

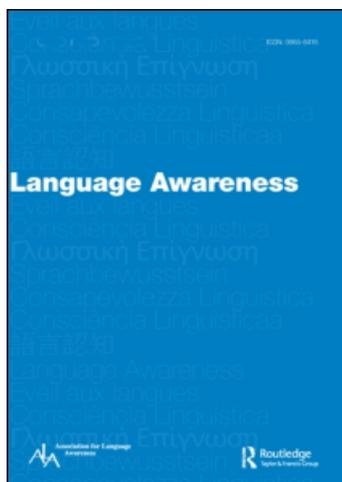
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Transforming Practice: Changing Patterns of Participation in Post-observation Meetings¹

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Reflective models of supervision have shifted the emphasis from teaching observations as primarily evaluative events to events intended to promote teachers' reflective practice. This paper presents a longitudinal action research study investigating post-observation interactions between language teachers and their supervisors in an American university English Programme. The longitudinal design, data collection and analysis were ongoing and recursive, allowing each to inform the other at various stages of the study. The authors/researchers were also the supervisors/participants in the study, and were interested in improving existing practices based on an analysis of available data. A preliminary analysis revealed that the supervisors produced the majority of the talk in the meetings and that the teachers were more passive. Focussing primarily on data from four teacher/supervisor pairs from two semesters, we describe how this study enabled supervisors to become aware of the linguistic and interactional subtleties of their practices in post-observation meetings. We then illustrate how supervisors changed the meeting dynamics from supervisor-centred to more teacher-centred. We describe changes in the distribution of talk and discuss how and why these changes took place. We also illustrate important changes in the ways that teachers were positioned by supervisors in the opening of meetings.

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Keywords: action research, corpus-based analysis, discourse analysis, institutional discourse, post-observation meetings, teacher supervision

Many teacher education programmes, including those whose objective it is to prepare language teachers, involve some type of one-on-one teacher mentoring, or supervision activities. One common supervision practice is the classroom observation and related post-observation meeting.² Several decades ago, the primary function of the teaching observation was for a supervisor to evaluate a teacher's ability (Chamberlin, 2000). In recent years however, with the introduction of reflective models of supervision, the emphasis has shifted away from a teaching observation – and the teacher/mentor meeting which typically follows this observation – as a primarily evaluative event, to an activity intended to promote teachers' reflective practice.

Despite the pervasiveness of post-observation meetings across educational contexts, much of the teacher education literature on the subject tends to be theoretical or prescriptive rather than empirical (Waite, 1993). In other words, much of this literature (e.g. Acheson & Gall, 1997; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2000) provides suggestions for how post-observation meetings should be conducted, rather than consisting of analyses of interactional data from such meetings. To date, there are few published empirical studies of post-observation meetings. Although some literature has examined teachers' preferences for feedback in response to simulations of post-observation meetings (e.g. Chamberlin, 2000; Copeland, 1980; Copeland & Atkinson, 1978), fewer studies have examined the situated discourse produced by teachers and supervisors in these meetings (exceptions include Farr, 2003; Vásquez, 2004; Waite, 1992, 1993). This article presents a portion of a larger, longitudinal investigation of teacher/supervisor discourse in post-observation meetings (Vásquez, 2005).

Background

The decades following the advent of clinical supervision saw an increase in empirical research on teacher supervisory conferences or post-observation meetings. The majority of these studies, motivated by an interest in learning about the verbal behaviours of supervisors and teachers, employed observation-coding systems consisting of a set of predetermined categories. The desire to classify participants' behaviour into a discrete set of a priori categories reflected the dominant behaviourist paradigm prevalent in educational research during this era (Zeichner, 1999). Coding schemes, such as those developed by Weller (1971), were designed to better understand teacher/supervisor behaviours during conferences, and mirrored similar instruments that had been developed to investigate student classroom behaviour (e.g. Simon & Boyer, 1970). Empirical investigations of post-observation meetings have been expanded in more recent years to include the development of new coding taxonomies (e.g. Christensen, 1988; O'Neal, 1983; Zeichner & Liston, 1985), as well as studies of teachers' perceptions of, preferences about and reactions to, various supervisory styles (e.g. those cited in Chamberlin, 2000; Holland, 1989).

Nevertheless, educational researchers have continued to be acutely aware that not enough research has been dedicated to this important aspect of teacher education (e.g. Holland, 1989; Perlberg & Theodor, 1975; Zeichner & Liston, 1985). Indeed, as Zeichner and Liston (1985: 171) have observed, 'Given the ascribed importance of supervisory conferences to the processes of formal teacher education, one finds it ironic that so little attention has been given to understanding the quality of what transpires during these encounters'. In a review of 20 years of research (both theoretical and empirical) on post-observation conferences, Holland found an 'imbalance of theory versus solid research on the conference' (1989: 378). She called for more research to be done in this area, and concluded by saying that 'the use of qualitative methods such as discourse analysis' offered great promise for future research on the subject.

Discourse analytic approaches

Responding to Holland's call, Waite (1992) used conversation analytic techniques, supplemented with ethnographic field notes and participant interviews, to examine five 'supervisory conferences', or post-observation meetings. In his study, Waite (1992: 369) addressed the ways in which supervisors 'exert control over conference direction and over teachers'. In a related study that examined the same set of data, Waite (1993) suggested that post-observation meetings can be described as consisting of three 'phases' (i.e. a supervisor's reporting phase, a teacher's response phase, and a programmatic phase). In both papers, Waite focussed on how teachers and supervisors negotiated their roles with respect to one another during the meetings.

