

**‘Time to construct positive identities’: Display questions in post observation teacher feedback**

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This document is the Accepted Version [AM]

**Citation:**

DONAGHUE, Helen (2019). ‘Time to construct positive identities’: Display questions in post observation teacher feedback. Classroom discourse. [Article]

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## Introduction

Interest in language teacher identity (LTI) is growing (Barkhuizen 2017). Varghese et al. (2005) point out the importance of understanding teacher identities:

*... to understand teaching and learning we need to understand teachers; and in order to understand teachers, we need to have a clearer sense of who they are: the professional, cultural, political and individual identities which they claim or which are assigned to them.* (Varghese et al. 2005, 22)

However, LTI research has neglected in-service teachers (Edwards & Burns, 2016; Eren-Bilgen & Richards, 2015; Farrell, 2011), focusing almost exclusively on pre-service teachers. If, as Varghese et al. (2005) argue, understanding teaching and learning involves a clearer sense of teacher identities, LTI research must include experienced working teachers who represent most of the profession. Equally important, and similarly under-represented in LTI research, are the identities of the supervisors who manage these teachers and who play an influential role in the practice of teaching and learning and in teacher development.

The experience of working as a language teacher repeatedly raises issues of identity (Gray & Morton, 2018). Teachers construct identities as they engage in ‘*the social positioning of self and others*’ (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005: 586) while carrying out different aspects of their job such as interaction with students and colleagues, and classroom actions. This article aligns with a view of identity as active and performative (Butler 1990) and recognises the importance of talk as a means of identity construction (Varghese et al., 2005). Despite a significant body of work in business and medical contexts which examines identity negotiation during institutional

interaction (e.g. Angouri and Marra 2011; Sarangi and Roberts 1999), there is a paucity of research looking at teacher identities during situated work-based talk (Gray and Morton, 2018). Researchers and practitioners have started to realise that the post observation feedback meeting is an important discursive space for teachers and observers to negotiate professional identities (Author 2018; Urzúa and Vásquez 2008). Common to teacher education courses, teacher evaluation systems, and peer review schemes, the post observation feedback meeting takes place after a trainer, supervisor, or colleague has observed a teacher's lesson. Various aspects of feedback discourse have been discussed in the English language teaching (ELT) literature and one area of talk repeatedly highlighted as an important resource is questioning (Copland 2015; Engin 2013; Vásquez and Reppen 2007). Previous studies have focused on questions in relation to teacher learning, looking at, for example, how questions help identify teachers' understanding of weaknesses in their lessons (Copland 2015), scaffold teacher development and learning (Engin 2013), and encourage teacher discussion, critical thinking, and reflection (Vásquez and Reppen 2007). Aiming to add to this important body of work, this article examines the use of display questions to construct and negotiate identities. Display questions (often contrasted with referential questions which elicit unknown information) are those in which the questioner already knows the answer and to which there are a limited number of responses. Display questions have been researched in language classroom settings (e.g. Walsh 2002, 2011), but little attention has been given to their use in post observation feedback.

By examining the use of display questions to construct identities during feedback talk between in-service teachers and a supervisor, this article aims to contribute towards filling three significant gaps created by a lack of LTI research into: (1) in-service teacher identities (2)

supervisor identities (3) identities discursively accomplished in situated, naturally occurring, institutional interaction.

## **Identity and feedback**

### ***Teacher Identity***

To my knowledge, there are only three studies which examine teacher identity in post observation feedback, all focusing on preservice teachers. First, Urzúa and Vásquez (2008) looked at the identities novice teachers projected during feedback sessions as they talked about the future. The novice teachers simultaneously communicated an image of themselves as both confident/knowledgeable/assertive and hesitant/inexperienced. Second, Vásquez and Urzúa (2009) analysed how novice teachers, while engaged in reported speech, highlighted accomplishments and developing expertise, thus constituting skillfull and confident identities. In contrast, while reporting mental states the teachers highlighted uncertainty, gaps in knowledge, or negative feelings and emotions, thereby indexing an insecure, unskilled novice identity. Third, Riordan and Farr (2015) examined face to face and online interaction between student teachers and tutors, drawing on a corpus of informal peer discussions, formal post observation feedback meetings, and online reflective blogs. During narratives, participants constituted both novice and knowledgeable teacher identities as they recounted difficulties and reported mental states and thoughts in hypothetical direct speech. Riordan and Farr (2015) looked at how identity was co-constructed within the unfolding discourse, unlike the first two studies which isolated specific speech acts and analysed only teacher talk. Riordan and Farr's (2015) focus on interaction revealed the importance of a conversational partner in identity construction.

