reflections on their own development. This was extracted by direct and indirect questions: e.g. Are you the same today as when you started out supervising?; What is the best thing a supervisor can do for a teacher?; What's the best thing supervisors can do for themselves?; Have you always believed this? (App. 13). Of the 30 supervisors, only one viewed himself unchanged over time, and even he said this was probably because he had not given the matter a great deal of thought¹. The rest testified to a range of emotions in reflecting on how they had changed. A common reaction to the 'are you the same?' question was embarrassed denial ('Hell, no!')

How, then, had they changed? A common theme was a shift in the perception of their instructive function. Jane said that when she first started out she 'wanted to tell them what was right and wrong'; she gradually moved to a different position: 'now I see learning differently - I now minimise the criticism so that they can take it in' (#1). Karen said that when she first started out, she would compare the way trainees taught with how she herself taught. Later: 'I got more into learning, less worried about doing it in specific ways, less prescriptive; now I try to get them to think of it in terms of aims' (#4). Peta said when she first started out 'I saw it as me in judgement of them'; later: 'I realised that feedback had to be given in such a way that they will come to their own realisation of the lesson' (#11). Megan said: 'I used to do everything for them; now I allow them more independence; I may come across as taking less responsibility but this is actually more helpful to them' (#7). Alison said that when she started out, she was a 'bull-dozer', wanting to solve all the problems and do so quickly, because she 'wanted things to be perfect'; later, she adjusted her approach to a more considered and reflective one: 'now I know it isn't possible to have no problems' (#18). Susan reflected on a similar impatience in herself: 'when I started out it was all invested in giving them all the knowledge I had in me in the next ten minutes, and I expected them to take it all on and apply it straight away'; later she became more selective about what she said and more realistic about how much time it would take to see results (#26). Bill looked back to his early supervisory experience as naive and unrealistic, promising himself never to return to it unless it had an overall structure in place and a prior negotiated agenda (#29).

¹ Interestingly, at the end of the interview, he expressed thanks for the opportunity it had given him for reflection.

A common motif running through the reflections was the perception of increased confidence in the role. This was often manifested in the way the observation protocol was used: Portia reported early adherence to an official form and later preferring 'the freedom of a blank page' (#15); Darren evolved from commenting on everything as per the *pro forma* to 'only commenting on what I considered to be necessary or useful for the teacher' (#23). Gina reported being terrified of being cast in the role of judge; and evolving to the point of being able to own up to my own weaknesses and discuss them with the teacher (#17). Likewise, Eve finally felt, after some 30 or so observations and feedback conferences, that she had something to offer, even if she 'wasn't an expert' (#27). Roy commented that experience had taught him how better to handle people's defensive reactions (#14). Andy remembered being constrained, through lack of confidence, to remain within the conventional parameters of the feedback conference; but evolving, with confidence, to greater experimentation, and now being able to use humour and 'acting out' as regular and integral parts of the feedback he gives (#19). Paula, on the other hand, said her early years were characterised by a great deal of experimentation, but that confidence had allowed her to settle into some well-tried and comfortable routines (#10).

The lack of confidence had also affected supervisors' ability to deliver criticism: 'I used to avoid criticising; now I know that you have to tell them' (#11). Likewise, Colin said: 'it's more important to me now that my message gets across - they deserve the chance to know' (#5). He compared delivering criticism to a trainee teacher with correcting error in an ESL learner: 'they need to know' (#5). Another added to this comment the proviso: 'yes, but as with the learner, at the *right* moment'.

Another shift was on the affective dimension. Generally supervisors (not unlike others in the helping/caring professions c.f. Maslach, 1986) reported a reduction over time in the degree of emotional identification invested in the teacher. Many said they had achieved this through distancing themselves from the trainee's perspective (#5, #7). Lucy said that she had begun supervising by being sympathetic, but found with time that a position of sympathy tended to 'bring out emotions' and that this tended to 'get in the way' through distorting perspectives. She claimed her more recent stance - 'more detached, more objective, more direct' - was also 'more professional' (#16). Maria said that she had begun by 'coming at it from feelings', but found that this empathetic perspective ('always thinking about it from their point of view') made her hyper-attentive to the teacher's face. Within this paradigm, she found she had great difficulty offering constructive help. Subsequently, she has become more aware of the power

difference between the participants and the need to minimise this. Within a collaborative paradigm, she has felt better able to offer constructive suggestions.

Nearly all the supervisors pointed to the lessons learned from experience in the field but argued that this could be telescoped through strategic training. Hilary, who now conducts training workshops for supervisors and managers, said:

There are specific skills you can train and there is knowledge people can have but the key is the attitude: it is the attitude that determines what people will do with the skills and knowledge that they have' (#30).

6.3 Conclusion

The foregoing ethnography has sought to 'know' what it means to supervise. There are, of course, different 'ways of knowing' (Van Manen, 1977), and the way chosen here is through the disclosure of a 'lifeworld', which, in his discussion of Heidegger (1962), Van Manen posits as an instance of knowledge (1977:215). Within this hermeneutic framework, spoken texts (interviews with informants) served as the means of 'unconcealment' of the supervisor's lifeworld. The rich particularity of ethnography permits momentary entry into another's 'province of meaning' (Schutz, 1973, cited by Van Manen, 1977:212).

The portrait of supervision is itself a distillation of the processes of data collection, analysis and reduction. The goal has been to achieve a balance of closeness (with the primary data source) and distance (gained through ordering and abstraction). Following Wolcott (1988:27), it is hoped that the reader has emerged with a sense of the setting and the participants but also 'sufficient information that (he or she) can challenge interpretations or offer alternative ones' Becker et al. (1961:231) refer to this as the 'discounting process' through which readers make their own adjustments to information supplied by researchers.

The consideration of four matters now rounds off this section: the emergent image of supervisors; the corroboration of a priori hypotheses; the grounded propositions that emerge from the ethnography; and a concluding synthesis of the research to this point.

6.3.1 The image of supervisors

Earlier, reference was made to the harsh image of the supervisor often cited in the literature. Like Battersby's (1984a; 1984b) grounded theory description of first-year teachers, which often shows up differences to themes in the literature, the supervisors who made up the data base of the present study proved to be different to the image generally held of supervisors in the literature. On the whole, they were highly solicitous of the teachers with whom they were interacting and like the subjects in Kremer-Hayon's study (1986), they found the delivery of bad news a difficult and irksome facet of their duties¹. Given the pervasive negative stereotype that supervisors have to accommodate, it is worth considering why these supervisors revealed such characteristics. This has bearing on the issue of the comparability and translatability of the findings to other fields.

One point to consider is that these teacher supervisors are without exception drawn from the ranks of teachers, and most of them are still largely in teaching roles, with supervision being an additional responsibility. In the words of Rose, one of the key informants:

Teachers are drawn to 'people' employment rather than employment with animals or things or machines. We tend to be sensitive to others' reactions and to make things as nice as possible for them. We want to be positive and encouraging and helpful. Our training drums into us the importance of praise, support, nurturing. When asked to give negative comments, we are at odds with our personalities and training and this causes cognitive dissonance - the behaviour is at odds with the beliefs (#28).

