# Learning How to Use Mitigation Devices: A Peer-Supervisory Context Between a Non-Native Peer-Supervisor and a Non-Native English Teacher

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**Abstract**
Learning how to provide effective supervision can be challenging. After all, helping language teachers increase awareness regarding their teaching practices requires the difficult task of giving them critical feedback, which, at times, can be a face-threatening act as will be defined later in the paper. To soften their criticism, supervisors make use of various language strategies. However, the task of delivering feedback using such language strategies in English can be even more difficult for supervisors who are also second language learners of English. Utilizing the mitigation devices Wajnryb (1994) conceptualized, this study analyzed the language used in three post-observation conferences in a peer-supervisory discourse between a non-native English teacher and a non-native peer-supervisor. The study found that mitigation devices as conceptualized by Wajnryb (1994) were effective in structuring a non-threatening and growth-oriented supervisory context when consciously used by the non-native peer-supervisor.

**Keywords**
language teacher supervision, mitigation devices, non-native language teacher supervisor, peer-supervision

**Introduction**

In the field of language teacher supervision, one of the most significant elements is the post-observation conference where the supervisor delivers critical feedback gained from classroom observation to the teacher. Wajnryb (1995) states that the post-observation conference is an indispensable part of supervision since it creates a context for the improvement of teaching practices. The concept of post-observation conference is based on the idea that "teachers can improve by gaining feedback" (Bailey, 2006, p. 141). The underlying assumption for the feedback is that teachers can only make the necessary changes in their instruction if they are aware of its effectiveness.

Freeman (1989) defines awareness as the "capacity to recognize and monitor the attention one is giving or has given to something. Thus, one acts on or responds to the aspects of a situation of which one is aware" (p. 33). The importance of language teacher supervision lies in the fact that much of what is going on in a teacher's classroom may be unknown to them as teaching is dynamic and being aware of everything in a lesson might be a challenge for the teachers. Therefore, it is the supervisors who help teachers become aware by providing information gained from classroom observation (Bailey, 2006).

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Nevertheless, delivering such critical information can be a challenging task for the supervisors. The very nature of the post- observation conference entails the discussion between what is and what should be, which in return might create a tension between the supervisor and the teacher. Therefore, it is important to set a positive tone in the post-observation conference. However, the task of delivering feedback in English while maintaining a non-threatening tone can be even more difficult for supervisors who are also second language learners of English. The concept of "non-threatening" is vital, which places the topic of language at the core of this study's discussion.

The current study is the result of a peer-supervision process between a non-native English teacher and a non-native peer-supervisor who did not have experience in supervision prior to the study. The concept of peer-supervision is important since it allows for a supervisory context that is beneficial for both the teacher and the peer-supervisor. Alfonso (1977) stated that peer-supervision context could be a very important source for "relatively non-threatening" assistance for the teacher (p. 600). Moreover, it also provides the opportunity for the peer-supervisor to practice supervisory language. Despite the fact that the peer-supervisor is a proficient speaker of English as a foreign language, she was not familiar with the supervisory language to conduct post-observation conferences in English. For this reason, the mitigation devices conceptualized by Wajnryb (1994) were deliberately utilized to structure the language used to deliver critical feedback in the post-observation conferences between the non-native English teacher and non-native peer-supervisor by scripting them prior to the post-observation conferences. Therefore, the study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What mitigation devices were scripted prior to the post-observation conferences (POCs)?
2. How were the scripted mitigation devices actually used during the post-observation conferences (POCs) and what was the response of the teacher?
3. How did the teacher comment on the language used during the post-observation conferences in her post-POC journal?

By answering these questions, the study investigates the language used and to what extent it was effective in creating a non-threatening and growth-oriented supervisory context with the aim of increasing teacher awareness regarding teaching practices.

## Literature Review

### *Language in the Post-Observation Conference*
Research shows that in order to create an empathetic relationship to help the teachers alter their teaching behaviors, supervisors employ certain language strategies that allow them to have technical proficiency during the post-observation conferences (Holland, 1989). Thus, language plays a fundamental part in the post-observation conference and the delivering of feedback. Wajnryb (1994) carried out one of the most comprehensive analyses of language used in post-observation conferences and found out that oftentimes, supervisors mitigate their language while delivering face-threatening acts (Bailey, 2009). Wajnryb (1994) defines mitigation as "the attempt by the speakers to hedge or undercut the full illocutionary force of their own assertions" (p. 201). She found that supervisors make use of mitigation to deliberately soften their message, partly to reduce the effects of the face-threatening act their message carries.