Similar to Waite, Arcario (1994) used modified conversation analytic techniques in his investigation of 11 post-observation meetings between English language teachers (graduate students in an MA-TESL programme) and their supervisors. As part of his multi-level analysis, Arcario proposed an alternative phase-based characterisation of the post-observations: (1) opening evaluative move, (2) evaluation sequence and (3) closing. After examining the structure, as well as linguistic and discourse features of his data, Arcario's (1994: 85) conclusions repeatedly emphasise the uniform nature of the 11 meetings analysed. He claims that regardless of supervisor's style, the conversation (i.e. the formal structure of the meetings) remains the same.

The work by both Waite and Arcario contributes important insights about the shifting roles of participants during these encounters. However, both describe teacher/supervisor interactions in terms of phases, and devote little methodological attention to the identification and delineation of such phases – Waite (1993: 682) himself acknowledges their fluid nature: 'participants move in and out of phases with relative ease . . . whenever both participants exhibit the behaviours indicative of a particular orientation to "what is happening now", they are in a particular phase'. Therefore, it is not possible to determine how such phases might be applied to describe comparable data.³ The present study combines the quantitative measure of talk produced by each participant with a more detailed qualitative discussion.

Recent approaches

Recent discourse analytic work on post-observation meetings between language teachers and mentors has introduced two new foci: an emphasis on linguistic politeness, and the use of corpus-based methods to assist in analysis. For example, focussing on linguistic politeness, Vásquez (2004) presented a number of linguistic expressions which function as politeness strategies in supervisors' delivery of advice and suggestions. Other studies, which have treated politeness phenomena include Phillips (1994), which examined the role of silence in these meetings, and Farr (2003), which investigated the pragmatic (and other) functions associated with various strategies of showing engaged listenership in these types of meetings. In their corpus-based analysis of *would* as a hedging device, Farr and O'Keeffe (2002) examined a corpus of post-observation meetings, and found that hedging as a politeness strategy was not unusual in such contexts. Finally, Reppen and Vásquez (2007) propose a number of ways in which the

tools of corpus linguistics can be used to investigate the language of teacher supervision.

In the present study, our approach includes three related methodological innovations to the analysis of post-observation discourse: a longitudinal design, a researcher-as-participant perspective and a quantitative rather than a phase-based analysis of interactions. The longitudinal design of the study permits an investigation of change in individual participants over time, by examining the interactions between several matched pairs of participants. This facet of the study represents a methodological innovation in the study of this type of speech activity, because prior studies of post-observation meetings – both discourse analytic studies (e.g. Arcario, 1994; Kutoglu-Eken, 1999; Roberts, 1992; Waite, 1992, 1993) as well as those which have quantified data into categories using observational systems (e.g. Blumberg & Cusik, 1969; Christensen, 1988; Zeichner & Liston, 1985) – have used data collected from a single point in time (e.g. one academic session). Next, our own dual role in the data collection (i.e. as both researchers and participants) provides us with the opportunity to introduce change, and enables us to comment on our awareness of our own patterns of interaction. Finally, our analytic choice to use a quantitative, rather than a phased-based, approach to provide a contextualised description of the data, enables us not only to measure change over time, but also to describe the variability in this corpus of meetings. Each of these innovations is discussed further in the following sections.

Method

Setting

The study was conducted at Northern Arizona University's Intensive English Programme (IEP), which is closely associated with a Master of Arts (MA) degree in the Teaching of English as a Second Language. The IEP provides instruction in English as a Second Language (ESL) – with a strong emphasis on English for academic purposes – to international degree-seeking students. At the same time, the IEP serves as an educational resource, at which several students in the MA program can gain practical ESL teaching experience. Most typically, MA students are contracted for one year to teach ESL part-time in the IEP during their second, and final year of graduate coursework.

Participants

In a typical semester, the IEP employs between five to eight teachers. Normally, the teacher participants have varied teaching experience prior to joining the IEP: from no previous teaching experience at all, to several years of teaching experience. The average amount of prior teaching experience is typically around two years.

The data in the present study consist of eight interactions from two academic semesters between two supervisors and three teachers. Table 1 provides demographic information about the three teacher participants. The three teachers were all women in their mid-20s to mid-30s, with varied prior teaching experience. Although not all of the teacher participants were 'novice teachers' in the

Table 1 Information about teacher participants

<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>L1</i>	<i>Educational background</i>	<i>Previous teaching experience</i>
Anne	29	English	BA, English	1 year teaching freshman liberal studies course at U.S. University 1 year teaching freshman liberal studies course at a U.S. community college
Maya	25	Russian	BA, English Education	6 months teaching EFL in Russia at the secondary level
Sara	33	English	BS, Physical Education	3 years teaching elementary physical education in U.S. 2 years teaching elementary EFL through physical education in Japan 2 years teaching adult basic ESL in U.S. 4 years teaching elementary ESL in U.S.

strictest sense, they were all new to teaching in this particular context: a university programme preparing international students to accomplish academic tasks in English.

During the period in which data were collected, the authors also served as teacher supervisors. Randi had over 15 years of teaching experience in a variety of subjects (both ESL and teacher training) and was in her mid-40s. She had been the director of the IEP for six years, and had conducted many observations and post-observation meetings with various cohorts of teachers. Camilla, the programme coordinator, was in her early 30s, had taught English for six years, and had one year of prior experience with teacher supervision. In spite of our different experiences, we shared a common philosophy of mentoring, and believed that our primary role was to provide support to teachers.