A second point is that these supervisors have come from the context of ESL/EFL teaching, a field they have usually entered with the mind-set of 'the caring professional'. Given the needs of migrants and overseas students, issues such as cross-cultural communication and conflict, culture shock, settlement stress, refugee issues, the position of ESL/EFL teacher has a pastoral/social work/psychological dimension that other teaching areas (e.g. maths, science, geography) may lack. As one supervisor said: 'we're all essentially ESL teachers which is all about being nice to people and that's why we find it hard to swap into the supervisor role and say not-nice things' (#4). Hatch talks about the 'benevolent conspiracy' (1992:67) that language

¹ This is not to say that contrary evidence does not exist. The researcher heard anecdotally of one conference where the supervisor began by eliciting the teacher's opinion and then said: 'Well, you did nothing right' (Crichton, J. 1994, pers. comm., 9 May).

teachers (and others) engage in so as to make learners more comfortable with themselves and less self-conscious about their linguistic incompetencies and inevitable culture-driven social gaffes. There is, too, a wealth of materials and literature dedicated to the central thesis of language teachers as caring for the delicate psyche of the language learner (Curran, 1976; Davis & Rinvold, 1990; Horwitz & Young, 1991; Moskowitz, 1978; Stevick, 1980; Stevick, 1990). This 'mental set' is a far cry from a professional supervisory role that requires one to confront people with the fact of their shortcomings.

A third point has to do with gender. Teaching is largely a female-intensive area, and especially so ESL/EFL. Of the 30 supervisors interviewed, only 11 were male. This itself is higher than the percentage of male participants on TESOL teacher training courses, which in the experience of the researcher is rarely more than 20%. (App. 31). Numbers aside, it might be said, too, that ESL/EFL teaching calls on largely 'feminine' skills, whether they reside in males or females: caring, supporting, nurturing, helping, empathising. Women are generally socialised into taking on such roles (Adams & Laurikietis, 1977). However, supervision often requires that we make pre-meditated critical remarks, and this goes against the grain of social/gender conditioning. An additional but related dimension is the influence of motherhood on professional women: 'it is difficult to observe the results of my thoughtfully inflicted hurt without wanting to immediately make it better' (#28). Overall, it is certainly emotionally easier to avoid unpleasantness and opt only for giving praise: 'it's hard to do something that makes me feel bad' (#28). One experienced supervisor, Gina, saw 'backing down' and 'copping out' as a real and necessary option, given the reality of face threats of delivering criticism (#17).

A fourth factor may be connected to an undercurrent of egalitarian ideology associated with Western culture, what Erickson and Rittenberg refer to as a 'distinctive... discomfort over subordination' and an 'attendant concern for equality' (1985, cited by Pearson, 1988:91). What has emerged so far from both the linguistic and ethnographic evidence is that TESOL supervisors are largely uncomfortable with the face-threatening power which their role legitimises. It is as if their right to criticise infringes the rights of the individual, a kernel concept in Western culture 'where individualism is assumed to be the basis of all interaction' (Ide, 1989:241). Certainly, it is the rights of the individual - 'an inordinate concern with individuality' (Miller & Steinberg, 1975:47) - that underpins the concept of negative face which is at the very heart of Brown and Levinson's politeness framework (1978). This may explain the discomfort, voiced in various quarters (Munro, 1991; Welker, 1991) a propos the modern

position of 'expert'. For example, Crichton (i.p.), in deconstructing patterns of interaction in staffrooms, highlights the need for face-maintaining inclusivity and the avoidance of hierarchic advantage. There may be a connection, too, with the 'growing fashion for "informality"' in which, Burns suggests 'the conventional attributes of role are shed in favour of those of personal identity, or "character"' (1992:275). Fairclough (1993) points to informality and a lessening of overt power markers as features of the current trend towards deformatising and democratising workplace interaction.

For these reasons, perhaps, the 30 supervisors in the data corpus may have found it relatively difficult (compared to non-teaching supervisors or non-TESOL-background supervisors) to steer and successfully resolve the 'interactional paradox' of critical feedback.

6.3.2 Corroboration of *a priori* hypotheses

Chapter 4 outlined the rationale behind the choice of the focussed interview as the instrument of data collection of the ethnographic stage. The primary linguistic stage had yielded a set of seven inter-related hypotheses about the delivery of bad news in feedback and one facet of the ethnography was to measure the degree of consensus among supervisors about the 'lived reality' of these issues. The 'combing' of the logs for corroboration took place after the initial coding stage. Issues related to the process of seeking and measuring corroboration are discussed in App. 32.

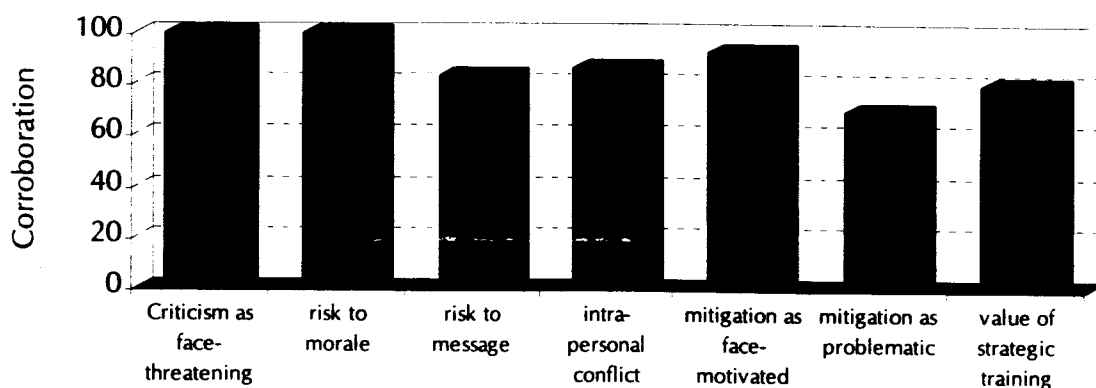


Figure 7: Corroboration of *a priori* hypotheses

Figure 7 displays the results of combing the logs for corroboration of the seven *a priori* hypotheses. The corroboration is widespread, providing strong support for the linguistic findings. This allows one to posit with confidence that the motivation for the proliferation of mitigation in supervisor talk is confirmed through the ethnography. The lowest, albeit still acceptable, corroborating figure (70%) is in the awareness of mitigation as problematic. Given that language use is largely sub-conscious; that people do not normally recall how they spoke (Tracy & Coupland, 1990b); and that most supervisors have not been trained to recognise patterns in or monitor their own language, it is a reasonable expectation that supervisors would not overwhelmingly demonstrate awareness of the problematic side of mitigation. (Indeed, part of the point of this research is to alert supervisors to this very issue). It might further be speculated that the linguistics background of most of the supervisors places them in an advantageous position in this regard; and that in other fields (e.g. teaching disciplines other than language; non-teaching areas), supervisors would produce a significantly lower score on this issue.

