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AUTHORS: Fatma GÜMÜSOK

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## **An investigation of post-teaching conferences: politeness in receiving criticism**

**Fatma Gümüřok<sup>1</sup>**

Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey

### **Abstract**

This study examined the discourse of student teachers in post-teaching conferences. More specifically, the study sought to analyze the politeness strategies Turkish student teachers of English language utilized while responding to criticisms addressed to one specific student teacher or the whole group by their supervisor. Given that receiving criticism is a face threatening act, it is of vital importance to examine how student teachers behave in such situations while addressing to a more-powerful person, their supervisor. The naturally occurring data for this study come from 145 minutes-long post-teaching conference sessions. The researcher analyzed the data through Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies (1987). The results revealed that student teachers accepted nearly all of the criticism the supervisor delivered. Student teachers mostly resorted to positive politeness strategies to create a sense of solidarity within their groups. They also employed negative politeness strategies to dissociate themselves from the criticized act. Consequently, the findings suggest that Turkish student teachers do not have specific preferences for positive or negative politeness strategies in the case of responding to criticism. They utilized similar strategies in both responding to criticisms addressed to one specific student teacher and to the whole group.

**Keywords:** Politeness strategies, post-teaching conferences, receiving criticism

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<sup>1</sup> Email: fgumusok@metu.edu.tr

## **Introduction**

The practicum holds a particular place in second language teacher education. This is a delicate stage in which student teachers experience their first professional teaching in cooperative schools with actual pupils and witness the complex and multiple sides of teaching. They can be taken aback by its demands and may feel afraid of failure, of lack of deference by pupils and cooperative teachers, and of possible issues with classroom management and instruction (Hascher, Cocard & Moser, 2004). However, they are not alone in this process, they are supported by mentor teachers in practice schools and supervisors on campus via the system of supervision.

Supervision provides a cooperative study environment for student teachers. A supervisor is “anyone who has... the duty of monitoring and improving the quality of teaching done by other colleagues in an educational situation” (Wallace, 1991, p. 107). Supervision aims at assisting student teachers to articulate their insights, construct their own knowledge and be autonomous eventually. Supervisors achieve this goal by introducing student teachers to the practicing schools, assign them observation tasks to see the realities of a language classroom, help them design their teaching, observe their teaching and finally provide them with feedback right after their assessed teaching. In the so-called post-teaching conferences also known as ‘supervisory meetings’, supervisors and student teachers come together, reflect on and discuss student teachers’ teaching.

These post-teaching conferences draw particular attention in the field since supervisors are expected to provide feedback to student teachers and most of the time the nature of feedback is negative. Feedback in post-teaching conferences is based on the fact that it offers an alternative interpretation of the discussed teaching, contributes to student teachers’ raising awareness on profession, and helps them alter their behavior and improve their teaching (Bailey, 2006). On the other hand, giving feedback “carries the potential of being an agonizing experience for both” student teachers and supervisors since there is the possibility of losing face as a result of delivering negative feedback, criticism (Shrigley & Walker, 1981 as cited in Bailey, 2006, p. 144). In addition, the unequal power distribution in these meetings -supervisors as the authority and student teachers as the needy party- further contributes to the face threatening nature of supervision (Bailey, 2006; Copland, 2012; Vasquez, 2004). Although supervisors are seen as the more powerful person and expected to criticize student teachers, they prefer avoiding criticism. In other words, “there is a natural reluctance to deliver bad news” among supervisors (Wajnryb, as cited in Bailey, 2006, p. 155). That is why when supervisors attempt to criticize student teachers, they try to mask it as much as possible by using gentle words in order to create a positive environment and sustain the cooperative relationship (Bailey, 2006).

The hierarchical positioning of student teachers and supervisors in the supervision system, and the face threatening nature of giving criticism have driven a few researchers to focus on supervisors’ speech and investigate their discourse (Akcan & Tatar, 2010; Roberts, 1992; Vasquez, 2004). How student teachers respond to supervisors’ overall feedback particularly in the case of criticism is an under-researched topic; their discourse has not received sufficient attention. Moreover, what is overlooked in these supervisory meetings is

the fact that these are not dyadic in nature in most of the contexts (Copland, 2011). In other words, there are more than one student teacher because student teachers generally attend these conferences as a group, which makes these meetings “semi-public platform events” (Copland, 2011, p. 3832). This characteristics of conferences is missing in the studies which focused on supervisory discourse (Akcan & Tatar, 2010; Roberts, 1992; Vasquez, 2004). In this sense, student teachers’ discourse as a group should be particularly explored in these meetings. Given that some face-threatening acts like criticism are acceptable and even unavoidable in these feedback conferences (Copland, 2011); the unequal power distribution between student teachers and supervisors affects their discourse; student teachers attend these conferences as a group or pair; and their responses to criticisms have not been sufficiently explored, this study aims to seek how Turkish student teachers of English as a foreign language respond to a supervisor’s criticism as a group in an English-medium university in Turkey. In this regard, the following research questions lead the present study:

1. How do student teachers respond to a supervisor’s criticism in post-teaching conferences as a group?
  - 1.a. What kind of politeness strategies do student teachers utilize to respond to a) the criticism addressed to one student teacher in the group and b) the criticism addressed to the whole group?

## **Theoretical Framework**

In the present study, Brown and Levinson’s (henceforth, B&L) Politeness Theory (1987) is adopted as the framework since as they suggest this model is about “the quality of social relationships” (p. 55) and it regards interaction as “the expression of social relationships and crucially built out of strategic language use” (p. 56). Since the power issues inherent in supervision require a meticulous and strategic language use in supervisory meetings, B&L’s Politeness Framework fits well into the context of the study.