In addition to organising pre-semester orientations and workshops, and facilitating staff meetings during the academic year, we conducted observations in the second half of each academic semester (at least once per semester with each teacher), and met with each teacher individually to discuss the lessons observed. These post-observation meetings are the focus of our analysis.

Data collection procedures

As in many educational contexts involving novice, or pre-service teachers, scheduled teaching observations and post-observation meetings are routine activities in the IEP. Although such meetings are typically *not* audio-recorded, during the period of data collection virtually all IEP meetings (i.e. routine staff meetings, pre-semester orientation meetings, less formal mentoring sessions, etc.) *were* recorded, so that both teachers and supervisors were well accustomed to the presence of audio-recording equipment before participating in the

Table 2 Change from Semester 1 to Semester 2. Teacher/Supervisor matched pairs: Words per meeting

<i>Meeting number</i>	<i>Semester 1</i>			<i>Meeting number</i>	<i>Semester 2</i>		
1A	Anne	911	(22%)	2A	Anne	1954	(38%)
	Camilla	3243	(78%)		Camilla	3214	(62%)
1B	Maya	271	(10%)	2C	Maya	628	(34%)
	Camilla	2352	(90%)		Camilla	1226	(66%)
1C	Sara	251	(10%)	2D	Sara	1753	(45%)
	Camilla	2193	(90%)		Camilla	2106	(55%)
1D	Maya	329	(20%)	2F	Maya	466	(23%)
	Randi	1356	(80%)		Randi	1598	(77%)

post-observation meetings.⁴ Due to our dual roles in this study (i.e. as researchers and participants), we use our given names to refer to ourselves, but use pseudonyms to refer to the teachers. Nearly all of the post-observation meetings conducted in the IEP during this period were audio-recorded and transcribed.⁵

Although 12 meetings were recorded for both Semester 1 and Semester 2, because our emphasis is on change, we limit our discussion to only eight meetings (four from each semester), which represent four 'matched pairs' of teachers and supervisors (see Table 2).⁶ The total word count for this subcorpus is 23,851.

Action research dimension

Action research has been defined as a systematic investigation that has the potential to bring about a change in an existing situation (Burns, 1999). Originally envisioned as a smaller-scale study of linguistic politeness (Vásquez, 2004), the present study was not initially conceptualised as an action research project. However, as the project evolved, the opportunity to introduce and examine change became possible. Data collection and analysis were ongoing and recursive processes. As we began to analyse data from the first semester, we found ourselves in a unique position to make changes to the ways in which the meetings were conducted. Therefore, in addition to providing us with insights about the data that we might not have had as outsiders, our researchers-as-participants perspective allowed us to make efforts to bring about change, particularly when we thought those changes would lead to improvement. It is this emphasis on change and transformation related to participants' levels of participation and ways of interacting, that serves as the focus of this study. And although we recognise that there are well-known limitations – as well as tensions – associated with simultaneously occupying the positions of researchers and researched (discussed in Grimshaw, 1989; Schiffrin, 1994; Tannen, 1984, and elsewhere), we believe that the quantification of a key variable (i.e. amount of talk produced) provides an objective basis for the qualitative discussion which follows.

Quantitative Findings

This following section describes our quantitative findings and consists of three sections, organised chronologically by stages of data analysis. The first part, *Findings from Semester 1*, presents quantitative data, which were analysed by the researchers prior to conducting observations in Semester 2. In *Changing Patterns of Interaction*, we discuss how these analyses motivated changes that were implemented in the meetings conducted in Semester 2. Finally, in *Comparison of Semesters 1 and 2* we discuss the resulting changes that took place in interactions among four of the same teacher/supervisor pairs over two semesters. Our quantitative findings are then followed and supported by *Qualitative Findings*, which closely examines selected extracts from the data.

Findings from Semester 1

The meetings in Semester 1 ranged from 9 to 23 minutes, with an average length of approximately 15 minutes. Because supervisors did not follow a specific protocol for the meetings, nor did they have a prescribed set of topics to cover, the duration of each meeting was accomplished interactionally. In other words, the duration of each individual meeting was determined largely by how much the two participants had to say to one another. The variable durations of the meetings may have also been influenced by both participants' conversational styles (Tannen, 1984).

After transcribing the meetings, the total number of words per participant per meeting was calculated using a computer program written for use in this project (Jones, 2003). This program divided each meeting transcript into two files; one file for each participant, allowing an accurate word count for each meeting by participant.⁷

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of talk for four post-observation meetings from the first semester. Two adjacent bars on the graph represent one teacher/supervisor pair, with the darker lines showing the amount of talk produced by a teacher and the lighter lines indicating talk produced by the supervisor. As is evident, in this semester supervisors produced far more talk than teachers.

Changing patterns of interaction

As we began examining the transcripts from Semester 1, we were surprised to discover how unbalanced they were with respect to proportions of talk produced by supervisors and teachers. Before conducting post-observation meetings in Semester 2, we agreed that if the primary objective of these meetings was to provide teachers with discursive spaces in which they could reflect on their own teaching practice, first they needed to be given opportunities to produce more talk. As a result, we developed a template of possible questions to generate more discussion from teachers, and to encourage them to reflect on and talk about the class observed. These are set out in the *Qualitative Changes* section. Our job as supervisors would be to guide the teachers in their critical thinking – rather than to present them with our version of 'what happened' in the class observed – and to shift the resulting post-observation meetings to be more

