

ED 661 - Language Teacher Supervision, Dr. Kathi Bailey
Discourse Analysis of Supervisory Feedback: December 1, 2004

The purpose of this assignment was to analyze the language discourse in the speech event of giving supervisory feedback to teachers. Secondary requirements included the professional practice of observation and setting appointments for pre- and post-observation conferences. The assignment allowed me to practice various aspects of language teacher supervision including: choice of data collection method, awareness and attitude reflection, the post-observation conference, and situational roles of teaching.

I analyzed my use of mitigation in supervisory discourse for three separate teaching observations of one hour each. I recorded the dialogue in the post-observation conference with the teacher's permission, and transcribed at least 15 minutes of conversation. Using the transcription, I analyzed the discourse using a framework set forth by Ruth Wajnryb in a series of articles (1994, 1995). This framework outlines three types of mitigation (hyper-, hypo-, and above-the-utterance level) and mitigation strategies (syntactic, semantic, and indirect). In addition to Wajnryb's framework, I analyzed the transcript with another framework, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)(1978). I chose the ZPD because the situation of a supervisor assisting a teacher to perform beyond his/her teaching ability is similar to Vygotsky's framework of an expert to student relationship that involves micro-genesis and mediation. Finally, the assignment required each student to integrate relevant literature with his or her discussion.

As a result of my data analysis, I observed that I didn't have the same supervisory role with each teacher, nor did I maintain the same role during the course of each teacher's post-observation conference. I didn't have the power or experience

relationship with any of my observees that could be defined as that of an expert to student. One thing that was not found in my observation notes was a recording of non-verbal communication, which Chamberlain (2000) claims is built, not spoken. In the future, I will be more sensitive to this aspect of communication in future conferences. Finally, I was under the impression that my language use was very guarded and void of mitigating devices. The transcript told a different story. When age difference or education level was a factor, I used more hedging devices to save face, meaning avoid embarrassment, from appearing too arrogant or knowledgeable when the power differential demanded my deference.

This assignment contributed to my learning in many ways. It allowed me the opportunity to synthesize skills and knowledge from other courses (namely Language Analysis and Second Language Acquisition) to investigate an issue that is tangential to teaching but nevertheless important. It increased my self-awareness of how my verbal and nonverbal language affects others. In the process of completing this assignment, I realized that performing discourse analysis of hedging devices will be a valuable tool in my professional practice as a language program administrator because I must be sensitive to the way that I deliver feedback to the teachers whom I am supervising.

References

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- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.