### ***Supervisor identity***

To date, I have found no studies looking at the identities of supervisors who observe in-service teachers. There has been some discussion of supervisory roles in the feedback literature but, again, this is restricted to pre-service contexts. Although not explicitly focusing on identity, this body of research often depicts pre-service trainers as struggling to maintain the conflicting (Brandt 2008), paradoxical (Farr 2011) and incompatible (Louw, Watson and Jimarkon 2014) roles of evaluator/gatekeeper and supporter/developer. However, research looking closely at pre-service trainers' discourse suggests that they typically favour an evaluative role over that of developer. Studies show trainers to be interactionally dominant: they control the floor, have longer turns, and initiate talk and topics (Copland 2011; Hyland and Lo 2006; Vásquez 2004). Trainers also claim expertise, privilege their views, and require trainees to accept these views, even silencing trainees by their discourse practices (Copland 2011). However, these studies are all conducted in pre-service contexts, and little is known about how in-service supervisors construct a sense of themselves within their assigned role.

Gray and Morton (2018) argue that identity has '*considerable explanatory power in enabling us to shed light on the complex process of becoming an English language teacher and the ongoing experience of working as one*' (p.19). It seems, however, that LTI research has concentrated mostly on the process of becoming a teacher. In contrast, the focus of this article is on the ongoing experience of working as teacher and on the process of becoming and working as a supervisor.

## **Materials and methods**

### ***Setting and participants***

The context for this research was a tertiary institution in the United Arab Emirates. The extracts

featured in this article are part of a larger data set of one-to-one feedback meetings with 17 in-service English language teachers and four supervisors, collected over four years (Author, 2016). The expatriate teachers are well qualified (all have a master's degree and teaching diploma) and each has more than ten years' teaching experience. They work in a one-year foundation programme which prepares Arabic-speaking students to progress to studying bachelor degrees in English. The supervisors' duties include carrying out annual appraisals to assess and rate teachers' performance, and this includes a lesson observation which is followed by a one-to-one feedback meeting. The observation and feedback process carries high stakes as it is used to inform management decisions on whether to keep a teacher after their first probationary year and thereafter whether to renew teachers' three year contracts.

### ***Data collection***

The study participants were self-selected after emails were sent every semester for four years inviting supervisors and teachers to participate by audio recording their feedback meeting (the researcher was not present at the meeting). Two supervisors worked concurrently at the institution, one at the men's campus and one at the women's, with each supervisor managing a team of approximately twenty teachers. During the data collection period, two supervisors left the institution and were replaced by two others. All four supervisors agreed to take part in the study. Table 1 is a list of the recorded meetings. All teachers except one (Eric) recorded one meeting during the four-year period (Eric recorded three). The extracts in this article come from the meetings shaded in Table 1.

Table 1: Feedback meetings in the larger data set (Author, 2016)

<i>supervisor</i>	<i>teacher</i>	<i>supervisor</i>	<i>teacher</i>	<i>supervisor</i>	<i>teacher</i>
Supervisor 1 (S1)*	Aoife*	Supervisor 2 (S2)*	Greg	Supervisor 3 (S3)*	Eric *
	Keith*		Lance		Anisa
	Dan		Michael*		
	Saul*		Eric*	Supervisor 4* (S4)	Eric*
	Aisha		Selina		Anna
	Joseph*		John		
			Eve*		
			Senan		
			Jim		

\*Participants who also agreed to be interviewed

Recognising that feedback talk does not exist in a vacuum (Erickson 2004), I supplemented these recordings with ethnographic data within a linguistic ethnographic framework. Linguistic ethnography (LE) is an interpretive approach which examines how local interaction is embedded in wider social contexts (Copland and Creese 2015). Ethnographic data came from two sources. First I added my own knowledge of the context gained from working closely with the research participants for 13 years, initially as an English language teacher and then in a job involving teacher development, support and counselling. Second, I carried out participant perspective interviews with some participants (see Table 1 above). Prior to interviews (conducted either in person or via Skype), participants were sent feedback extracts in the form of short audio clips and corresponding transcriptions. They read, listened to, and made notes about the extracts, and then we discussed their perceptions.