6.3.3 Grounded propositions

It may be helpful, as a way of rounding off the ethnography, to conclude with a set of propositions - displayed in Exhibit 7 - that are grounded in the data furnished by the supervisors. These are more general than the specific propositions emerging from Battersby's study (1984a; 1984b), but less sweeping than Spradley's 'cognitive principles' (1979:186). They may serve other researchers as a benchmark for the appraising of 'reliability' and 'comparability' to other subjects and other contexts.

As a further reliability check, the seven propositions were used to create a 'grounded' survey (Guba & Lincoln, 1983:319), which was sent out by post to another batch of supervisors (n = 40). Guba and Lincoln state that the value of such a survey lies in its being 'grounded on the analysed responses of informants representing a stakeholding audience' (1983:319). The 'stage II' informants were again selected by purposive sampling, where the researcher hand-picked the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of her judgement of their 'typicality' (Cohen & Manion, 1985:100). This adhered to the same criterion that guided the selection of the 30 informants in Stage I. The motivation for increasing the data base - indeed more than doubling it through greater representation - was to make the study more robust.

In feedback conferences, supervisors:

1. are concerned with the impact of their words on the face and morale of the teacher, and accordingly, adjust their words, bearing in mind the teacher's unforeseen responses, both immediate and delayed;
2. have to juggle the twin demands of helper (advising; counselling; nurturing; encouraging; guiding; supporting) and critic (judging; assessing; pointing out weaknesses);
3. in choosing their words, have to ride a fine line between not hurting the teacher with their words but also getting a clear message across;
4. are aware of staging, managing and handling the conference in ways that may make it productive and facilitate the successful delivery of bad news;
5. work hard at the affective factors of trust and empathy to create a context in which critical feedback might be well received;
6. develop means by which they safeguard their instructive message to counter the mitigating impact that face has on their choice of words;
7. refer to the complexity of their functions, demonstrate an awareness of their own evolution towards more effective practice, and testify to the value that strategic training might offer.

Exhibit 7: Grounded propositions

The questions in the grounded survey (App. 18) were derived from the grounded propositions (Exhibit 7). It asked informants to respond, on a 5-point Likert scale, with their assessment of the validity of the statements. The statements were checked against guidelines for question construction (Bell, 1992; Brindley, 1990; Brindley, 1991); and then piloted before being posted out. The response rate was just over two-thirds (67.8%). At the point at which 40 responses were received, data collection ceased and processing began. The mean score of the seven propositions over 40 respondents was a high 4.4¹. The lowest two scores (3.78% and 3.93% on propositions 6 and 4 respectively) are not surprising, given that they both deal with issues of conscious awareness of language choices during feedback. While many supervisors register discomfort at giving feedback (to which this chapter bears witness), most are not acutely conscious of the clash-of-goals within the speech event; even fewer are conscious of mitigation; and among these, very few would be aware of how mitigation jeopardises clarity.

¹ See Table A in App. 32.

However, the scores achieved through the survey must be appraised with a healthy scepticism. The drawbacks of survey research are amply detailed in Copeland and Atkinson (1978). Not only is there no control on subjects' subjective recall and interpretation of supervisory experience, but a major drawback lies in recruiting what is for the respondent decontextualised information. In addition, the questions may be perceived as impersonal, intrusive, trivialising or frustrating (Partlett & Hamilton, 1977). As well, the evaluator faces the masked problem of denial - where respondents may deny the reality of an issue rather than confront it through affirming it (Guba & Lincoln, 1983). In addition, there is no sure way of ascertaining the extent of the halo effect - where responses abide by an expected image. Perhaps more serious as a caveat is the self-selecting factor: it may be that only those who 'warmed towards' the propositions had the interest to return the survey forms.

6.3.4 The story so far

It is timely at this point to recap on the investigation and synthesise the findings. In the primary linguistic investigation, the decision was made to pursue language from a pragmatics perspective: seeing language as an issue of speaker intent embedded in a specific context. A conceptual framework - the theory of politeness that is central to pragmatics - was employed. The study revealed pervasive evidence of mitigation clustering around the FTA of delivering criticism. A close examination of these utterance-level, redressive strategies gave rise to the data-driven typology of mitigation in supervisory discourse.

Given the pragmatics orientation, it is altogether appropriate that the second stage of the study should seek to establish the nature of that context, so that the language already identified and classified pragmatically might now be appropriately 'clothed' and contextualised. This is related to Halliday's notion (drawn from Malinowski, 1923; and Firth, 1957) of 'context of situation' (1978:28). In Gilbert's words (1992:55), the interpretation of naturally occurring texts is 'strengthened by the insights... interviewing... provides(s) into the way people engage in interactions'. With the delivery of criticism classified as a FTA, the ethnographic study sought to 'climb into the minds' of supervisors in a bid to see feedback from their perspective, to see what it is, in the context of setting, that makes them react linguistically in the way that it had been established that they do. 'Perceiving emicly' (Blum-Kulka, 1990:260) became the basis of a portrait of supervision and a loose typology of supervisory concerns. In this way the study has discovered the conflict, angst and difficulty supervisors face in achieving satisfactory resolutions to the competing demands and pressures within their roles.

The ethnography sought corroborating evidence to support the prior pragmatic analysis of the language. The portraiture affords an understanding of what it is that makes for face and threat and how these things are managed in the daily lived reality of the context of supervision. As a whole, the ethnographic portrait serves to flesh out the context in which the mitigating language occurs; it allows one to understand that the context of setting holds influences and constraints that shape perspectives, impinge on participants, steer orientations and determine language choice. It is in the context that one finds the motivation for the language.

Overview

The next chapter, embracing the third arm of the methodological triangulation, involves a shift in footing: through experimental means, it seeks to explore supervisees' perceptions of mitigation.

Chapter 7

Perceptions of Mitigation

*It is our willingness to... commit ourselves to what others may make of our words, our intentions, our performances, and our **esse** as **percipi**, that makes communication and even action possible (Pocock, 1973:34).*

Overview

The third prong of this investigation of supervisory mitigation, which will serve as the third arm of the methodological triangulation, is a largely quantitative, experimental study of supervisee perceptions of mitigation in supervisory language.

To recap, in the first prong of the research, a data-driven typology of mitigation emerged from an analysis of supervisors' critical messages. Adopting a pragmatic frame of reference, mitigation was interpreted as hedges on FTAs, imposed by the constraints of face-to-face interaction. The second, ethnographic prong allowed the climbing inside of the skin of supervision to see the concerns that shape supervisors' experiences and to compile an account of their participant meanings. The second prong corroborated the linguistic finding - that mitigation is a means adopted by supervisors to render a distasteful task more palatable.