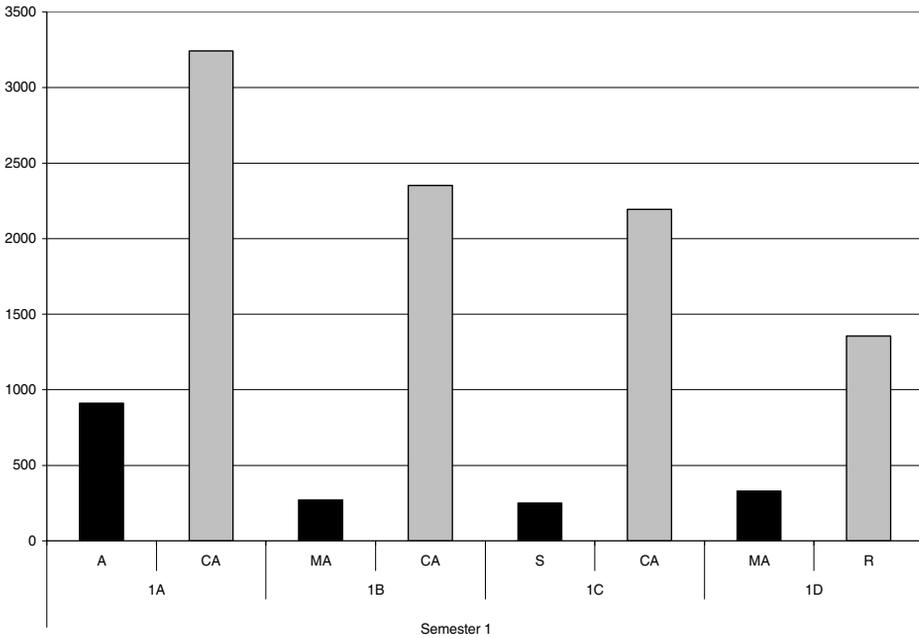


Figure 1 Teacher/Supervisor interactions from Semester 1

'teacher-centred', and less 'supervisor-centred'. In other words, we consciously attempted to elicit more talk from the teachers in Semester 2 than we had in Semester 1.

Comparison of Semesters 1 and 2

The meetings in Semester 2 were only slightly longer than those in the previous semester, and ranged from 11 minutes to 26 minutes, with an average length of approximately 18 minutes. Figure 2 presents the distribution of talk from Semester 2. It is clear, from comparing Figure 2 to Figure 1, that the amount of talk produced by all teachers increased in Semester 2. Also, there are less dramatic differences in proportions of teacher/supervisor talk in Figure 2 when compared to Figure 1.

Table 2 shows the counts for the total number of words produced by each speaker, in each meeting. The relative proportion of talk produced by each teacher and supervisor participant is included as a percentage for each of the eight meetings. Examining the total number of words per speaker in these same four pairs of speakers meetings allows for a more nuanced view of trends in the data. In the first semester, the average number of words produced by teachers per meeting was 441. In contrast, teachers produced an average of 1200 words per meeting in Semester 2, reflecting the major increase in teacher involvement in the second semester, when compared to the first.

Table 2 shows that, in general, the amount of talk produced by supervisors stayed approximately the same, or in some cases decreased slightly from Semester 1 to Semester 2. In contrast to the supervisors, however, all of the teachers in the four teacher/supervisor matched pairs showed an increase in total

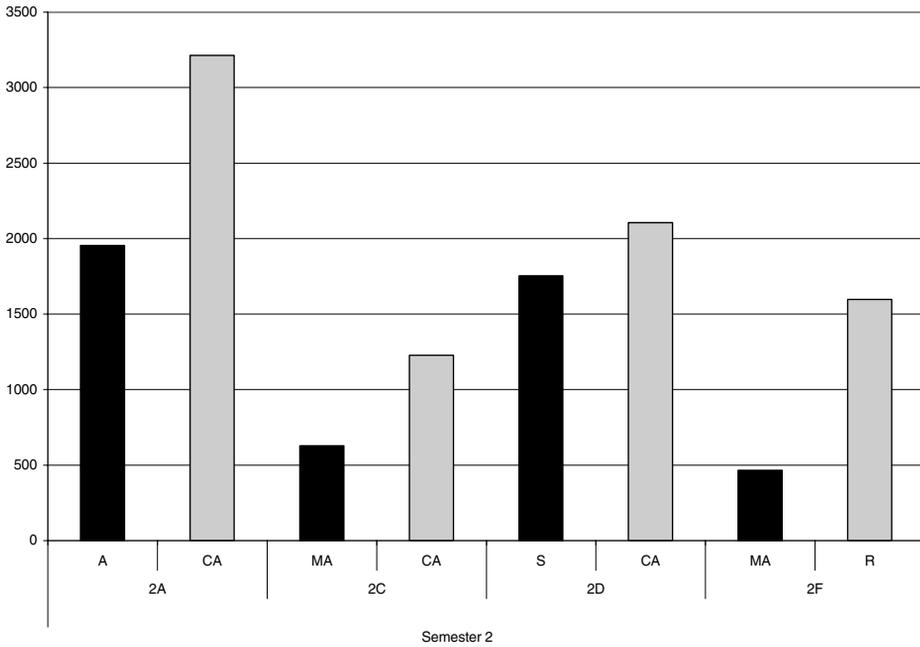


Figure 2 Teacher/Supervisor interactions from Semester 2

words per meeting from Semester 1 to Semester 2. A comparison of averages supports this trend: in Semester 1 supervisors were responsible for approximately 84% of the talk and teachers for 16%, while in Semester 2, supervisors produced 65% of the talk and teachers produced 35%.