B&L (1987) developed their politeness framework, inspired by Goffman’s definition of face, which is “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself” (1967, p.5). They defined face as “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself....something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction” (1987, p. 61). Since face can be maintained as long as other people’s face is respected, B&L (1987) suggested that it is always good for everyone’s best interest to maintain each other’s face. They further divided their concept of face into two: positive face and negative face. Positive face refers to people’s desire to be respected and approved, their want other people to appreciate their positive qualities. On the other hand, negative face means people’s desire to be autonomous, unimpeded by others. As Trees and Manusov (1998) suggested, B&L’s framework used “face concerns to explain communication outside of that necessary for efficient and clear accomplishment of message goals” (p. 565).

On the other hand, some certain acts known as ‘face threatening acts’ (FTAs) do not satisfy speakers and hearers’ face wants. FTAs can function in two distinctive ways: (1) they

threaten either positive or negative face, and (2) they threaten either the speaker's or listener's face (B&L, 1987). Speech acts such as apologies and confessions or admissions of guilt are face threatening acts to the speaker's positive face. Nevertheless, acts like giving thanks and acceptance of offers are threatening the speaker's negative face. Regarding the hearer's part, expressions of disapproval, criticism, disagreements, and challenges put pressure on the hearer's positive face. The hearer's negative face is badly threatened by orders, requests, suggestions, and threats by the speaker.

With regards to the present study, criticism and receiving criticism (accepting-challenging) should be specified clearly from the perspective of which and whose face is threatened. Criticism is "an illocutionary act whose illocutionary point is to give negative evaluation of the hearer's (H) actions, choice, words, and products for which he or she may be held responsible" (Nguyen, 2008, p. 770). Nguyen (2008) further elaborated that the speaker performs this act in order to influence the hearer's action for the hearer's betterment or express her lack of satisfaction with the hearer's action. In this sense, criticism threatens the hearer's positive face as the speaker does not appreciate the hearer's deeds. Besides, as B&L (1987) expressed some acts threaten both positive and negative face simultaneously, criticism poses threats to the hearer's negative face since there is the expectation from the speaker on the hearer's side for the betterment of the concerned, criticized performance, limiting her autonomy (Hatipoğlu 2009; Trees & Manusov, 1998). As for responding to criticism, accepting or rejecting it makes a difference. Firstly, responding to criticism is a post-event, it is a reaction to the speaker's asserted negative evaluation of the hearer's action. If the speaker (hearer in criticism) accepts criticism, this threatens her own positive face since her need to be approved and respected is not satisfied. Accepting criticism can be considered quite similar to B&L's (1987) expression of "confessions, admissions of guilt or responsibility" (p. 68) regarding the acts that directly threaten the speaker's positive face. On the contrary, when the speaker (hearer in criticism) challenges it, this poses a threat to the hearer's positive face. As B&L (1987) suggested, challenging is always a face threatening act to the hearer's positive face.

When there is the possibility of face being badly damaged, people may avoid face-threatening acts or attempt to mitigate the effects of their possible threats (Hatipoğlu, 2006, 2012, 2016). B&L (1987) provided five strategies in order to handle face threatening acts. Their first strategy is to remain silence and not to perform the act. The second strategy is to do it off-record in an indirect, implicit way. The other way is to perform it on record, very explicitly and directly. On-record FTAs are divided into two: (1) on-record without redressive action, baldy; and (2) on-record with redressive action. The former suggests performing the FTA in the most direct, clear way possible while the latter implies that FTAs are done with such modifications or additions that speakers clearly indicate that no face threat is intended. On-record with redressive action can be performed in two ways: (1) use of positive politeness, and (2) use of negative politeness.

Positive politeness strategies which are also known as "the expression of solidarity" (B&L, 1987, p. 2) are employed to address positive face of the hearer through emphasis on the similarity between the speaker and the hearer. There exist three major ways of expressing

positive politeness: (1) claim common ground, (2) convey that the speaker and the hearer are cooperative, and (3) fulfill the hearer's want. These positive strategies assert that the speaker desires to come closer to the hearer or appreciate the hearer's want overall.

On the other hand, negative politeness strategies, "expression of restraint" (B&L, 1987, p. 2) are needed to address to the negative face of the hearer. Negative politeness minimizes the unavoidable restriction of an FTA by acknowledging the hearer's basic want to be unimpeded. Therefore, negative politeness is characterized by "self-effacement, and formality" (B&L, 1987, p. 70). There are five main negative politeness strategies: (1) be direct, (2) don't presume or assume, (3) don't coerce the hearer, (4) communicate the speaker's want to not impinge on the hearer, and (5) redress other wants of the hearer's, derivate from negative face.

B&L (1987) claimed that people may use these strategies based on the seriousness of FTAs which is affected by three sociological variables: (1) power, (2) distance, and (3) ranking. Relative power implies the asymmetrical relationship between the speaker and the hearer. It is "the degree to which H (hearer) can impose his own plan and his own self-evaluation (face) at the expense of S' (speaker) plans and self-evaluation" (B&L, 1987, p. 77). On the contrary, distance is about the degree of similarity-difference between the speaker and the hearer. It suggests a symmetrical relationship. Ranking, on the other hand, is about the imposition of the speech act on the hearer's need of approval and appreciation (positive face) and her desire to be unimpeded (negative face). All these three variables are context-specific, they are applicable for the specific speech act at the specific time.