It is fitting now, in the third prong, that the spotlight turns to the *other* participant in the feedback encounter - the teacher receiving the feedback - and penetrates perceptions of mitigation from the receiving end of critical feedback. How do hearers respond to mitigation? How does it affect the message? What other messages does it carry? How does it affect teachers' perceptions, both of the criticism and of the supervisor? How productive is it - or what does it augur of future action?

The concern in the third prong was to achieve two ends: to repair some of the imbalance by a timely focus on the receiver of feedback; and to corroborate, via a different

methodological route, a central thesis of the research: that supervision involves a clash-of-goals which is resolved through mitigation, albeit precariously and often without impunity.

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 Problematising mitigation

The focus on the receiver-of-feedback is achieved by *problematising* mitigation. Two views underpin this. The first is the view that mitigation is a natural, pervasive, functional and largely subconscious feature of supervisory language, which yields itself to certain configurations and clusters, especially at the pivotal point of the FTA of giving criticism. The second is the view that, lacking strategic and domain-specific training, supervisors often operate at an instinctive level (Toppins, 1983) or at the level of folk models (Garman, 1986b); and hence many of the processes of supervision happen subliminally - without conscious awareness or reflection. The danger is that supervisors may lean too heavily on social skills to ease them through what are often delicate face-to-face encounters.

Difficulties emerge when the resolution of the one problem may be the spawning of the next. Is mitigation perhaps a two-edged sword, detracting from the communication while at the same time contributing to it? Does mitigation, while serving the needs of face in a face-threatening context, generate other problems? Are there inadvertent by-products to the remedy, not unlike iatrogenic diseases - unwanted side-effects of medical intervention. In the light of the generally assumed 'helping' function of supervision, this seems a worthy issue to explore.

Problematising mitigation in this way prompts one to consider two extremes of mitigation: too much (hyper-mitigation) and too little (hypo-mitigation). There is a need first of all to know whether receivers of feedback in fact discriminate among variously mitigated texts and whether there is good reason to fear the problems mentioned. In addition, a third option - above-the-utterance (AUL) mitigation combined with hypo-mitigation - is offered as part of the experiment.

7.1.2 Objectives

The immediate objective was to determine whether teachers discriminate among three types of supervisory communication in post-observation supervisory conferences, as depicted in a video simulation. The three types are represented in three scripts (App. 33).

The three types of communication were:

- a. language which is hyper-mitigated i.e. endowed with a plenitude of mitigating devices (Script A)
- b. language which is hypo-mitigated i.e. stripped of nearly all mitigation (Script B)
- c. language that is stripped of mitigation at the level of the utterance, but is mitigated at the above-the-utterance level (Script C).

This is explained further below.

In the first type, the language of the supervisor shows ample evidence of his attending to the face of the supervisee/teacher¹. He repeatedly undercuts his own authority; seeks to reduce the impositive nature of what he is saying; dilutes the gravity of the message; redresses his criticism with hedges; and undercuts the rhetorical force of his assertions.

In the second conference, the supervisor is up-front, blunt, and totally frank; uses bald, unredressed language; calls a spade a spade; avoids gift-packaging his language; and delivers his message with attention to the transaction (the transmission of information) rather than to the interaction (the face of the interlocutor).

In the third conference, the language of the criticism is the same as the second. However, prior to the bald delivery of the criticism, the supervisor uses above-the-utterance mitigation: he seeks to better prepare the teacher for the forthcoming criticism by, in this case, building on her strengths; affirming the positive side of her teaching; engaging her in interaction; and

¹ In the simulation, the supervisor was male, the supervisee female. The same actors were involved across the three scripts.

setting a tone of trust and professional dealings. This amounts to an address to positive face. Thus, while through the text of the FTA, his message is unmitigated (indeed, it is the same as for Script B), it begins with above-the-utterance level mitigation.

A secondary objective was to determine what by-products accrue to the three types of mitigation. In this regard a number of terms are used to characterise the way in which the supervisor's language is received by the teacher. The terms used to characterise these dependent variables are defined below:

Clarity: the degree to which the supervisor's criticism is clear.

Authority: the degree to which the teacher can have confidence in the supervisor's expertise.

Supportiveness: the degree to which the supervisor is encouraging towards the teacher.

Productivity: the likelihood of the teacher's behaviour changing as a result of the supervisory conference.

Gravity: the degree to which the criticism is perceived as serious.

Trust: the degree to which the teacher can have confidence in the supervisor's goodwill.

Receptivity: the degree to which the criticism is likely to be well received.

These terms to some extent borrow from Pajak and Glickman (1984); but also relate to concepts discussed earlier in the thesis. At the core, of course, are clarity and supportiveness: *clarity* relates to the Gricean notion of efficiency in communication; and *supportiveness* relates to face work - efforts invested by the supervisor in attending to the face needs (positive and negative) of the teacher.

7.2 Method

7.2.1 Simulation

Simulation as a procedure offers controlled experimental conditions and allows one to explore perceptions of a variety of communications and the relationship of the communication to other variables. As in Copeland and Atkinson's (1978) research, the prompt is provided by carefully controlled video-taped vignettes of a simulated supervisory conference. The simulation side-steps the methodological problems of survey research (discussed in Copeland & Atkinson, 1978:123; 1978:126) which requires respondents to express a preference from memory. The simulation approach was modelled on Pajak and Glickman (1984) who borrowed their paradigm from communication theory (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The latter ask the following questions: '*who says what, how, to whom, with what effects?*'. As with the Pajak and Glickman experiment, this simulation research strategy allows the researcher to manipulate *who, what, how*, and to *whom* (the independent variables) in order to measure *effects* (the dependent variables).

7.2.2 The sequencing issue

The three scripts were recorded onto videotape. The sequencing issue, discussed at length in Pajak and Glickman (1984) was avoided by having each subject view only one script. The intention was to avoid any potential for interaction between script order and subject response. The disadvantage here is the need for large numbers of subjects; this, however, was overcome by conducting the experiment many times, over many groups, over a period of fifteen months.

7.2.3 Contextualisation

The subjects were introduced to the experiment in a way designed to give them enough background information to contextualise the scene and the interaction. This provision of a 'handle on meaning' was considered a facilitating factor in allowing subjects to process the texts (Brown, 1989; Brown & Yule, 1983b; Willing, 1992). They were told that the study was investigating the language of supervisors in supervisory post-lesson conferences, especially in the context of making a criticism. They were not told about the focus on mitigation, as this is an alertness that needs to be 'educated'. The video clip, they were told, was a simulated

supervisory conference in which the teacher's teaching was being discussed. As with the Pajak and Glickman experiment, the subjects were asked to identify with the supervisee - to imagine that the supervisor shown in the video had just observed them teaching and was meeting with them in a post-lesson supervisory conference.

As the discussion in the video clip is connected with concept checking, the subjects were given some background on this teaching strategy, although it was assumed that this was not their first contact with the notion. Concept checking, they were told, is a strategy of asking questions for the purpose of confirming learner understanding. For example, while or after teaching the word 'borrow', the concept question might be: will the person keep it (the thing that has been borrowed) forever or give it back when they have finished with it? Concept questions often require yes/no answers; often offer a choice of two options (e.g. give it back/keep it?); and aim to elicit the key concept being taught.