Following the British Association for Applied Linguistics (2006) ethical guidelines, informed participant consent was gained, including written consent for recorded data to be used in publications and conference presentations. Participants' anonymity was ensured by using

pseudonyms for teachers and numbers for supervisors. In addition, the research institution is not named and the time of data collection is not revealed. The original study was also subject to a rigorous ethical approval process by a university in the UK.

### *Data analysis*

Feedback meetings were audio-recorded and transcribed. Linguistic analysis of these recordings involved a three-level examination of discourse. First, I repeatedly listened to the feedback meetings and carried out detailed transcriptions to enable a close engagement and familiarity with the data. Second, I segmented transcripts into thematically bounded units and described each episode. Third, I carried out a fine-grained, turn by turn, microanalysis of salient episodes. This microanalysis was guided by the following questions:

- What identities are being made relevant?
- How is the speaker claiming or ascribing an identity? What linguistic devices are being used?
- How does the other participant react?
- Are identities verified or challenged by the other participant?
- How is this verification or challenge managed?

I then layered onto transcripts contextual information from my own knowledge of the research site that I thought relevant to the ongoing talk. Finally, I chose extracts in which identity negotiation was salient and asked participants to comment on these, adding this information into the analysis.



### *Data extracts*

This article features extracts from three one-to-one meetings involving a supervisor (S1) and three teachers: Aisha, Dan and Saul (all pseudonyms). In the year that these meetings were recorded, S1 had worked at the institution for 7 years and had been promoted from teacher to supervisor the year before. Aisha and Dan were both in their second year at the institution at the time of recording (which means they began working there in the same year S1 started his job as supervisor). Saul had been teaching at the institution for over ten years. S1, Dan and Saul all have English as a first language and Aisha is bilingual, English and Arabic.

In each extract, S1 asks a display question i.e. he asks a question which is not intended to elicit unknown information. Instead, as evidenced in the unfolding talk, S1 already knows the answer to the question (in some cases, prompting the teacher to give this answer). In addition, these display questions all have only one possible answer i.e. the one already known to S1. These display questions seem designed purely to allow both teacher and supervisor to show their knowledge or expertise and therefore function as a means of building positive identities for both participants. During the analysis stage with the larger data set, it took me a while to notice these display questions. I categorised instances in the data where positive and negative identity construction occurred (see Author, 2016 for more detail). While examining the positive identity sub-set, I started noticing (among other strategies such as praise) a particular linguistic device used to construct positive identities: display questions. Although supervisors (including S1) asked many more referential questions, there were times when they asked questions to which the answer was known and obvious. These sequences followed a common pattern: the supervisor asked a display question, the teacher produced the required answer, and the teacher and

supervisor co-constructed positive identities for themselves and each other. The first two extracts in this article were chosen because they exemplify this common pattern of discourse. However, extracts 3 and 4 were selected as the only atypical examples in the larger data set that deviate from the common pattern: in both extracts the teacher resists S1's display question.

## Results

### *Extract 1: Arabic*

Extract 1 comes near the beginning of a feedback meeting with S1 and Aisha (01:22 in a meeting lasting 17:53). Prior to this extract, S1 has asked Aisha's opinion of the lesson and the two have discussed the importance of taking attendance. S1 then moves on to a new topic by asking Aisha to explain a strategy she uses to stop students speaking Arabic:

#### Extract 1 (See Appendix for transcription conventions)

1 S1 you set up your class management  
2 Aisha mmhm  
3 S1 yeah could you explain to me what you did there?  
4 Aisha e:hh  
5 S1 for the Arabic  
6 Aisha ah usually a- this is what I do every time I I do  
7 something new  
8 S1 mmhm  
9 Aisha ah but I have this this plan u-usually works for them I  
10 just do circles on the board↑ if they speak Arabic the  
11 thing that they hate doing is homework or having a quiz  
12 (.) so if they speak Arabic they have a quiz the next day  
13 (smile voice) [and I really do that with them  
14 S1 [mmhm  
15 Aisha if they if they speak Arabic they have EXTRA homework (.)  
16 so they're very careful about speaking Ara- they have TEN  
17 Arabic words throughout the whole HOUR so they're always  
18 careful if somebody speaks Arabic they would really get  
19 to her they will say why did you say that word in Arabic?  
20 so (.) they're very careful about that so I just put x's  
21 S1 yeah I thought that was very successful throughout I mean  
22 normally with a (.) a LOWER level class particularly when  
23 they've got an Arabic speaker