When post-teaching conferences are reconsidered from the point of sociological variables of politeness strategies, the asymmetrical relationship between student teachers and supervisors-relative power- becomes a salient feature (Copland, 2012; Vasquez, 2004). The relative power seems to dominate supervisors' discourse in their attempts to maintain their harmonious relationship (Bailey, 2006). In a similar vein, regarding the choice of doing FTAs, supervisors seem to go on record with redressive action so as to be supportive of student teachers and create a positive atmosphere (Bailey, 2006). However, how student teachers do FTAs in these meetings has not been sufficiently explored to the researcher's knowledge.

## Literature Review

It is clearly acknowledged that feedback discourse in post-teaching conferences is underresearched (Copland, 2012, Vázquez, 2004). The focus of a few studies is supervisors' language as supervisors generally avoid giving explicit criticism, try to provide support and create a friendly environment for student teachers (Bailey, 2006). For instance, Wajnryb (1994, as cited in Bailey, 2006) focused on how supervisors from different parts of the world (Australia, Israel and the USA) played with their language to downgrade the seriousness of the criticism they delivered to student teachers, by analyzing this phenomenon from the perspective of politeness. She found out that supervisors mitigated their discourse in two ways: syntactic mitigation and semantic mitigation. In a similar vein, Vasquez (2004) investigated positive and negative politeness strategies supervisors used while giving advice

and suggestions in post-observation conferences. After analyzing four supervisors' meetings with teacher candidates, the researcher concluded that the supervisors used positive politeness strategies to create a solidarity and negative politeness strategies to minimize the imposition of the advices. Then, the researcher analyzed the perceptions of the teacher candidates about the outcome of the meetings. The result illustrated that teacher candidates believed that they did not receive any suggestions and advice due to the abundance of the positive feedback and indirect nature of negative evaluations. Akcan and Tatar (2010), however, concentrated on the content of mentor teachers and supervisors' language. They analyzed data from 27 post-lesson conferences, field notes and classroom observation. They discovered that mentor teachers' feedback was prescriptive and directive while reflective and cooperative feedback was provided by supervisors. Supervisors' feedback entailed comments on student teachers' target language use, suggestions on activities used in the lesson, pupils' participation and interest whereas mentor teachers paid attention to situation-specific cases and building rapport with student teachers.

On the other hand, there are very few studies which focused on student teachers' language in these post-teaching conferences. For example, Gumusok (2014) explored student teachers' language in seven supervisory meetings from the perspective of the content and the level of reflection they were engaged in. Yet, Copland (2011) studied how face was negotiated in feedback conferences by utilizing the methodology of linguistic ethnography. She video-recorded feedback conferences, and interviewed both four trainers and nine teacher candidates in an initial teacher training program. The findings indicated that in face threatening situations such as supervisors' giving negative evaluation, teacher candidates immediately accepted the criticism and advice. When teacher candidates were asked to provide feedback to their peers, they preferred to remain silent and reluctant to comment on their teaching if it would be a negative evaluation. When they reflected on their friends' teaching, they delivered their negative evaluation by linking it to a weakness in their own teaching. In her analysis of negative evaluation in teaching practice feedback, Phillips (1997, as cited in Phillips, 1999) found that "by far the most common response to criticism in the data was that of agreement in the form of "Yeah", "Right", or a sound of agreement: "Mmm" or "Uhuh"" (p. 156). She also claimed that the second frequent reaction was remaining silent, which may indicate student teachers' disagreement.

## **Methodology**

The present study is built on naturally occurring data. Among three categories of methods in pragmatics research that Kasper (2008) identified, this study utilized interaction (the other two are questionnaires, and written and oral forms of self-report). Under the heading of interaction, authentic discourse-institutional talk was studied (Kasper, 2008). Institutional talk differs from ordinary conversation which is not limited to any specific setting or particular tasks (Heritage, 1998). Talk is defined as institutional when "participants' institutional or professional identities are somehow made relevant to the work activities in which they are engaged" (Drew & Heritage, 1992, p. 3). In other words, institutional talk is more restricted and context-specific (Drew & Heritage 1992). In this sense, post teaching conferences can be

considered as institutional oral talk (Vasquez, 2004) since the language used in these meetings are relevant and specific to language teaching, limited to teacher education and only to this teacher education institution.

From the perspective of politeness, the study falls upon the first-order politeness research. Watts (1992, as cited in Haugh, 2012) drew a distinction between first-order and second-order politeness research studies. The first-order politeness which is also known as ‘politeness in action’ refers to “the way politeness actually manifests itself in communicative behaviour” (Ellen, 2001, as cited in Haugh, 2012, p. 119) while the second-order politeness focuses on how people perceive the concept or politeness-related constructs. In this regard, since this study examined how politeness strategies were implemented by student teachers while receiving criticism by their supervisor in post-teaching conferences, it explored first-order politeness.