7.3 Subjects

The subjects were 231 student teachers and practising teachers all of whom had had some familiarity with or experience of the supervisory conference¹. The student teachers were chosen at random from a wide variety of institutional contexts, mostly pre-service but including some in-service; mostly TESOL, but also LOTE. The teachers were mostly TESOL trained, but some included LOTE qualifications as well. Their work settings comprised a diverse array of institutional contexts, both public and private; predominantly in the adult learner domain. The criteria governing selection of subjects were: that they be language (preferably ESOL) teachers or trainee teachers; that they have a native, native-like or high, non-native proficiency in English; and that they be familiar with the feedback dyad which is the basis of the simulation.

The data were gathered both in Australia and internationally. The experiment was conducted many times in Australia, in USA (San Francisco), and in Israel - sites chosen because of co-operative links with TESOL training establishments and personnel². In the latter cases, a copy of the video and instructions for conducting the experiment (App. 34) were sent to designated

¹ Numbers for Scripts A, B, and C, respectively were: 85, 87, 59.

² Conrad Heyns (San Francisco); Penny Ur (Israel).

persons in charge. In the case of the San Francisco connection, the experiment was run with a new batch of trainee subjects, every month over ten months.

7.4 Apparatus

7.4.1 Language as the independent variable

To ensure that the language (i.e. what was said) was the only independent variable, the three scripts were performed by professional actors playing the roles of instructional supervisor and teacher-supervisee. The co-operation of people who were both TESOL professionals and actors was obtained. The actor who played the role of supervisor was in fact an experienced supervisor, working in the role of supervising staff. In this case, too, the original script (App. 33) - which served as the base from which the amendments A, B and C were derived - was actually his own and was one of the 10 conferences used in the grounded theory study [SD4] of the first prong of the study.

Great care was taken to maintain a similarity across the three scripts of important non-verbal facets of communication (the 'how' of the communication) - broadly covering prosodic features, non-vocal kinesics and proxemics. Thus, while there is a gender factor (male supervisor/ female supervisee) as well as indices of age, appearance, idiolect and perceived affective qualities (e.g. friendliness, empathy etc) that may affect respondents' perceptions, the fact that these phenomena are held constant across all scripts served to control their impact (c.f. Copeland & Atkinson, 1978).

7.4.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire (App. 35) comprised 13 questions. The first two were multiple choice, testing subjects' comprehension of the language. The next 10 used Likert scales. These 10 contained four sets of matched pairs (a question pertaining to a particular variable, asked in two different ways) to improve internal validity (4 & 8; 5 & 9; 6 & 10; 7 & 11). In addition, the accuracy of answers (from the multiple choice Questions 1 & 2) was checked against perceptions of clarity (Q.3). The last question (Q.13) was open-ended and yielded both quantitative and qualitative data. It furnishes a validity check on the preceding 12 questions, in that it is logical to expect the general comment to reflect views consonant with, rather than

contradictory to, specific responses already given. In general, care was taken to avoid culturally loaded questions and the research complications related to inter-cultural issues (Briggs, 1986).

7.4.3 Pilot

The instruments (video and questionnaire) were piloted on the staff of a small English language school (7 teachers). The instruments were found to be effective, requiring several minor adjustments to wording and layout. Significantly, it was decided, for the main study, to widen the Likert scales from 5 to 7 to enable greater variability in response. Notwithstanding the small number (7 respondents), the pilot study (reported in Wajnryb, i.p.) revealed hypotheses-confirming trends as well as a high correspondence between matched pairs of questions. It was recognised, too, that Questions 5 (authority) and 9 (trust), originally intended as an internal pair, were in fact treating two distinct elements: authority represented confidence in the supervisor's expertise (Q.5); trust represented confidence in the supervisor's goodwill (Q.9).

7.5 Hypotheses

It is hypothesised that:

A. teachers receiving feedback will perceive differently supervisory conferences that were hyper-mitigated, hypo-mitigated, and mitigated at above-the-utterance level (AUL).

B. teachers will perceive AUL mitigation more favourably than hyper-mitigation or hypo-mitigation, as measured by the dependent variables (by-products) of: clarity, authority, supportiveness, productivity, gravity, trust and receptivity.

More specifically, that:

1. Clarity and Authority: greater clarity and authority are perceived in hypo-mitigated and AUL-mitigated language than in hyper-mitigated language;
2. Supportiveness: greater supportiveness is perceived in hyper-mitigated and AUL-mitigated language than in hypo-mitigated language;

3. Productivity: suggestions given in AUL-mitigated language are perceived to be more likely to be productive than suggestions given in hyper- or hypo-mitigated language;
4. Gravity: greater gravity is perceived in hypo-mitigated language than in hyper- or AUL-mitigated language;
5. Trust: greater trust is perceived to be inspired by AUL-mitigated language than hyper-mitigated language;
6. Receptivity: criticisms expressed in hyper- and AUL-mitigated language are perceived to be more readily received than those expressed in hypo-mitigated language.

Six null hypotheses were tested¹.

For Question 3 and Question 5: **Clarity & Authority**

$$H_{0_1}: \bar{\mu}_A = \bar{\mu}_B \quad (1)$$

$$H_{0_2}: \bar{\mu}_A = \bar{\mu}_C \quad (2)$$

For Question 4 and Question 8: **Supportiveness**

$$H_{0_3}: \bar{\mu}_A = \bar{\mu}_B \quad (3)$$

$$H_{0_4}: \bar{\mu}_B = \bar{\mu}_C \quad (4)$$

For Question 6 and Question 10: **Productivity**

$$H_{0_5}: \bar{\mu}_A = \bar{\mu}_C \quad (5)$$

¹ Alternative hypotheses could of course be derived but have been omitted for reasons of conciseness.

$$H_{0_6}: \bar{\mu}_B = \bar{\mu}_C \quad (6)$$

For Question 7 and Question 11: **Gravity**

$$H_{0_7}: \bar{\mu}_A = \bar{\mu}_B \quad (7)$$

$$H_{0_8}: \bar{\mu}_B = \bar{\mu}_C \quad (8)$$

For Question 9: **Trust**

$$H_{0_9}: \bar{\mu}_A = \bar{\mu}_C \quad (9)$$

For Question 12: **Receptivity**

$$H_{0_{10}}: \bar{\mu}_A = \bar{\mu}_B \quad (10)$$

$$H_{0_{11}}: \bar{\mu}_B = \bar{\mu}_C \quad (11)$$

7.6 Findings and discussion

The Independent Samples / Pooled Variance T Test was used where samples within the study are random samples from the population of language teachers/trainees (TESOL/LOTE). The distributions of the measured variables are normal in accordance with the Central Limit Theorem and their variances are the same. The Independent Samples / Separate Variance T Test was used where Levene's test for Equality of Variances proves that the population variances are unequal.