24 Aisha yes [they take advantage  
 25 S1 [i:s (.) they take advantage of that and there tends  
 26 to be a lot of Arabic in the class [but there was almost  
 27 Aisha [yes  
 28 S1 none [so I mean that's that's to be commended  
 29 Aisha [yes

S1 was present in the classroom, observing the lesson, and could presumably see Aisha's strategy in operation so his question '*could you explain to me what you did there?*' (3) is not intended to elicit unknown information. In addition, S1's prompt after Aisha hesitates (4): '*for the Arabic*' clearly shows that he already knows the answer. The question has a formal construction and is reminiscent of an oral language exam where the examiner uses a 'tell me about X' construction to elicit spoken language from a candidate. Similarly, S1's question seems to function as a means of demonstration – in this case for Aisha to demonstrate expertise.

Aisha's '*ah*' (6) appears to be a recognition token as she realises what answer S1 is looking for, and she then complies, giving a detailed account of her strategy (9-20). By narrating a successful teaching strategy, Aisha is able to construct a particular identity – that of a knowledgeable, aware teacher and a successful problem solver. This identity is positive because knowledge is important at work: '*being knowledgeable is crucial in most institutional roles; it is something people care deeply about*' (Tracy and Robles 2013, 202). Positive, valued identities are often constituted via knowledge displays (Clifton 2012). S1 is also able to index an identity involving knowledge as the trajectory started by the display question ends in S1 making evaluative comments (21, 28).

As Raymond and Heritage (2006) point out, claiming the right to evaluate demonstrates knowledge, and both evaluation and knowledge can be used to invoke identity:

*The management of rights to knowledge and, relatedly, the rights to describe or evaluate states of affairs can be a resource for invoking identity in interaction.* (Raymond and Heritage 2006, 680)

S1's positive evaluation of Aisha's strategy also indexes a manager/assessor identity. Holmes, Stubbe and Vine (1999) report that expressing approval is one way that managers 'do power'. S1's identity of manager is also evident in his control of the conversation - his display question dictates the topic and obligates Aisha to give an answer. Aisha verifies this manager identity by playing her part and willingly explaining her strategy. As both participants co-construct positive identities for themselves and each other, they also orient to alignment as Aisha completes S1's turn (24) and S1 repeats and thus confirms Aisha's utterance (25).

### ***Extract 2: Do now***

A similar trajectory is played out in Extract 2 from a meeting between S1 and Dan. Prior to Extract 2 below (1:33 in a lesson lasting 25:06), S1 has asked Dan for his opinion of the lesson and then S1 suggests that they talk through the lesson chronologically. They focus on the start of the lesson:

#### **Extract 2**

1	S1	you started with a Do Now activity
2	Dan	yeah
3	S1	is that something you've learned here [o:r-
4	Dan	[yes definitely
5		[yeah
6	S1	[and I mean how do you how do you find that your class
7		benefits from that?
8	Dan	oh it's it just (.) it gets them focused on what's coming
9		up without me having to i- it (.) it puts the onus on the
10		students to do something (.) first of all instead of me
11		just saying oh eh come on sit down u:h [if if I just

12 S1 [mmhm  
 13 Dan literally I don't even say anything of-often I just point  
 14 at the board and (*laughs*) so I don't do it every single  
 15 class but em when I've got a s- specific thing I'm trying  
 16 to get to often you know we'll do that sometimes  
 17 S1 yeah [I thought I thought it worked well  
 18 Dan [I think it's it's great yeah (.) I like those

S1 asks two questions to which he knows the answer (3 and 6-7). S1 knows that an in-house teacher development course drawing on Lemov's (2010) book of teaching techniques includes a strategy called '*Do Now*' in which students are given a short writing task as soon as they enter the classroom in order to focus their attention and establish a working atmosphere. He also knows that Dan attended this course. Therefore, as in Extract 1, there is no epistemic gap to be filled. Another similarity with the previous extract is that the second question is rather formally constructed: '*how do you find that your class benefits from that?*' and seems intended solely for Dan to demonstrate knowledge and expertise, which he does (8-16).