### *Setting and Participants*

In this study, the researcher examined four post-teaching conference sessions in order to explore the politeness strategies student teachers employed as a group when they were criticized by their supervisor. These conferences occurred within the context of an English medium university’s foreign language teacher education program in Turkey. The data were collected through the end of the first practicum course of the program. Participants were one supervisor and ten student teachers. The supervisor holds a PhD degree in English Language Teaching. She had been teaching in the same institution more than a decade. Out of ten student teachers, two were male and the rest were female. After studying on English language, linguistics, language teaching methodology and general educational courses within three years on campus, student teachers started their first practice teaching course in the senior year. Within the context of the first practicum course, School Experience, the university supervisor assigned each student-teacher to a mentor teacher who was a regular EFL teacher in those visiting schools. Since student teachers outnumbered mentor teachers, student teachers visited the schools in groups of two or three. During the semester, student teachers attended their mentor teachers’ classes, spent four hours per week during a 10-week period. They observed their mentor teachers along with EFL learners, and completed observation and research tasks. Also, they attended one-hour seminar course on campus offered by the supervisor. Throughout the semester, they taught four times. First three teaching tasks were graded by the mentor teachers while student teachers performed their last teaching in the presence of their supervisor. Student teachers as a group delivered teaching. In the following two-three days, the supervisor held post-teaching conferences with student teachers who attended these meetings as a group at the university site.

### *Data Collection*

Data for this study included video-recordings of four post-teaching conferences. Actually, the data was part of a larger research project- the researcher’s MA study. The data



for the MA study were back then analyzed to explore the content and level of reflection student teachers were engaged within during these meetings. The researcher attended all these sessions and took notes. In these meetings, the supervisor firstly asked student teachers to state the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching, then she shared the notes she took while observing them and asked them to come up with alternative practices to what they had done. In all of the meetings, both the supervisor and student teachers spoke Turkish, their native language. For the presentation of the strategies they used to respond to criticism, the excerpts were translated into English. An interpreter with a Master's degree in translation reviewed the English versions and revised them when needed. In total, the data for this present study were 145-minutes long, the length of sessions varied from 26 minutes to 50 minutes.

### *Data Analysis*

The video-recordings of four supervisory meetings were transcribed through interactional transcription (Jenks, 2011). The researcher notified the overlaps, notable pauses and laughter in the transcription through Jefferson notation (2004) (Please See Appendix A) since it is the most commonly used convention (Hepburn & Bolden, 2013). Since participants spoke in Turkish, the English version of the talk was provided right beneath the lines. For this research, the researcher utilized data-driven approach; in other words, she analyzed the talk-in-interaction inductively (Bednarek, 2011). After reading the transcripts a few times, she noticed that student teachers interacted with each other quite frequently, which drove her to concentrate on student teachers' interaction as a group. Then, after identifying the parts in which student teachers talked to each other, agreed with each other and built speech on each other's speech, the researcher decided to explore only the parts of their interaction when supervisor addressed a criticism to either a particular student or to all. The researcher did not focus on the criticism which the supervisor addressed to only one student and the student responded to it on her own, and the criticism addressed but not responded. She only analyzed the criticism to which student teachers responded as a group. As the literature review suggested, supervisors' criticisms are generally indirect (Wajnryb, 1994 as cited in Bailey, 2006); the researcher asked a PhD candidate who is also interested in talk-in interaction to check whether the supervisor's speech in these parts actually entails criticism. She confirmed that these parts were actual criticism addressed to student teachers. In such cases, the researcher first identified whether student teachers accepted the criticism or challenged it. Then she specified the politeness strategies student teachers utilized: positive politeness (PP) strategies or negative politeness (NP) strategies (B&L, 1987). The researcher asked the PhD candidate to comment on her identification of politeness strategies. This asking part functioned as peer audit (Creswell, 2013).

### **Results and Discussion**

The analysis of the data revealed that in 145 minutes long supervisory meetings, there were 14 criticism instances in which student teachers responded as a group. Out of 14 criticism

instances, half of them were addressed to one specific student teacher in each group while the other half were directed at the whole group. In nearly all these instances, student teachers accepted the criticism; there was only one case in which student teachers challenged it. In the cases of accepting criticism, student teachers as a group, provided their reasoning for the criticized issue. While in 13 instances student teachers tried to defend themselves or the friend the criticism was directed at; only in one instance the group did not defend their friend and contributed to the supervisor's criticism.

Student teachers made use of both positive politeness (PP) and negative politeness (NP) strategies in both contexts, receiving criticism addressed to one specific student and criticism to the whole group. They used PP strategies very frequently while justifying the criticized act. Although B&L (1987) claimed that PP strategies contribute to the creation of unity or community between the speaker and the hearer; these strategies in the study showed differences in the sense that the solidarity was established among the student teachers not with the supervisor. In other words, student teachers used the majority of PP strategies not to bond a similarity with the speaker-supervisor but to indicate that they, student teachers, were a group who acted and thought similarly. For example, they generally used "biz" (we in English) to underscore that they performed the criticized act together (Excerpts 1 and 2). Moreover, they repeated what other student teachers had previously uttered to seek agreement with the student teacher (Excerpts 1, 2, and 3). Instances where student teachers completed the unfinished sentence of their friends were also present in the conversation (Excerpt 1) and the researcher interpreted these as giving gifts to the speaker (B&L, 1987). Though not present in B&L (1987), overlaps were also observed in the data as a PP strategy (Excerpts 1, 2, and 3).