On the basis of the data, synoptically displayed in Table 6 (see also App. 36), all the null hypotheses were rejected, except for Hypotheses 7, 8 and 10, pertaining to gravity and (partly) receptivity. There was correspondence between the three sets of matched pairs - Qs. 4 & 8 (care/supportiveness); Qs. 6 & 10 (productivity); Qs. 7 & 11 (gravity) - indicating internal validity within the matched pairs.

The findings will be discussed (below) according to how they contribute to an understanding of the three types of mitigation, as represented in the three scripts. In the first instance, the discussion will focus on the null hypotheses that were rejected (Hs.1,2,3,4,5,6,9,11), pertaining to clarity, authority, supportiveness, productivity, trust and (partly) receptivity; and then on the null hypotheses that were not rejected (Hs.7,8,10), pertaining to gravity and (partly) receptivity¹.

7.6.1 Discussion of clarity, authority, supportiveness, productivity, trust and receptivity

The variables are discussed in terms of how they pertain to the three text types (Scripts A,B and C, in turn).

It can be said that Script A (hyper-mitigated) offers supportiveness (Qs. 4, 8), but suffers from a lack of clarity (Q.3), authority (Q.5), and productivity (Qs 6, 10). As expected, the attention to face work (high mitigation) is perceived by teachers as positive, supportive supervisory concern. However, at the same time, the attention to face work detracts both from the clarity of the message and from the perceived authority of the speaker. Perhaps because of these factors, hyper-mitigated language suffers in the perception of a reduced likelihood of being implemented (productivity).

It can be said that Script B (hypo-mitigated) offers clarity (Q.3) and authority (Q.5), but suffers from a lack of supportiveness (Qs. 4,8) and receptivity (Q. 12), and scores lower on productivity than Script C. As expected, the neglect of face work (minimal mitigation) serves the interests of clarity: Gricean maxims operate to the fullest efficiency. At the same time, however, this detracts from the perceived supportiveness of the language. As a result, hypo-mitigated language scores lowest on receptivity; and while more productive than Script A, falls short of C in the perceived likelihood of implementation (productivity).

It can be said that script C (AUL-mitigated) offers clarity (Q. 3), supportiveness (Qs.4, 8), authority (Q. 5), productivity (Q. 6,10), trust (Q.9) and receptivity (Q.12). This text - offering

¹ It will be noted (from the word 'partly') that there is a split in the variable of receptivity (Q.12; Hs.10,11). The hypothesis is partly rejected (H.11) and partly not rejected (H.10); hence the discussion of this variable will straddle sections 7.6.1 and 7.6.2.

language which combines a bald (i.e. clear) delivery of the FTAS with AUL-mitigated language - is the *only* one of the three scripts which succeeds in a satisfactory achievement of the twin goals of supervision: i.e. the message is clear *and* the messenger is perceived to be supportive. In addition, it carries the stamp of authority (Q.5) and inspires the teacher's trust in the supervisor's good will (Q.9). Perhaps because of these positive effects, Script C consistently scores highest of the three in both receptivity and productivity.

On final balance, in consideration of the three options, it might be said that Script C offers the best range of benefits with the fewest drawbacks. The application of this finding suggests that supervisors who deliver FTAs in an unredressed way, but perform the needed face work through *other* strategic means (AUL-mitigated language) may achieve a satisfactory resolution of the clash-of-goals inherent in supervision. In the words of one supervisor, 'we need to mitigate the circumstance, rather than the message' (Cervi, D. 1993, pers. comm., 20 Feb.) This endorsement notwithstanding, the responses to Question 13 (discussed in 7.7, below) suggest some qualification.

7.6.2 Discussion of gravity and receptivity

The null hypotheses that were not rejected relate to gravity (Hs.7,8) and receptivity (H.10). The expectation that Script B, lacking face work through the absence of mitigation, would be perceived the most gravely was not confirmed. While the internal check (Qs.7 & 11) suggest a consistency of results, the fact that the null hypotheses were not rejected may lie in a confusion accruing to the word 'serious', which would suggest that a resolution may be achieved through a reformulation of the questions.

An overlay of meanings in the term 'serious' may have contributed to the confusion. 'Serious' may be deemed to be: a) what is perceived to be important as a teaching skill; b) what is perceived to be urgent (i.e. how critical is the need for change?) and c) what is perceived to be genuine (i.e. how sincere is the supervisor being?) Evidence of such confusion emerged in responses to Q. 13 which sought a qualitative reaction to the feedback (see 7.7, below).

Significantly, too, the qualitative evidence (from Q.13) confirms the expectation that a distortion to message gravity is effected through mitigation. In addition, there may be some ambiguity as to whether the questions on gravity are seeking the respondent's assessment of the gravity of the criticism; or the respondent's perception of the supervisor's assessment of

Question	Group	A	B	C
Clarity				
3		4.1176	5.5632	6.0847
A	v	B	t = -5.47 p < 0.001	
A	v	C	t = -7.67 p < 0.001	
Authority				
5		4.4824	6.0115	5.9661
A	v	B	t = -6.81 p < 0.001	
A	v	C	t = -6.53 p < 0.001	
Supportiveness				
4		4.9765	4.2184	5.0678
A	v	B	t = 3.07 p < 0.005	
	B	v	C	t = -5.78 p < 0.001
8		4.7176	3.9655	5.0678
A	v	B	t = 2.75 p < 0.01	
	B	v	C	t = -3.98 p < 0.001
Productivity				
6		4.5765	4.9195	5.6949
A	v	C	t = -3.93 p < 0.001	
	B	v	C	t = -3.13 p < 0.005
10		4.9529	5.4483	5.9661
A	v	C	t = -3.77 p < 0.001	
	B	v	C	t = -2.13 p < 0.05
Gravity				
7		3.8706	5.2184	4.8814
A	v	B	t = -5.67 p < 0.001	
	B	v	C	t = 1.50 p < 0.2
11		4.2824	5.3333	5.3559
A	v	B	t = -4.63 p < 0.001	
	B	v	C	t = -0.11 p < 0.95
Trust				
9		4.0353		4.9153
A	v	C	t = -3.05 p < 0.005	
Receptivity				
12		4.7529	4.5057	5.500
A	v	B	t = 0.79 p < 0.5	
	B	v	C	t = -3.07 p < 0.005

Table 6: T-test results (summary)

the gravity. These issues of ambiguity, deriving from the wording of the instrument, would need to be repaired in any attempt at replication.

The other null hypothesis that was not rejected was H.10 pertaining to Q.12 (receptivity) in relation to Script A and B. The expectation was that the face work (mitigation) of Script A would render hyper-mitigated language more acceptable to teachers than the neglect of face work carried by hypo-mitigated language. However, the result would seem to suggest that the negative effects of obscurity (which emerge as very apparent in the qualitative analysis of responses to Q. 13, see below), combined with the erosion of trust (Script A suffers the lowest score on Q. 9), militate against the receptivity offered by Script A. This again is evidence of the inherent complexity of the construct of mitigation and the need to guard against facile equations (discussed further in Ch. 8).