In examining the levels of participation of individual teachers, the amount of talk produced by teachers Anne and Sara increased dramatically from Semester 1 to Semester 2, with Anne producing twice as much talk in the second semester, and Sara producing over four times as much talk as she did in Semester 1. Maya’s volubility increased only slightly from Semester 1 to Semester 2 in her meetings with Randi; in her meetings with Camilla, the amount of talk Maya produced in Semester 2 more than doubled. Nevertheless, even in Semester 2, Maya’s levels of participation do not approach those of Sara or Anne. It is possible that Maya’s status as a non-native speaker of English may have played some role in her taciturnity; the majority of teachers, including Anne and Sara, were native speakers of English. However, data from subsequent semesters (i.e. 3 and 4) included two other female teachers who were non-native speakers of English (and who were also comparable to Maya in age, educational background and prior teaching experience), both of whom were equally, or more, talkative than the native-English speaking teachers in the study. As a result, we believe that differences in individual conversational style (rather than L1, age or prior teaching experience) were the most important factors in accounting for consistent patterns in volubility among teacher participants. In the section that follows we examine examples of our interactions with Maya in further detail.

Qualitative Findings

The quantitative analysis reported in the *Quantitative Findings* section was conducted during the data collection. In other words, we examined word counts and proportions of teacher/supervisor talk from Semester 1 prior to conducting our post-observation meetings in Semester 2. In contrast, the closer textual analysis that follows was conducted after data collection was completed.⁸ And although this information did not specifically inform the changes that we made, we believe that it helps to shed light on the relationship between how these interactions were initiated and how they progressed.

Of course, it is neither possible nor appropriate – in this type of study – to claim that any single factor was responsible for teachers' increased volubility in Semester 2. However, it is likely that a combination of factors contributed to this trend. Certainly, one set of factors related to this increase was: (1) that the teachers had already completed one semester of teaching in the IEP, and were teaching for the second semester – making them perhaps more comfortable and confident in their role as teachers and (2) that they had already experienced one post-observation meeting with this particular supervisor, and therefore knew what they might expect from such a meeting. Teachers may have observed that the meeting was not exclusively limited to the evaluation of teaching ability, but rather that the meetings also functioned as an opportunity for both participants to discuss and share perspectives about the class, the students and teaching in general.

Another possible factor that contributed to this change, as discussed earlier, was our conscious decision to make the meetings more 'teacher-centred' and less 'supervisor-centred', and our deliberate attempt to elicit more talk from the teachers. In many cases, we may have also explicitly raised teachers' awareness of this change of expectations in the openings of the Semester 2 meetings, as is discussed in the following section, *Metadiscursive Positioning*.

Metadiscursive positioning

Positioning as discursive practice refers to 'all the ways in which people actively produce social and psychological realities' (Davies & Harré, 1990: 45). Davies and Harré distinguish between *reflexive* positioning (in which a speaker positions him/herself) and *interactive* positioning (in which what one person says positions another). By metadiscursive positioning, we refer specifically to the ways in which participants position themselves – as well as how they are positioned by others – in their discourse roles as speaker/listener. A comparison between the same supervisor's language in the opening of Semester 1 meeting with Maya (Extract 1) and in Semester 2 (Extract 2) illustrates an important contrast in how teachers can be variously positioned by supervisors at the beginning of a post-observation meeting (see Appendix for transcription conventions).

Extract 1 (from meeting 1B)

Camilla: Yes, good. OK I **have** nothing but positive things **to tell you**
Maya: Oh great

Camilla: {so uh um let's see- so **I just wanted to kinda talk** through what I observed and **let you know** what I saw. Um, so most of your students came in on time. . .

In Semester 1, Maya is positioned as a listener, or as a passive recipient of information, by the supervisor's statements, *I have nothing but positive things to tell you*, and *I just wanted to kinda talk through what I observed and let you know what I saw*. Nowhere in the supervisor's opening comments in Extract 1 is there a mention of any expectation of Maya's active participation in the meeting.

In contrast, in Semester 2 (Extract 2) the same supervisor explains that a programmatic decision has been made that the meetings will be more 'teacher-centred'.

Extract 2 (from meeting 2C)

- Camilla:** Ok so Randi and I have decided that we are going to make the post-observation meetings **more 'teacher-centred'** this time around
- Maya:** {Ok
- Camilla:** So um basically-and this is perfect since the class just got out and everything's fresh in your mind um-
- Maya:** {mhm
- Camilla:** **I'd like to ask you** if you- if there's anything um that you think you would have done differently, or anything that you would have changed about the class if you could have . . .

The initial goal of making the meetings in Semester 2 more 'teacher-centred' is then reinforced with a question posed to Maya, indicating that her active participation in the meeting is desired. When comparing the distribution of talk in the two meetings (see Table 2), the amount of talk produced by Maya more than doubled in Semester 2, and the amount of talk produced by the same supervisor decreased by almost half, suggesting that both participants had – to some extent – taken up different discursive positions in Semester 2. This change indicates that not only it is important for supervisors to be aware of how their language positions teachers during these interactions (i.e. supervisor's other-positioning may have some effect on participants' expectations for the meetings, and their resulting levels of participation), but also that it is possible for both participants to make adjustments or changes to their levels of participation in these meetings after becoming aware of their existing discourse practices.