As for the use of strategies student teachers employed to justify the criticized act while addressing to the supervisor, they benefitted from various sources. They mainly distanced themselves from the criticized act through blaming others: pupils they taught (Excerpt 3), the task they implemented (Excerpt 2) or the coursebook they used (Excerpt 1) or using impersonal verbs (Excerpt 2). They also apologized for their criticized act by stating their other weaknesses in order to account for it (Excerpt 1). These distancing and apologizing examples could be interpreted as NP strategies. Moreover, the common form of NP strategies was using hedges (false starts-adverbial hedges) (Excerpts 1, and 2). While doing these, they sometimes resorted to PP strategies by presupposing a common ground and seeking agreement with the supervisor, exaggerating their speech and joking through imitating other person's speech as well (Excerpt 3). In addition, they shared the criticism addressed to one person (Excerpt 2). Overall, the findings indicated that there were no differences between the politeness strategies student teachers utilized in receiving the criticism addressed to one specific student and the criticism addressed to the all as a group. To put it differently, student teachers employed the same strategies in both situations. Below, in Excerpt 1, the criticism was addressed to the whole group, and student teachers integrated both PP and NP strategies. Excerpt 2 exemplifies a criticism addressed to one student teacher and how the pair combined PP and NP strategies. Excerpt 3 illustrates how a criticism addressed to one specific student teacher was challenged by the group drawing on both PP and NP strategies.

### **Excerpt 1:**

In this example, the supervisor addressed her criticism in the form of questions and the criticism developed through each question the supervisor asked. The criticism was about the poor quality of the reading text three student teachers distributed to pupils. Student teachers accepted the criticism and tried to justify their positions by apologizing in the form of accounting.

- 1 S:           bir de şey erm siz bunu kendiniz mi yazdınız  
                  one more thing erm did you write it yourself
- 2 ST6:       [ders kitabından]  
                  [from the coursebook]
- 3 ST7:       [yok hocam] ders kitabından aldık  
                  [no hocam] we took it from the coursebook
- 4 S:           bu ders kitaplarında var peki niye fotokopisini verdiniz  
                  this is from the coursebook all right why did you give it as photocopy
- 5             (.) ders kitaplarında varsa  
                  (.) if this is from the coursebook
- 6 ST6:       hocam şöyle hani birkaç tane cümle  
                  hocam it was like well a few sentences
- 7             i like playing football tarzında cümleleri hani biz sadece ekledik  
                  sentences such as I like playing games well we only added them
- 8             gerisi olduğu [gibi]  
                  the rest was [all taken from the course book]
- 9 ST7:                       [evet]  
                                  [yeah]
- 10 ST6:      ders kitabından alınmaydı  
                  taken from the coursebook
- 11 ST7:      sadece oyunlu kısımlarını ek- ekledik ki  
                  we only ad!- added the game parts so that
- 12             transition yapabilelim oyunlara diye  
                  we could make transition to the games
- 13 ST8:      hocam game e- evet gamelere relation yapmak için  
                  hocam game ye!- yes to make relation to the games
- 14 S:           hmm

- hmm
- 15 ST7: çünkü hocam bağlamakta biz gerçekten çok zorlandık yani  
because we had really difficult times in linking I mean
- 16 bir can var bir daily routine var bir directions var  
there was can, there was daily routine and there were directions
- 17 S: uh-huh  
uh-huh
- 18 ST7: [yani]  
[I mean]
- 19 ST6: [hem] her şey  
[besides] when everything
- 20 ST7: bizim [göbeğimiz çatladı]  
we [really busted a gut]
- 21 ST6: [işin içinde olunca bu sefer [oradan]  
[was involved this time [we really]
- 22 ST8: [(relation ı kuramadık)  
[(we couldn't make the relation)
- 23 ST6: oraya nasıl geçebiliriz bilemedik  
didn't know how to make the connection
- 24 S: şimdi kitaptan aldığınız için hani şöyle sizin için mutlu oldum şöyle  
now as you took it from the book well like I am happy for you like
- 25 mutlu oldum sizi suçlamayacağım bu text için erm ama şu var yani  
I'm happy I won't blame you for the text erm but here is the thing I mean
- 26 rezalet bir texti bence yani öyle söyleyebilirim  
I think it was a terrible text I can put it that way

The supervisor asked student teachers “did you write it (the text) yourself?” and initiated the criticism. While responding to this criticism, ST6’s saying “from the coursebook” and ST7’s utterance “No, Hocam” overlapped. They stated that they took it from the coursebook. In Line 4, the supervisor brought up another criticism by asking “why did you give it as a photocopy if it were in their coursebook?”. She even emphasized the part “if it were in their coursebook?” by repeating it. Then, student teachers, all of them, collaboratively tried to give responses to the criticism. They claimed that they added certain sentences like “I like playing games” to make transition to the game subject. In doing so, they used ‘we’ very