According to Wajnryb (1994), face is "the public, socially valued image of self which participants in an encounter claim for themselves and each other" (p. i). Face-threatening act, on

the other hand, is "a communicative act which runs contrary to the face needs of speaker or hearer" (Wajnryb, 1994, p. i). Face-threatening acts have also been defined as utterances "that represent a threat to another individual's expectations regarding self-image" (Erozan & Shibliyev, 2007, p. 125). Thus, teacher supervision can be a face-threatening act in that it requires supervisors to communicate things to the teachers that they might otherwise not want to hear. To keep away from loss of face, Waite (1992) found that supervisors mostly reduce the weight of their criticisms. To do this, supervisors can choose to mitigate their language while delivering feedback.

### *Mitigation Devices as Conceptualized by Wajnryb (1994)*

Conducting one of the most elaborative research of supervisory language, Wajnryb (1994) concluded supervisors make use of "a high degree of mitigation to ease them through unenviable tasks" (Wajnryb, 1998, p. 531). This necessity for mitigation results from the emergence of "conflict of interests" between what the message demands and the need to protect the face of the addressee (Wajnryb, 1994, p. 202). Wajnryb identified three fundamental types of mitigation supervisors resort to while delivering critical feedback: hypermitigation, hypomitigation, and above-the-utterance-level mitigation. *Hypermitigation* means there is too much mitigation that the message is so softened to a point that it is not clear anymore. *Hypomitigation,* on the other hand, means that there is too little mitigation that the message is too direct and most likely threatens the *face* (Bailey, 2006). Therefore, hypermitigation and hypomitigation are at the two ends of the spectrum. While it is the clarity of the message that is threatened in hypermitigation, in hypomitigation, the danger lies not in the reception of the message. That is, when the message is too direct, teachers may get defensive, and they may assume a passive or an adversarial role which would then risk the message to be absorbed by the teacher (Bailey, 2006). It is challenging for the supervisors to set the balance between hypermitigation and hypomitigation, and to deliver the critical feedback in a way that the message is clear but also not threatening. The third type of mitigation Wajnryb discusses, *above-the-utterance-level mitigation,* refers to this balance and awareness of language, which means that softened criticism is achieved.

It is evident in Wajnryb's study that supervisors achieve above-the-utterance-level mitigation by using various linguistic means, which are categorized as semantic and syntactic devices. Wajnryb (1994) argues that they are all strategic since they all work to reduce the effects of face-threatening acts. Below, there will be a more detailed explanation of each device.

### *Semantic Devices*

Semantic devices refer to mitigation strategies that are fulfilled with words as signals of meaning (Wajnryb, 1994). They include qualm indicators, asides, lexical hedges, and hedging modifiers. To start with, qualm indicators are linguistic signals that demonstrate uneasiness and reticence by the speaker. They are used to show the speaker's hesitation which then makes the message less certain and more ambiguous. They are a combination of aural and linguistic signals, and they are most likely to be fragments of utterances instead of whole utterances (Wajnryb, 1994). Some examples of qualm indicators are "um," "well," and "you know" (Wajnryb, 1994, p. 269).

Lexical hedges are meaning of words supervisors choose over another to reduce the criticism and soften the impact of the message. Wajnryb (1994) argues that it is not possible to identify the words over which they are chosen since they are absent but asserts that it is sufficient to suggest possibilities and identify the strategy as avoidance of certain words. Lexical hedges are preferred as an alternative for the more congruent option of a word in order to mitigate the harshness of the message. By utilizing lexical hedges, supervisors can assume a shared ground in

which only the teacher can understand the meaning of the word choice since it is only accessible to the ones who the information is shared with (Morallo, 2019). Moreover, when hedges are used as a linguistic device, they can point to a lack of full commitment by the speaker to the message they wish to convey (Fraser, 2010). Finally, lexical hedges are used to avoid technical language to reduce the professional distance between the speakers, as supervisors being seen as the expert. In this case, supervisors deliberately use style-shifted lexemes to show solidarity with the teachers.