S1's display question enables Dan to demonstrate his learning and his successful use of a teaching strategy, and thereby claim the identity of an effective teacher. On reading this extract, S1 confirmed the purpose of his display question:

*I think I'm trying to get him to realise that he's improved as a teacher during his time with [the institution] and look at how what he's doing helps his class.* (Extract from S1's participant perspective interview)

The extract ends with a positive evaluation made by S1 (17) which again enables him to index a managerial identity (Holmes, Stubbe and Vine 1999). Dan's compliance in answering the display

question reinforces this identity. Thus a positive identity is co-constructed for and by Dan and S1. Again, affiliation between the two participants is evidenced by their overlapping positive comments at the end of the sequence (17 and 18).

### ***Extract 3: Laptop lids***

In Extract 3 (1:38 in a lesson lasting 20:43), S1 again asks a display question (1-2). Prior to this, S1 has asked Saul his opinion of the lesson and then suggested that they talk through the lesson chronologically. S1 starts with the first thing Saul did (1), followed by the display question ‘*why*’ (2). This time, however, the question results in a different trajectory. The teacher, Saul, very subtly resists S1’s requirement for him to display knowledge:

#### Extract 3

1     S1     now the first thing (.) you DID (.) is you got them to  
2           close their laptop lids why?  
3     Saul   because I know that they can↓ (.) they’re listening and  
4           they are listening to ME rather than (.) looking at  
5           what’s going on in front of them on the laptops↓  
6     S1     yeah no I agree i- it’s a good technique (.) it’s a  
7           good technique to use **I** use the lids down and hands off  
8           is another one I use  
9     Saul   °mm°  
10    S1     hands off (they’ve got to) (*clears his throat*) put  
11           their hands in their lap (.) you know move move away  
12           from the table (*smile voice*) sort of thing cos other  
13           otherwise you know as you as you’re well aware they’ll  
14           keep tapping away  
15    Saul   °yeah°  
16    S1     um  
17    Saul   and it just saves having to repeat the instructions (.)  
18           s:o (*big sigh*) yeah

This is an interesting episode because, unlike the extracts with Aisha and Dan, the display question doesn’t seem to promote alignment and affiliation. The extract starts with a display

question (1-2) but when Saul answers, he doesn't show the same willingness as Aisha and Dan. His falling intonation in line 3 seems to suggest that the answer is obvious (which indeed it is, especially as the teachers in this institution had extensive PD training in how to manage students' use/abuse of laptops and asking students to close the lids was a well-used (and obvious) technique teachers used to gain students' attention). His intonation falls again at the end of line 5, again perhaps indicating that the (reluctant) answer he is giving is obvious. The falling intonation in Saul's answer (3, 5) also conveys slight impatience. In addition, his turn features conversational signals that convey uninvolved involvement (Tannen 2005): he talks slowly, pauses several times, his response tokens are so quiet they are barely audible, his intonation is flat, and he is vocally unanimated.

S1's evaluative comment '*it's a good technique*' (6-7) is followed by a pause which could indicate that perhaps S1 expects Saul to agree. S1 repeats the evaluation when Saul remains silent. An extension to Saul's strategy is then mentioned ('*I use the lids down and hands off is another one I use*', 7-8) but at the end of his turn, S1 concedes that this adds little of value to Saul: '*as you're well aware*' (9-11), possibly prompted by Saul's less than enthusiastic response (9). However, S1's claim to use the same technique is important because it enables him to demonstrate knowledge and experience and to claim the identity of an effective teacher. This is a face-enhancing move made to elicit approval from and align with Saul. S1's response also confirms that his question at the beginning of the extract was not made to elicit unknown information. Saul barely responds (9, 15) and does not laugh at S1's joke '*move away from the table*' (7-8), suggesting that he is unwilling to take part in the knowledge display. However, Saul does actually comply at the end of the extract (17-18) as he contributes the 'right' answer.

However, this comment is accompanied with a big sigh and he tails off at the end, again suggesting lack of interest and disengagement. Although S1's turn may be intended as a vehicle for both participants to display knowledge, Saul resists this requirement and indexes a more disaffiliative stance. This non-compliance very subtly contests and weakens S1's manager/assessor identity. Saul, in contrast, is ascribed a positive identity by S1's recognition of an effective (if obvious) teaching strategy. Saul also claims a confident and powerful identity through his resistance to S1's display question.