frequently: “we took” in Line 3, “we only added” in Line 7, and “we could add” in Line 12. The use of ‘we’ and ‘our’ (our belly-göbeğimiz- although it was translated as we really busted a gut) occurred more than six times during the conversation. B&L (1987) claimed that when the speaker uses ‘we’, she includes the hearer into the activity. However, in this case and others, the use of ‘we’ suggests the inclusion of the other hearers of the criticism rather than the speaker of the criticism. In this way, student teachers tried to create a community, kind of solidarity (B&L, 1987) among themselves not with the supervisor. Repetition for seeking agreement was another strategy present in this example. In Lines 2-3, the expression “from the coursebook” was repeated by the ST6 and ST7. Besides, the phrase in Line 12 “so that we could make transition to the games” was similar to the expression “to make a relation to the games” in Line 13. A series of overlapping examples was present from Line 18 to Line 22. All three student teachers’ speech overlapped. Although overlapping is thought as disruptive in conversations, in this example and others in the study, they functioned as forming a cooperative discourse, as an expression of solidarity (Tannen, 1994; Lazzaro-Salazar, 2009) since the content of the overlapping speech showed agreement and support between the speakers and the overlapped words were used by the other student teacher in the following turn. In her study about the role of overlapping in the intercultural work place, Lazzaro-Salazar (2009) also found out that overlaps helped the cooperative meaning construction in interaction in her video-recording data. In addition, her stimulated recall data revealed that participants believed that overlaps contributed to the maintenance and enhancement of the positive relationship among the group. In that sense, overlaps could be regarded as a PP strategy. The final overlapping instance was also of quite importance. The utterance in Line 22 gives the impression that ST8 by saying “couldn’t make relation” kind of completed ST6’s sentence which was “when everything was involved, this time we”. This also can be interpreted as giving gifts to the speaker (B&L, 1987) as a sign of forming solidarity among the group, contributing to their defense. This excerpt also revealed the use of NP strategies. The uses of “hani” (well) in Lines 6-7 by ST6, “yani” (I mean) in Lines 15-18 by ST7 are hedging. Besides, in ST7’s expressing “we had really difficult times” in Line 15 also included ‘really’ as a hedge. This ‘really’ functioned as “I sincerely assure you” (B&L, 1987, p. 149). Lastly, the striking NP strategy they used to justify the criticized action was apology in the form of accounting through stating another weakness of theirs, which was having difficulty in combining the topics of ‘games’, ‘can’, and ‘directions’. Through sharing this shortcoming, they attacked their own positive face (B&L, 1987). However, such an act cannot be perceived as negative since a supervisory meeting, as an institutional talk, is an occasion on which student teachers are invited to reflect on their weaknesses and ask for help to improve themselves (Vasquez, 2004).

### **Excerpt 2:**

In this example, the supervisor was talking about a game called ‘cabbage ball’ that ST10 had played with pupils. In this activity there were three different groups and each group had one ball to choose the person within the group to talk. The problem about the activity was that ST10 lost the control of the game and pupils made quite a lot of noise. ST10 accepted the

criticism addressed to his classroom management, yet while doing this, he tried to show his reasoning through impersonal verbs (B&L, 1987) and distanced himself and his partner, ST9, from the task they prepared.

- 1 S: niye üç tane farklı grup oldu onu merak ettim  
I wonder why there were three different groups ((of students))
- 2 ST10: uh-huh (.5) bilmiyorum bir top (.3) aynı anda daha [iyi]  
uh-huh (.5) I don't know one ball (.3) it ((what he meant was 'three at once'. However, in Turkish he omitted the subject)) would be [better]
- 3 ST9: [karışık]  
[complicated]
- 4 ST10: olur diye düşündük ama (.)  
we thought so but (.)
- 5 S: huh-huh
- 6 ST10: yani [uzun sürerdi]  
I mean [it would last longer]
- 7 ST9: [daha uzaktaki kişi şey yapardı o zaman hani bek-beklerdi başka bir  
[the student who was sitting away would do well wa-wait]
- 8 şey yapardı  
would do something else
- 9 ST10: [huh-huh]
- 10 ST9: [falan]  
[Kind of]
- 11 S: hmm
- 12 ST9: böyle kendi içinde sanki daha  
in this way in a smaller group they would be as if more
- 13 ST10: daha aktif olur diye düşündük aslında oldu aktif işte biraz aştı  
more active we thought they were active indeed you see a little over-active
- 14 S: ((laughing))
- 15 ST9: [Mesela]  
[For instance]
- 16 ST10: [yani belki] iki grup daha iyi olurdu

- [well maybe] it would be better to have two groups
- 17 S: ((laughing)) [şimdi]  
 ((laughing)) [now]
- 18 ST10: [üç grup] biraz fazla olmuş  
 [three groups] it was a bit more ((than necessary)) to have

The supervisor initiated the criticism in Line 1 in the form of a question “why there were three different groups”. Although the addressee of the criticism has not been named in this line, it was ST10 who conducted the activity. Therefore, he tried to respond to this question. As can be seen in Line 2, his first reaction was “uh-huh” which was followed by a notable silence. His utterances as “I don’t know”, “one ball”, “it would be better” in the same line might indicate that either he had not considered this issue sufficiently beforehand or he was having problems articulating his thoughts. The rest of the conversation shows that he and his partner had already discussed this issue as stated in Line 4 as “we thought so”. His momentary difficulty in expressing himself through false starts was further supported by his partners saying “complicated” in Line 3. While he preferred to utilize a word with a positive meaning “better”, his partner used a negatively loaded word “complicated”. Although the meanings of their expressions were contradictory, the reason why his partner was involved in the conversation was to support her friend assuming that “it” in Line 2 would refer to “one ball”. Actually, ST10 omitted the subject, which was the reason why her partner said “complicated” considering using only one ball to play. In addition, each time ST0 provided a reason for his choice of three groups, ST9 contributed to his logic. For example, when ST10 expressed a concern for the time as for the existence of three groups, she strengthened his view by stating another issue, the possible loss of student attention to the task and the possibility of students’ engaging with something else as can be seen in Lines 7-8. ST10’s utterance as “huh-huh” in Line 9 implies an agreement with his partner. Although the overlapping of “better” and “complicated” might be interpreted as contradictory expressions, other examples of overlaps demonstrate an agreement between the student teachers such as “huh-huh” in Line 9 and “kind of” in Line 10. In addition, the harmony between them can be further noticed by ST10’s starting his sentence with “more” which is the last utterance ST9 produced in Line 12. Furthermore, the sentence ST10 formulated as “more active we thought they were active indeed you see a little over-active” in Line 13 could be seen as the continuation of the sentence uttered by ST9 in Line 12: “in this way in a smaller group they would be as if more”. This may exemplify giving gifts to the speaker (B&L, 1987) as an intention of establishing a sense of solidarity among the group, contributing to their explanation. His final utterances as “it would be better to have two groups” in Line 16 and “three groups it was a bit more to have” in Line 18 show that he accepted the criticism. While doing so, ST10 tried to show his reasoning through the strategy of impersonalizing the speaker from the FTA. ST10 employed impersonal verbs such as “it would be better” in Line 16 and “it would be better to have two groups” in Line 18 in order to “phrase the FTA as if the agent were other than S” (B&L, 1987, p. 190). In this way, ST10 distanced himself and