In Extract 3 from another Semester 2 meeting, the supervisor again shifts the emphasis from herself as speaker, to the teacher as speaker. Furthermore, she makes explicit reference to having given consideration to the teacher's (Sara's) responses during an interview, which had been conducted for research purposes.⁹

Extract 3 (from meeting 2D)

- Camilla:** So um I thought that maybe this time - and actually **this is because of some of your comments** during the interview when we talked

Sara: mhm

Camilla: it would be good to maybe- **for me to ask you** what your impressions were . . .

Again, this example reveals that the post-observation data were shaped by ongoing analysis. Specifically, Sara is informed that, as a result of her previous comments (*actually this is because of some of your comments during the interview when we talked*),¹⁰ she is now invited to take a more active role in the meeting. Looking back at teachers' patterns of participation in Table 2, of the three teachers, Sara showed the most dramatic increase in the amount of talk she contributed from Semester 1 to Semester 2. Perhaps in Sara's case, this increase is attributable not only to the overtly-stated change in expectation, but also to a more personal investment in the meeting, because of the indication that her ideas were valued and had been taken into consideration by the supervisors.

Qualitative changes

Posing questions to teachers during these interactions allows them to engage in reflection, to think critically, and to approach teaching as a decision-making process. In examining the transcripts of Semester 1 meetings, we found that we typically only asked the teacher one question per meeting, including questions such as 'Would you say that the class I observed was a fairly typical class?' or 'If I were to visit your class again, what would you want me to look for?' In contrast, in Semester 2, we found that we asked, on average, 3–4 questions per meeting, including the types of questions asked during Semester 1 as well as more focussed questions which oriented to a specific aspect of the lesson observed, chosen randomly from our template: What would you perceive to be the strengths/weaknesses of the class that I observed? What do you think worked particularly well? What would you have changed or done differently? What are your feelings about the effectiveness of activities, the variety of activities, your pace/timing, the clarity of your instructions, the level of student involvement? In examining our data, we found that asking more questions in Semester 2 had the important effects of turning the floor over to the teachers and allowing supervisors to become less directive.

In this section, we take a closer look at changes in the patterns of participation from Semester 1 to Semester 2, between one teacher and supervisor pair (Maya and Camilla). We chose to focus on Maya because even though she became more actively involved in the Semester 2 meeting, of all the teacher participants she produced the least amount of talk in Semester 2. Therefore, a closer examination of the talk produced during Maya's meetings helps shed light on how even subtle changes, or shifts, in levels of participation can result in qualitative differences.

Extract 4 below represents a portion of one of Maya's Semester 1 post-observation meetings.

Extract 4 (from meeting 1B)

Camilla: . . . and then you reminded them of- and that was good too, I think When you were writing on the board and you turned around and you saw that some of them were just sitting there thinking and you said, 'OK don't think about it too much. Just write'. So kind of reminding them you're aware of what's going on, even though you're writing on the board.

Maya: mhm

Camilla: and you know taking care of everything. Ok, and then um you previewed the text that was the next assignment and you said 'It's interesting, but a little bit long'. I think that's good also: to give them some expectations um [unclear]. And then you reminded Adam and Eddie that they need to do their email journals because it's ten [laughing] percent of their grade

Maya: {[laughing] mhm

Camilla: Good. And so um in summary I think that you had really a good rate of speech. Your – you speak – your, you know, pacing is just absolutely perfect. . .

Maya: mhm

As can be seen in Table 2 and Figures 1 and 2, Maya was the least 'verbally active' of all teacher participants. Extract 4 is very representative of the majority of Maya's meetings from Semester 1, in which the supervisors provided descriptions of class and positive feedback, and Maya's participation consisted primarily of minimal responses or, at the most, three-to-four word turns. This extract shows that the supervisor has asked no questions, and the primary mode of interacting appears to be the one that has been established at the opening of the meeting: supervisor as 'teller' and teacher as 'listener'.

In contrast, even though the amount of talk Maya produced did not increase as dramatically (from Semester 1 to Semester 2) as that of the other teachers, the following extracts from her Semester 2 meeting show Maya's increased level of participation and production of much longer turns. Even though others (e.g. Waite, 1993) might not consider Maya's role to be a very 'active' one (i.e. most of the talk she produces consists of responses to supervisors' questions, and she initiates very few new topics herself), her talk in Extracts 5 and 6 shows that she is not only actively engaging with relevant issues related to her teaching and evaluating her own performance, but she is also commenting on her role and identity as a teacher. Maya's response in line 1 of Extract 5 is in response to the question posed by Camilla at the end of Extract 2 (i.e. *I'd like to ask you if you- if there's anything um that you think you would have done differently, or anything that you would have changed about the class if you could have. . .*)

Extract 5 (from meeting 2C)

Maya: mm well um I finished like three minutes early

Camilla: {[laughing]

- Maya:** {[unclear] because I didn't know what to do. I should have had more ah backup questions or something
- Camilla:** {[laughing] actually I think it seemed right on time to me
- Maya:** {[unclear]
- Camilla:** {but OK
- Maya:** um [pause] it was – I had a good feeling about it because everybody was prepared
- Camilla:** {mhm
- Maya:** Sometimes when they don't come a hundred percent prepared it's difficult to you know get everybody involved and [unclear]. It's a hard question.
- Camilla:** I know . . . Well you know maybe if you think about the students' participation, their involvement. Is there anything you would have changed, you know if you could move the seating arrangement around to suit your needs I mean
- Maya:** yeah it probably would have been a good idea to make them move maybe make them work in pairs and so they have to change seats
- Camilla:** {mhm
- Maya:** So that was kind of too passive [laugh] um and maybe think of – that's my trouble, I can never think of fun activity, where everybody would be moving and you know just sort of – because reading is – can be boring [laugh]
- Camilla:** {mhm
- Maya:** and so I always try to think of activities that um involve them more and maybe some physical activities
- Camilla:** {mhm
- Maya:** so I didn't do it this time and that's I think my problem as a teacher because it always takes me a while to think of stuff like that
- Camilla:** {uhhuh
- Maya:** I know that I have to um do it but it just doesn't come natural [laugh]
- Camilla:** {so you yeah OK so it's something that you're aware of and that you try to incorporate some more physical
- Maya:** {yeah