7.6.3 *Post hoc* hypothesis

In respect to the null hypotheses that were not rejected (Hs. 7,8, & 10), a *post hoc* hypothesis was formulated, which was the same as for the *a priori* hypotheses for Hs. 7,8, & 10, except that the sample of respondents was culled to include only those who answered correctly the multiple choice questions (Qs. 1 & 2). It was hoped that the second sample, while smaller, would be more robust through containing only those who had accurately comprehended the gist of the text. However, while the act of removing from the sample those respondents whose answers to Qs.1 & 2 were incorrect reduced the samples considerably, the measure did not alter the level of rejection of the three null hypotheses.

A consequence of reducing the data base to respondents whose comprehension was accurate produced an interesting finding (Fig. 8): 48% of respondents to Script A (hyper-mitigated) comprehended the language incorrectly; 34% in the case of Script B (hypo-mitigated); and only 17% (AUL-mitigated). The contrast between Scripts A and B conforms with what is known in politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1978) that language that attends highly to face work (in this case, through mitigation) will pay the price through a sacrifice of clarity.

The difference between Scripts B (34%) and C (17%) warrants mention. Considering that the actual text for the delivery of the FTA is the same for Scripts B and C, the only difference between the two texts (such that might account for the different scores) is that Script C prefaces the FTA with AUL-mitigated language. The dramatic difference in scores (50%) would suggest

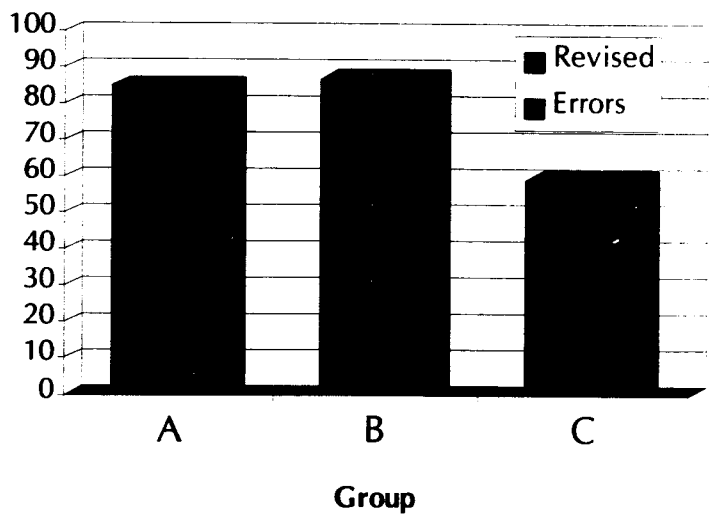


Figure 8: *Post hoc* hypothesis: responses to Questions 1 & 2

that the strategy of using AUL-mitigation prior to the bald delivery of the FTA renders the teacher more receptive to the message than the FTA delivered alone (as in Script B).

7.7 Qualitative findings (Question 13)

7.7.1 Content analysis of response valency

The last item on the questionnaire was open-ended, with respondents asked to give their ‘impression of the feedback’. Most respondents included some comments here; many included more than one response¹. The content analysis of these comments involved categorising them as ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ in tone. Generally, this was readily apparent (App. 37).

For example, the following remarks - ‘the criticism was unclear and confusing; he made the mistake a serious issue’ [A.67] - was analysed as having two negatives (lack of clarity; exaggerated gravity). The following remark - ‘I hope my prac teaching supervisors are this supportive and helpful and caring of my feelings’ [A.71] - was analysed into two positives (helpfulness and supportiveness). The following - ‘clear instructions were given but the

¹ One insight that the analysis of comments reveals is that respondents treat differentially the opportunity to comment verbally which Q.13 provided: e.g. some leave it blank; some comments echo/reinforce a view already expressed quantitatively; some interpret it as an opportunity to add supplementary or tangential information; some see it as invitation to express subjective, affective views, perhaps believing this area to be untapped by the Likert-scale paradigm.

criticism was not directed at examples from the lesson' [C.50] - has one positive (clarity) and one negative (non-specific). In a very small number of cases, where the tone was neutral or difficult to determine, the responses was not scored either way. While the judgements made here are subjective in nature, the subjectivity may be countered 'by reaching an acceptable level of inter-rater agreement' (Allwright & Bailey, 1991:193). This validity check (App. 38), involving five independent raters, yielded a correspondence of 95.4%

SCRIPT	Number of respondents	Number of responses	Positive	Negative
A	74	196	24%	76%
B	80	211	29%	71%
C	58	153	60%	40%

Table 7: Positive and negative responses to scripts A, B and C, based on responses to Question 13

The positives and negatives per script were totalled, and the findings displayed in Table 7. While Scripts A and B are at extreme ends of the continuum of mitigation (A= hyper-mitigated; B= hypo-mitigated), respondents tended to have roughly similarly negative responses to both. This suggests that problems lie both in overdoing face work at the expense of clarity as well as in neglecting face work for the sake of clarity. Script C (combining hypo-mitigation with AUL-mitigation) achieved a reasonably high positive response, confirming that respondents do perceive supervision differently according to variables in the linguistic medium: namely, type and amount of mitigation. It also confirms that both clarity and face attention are necessary in feedback; and that supervisors neglect one or the other at their peril. That these elements are both necessary *and* (potentially) linguistically competitive, merely highlights the complexity of the supervisory task, an issue to be taken up in Ch. 8.

Apart from the quantification afforded above, the value of Q. 13 lay in providing the opportunity to 'flesh out' responses (Guba & Lincoln, 1983:99) i.e. affording qualitative confirmation (or otherwise) of the hypotheses underpinning the experiment. This is important because it affords insight into the 'shades of grey' in subjects' responses, for example, revealing that support for Script C, while certainly higher than that for either A or B, was not without reservation. In addition, it exposed confusions that accrued to the use of certain terms, as

discussed earlier in regard to the null hypotheses that were not rejected. In so doing, it provides an internal validity check for the quantitative findings.

7.7.2 Issues of concern

Respondents chose a range of issues on which to comment, the main thematic categories

-
- Interpersonal issues
 - e.g. affective impact of supervisor's tone / attitude
 - care and supportiveness
 - issues of trust and suspicion
 - Features of the language
 - e.g. directness
 - clarity
 - precision
 - Supervisor's approach to the feedback:
 - e.g. balance/sequence of praise and criticism;
 - one way or two way communication;
 - use of concept check to check understanding;
 - use of reasoning, examples
 - Value of feedback: helpfulness or otherwise
 - Validity of criticism
 - Motivational value of feedback
 - Issues of authoritative vs authoritarian stances.
 - Message gravity
 - Productivity: likelihood of teacher implementation
-

Exhibit 8: Thematic categories: content analysis of Question 13

being displayed in Exhibit 8.

7.7.3 Discussion of the three scripts

7.7.3.1 Script A

The predominant responses to Script A focussed on the related issues of face work and clarity¹:

¹ Instances cited are illustrative, not exhaustive.