his partner from the task they prepared. In this excerpt, the use of “we” was present as well. ST10 resorted to inclusive ‘we’ twice in Lines 4 and 10 as in “we thought” to suggest that the fault was not only his but also his partner’s. In this regard, As Hatipoğlu (2007) puts forward in her analysis of (im)politeness in e-mailed call-for papers, use of inclusive ‘we’ can play a persuasive role to convince the addressees. In that sense, ST10’s attempts to integrate use of ‘we’ into his speech may indicate his aim to persuade the supervisor that the criticized act was actually a shared one. ST9’s engagement in the conversation also supports the idea of sharing the criticism. In this way, a solidarity was established between student teachers.

### **Excerpt 3:**

In this example, the supervisor addressed the criticism to ST3 about his behavior towards a specific pupil. Since the supervisor addressed her criticism in the form of behavior account, student teachers agreed with his supervisor in the beginning. However, with regards to her reasoning of criticism, which was nominating a reluctant pupil to answer a question, student teachers challenged the supervisor.

- 1 S: en son soruya geldin ST3 (0.2) dedin ki  
you asked the final question ST3 (0.2) then you asked
- 2 kim kalsın  
who should answer
- 3 bazı çocuklar parmaklarını kaldırıyor  
some students were raising their hands
- 4 sen dedin ki  
you said
- 5 ST3: evet  
yes
- 6 S: bugün kim kalkmadı jack bugün seninle uğraşmadım  
who hasn’t taken any turn today, jack I haven’t teased you today
- 7 sen gel  
you do it
- 8 ST2: ((laughter)) bugün hiç kalkmadın ((imitating ST3))  
((laughter)) you haven’t taken any turns today (imitating ST3)
- 9 S: ((laughing))
- 10 ST1: hocam ben dört kere kalktım ((imitating the student)) dedi  
he said that hocam I have taken four turns today
- 11 S: dedi huh- huh ((laughter))  
he said that huh-huh ((laughter))



- 12 ST1:        kalk kalk ben bugün seninle uğraşmadım ((laughter)) ((imitating ST3))  
                  stand up stand up I haven't teased you today ((laughter))  
                  ((imitating ST3))
- 13 S:            ((laughter)) şimdi çocuk sessiz sakın oturuyor bence hiçbir şey yok  
                  ((laughter)) the boy was sitting quietly I think there was no  
                  problem
- 14 ST1:        ama olsun [hocam siz varsınız diye] öyle  
                  but this was better [hocam he was quite because you were there]
- 15 ST3:                            [ama hocam sizin karşınızda öyle duruyor]  
    [but hocam he was sitting like that in your presence]
- 16 S:            tamam oyle olsun ... ST3 birden bire çocukla muhatap oluyor  
                  okay let this be the case... ST3 dealt with him out of nowhere
- 17                ((laughter)) çocuk seninle uğraşmamış  
                  ((laughter)) he didn't pose any problem to you,
- 18                dersini sabote etmemiş  
                  he didn't sabotage your lesson
- 19                kimseye bir şey dememiş adam gibi sorulara cevap veriyor  
                  he didn't say anything to anyone, answering the questions properly
- 20                sen diyorsun ki bugün seninle uğraşmadım sen gel ((all of them are  
                  laughing))  
                  you say I haven't teased you today you do it

In this excerpt, the criticism was addressed in the form of the account of the behavior, which is a very frequently used strategy among supervisors to deliver criticism (Bailey, 2006). The supervisor initiated her criticism by narrating what ST3 had done. About this story-like accounting, ST3 said “yes” to show his approval in Line 5. After the supervisor uttered ST3’s problematic sentences which were “who hasn’t taken any turn today? I haven’t teased you jack today, you do it” in Line 6, ST2 and ST1 showed their agreements with the supervisor by imitating either ST3 or the pupil in a humorous way. ST 2 imitated ST3’s problematic part “you haven’t taken any turns today” in Line 8 whereas ST1 imitated the pupil Jack “Hocam, I have taken four turns today” in Line 10. During this time, the supervisor laughed hard and approved ST1’s imitation in Line 11 by saying “he said that”. Upon this, ST1 imitated ST3 this time by stating “stand up, stand up, I haven’t teased you today” in Line 12. In Line 13, the supervisor expressed the reason of her criticism as the boy was sitting quietly and there was no reason to nominate him. Right after that, both ST1 and ST3, the