Asides are defined by Wajnryb (1994) as short utterances that come with criticisms and they differ from qualm indicators in that they are "complete units, not fragments" (p. 272). Their meaning in context is closely related to the criticism that accompany them. Lastly, hedging modifiers can be in the word, phrase or clause form which can consist of a word (e.g., "just"), a phrase (e.g., "a little"), or a clause (e.g., "I feel"; Wajnryb, 1994, p. 289). Among their functions are making the criticism vaguer and less significant, reducing the quantity of a related item, and reducing certainty and obligation (Wajnryb, 1994).

### Syntactic Devices

Syntactic mitigation devices account for mitigation strategies that are realized with the grammaticalization of politeness through the syntax of the language (Morallo, 2019). The sub-categories include tense shift, aspect shift, negating, interrogative structures, modal verbs, clause structures, and finally person shift.

Tense shifts allow the speakers to be politer and to mitigate their message. When the speaker chooses to use the past over the present, they distance that event from the present. Shift to present, on the other hand, occurs when the speaker wants to show solidarity with the addressee. Aspect as a grammatical category is concerned with how the action described by the verb is perceived, such as whether or not it is ongoing, continuous, recurring, or instant. Pragmatically, aspect shift makes the event more uncertain and less specific. Examples include nominalization using the -ing form to focus on the process that make the criticism more acceptable, such as "<u>making</u> them aware" rather than "make them aware" (Wajnryb, 1994, p. 238). Next, negation as a mitigation device is used to "mitigate rather than eliminate the representation of the negated concept" (Giora et al., 2005, p. 83). Negation serves the purposes of stating remarks that are considerably less informative, reducing the power of direct criticism, and letting the speaker reduce the criticism from an obligation to an option. For instance, "it's <u>not</u> necessarily the best way to learn" (Wajnryb, 1994, p. 244).

Another type of syntactic mitigation device is interrogative structures. They are basically questions used as a mitigation strategy by supervisors to transform the criticism into a polite request. Supervisors make use of questions as an alternative to statements in that they give the opportunity to alter an "I" statement into a "you" question, turning criticism into obvious inquiry, as in "were you happy with the language analysis?" (Wajnryb, 1994, p. 246). Moreover, modal verbs are used as a source of pragmatic exploitation to reduce the assertiveness of the critical feedback. They can suggest a myriad of meanings such as degree of probability, attitude, and politeness (Morallo, 2019). As the final syntactic strategy, person shift can come in shift to the third person, shift to the first person, or shift to the second person in the ambivalent form. Shifting to third person gives the supervisor the opportunity to disguise the direction of the critical feedback, as in the example "I thought it worked well, but <u>it</u> wasn't always consistent." Mitigation occurs with the shift to the first person by the supervisor focusing the conversation on him/her to create a sense of solidarity. Finally, shift to second person removes the specificity of the person to whom the feedback is directed to, thus reducing the face-threatening effect of the criticism such as

"instead of <u>you</u> always asking the questions is to get them ask <u>you</u> a question," which makes it less obvious to tell whether the supervisor is referring to the teacher as the addressee or people in general (Wajnryb, 1994, p. 265).

## Methodology

### *Participants*

There are two main participants in this study. The first one is the researcher who acted as the peer-supervisor and the second one is the subject who works as an EFL teacher in Turkey to whom the peer-supervisor delivered feedback regarding her lessons. Both participants are native speakers of Turkish with a high proficiency in English as a foreign language. The second participant voluntarily took part in the study as she saw it as an opportunity to improve her awareness concerning her classroom teaching practices. Classroom observations are normally conducted in the private elementary school the subject is working for with teachers observing each other's classes as part of their professional development, but the subject thought doing the study with the researcher would provide her with new perspectives as the researcher is pursuing her graduate studies in the field. The relationship between the participants allowed for a peer-supervisory context as they had known each other for more than 10 years studying at the same high school and pursuing similar career paths.