In Extract 5, Maya initially responds to the supervisor's question with a comment about a somewhat trivial point: finishing class three minutes early. And although Maya seems willing to abandon this topic (*It's a hard question*), when the supervisor re-formulates her original question making its focus more precise, Maya responds with a more elaborate discussion of needing to pay more attention to facilitating higher levels of student activity and involvement in her class. Williams and Watson (2004) suggest that teachers' use of modals serve as an index of verbalised reflection. In this sense, Maya engages in reflection by discussing what she could have done to improve the lesson (. . . *it probably would have been a good idea to make them move may be work in pairs and so they have to change seats*). She then offers a more critical analysis of the lesson (. . . *so that was kind of too passive . . .*), revising her original evaluation (. . . *I had a good feeling*

about it . . .). In addition to providing a more critical assessment, Maya continues with an interesting discussion of her identity as a teacher and some of the challenges that she experiences (*That's my trouble, I can never think of fun activity . . . ; that's I think my problem as a teacher because it always takes me a while to think of stuff like that . . .*)

Supervisors' questions open up discursive spaces for teachers and allow them to articulate their own awareness of their teaching practice. In some cases, as in Extract 5, this facilitates the discussion of areas where they can make improvements in their teaching (i.e. self-critique), but as Extract 6 shows, these discursive spaces can also provide teachers with an opportunity to reflect and comment on their current practices which are highly effective.

Extract 6 (from meeting 2C)

Camilla: . . . And then, um, what are your feelings about like the clarity of your instructions? When you told them to do things

Maya: um, I think it's clear because they can always – they can also see it in the written form

Camilla: {mhm

Maya: and then I try to rephrase it and make sure they understand

Camilla: {mhm

Maya: and when I start walking around when they start doing it I make sure that everybody understands what they're doing

Camilla: mhm, right. And the activities are pretty straightforward as well, And how about

Maya: {Did you think I gave clear directions?

Camilla: No, I did! I DID!

In response to the supervisor's question about a specific topic (i.e. clarity of instructions), Maya responds by offering evidence of three actions that she performs to ensure that students understand her instructions: (1) writing instructions on the board, (2) rephrasing instructions and (3) monitoring student progress as they begin the activity. By verbally articulating the techniques she uses, Maya is able to reinforce for herself her own successful teaching practices.

Extracts 5 and 6, from one of her Semester 2 meetings, illustrate Maya's willingness to adopt a more active role in response to a stated change in expectations (i.e. Extract 2). Thus, in general, supervisors' questions appeared to be productive in eliciting more talk from teachers. Nevertheless, Extract 6 indicates that even when expectations about interactants' participation are made explicit at the opening of a meeting, teachers may 'misread' supervisors' intentions and interpret supervisors' questions as a type of indirect criticism, even when they are not intended as such.¹¹ The ambiguous force of supervisors' questions is, no doubt, related to the tension inherent in this type of speech activity, which most often entails the dual goals of evaluating a teacher's performance as well as encouraging the teacher to reflect on her teaching.

Conclusions

This study provides evidence of variability in a corpus of post-observation meetings recorded in the same programme, in which a number of key situational variables (i.e. setting, participants) remained the same over time. Our study suggests that measures of volubility may serve as a useful unit of analysis for a preliminary understanding of participant interactions in post-observation meetings. By looking at a relatively simple variable, such as the number of words produced by each speaker, it becomes immediately evident that there is not only 'one canonical post-observation conversation', as has been suggested by one author (Arcario, 1994). Instead, as we have shown, there are sometimes dramatic differences in how the post-observation meeting is realised in terms of relative distribution of talk. In other words it is not simply the supervisor controlling the direction of the meeting (as has been suggested by Waite, 1993), but rather, *both* participants contributing to the patterns of interaction and levels of participation that evolve in a particular post-observation meeting. The post-observation meeting is a complex type of speech activity and one that is jointly constructed and negotiated by all individuals who participate in it. If it were 'but one conversation', then there would certainly be less extreme variability in the distribution of talk among teacher and supervisor participants.

We have also shown that in four teacher/supervisor matched-pairs, teacher volubility increased from Semester 1 to Semester 2. We discussed a number of factors that might have contributed to this change, one of which was a motivated decision by the supervisors to ask more questions, thereby providing teachers with more opportunities to talk. We believe that distributions of teacher/supervisor talk are not fixed, but rather can be changed, when supervisors and teachers deliberately make an effort to adjust their behaviour. Certainly, our own behaviours were transformed due to our analysis and increased awareness of our existing practices. Although we have focused here on the comparison of eight pairs of teacher/supervisor interactions (matched for participants) taking place over two semesters, we believe that this change in our awareness and our sensitivity to our own patterns of interaction have had longer lasting effects. For example, in the larger study (Vásquez, 2005), which examined 19 post-observation meetings from four semesters, teachers spoke less in Semester 1, than in any of the three subsequent semesters. We also compared the proportions of teacher/supervisor talk from Semester 1 post-observation meetings (16% and 84%, respectively), with the proportions of talk in the following academic year – when we interacted with a new set of teachers – and found that the proportion of talk was 46% and 54%, respectively. Thus, 1 year later, we were able to improve our own practice, by becoming less dominant and less directive, with the insights we gained as a result of this study.