- he should have spoken more directly and straight to the point but still caring [A.4]
- he did everything in his power not to make teacher uneasy; wishy-washy; needed to get to the point [A.13]
- he beat around the bush and I just wanted him to spit it out; he tried to criticise but was too nice and left the teacher confused [A.20]
- the feedback was supportive and caring but not altogether clear [A 51]

Significantly, while the quantitative aggregation did not confirm expectations regarding distortion to message gravity, the qualitative responses did, as the following examples of 'down-playing' illustrate:

- I would have accepted his advice but wouldn't feel any urgency about correcting the problem [A.25]
- caring and supportive but down-played the importance of the criticism; rather too much hedging; some more direct criticism would have clarified the situation [A.48]

However, the hedging also triggered the following response:

- criticism was unclear and confusing; he made the mistake a serious issue [A.67]

On the issue of trust and suspicion:

- praise was false because he was trying to 'couch' the criticism [A.68]
- I felt as though he was giving mixed messages [A.20]
- I'd be suspicious: if he's saying I'm OK, why is he going on about it? [A.39]
- his criticism was so couched in non-confrontational language that he became incomprehensible; wasn't direct enough, because he seemed bumbling; I wouldn't take him seriously or regard his advice as worthwhile; it's hard to take criticism from someone you don't respect or understand [A.63]
- how truthful is his criticism? [A.17]

Some responses highlight the irony that the supervisor may have been more supportive of the teacher had he tried less hard to offend:

- caring and tactful but not direct enough which would have helped make it clear and would have been more supportive of the trainee [A.21]
- overly gentle approach seems condescending [A.49]¹

¹ This point is raised in Goldsmith (1992), who suggests that redressive strategies may backfire by provoking the addressee to infer that the speaker 'thinks I am too fragile to handle it' (1992:267).

7.7.3.2 Script B

The hypo-mitigated script prompted strong reactions to the negative-affective climate engendered by a neglect of face work. A cluster of related terms capture this reaction:

condescending; sterile; patriarchal; cold; unsympathetic; pontificating air; one-sided; unsympathetic; didactic; prescriptive; polarised opinions; formal; directing; controlling; disempowering; inflexible; unfeeling; threatening; patronising; aggressive; too straight ahead.

As was expected, clarity was not an issue of itself:

- fair, clear; you'd know exactly what to focus on [B.86]

However, the explicitness itself creates problems of a different kind, linked to productivity:

- the aim was to clearly establish the teacher's errors without concern for her feelings; simply a thorough criticism of her performance [B.74]
- clear but harsh; liable to create fear and anxiety about that area in future [B.78]
- manner could detract from teacher being able to take in the entire meaning of his criticism.[B.72]
- won't promote change only conformity to authority [B.29]
- supervisor needs to be a bit more 'human' in dealings with teacher [B.21]
- one-way communication makes the feedback hard to accept [B.87]

In regard to gravity, the hypo-mitigated language tended to exaggerate the problem:

- the absolute intensity of his clarity made the problem seem bigger than it was [B.42]
- implied she had committed a major sin [B.60]
- made the problem out to be a big fault [B.65]

7.7.3.3 Script C

The blend of face work and clarity in Script C is evident in the responses:

- clear and supportive [C.9]
- caring and helpful [C.32]
- clear in pin-pointing the teacher's weaker point and helpful in suggesting a solution. The praise given at the beginning made the criticism easier to take [C.52]
- began positively; put teacher at her ease; stated what the deficiencies were quite clearly [C.39]

- gave a lot of positive feedback and praise before constructive criticism; imparts information slowly so she will understand; teacher accepted his criticism well [C.47]

Overall, there is a greater positive response to Script C than to the other two scripts and in particular the tactic of AUL-mitigation strikes a positive response:

- positive and supportive feedback; began by stroking with praise and then moved on [C.31]
- by initially praising, a supportive environment was created and the criticism would be accepted as fair and objective [C.22]
- balanced his comments while not making light of the problem [C.23]

However, the severity of hypo-mitigated language with which the criticism was delivered prompted some negative reactions, typified by:

- he was very much the superior; he was the owner of the expertise, telling the young teacher where she went wrong [C.27]¹

Findings from the qualitative analysis suggest, firstly, that too much, as well as too little, mitigation is problematic. Secondly, it would seem that the AUL-mitigation offered in Script C is a safer option than either of the other two standing alone. However, although Script C is preferable to both A and B, it is still far from ideal. More specifically, what is being pointed to is that AUL-mitigation combined with a judicious degree and selection of utterance-level mitigation might offer better guidelines for felicitous practice. The meaning and implication of 'judicious', in terms of the applied outcome of supervisor training, are further explored in Ch. 8.

7.8 Summary of triangulation

Chapter 7 brings to a close the third arm of the between-method triangulation used in this study; and hence it is an opportune time to review and synthesise conclusions to this point. According to Mathison (1988), while triangulation can afford a rich and complex picture of a particular social phenomenon, it rarely provides 'a clear path to a singular view of what is the case' (1988:15), an image she condemns as 'phantom' (1988:17). She argues that the metaphor of precision-convergence used by military strategists in locating enemy targets is inappropriate to and problematic in qualitative research where one of the defining features is

¹ There may be an added irony here in the fact that the actor playing the supervisee is some fifteen years the older.

'an ever-present degree of uncertainty' (1988:15). In truth, findings may be converging, inconsistent or even contradictory; and in every case it is the task of the researcher to 'make sense' of the evidence through various 'levels of evidence' (1988:15-16), grounded in the immediate data, the context of action, and the wider social world.

In the present inquiry, the felicitous outcome is a convergence of three outcomes, not so much in the singularity of one result, as in the consonance of the contributing images to the overall picture. The project began with the goal of seeking an explanation, in the language of supervision, for the fragility of the speech event of the conference. The outcome of the linguistic prong was to expose the clash-of-goals at the heart of teacher supervision and the linguistic ramifications of this. In the second study, the focus widened to embrace the context of supervision and the perspectives of actors within it. The outcome of the second prong was to corroborate the linguistic picture by revealing the nature and extent of supervisors' awareness of the clash-of-goals central to their role. The outcome of the third prong, respondents' reactions to the simulated conference, confirmed the complex and problematic nature of mitigation as the linguistic ramification of the clash-of-goals in supervision.

Thus, what the use of multi-methods has achieved in this study is not so much the replication of the same point in triplicate, as the corroborating contribution of 'different images of understanding' (Smith & Kleine, 1986, cited by Mathison, 1988:13) to a coherent view of supervision. Individually and collectively, Chs 5, 6 and 7 have sought to explain outcomes in terms of the three 'levels of evidence', cited above; and to do so guided by Miles and Huberman's (1984) admonition about self-consciously meticulous and deliberately explicit procedures.

Overview

The triangulation completed, the thesis now moves to its conclusion. Chapter 8 will round off the study, consider its generalisability, make recommendations for further research and discuss applied outcomes.