### *Data Collection Procedure*

After agreeing to take part in the study, the teacher informed the principals in her school to receive their permission for her classes to be observed by an outside researcher. Following the principals' and parents' permission, the peer-supervisor and the teacher met for a pre-observation conference the main purpose of which was for the researcher to familiarize with the lesson plan, course materials and objectives. Moreover, the goal of pre-observation conference was also to decide on areas of concern the teacher might want to address in the post-observation conferences (Yürekli, 2013). After the pre-observation conference, the peer-supervisor observed a third grade class in which native Turkish-speaking students are learning English as a foreign language. The peer-supervisor observed the same classroom three times, following each observation with a post-observation conference where she delivered her feedback to the teacher. Thus, the data collection procedure involved six steps. First, the peer-supervisor observed the lessons via Zoom as all classroom instruction went online in Turkey in the spring 2021 semester due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While observing the lesson, the peer-supervisor took field notes while recording the lesson. The second step involved transcribing the lesson and analyzing it based on the field notes. The second step also involved deciding what type of feedback the peer-supervisor would like to give to the teacher based on the points discussed in the pre-observation conference. In the third step, the peer-supervisor scripted the feedback she wanted to deliver to the teacher using the mitigation devices conceptualized by Wajnryb (1994). The next step included the post-observation conference where the peer-supervisor delivered her feedback to the teacher and the two discussed issues related to the classroom instruction over Zoom. In the fifth stage, the teacher wrote in her reflective journal her thoughts about the post-observation conference using a google doc for the peer-supervisor to peruse. In the final step, the peer-supervisor transcribed the conversations between herself and the teacher and went through the teacher's journal for a detailed analysis.

*Data Analysis*

Qualitative methodology was used to analyze the data from the scripted and the actual feedback delivered in the post-observation conferences as they constituted the main data in this study. Qualitative methodology allows for an interpretation process which includes immersion in the data with the purpose of understanding phenomena with respect to the meanings people make of them (Richards, 2009). For the current study, qualitative methodology gives the opportunity to analyze the language used in the post-observation conferences to understand the extent to which the language allows for a growth-oriented and non-threatening peer-supervisory context for the teacher. To achieve this, the peer-supervisor transcribed the conversations that took place in each post-observation conference. The peer-supervisor then analyzed the language used in her feedback in terms of what mitigation devices were utilized and what responses the teacher gave to the feedback to investigate whether the mitigation devices were successful in creating a non-threatening and growth-oriented supervisory context. Each instance of delivering feedback and the teacher's responses were extracted from the transcription to conduct a detailed analysis of the interaction between the peer-supervisor and the teacher. Moreover, the journals kept by the teacher were also analyzed qualitatively to understand if the language used in the peer-supervision process was effective in increasing teacher awareness regarding her instruction.

**Findings**

*Language Analysis in the First Post-Observation Conference*

For the first post-observation conference, there were two main points of feedback ("F") that the peer-supervisor wished to deliver to the teacher partly based on what they discussed in the pre-observation conference. The scripted feedback was as follows:

> POC1  F1: "I noticed that students hardly ever use the target language, except for when answering your questions."
> POC1  F2: "I thought the lesson was really great, but I was just wondering, could you also add more student-centered activities?"

The way these scripted utterances was conveyed during the post-observation conference was similar to how they were structured. Below is the actual conversation that took place between the teacher and the supervisor:

> F1:
> 1      S: **I also noticed during the lesson [teacher's name] that students hardly ever**
> 2      **use the target language. Except for answering your questions.** What do you
> 3      think is the reason for that?
> 4      T: As you said, how can I say, the levels of students are very different. I should
> 5      have some differentiation activities for them. I should check every student whether
> 6      they are listening or not. Sometimes they are just there physically but mentally they
> 7      are not there so I need to check every student. I always yes I always follow English
> 8      but sometimes I need to speak Turkish because when you speak English all the
> 9      time, they get blind. If you warn them in English sometimes they just don't care but
> 10     when I switch to Turkish, their attention is on me. So it works, when they are not

11      on task I switch to Turkish. But they are not very actively using English. That's one
12      of my problems. When it's face-to-face education, it's okay. They are always
13      pushing themselves to speak in English but when they are online something
14      happens. I don't know why. Maybe it's because they are at home. They have
15      different distractive tools around them. Sometimes the parents are talking,
16      sometimes their toys are there. Something on the background is on. […………] So
17      I should always force them to speak in English.