Our privileged position as both researchers and participants afforded us many opportunities, which included becoming more aware of our patterns of interaction, and responding to our increased awareness by making changes we felt would improve the quality of our interactions with teachers in our programme. And although these changes may have resulted in more balanced levels of participation, we have also become aware that increased levels of questioning may make some teachers uneasy. Advocated by many classic works on teacher

supervision (e.g. Acheson & Gall, 1997; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002), questioning can be a powerful technique for stimulating teachers' discussion of their challenges and problems, as well as of their strengths and accomplishments. Nevertheless, we provide the results of our analysis with the caveat that although posing questions may be a key ingredient in helping teachers develop a reflective practice, it should also be combined with some reassurance that teachers are 'on the right track', when this is, indeed, the case. Research on the feedback styles preferred by teachers (e.g. Copeland, 1980) indicates that this may be especially true for those teachers with little prior experience.

Furthermore, the analysis of the metadiscursive positioning that takes place at the opening of a meeting shows that this type of positioning may have important implications for the patterns of participation reflected in the meetings themselves. The present study suggests that it is precisely this type of talk, located at the opening of the meetings, that 'sets the stage' and establishes the interactional roles and responsibilities for each participant. As a result, supervisors should be aware of how they position themselves and teachers in their opening remarks during meetings. When supervisors position themselves as the primary speakers and simultaneously position teachers primarily as listeners – or recipients of talk – it is not surprising that those are the discourse roles that are enacted in the ensuing conversation. In contrast, the present findings suggest that when teachers are metadiscursively positioned as active contributors in the post-observation conversation, it is likely that they will participate more actively than they might otherwise. We therefore urge supervisors to make explicit the expectations for both participants to be actively involved in post-observation meetings, and – if possible – to also be more clear about their motives in asking questions.

Finally, just as we hope to encourage teachers to become more aware of their teaching practice through these types of mentoring activities, we believe that – through conducting action research – teacher supervisors can also develop an increased awareness of their *own* mentoring practices and patterns of participation.

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Notes

1. Parts of this paper were presented at the 2nd Inter-Varietal Applied Corpus Studies (IVACS) Group International Conference, Queen's University, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 2004 and at the Fourth International Conference on Language Teacher Education, held in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 2005.
2. We prefer the label 'post-observation meeting' to other alternatives, because we feel it is more specific (i.e. a 'feedback conference' could refer to an activity such as a writing conference between a teacher and a student, and a 'supervisory conference' does not necessarily entail an observation).
3. Similarly, many studies that have adopted a coding system to the analysis of data from meetings (e.g. Christianson, 1988; O'Neal, 1983) ignore the multipragmatic potential of any single utterance, and devote little attention to the methodological difficulties associated to coding a single statement that can often be described

- by multiple categories, which are also often, in themselves, quite vague (e.g. 'evaluation').
4. Video-recording these meetings would have, no doubt, resulted in an opportunity to gather important non-linguistic information such as gestures, facial expressions, etc. Nevertheless, we felt that the introduction of video-recording equipment would have represented a major intrusion in the private one-on-one meetings. Consequently, we decided to use a considerably less obtrusive audiotape recorder, which because of its small size and portability, enabled us to record most of our meetings over a 2-year period (i.e. not only the post-observation meetings, but also weekly staff meetings, orientation sessions and so on), which, in turn, resulted in participants being accustomed to the presence of the recording device. We doubt that the same would have been possible with the introduction of video equipment.
 5. During this period, only two additional meetings were held but were not recorded. In one case, the teacher did not wish to participate in the study, and in the other, the meeting was held in an off-campus location, where recording equipment was unavailable.
 6. The remaining four meetings (i.e. two from each semester) consisted of teacher/supervisor pairs that occurred only once.
 7. Each of the split files was cleaned prior to running the word count function. All bracketed words providing contextual information (e.g. [laughing], [phone rings], [loudly], etc.) were deleted. Also, any talk that was directed to a participant other than a teacher participant or supervisor participant (e.g. supervisor answering the telephone during a meeting, supervisor answering a question from a student who interrupts a meeting, etc.) was deleted. Finally, every instance of an incomprehensible utterance (indicated by an [unclear]) was counted as one word, since it could be reasonably assumed that each unclear utterance represented minimally one word.
 8. Ideally, not only the quantitative analysis but also the qualitative analysis would have been conducted prior to the Semester 2 meetings. However, the practical constraints of time only allowed us to examine word counts, and quickly read over the transcripts from the Semester 1 meetings before conducting the Semester 2 meetings. More in-depth qualitative analysis was begun following Semester 2.
 9. Each teacher completed a questionnaire and participated in an interview; these represented secondary data sources for the larger study (i.e. Vásquez, 2005).
 10. Sara's 'comments during the interview' were related to giving teachers an opportunity to provide their own constructive criticism.
 11. Blumberg and Cusik (1969) and Kutoglu-Eken (1999) have also noted mismatches between supervisor and teacher perceptions about the intended meanings associated with certain types of feedback.

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Appendix : Transcription Conventions

. pause of one second.

.. two second pause, etc.

, phrase final intonation.

{ speaker overlap.

? yes/no question or rising intonation.

- cutting off of sound.

[] used to comment on non-linguistic sounds, quality of speech or context.

CAPS emphatic stress.