addressee of the criticism, challenged the supervisor. First, ST1 said that the presence of the supervisor made him quiet and that ST3 was right in his action by saying “ama olsun” (but this was better). Similarly, ST3 also undermined the supervisor by claiming that “but hocam he was sitting like that in your presence”, in a way that he supported his action in the classroom. Based on these arguments, the supervisor continued to tell why his behavior was wrong. As in the previous excerpts, this piece of conversation also included supportive overlaps (Lazzaro-Salazar, 2009; Tannen, 1994). The different element in this case was making jokes through imitation. B&L (1987) stated that jokes as a PP strategy highlight the “mutual shared background knowledge and values” (p. 124) among the speaker and the hearer. In this case, ST1 and ST2’s joking was the sign that they agreed with the supervisor in her criticism in the beginning. Although Zajdman (1995) claimed that the person who has the power generally makes the jokes and people who are inferior in the hierarchy avoid joking; in this situation, student teachers who were considered as in a lower position to the supervisor initiated the joke. While these imitating practices helped ST1 and ST2 establish a solidarity with the supervisor, it could also be interpreted as threatening ST3’s positive face, too. ST3’s silence during these imitations could be the hint of his reaction to this FTA as well as his challenging position towards the criticism. After the supervisor’s sharing her reason of criticism, ST1’s reaction to the criticism altered and she loudly expressed her actual thought, her disagreement with the supervisor “but this was better he was quiet because you were there” in Line 14. ST3’s overlapping speech and his utterance “but hocam he was sitting like that in your presence” were the sign that he actually did not accept the criticism. They both accused the student and dissociated ST3 from the criticized act. This contextual distancing could be regarded as a NP strategy.

When the overall results are reconsidered, one of the significant results of the study was that student teachers showed acceptance of the criticism in nearly all instances. There was only one example in which student teachers challenged the criticism. However, they did not directly accept the criticisms. They tried to justify their reasoning. In that sense, the asymmetrical power relations may drive student teachers to the acceptance of the criticism (Don & Izadi, 2013). Furthermore, in every responding to criticism instance, even in the case of challenging criticism, student teachers were quite verbal, which does not support Phillips (1997, as cited in 1999). The fact that this supervisor adopted a reflective approach to supervision (Bailey, 2006) may lead to a maximum amount of student teacher talking even in the case of criticism. Similarly, this hierarchical superiority of supervisors is expected to make student teachers reluctant to comment on their friends’ teaching and generally listen to the supervisor’s feedback (Copland, 2012). However, in this case, student teachers were observed as quite verbal, reflecting on their friends’ teaching and responding to their supervisor’s criticism. In a similar way, Copland (2011) also suggests that student teachers tend to share responsibility for their friends’ weaknesses in teaching. In that sense, this study is in the same line with Copland (2011) given that student teachers responded to criticism addressed to one specific student as a group in the half of the criticized situations.

In this study, student teachers used both PP and NP strategies. In that regard, the study supports Vasquez (2004) who claimed that in the context of post-teaching conferences, both positive and negative politeness strategies are of crucial importance. In the similar vein, the

study is also in parallel with Doğançay-Aktuna and Kamışlı (2001) which investigated politeness strategies Turkish people made use of when they addressed two FTAs, disagreement and correction, to the hearer of higher and lower status than themselves. They concluded that Turkish people may not have a specific orientation for NP or PP in the contexts of correction and disagreement since they combined PP strategies right after NP strategies. On the other hand, the study does not corroborate Wolfson (1989, as cited in Doğançay-Aktuna & Kamışlı, 2001) who suggested that when the speakers are inferior to the hearer, they display preferences for negative politeness strategies. Quite the contrary, in this study student teachers mostly benefited from PP strategies.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to explore how student teachers responded to the supervisor's criticism in post-teaching conferences. More specifically, the study investigated the politeness strategies student teachers as a group utilized to reply to the criticism addressed to either a specific student teacher or the whole group. While doing so, the study made use of naturally occurring data and analyzed first-order politeness. Overall, the findings revealed that student teachers used similar politeness strategies in both contexts of replying to the criticism addressed to a specific student teacher (Excerpts 1 and 3) and the criticism addressed to all (Excerpt 2).

Specifically, student teachers mostly used PP strategies such as seeking for agreement, repetition, including both the speaker and the hearer in the activity by use of "we", and giving gifts to the hearer. Although overlaps are not present in B&L's framework (1987), the data revealed that student teachers' speech overlapped very frequently, and this overlapping was not disruptive but supportive and contributing to the establishment of the solidarity (Lazzaro-Salzar, 2009; Tannen, 1994). Most of the time, they used these PP strategies among themselves not with the supervisor. In other words, they tried to build a community within the student teachers' group not with the supervisor. However, they also used PP strategies with the supervisor such as joking through imitation and seeking for agreement. Furthermore, they utilized NP strategies while responding to the supervisor. They resorted to hedges, apologizing, and impersonalizing the speaker. Although, it may seem outside the scope of the politeness strategies since B&L (1987) focused on the linguistic forms and did not concentrate so much upon the content, in this study student teachers dissociated themselves from the act of criticism by using strategies such as accusing pupils; blaming the course book or the task; and they tried to maintain their positive face in this way which could be considered as a NP strategy. On the other hand, by stating their other weaknesses while apologizing, they tried to justify their criticized action. Although this threatened their positive face, the nature of the supervisory meeting promotes such reflective practices (Vasquez, 2004).

To the best knowledge of the researcher, there was not a study seeking the politeness strategies of student teachers in the post-teaching conferences in Turkey. In that sense, the study can be the first of its kind. That is why there are some limitations. The study focused on

only the naturally occurring interaction data. The participants' interpretations of the criticism instances were not recorded. In this regard, the future studies could explore politeness both in the interaction and in participants' pragmatic comments.

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#### APPENDIX A: KEY TO TRANSCRIPTION

- [ ] Overlapping talk
- (.) Micro-pause
- (0.2) A number inside brackets denotes a timed pause
- (( )) Transcriber's description

- () Speech which is unclear or in doubt in the transcript
- An abrupt halt or interruption in utterance