F2:
1      S: I thought the lesson was great. **But I was just wondering if you could add more**
2      **student centered activities.**
3      T: yeah, it was one of my concerns you remember. This was one of my concerns.
4      Teacher talking time is a lot. Maybe it is about my attitude. I always try to control
5      the students. And maybe I should give them more control. It was just a few minutes
6      I told them to become the teachers. But you're right. I should give them more
7      opportunity. I feel like they are just passive listeners. Answering the questions.

In lines 1 and 2 of the first comment, the teacher used clause structure to formulate her criticism which is among the syntactic mitigation devices. Clause structures are constructed with a perception word in the main clause with the criticism incorporated in the subordinate clause. They are used to reduce the effect of the criticism while allowing the listener to voice an opinion or even disagree. In the data, by asking the teacher what she thought could be the reason, the supervisor already invited the teacher to respond to her criticism. The perception word *notice* still suggests subjectivity which gives the teacher room to reject or disagree with the feedback. In fact, the teacher provided an explanation from her point of view that indicates that the way the peer-supervisor structured her language allowed for negotiability for this particular criticism.

Additional feedback involves both syntactic and semantic mitigation devices. The way it was scripted was slightly different than how it was uttered during the conversation. In the script, the peer-supervisor used a clause structure, but then added a direct question to it. However, during the actual conversation, the peer-supervisor used a question embedded in the clause structure. The reason for this could be that embedded questions as conceptualized by Wajnryb (1994) may have also sounded more natural to the peer-supervisor at the time of the conversation. The implications for this change in the peer-supervisor's language are twofold. First, by studying the mitigation devices prior to the post-observation conferences, the peer-supervisor develops an unconscious understanding of the use of mitigation devices. Second, despite the fact that the peer-supervisor is a non-native speaker of English, her supervisory language reflects the real language used by the supervisors who are native speakers of English.

Turning back to the analysis of the language, the peer-supervisor used both embedded questions and degree hedges to deliver her feedback that served three purposes in mitigating her language. First, embedded questions provide the criticism to be hidden in the subordinate clause which reduces the effect of what would have been a face-threatening act with a direct question. Another purpose allowed by embedded questions is to pre-empt defensiveness from the addressee by delaying the criticism. Finally, the word *just* reduced the force of the criticism by turning it into a mere inquiry. As a reaction to this criticism, the teacher admitted that it was one of her concerns, but instead of being a passive listener of the feedback, she identified her own areas of improvement and suggested ways to tackle with the perceived problem. In fact, in her journal entry after the POC, the teacher noted "you helped me realize that students shouldn't just be passive listeners, but

they should also use English themselves" addressing the peer-supervisor. This shows that the language structured in this particular comment not only mitigated the criticism, but also addressed the awareness aspect of teaching as discussed by Freeman (1989), which is one the most fundamental aims of post-observation conferences.

### Language Analysis in the Second Post-Observation Conference

For the second post-observation conference, there were three pieces of main critical feedback that the peer-supervisor wanted to deliver. The scripted feedback was the following:

POC2 F1: "I just kind of felt that this lesson was a bit rushed."
POC2 F2: "I think it's important to allow time for students to realize one thing is finished and something else is starting."
POC 2 F3: "The instructions were a bit confusing for the students."

F1:
1    S: **About this lesson, I just kind of felt that it was a bit rushed. I felt like there**
2    **was a lot of exercises to cover.** You had reading. And then playing finger games,
3    showing right hand and left hand, and the name of the fingers, trying to write
4    without using the thumbs. I felt like there were a lot of things to do.
5    T: Yes, I totally agree with you. I'm always in a rush. I don't know why. Always
6    in a rush. I'm using exaggerated gestures, at the end of my lesson I feel very tired.
7    Maybe I should make my lessons more condensed. I should have just one or two
8    activities. I don't know why I'm just trying to cover all the activities. and calling
9    students all the time listen to me, eyes on me. I think you're right. I totally agree
10   with you.

F2:
1    S: ……. There also students couldn't follow what to do. **I thought it's important**
2    **to allow time for students to realize one thing is finished.**
3    T: you're right. I should slow down. Sometimes when I share the screen, it takes, it
4    comes a little bit later than I see, they see it later than I show it. So when I say read,
5    they say teacher wait I can't see the screen. So they say no I can't see the screen
6    and I'm like no come on read (laughs). That problem. I should slow down.

F3:
1    **S: I also thought [teacher] that the instructions were a bit confusing to**
2    **students.** […….] maybe this waiting time. you know like allowing students time
3    to think and absorb something. It might be also related to the first point. It was a bit
4    rushed. Because there were a lot of things you were trying to cover all of them.
5    **That's why even the instructions they were fast.**
6    T: they were fast and I don't like silence in the lesson. Because that's why I'm not
7    waiting. I should wait. They should understand first but I don't wait. When there's
8    silence I feel like they are not listening, they are busy with another thing, so they
9    shouldn't get silence. They should answer my questions immediately. I should ask
10   them one more. I should keep them engaged. But you're right I should slow down
11   and wait. They should think, they should internalize and then they can answer it.

Lines 1 and 2 of Feedback 1 demonstrate that the scripted and the actual criticism are almost identical. They were structured with two semantic mitigation devices: degree hedges and authority hedges. By using the phrase "I felt that," the supervisor dresses up the critical feedback as a subjective opinion. If we have a look at the criticism without the main clause, "it was a bit rushed," even with a degree hedge it sounds like a more direct criticism. Moreover, Wajnryb (1994) states that use of perception words suggests a cogitative act instead of a declarative act, which gives the addressee room to agree or disagree. In fact, the response from the teacher starts with the expression "I agree with you." Therefore, mitigation in this feedback occurs in two aspects. First, the supervisor assumes the responsibility for thinking a certain way about the lesson, which can be countered to be incorrect. Second, by disguising the criticism in the subordinate clause, the supervisor reduces the effect of what could have been a more direct and face-threatening criticism.

The second comment is also almost the same as the one scripted before the post-observation conference. The data indicates that authority hedges were utilized in the structuring of the second comment as well. The purpose of authority hedges was discussed above, so the analysis will continue with the lexical hedge also used to mitigate this particular criticism. Specifically, the peer-supervisor used style-shifted lexemes. Style-shifted lexemes allow for the non-technical language that reduces the distance between the supervisor and the teacher. The main argument the peer-supervisor is trying to make here is that teacher's wait time was not enough for students to understand what was going on in this lesson. Even though the term *wait time* would be used later in the post-observation conference, the peer-supervisor first establishes a sense of solidarity by delaying the use of more technical language until after a conversation occurs on the importance of wait time. Indeed, the response to this feedback from the teacher was a reflective one in which the teacher reflected on her own teaching practices, which can be seen in lines 6–11.

As for the third piece of feedback, the scripted and the actual versions are almost the same with a slight difference in prepositions. As well as using authority hedges like the previous ones, the peer-supervisor made use of aspect shift as a mitigation strategy. Aspect shifts serve to make the criticism less precise, and as discussed earlier, change the focus to the description of the event to reduce the bluntness of the criticism. The feedback would have been more direct and threatening if it was structured as "Your instructions confused the students or You confused the students with your instructions." By highlighting the process instead of the person who was the agent of that process, the criticism is mitigated, and focus is shifted to the event itself, not the teacher. The same also applied to the next feedback in line 5 of F3. The peer-supervisor again referred to the instructions as being fast, but not the teacher who was fast in giving the instructions. This resulted in the teacher referring to the instructions as being too fast, rather than saying, "I was fast." Another important aspect of this mitigation strategy for the current study is that the peer-supervisor had not scripted this part of the feedback before the post-observation conference. However, during the conversation, she made use of aspect shifts as a mitigation strategy unconsciously, which also suggests that her language reflects the supervisory language used by actual supervisors as conceptualized by Wajnryb (1994).

After the post-observation conference, the teacher mentioned in her journal that she could not realize she did not have enough waiting time for students and that the supervisor was in a position of *observer* instead of a *judge.* This indicates that mitigation devices used in the second post-observation conference were helpful in structuring a non-threatening supervisory context and post-observation conference environment. Data also indicate that the language used by the peer-

supervisor again addressed an aspect of the teacher's instruction that she was not previously aware of, which suggests that the second post-observation conference was also effective in raising teacher's awareness regarding her teaching practices.

### *Language Analysis in the Third Post-Observation Conference*
In the third post-observation conference, there were two main critical feedback the peer-supervisor delivered. The following is the scripted feedback the peer-supervisor structured before the conference.

> POC3 F1: "It's always good to show the questions to the students before the listening or reading to give them a purpose for the task."
> POC 3 F2: "I was just wondering if you could allow some time first for the students. I know you don't want to use breakout rooms, but I thought it would be really helpful if students worked on them [the questions] by themselves."

For the third post-observation conference, the difference between the scripted and actual feedback was more apparent and the two feedbacks were somewhat intertwined with each other. Below is the transcript for both.

> F1 & F2:
> 1    S: [….] **I was thinking maybe you could show the students the questions first**
> 2    T: hmm yeah [taking notes]
> 3    S: Because **I think it's always good to show the questions to the students before**
> 4    **the listening or reading tasks to give them a purpose for the**
> 5    T: hmm, yeah you are right. You are right. They were listening but they didn't know
> 6    why they were listening. Which parts they should focus on. You are right.
> 7    S: that's what I was thinking. And also I think it was great that students were trying
> 8    to answer the questions, they were mostly engaged. **But I was just wondering if**
> 9    **you could allow some time for the students before the whole class discussion**. I
> 10   know you don't want to do breakout rooms, I understand that it can be tricky for
> 11   online lessons but it can be really a great opportunity for students to practice first-
> 12   T: hmm
> 13   S: before trying to answer, they can just, or maybe at least. Or what do you think?
> 14   T: yeah, actually you are right maybe I could tell students to think about the
> 15   questions individually first. For example you got one minute, everybody will focus
> 16   on the question 1, and then I will get your answers in silent. Everybody will be
> 17   muted. Or as you said I could put them in breakout rooms. There are four breakout
> 18   rooms there are four questions, each room will focus on one question maybe. And
> 19   then you'll discuss it.

As can be seen in the data, the peer-supervisor again resorts to using authority hedges to mitigate her language in line 1. This might be because she is a peer-supervisor and does not want to imply any expertise on her part, especially with the teacher having more experience in teaching EFL than the peer-supervisor. As discussed earlier, authority hedges are used to put the responsibility of the criticism on the supervisor, which suggest that the assertion might not be correct, but it is the supervisor who thinks this way. Moreover, the use of modal verbs and adverbs

such as *maybe* and *could* serve to decrease the harshness and the certainty of the criticism respectively. What's notable here is that this sentence was not scripted prior to the post-observation conference and happened in the flow of the conversation. This indicates that the peer-supervisor's spontaneous language in the third post-observation conference also started to reflect the mitigated language supervisors used in Wajnryb's (1994) study.

The second comment in line 3 involves person shift. Person shifts from the second person to third person allow for the agency of an action to become anonymous and removes the responsibility of the action from the teacher. The criticism here lies in the fact that the teacher did not show the questions before the task which led to a confusion for the students. Continuing from the previous feedback, instead of emphasizing that the teacher did not show the questions to the students, the peer-supervisor structures the language with a shift to third person singular to reduce the effect of the criticism.

The third comment which can be seen in lines 8–9 include both an embedded question and conditional subordination to mitigate the criticism. While the embedded question gives the teacher the opportunity to not respond to supervisor's message, conditional subordination changes what would have sounded like an instruction from the supervisor to an indirect suggestion. Indeed, instead of stating it as an obligation, the peer-supervisor is offering the use of break-out rooms as an option. The teacher's response clearly demonstrates how the hearer also perceives the message as an optionality. Her use of modal verbs indicate probability from her part, that she might use the breakout rooms in her future lessons. Presenting the criticism as an option also led the teacher to reflective thinking that even provided ways how to implement the suggestion in her lessons.

Following the post-observation conference, the teacher wrote in her journal that she wanted to use breakout rooms for her coming lessons. She also commented on how the way peer-supervisor gives suggestions motivates her more by saying, "Your use of language while giving suggestions encourages and motivates me more." The important thing to notice here is that she referred to the feedback as suggestion, which was the purpose of using particularly the conditional subordination.

## Discussion

### *Issues in Language Teacher Supervision for Non-Native Supervisors*
As previous research indicates, the fundamental purpose in conducting post-observation conferences is to create a non-threatening environment of professional learning and growth for the teacher, resulting from the effective use of mitigation strategies. For the language teacher supervisors who are also non-native speakers of English, mitigating their supervisory language in English poses a distinct challenge, one that requires pragmatic competence. Non-native supervisors who speak English as a foreign language might not have the pragmatic competence in English as pragmatic competence is mostly overlooked in the EFL context (Alqurashi, 2019). As use of mitigation devices might be demanding for even the native speakers of that language, the difficulty only increases for non-native speakers. Therefore, it is crucial for non-native supervisors to practice supervisory language skills containing mitigation devices that would create a non-threatening supervisory context.

Taking into consideration the analysis above, this study has implications for non-native language teacher supervisors concerning the language used in post-observation conferences. The data collected in the study suggest that studying and consciously making use of mitigation devices as conceptualized by Wajnryb (1994) could be an effective tool for non-native supervisors to learn

about and familiarize themselves with supervisory language. The data also show that even the unconscious language used by the peer-supervisor started to reflect a mitigated language that address the areas of concern for the teacher in a way that protects the face of the teacher, as a result of the non-native supervisor having studied mitigation devices prior to the post-observation conferences. Indeed, the teacher's responses to the feedback and journal entries on her thoughts about the post-observation conferences show that the non-native peer-supervisor managed to create a safe and non-threatening supervisory environment for the teacher.

### Cross-Cultural Effects of Turkish on Mitigation in L2 English

Studies focusing on politeness and mitigation in Turkish found that Turkish speakers prefer to mitigate their language in ways Brown and Levinson (1987) termed "on-record negative politeness" (as cited in Dogancay-Aktuna & Kamisli, 1997; Erozan & Shibliyev, 2007). On record negative politeness refers to attending the hearer's needs to be independent and not to be imposed on by others, by using linguistic devices to compensate for the message that would otherwise be face-threatening. As such, language teacher supervision requires mitigating the language used in the post-observation conferences to reduce the effects of the feedback given to the teacher, which can also be considered on-record negative politeness. Since previous research suggests that Turkish speakers also employ such language strategies to protect the face of the hearer in face-threatening situations, we can argue that the participants' L1 has implications on the success of the peer-supervision process in this study in that Turkish speakers are familiar in similar discourses in their L1. Similar communication styles in both their L1 and L2 might have informed the peer-supervisor and the teacher's understanding of the mitigation devices in ways to create a growth-oriented and non-threatening peer-supervisory context to increase teacher awareness regarding teaching practices.

### Implications for Further Research

Literature on the language teacher supervision have mostly focused on teacher perceptions concerning the classroom observations and post-observation conferences, but they have not said much about the language used in the post-observation conferences by non-native supervisors (Kahyalar & Yazici, 2016; Rahmany et al., 2014; Rehman & Al-Bargi, 2014; Shah & Al Harthi, 2014). However, investigating what kind of language strategies non-native language teacher supervisors use in the post-observation conferences is crucial as non-native teachers of English can also be in supervisor positions, sometimes even supervising native teachers. Therefore, this study has implications to encourage further research that would be helpful in improving the supervisory skills of non-native supervisors by conceptualizing the language strategies they employ in the post-observation conferences.

This study also has implications for cross-cultural considerations for the non-native language supervisors' L1. The data in this study showed that the peer-supervisory context was successful in creating a non-threatening and growth-oriented post-observation conferences to increase teacher awareness. However, the meaning making processes of the peer-supervisor and the teacher informed by their L1 might have also affected the outcome of the study, since their L1 Turkish and L2 English use similar conversational styles in situations where the face of the listener might be threatened by the message. Therefore, further research could also be conducted in which the non-native supervisor and the teacher are from different linguistic backgrounds to investigate the effects of L1 in the success or lack thereof, in creating a non-threatening supervisory context with the effective use of mitigation devices in English.

**Conclusion**

Language teacher supervision can be very challenging in that it requires supervisors to deliver critical feedback to the teachers, which, at times, can be a face-threatening act. Language used by the supervisors to structure critical feedback plays a crucial role in creating a safe and non-threatening supervisory context for the purposes of increasing teaching awareness. In a highly comprehensive study, Wajnryb (1994) identified various mitigation devices supervisors use as a language strategy to soften their criticism. In the present study, it was argued that by studying and consciously making use of these mitigation devices, supervisors who are second and foreign language learners of English can also provide effective supervision with the aim of increasing teacher awareness regarding their teaching practices.

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