***Extract 4: Not given***

Extract 4 comes later in the meeting (10:36) between S1 and Saul. S1 asks Saul to explain his approach to helping students answer True/False/Not Given reading test questions, specifically identifying 'not given' answers (1-2):

Extract 4

1 S1 what's your technique for the (.) for the not given I  
2 mean how do you how do you explain that to them can you  
3 remind me (.) cos you did explain it  
4 Saul yeah e:m well (*small sigh*) e:m (.) I said yeah if it's  
5 not (.) in the text and even if they think that it's  
6 it's right or [WRONG then the answer's not given they  
7 S1 [mm  
8 can't just (.) e:h assume that something you know is  
9 (.) you know just decide it's true or false just  
10 [because they THINK it's true or false you know it has  
11 S1 [mmhm  
12 Saul to be stated in the [(xxx)  
13 S1 [I suppose as well because you were  
14 getting them to highlight the the part of the text  
15 where the answer was so if you can't highlight a piece  
16 of the text then that's that's a not given I use a (.)  
17 I've u- I've used similar techniques (in the) (.) works  
18 nicely e:m



S1 asks Saul to remind him how he helps the students identify not given questions (2-3). This is later proved to be a display question as S1 himself, after a half-hearted reply from Saul, gives the ‘correct’ answer (i.e. the one S1 is looking for) at lines 13-16. At line 4, Saul is obliged to answer S1’s display question, but his reply shows signs of uninvolvedness: he hesitates and sighs: ‘*yeah e:m well (small sigh) e:m*’ (4), signalling reluctance to give the obvious answer. Saul’s reply seems perfunctory and indicates disengagement, even boredom. Saul’s repetition of ‘you know’ (8, 9, 10), although perhaps merely a filler, is ironically appropriate because S1 interrupts Saul to himself supply the answer (13) and he also claims to use the same technique (17-18). It is possible, therefore, that S1 asked the initial question to enable himself, as well as Saul, to display and claim knowledge and expertise. This was picked up by Saul in a participant perspective interview:

*He didn’t allow me to finish, again he wanted to say what he does – possibly wanting to show me that he does a similar thing so we share good teaching techniques. Again I seem a bit reluctant to explain myself especially as it was mentioned in the class. [S1] answered the question for me – either he was in a hurry or he just wanted to tell me again what he does. (Extract from Saul’s participant perspective interview)*

In his interview, S1 made clear that the identity of a practising teacher is important to him:

*Something I should add here is kudos. I think with [other supervisors], for example, they don’t have the classroom kudos. How long was it since they taught? And they definitely couldn’t have hacked it with iPads, Blackboard etc. They would then lay into people*

*about their teaching / curriculum and the like... I'm still in the classroom, and perhaps that helps. I'd like to think it gives me more kudos with people I'm giving feedback to.*

(Extract from S1's participant perspective interview)

For S1, it is important that he is 'still in the classroom' because this gives him 'kudos' with the teachers he is supervising, observing, and giving feedback to. This kudos involves being recognised as a practising teacher with knowledge of and expertise in the new technology recently introduced into the institution. This identity also means that S1 can compare himself favourably with other supervisors. S1's interview comments confirm that he is using display questions as a resource to claim this positive identity:

*With [Saul], I probably am trying to impress him more than he me. I have huge respect for what he does in the classroom and out of it, so perhaps unconsciously I am trying to reassure him that I'm fit to lead him?* (Extract from S1's participant perspective interview)

S1's desire to convince Saul of his worth and expertise adds a layer of complexity to feedback as S1 recognises the need to gain respect, reassure, and impress the experienced and knowledgeable teachers that he is supervising. This move ascribes a powerful and positive identity to Saul i.e. he is someone worth impressing.

There is a difference in the way that Aisha and Dan react to display questions and the way Saul does. This may be partly explained by context and relationships. Aisha and Dan co-construct

display sequences willingly, perhaps because it is in their best interest to comply with S1. They were fairly new to the institution at the time of recording and were in their first 3-year contract period. This puts them in a more vulnerable position than Saul who was in his fourth contract (i.e. he had been working at the institution for over nine years, longer, in fact, than S1). Saul was also much respected by students, teachers and management, and widely regarded as one of the most committed and effective teachers in the English team, confirmed by S1's interview comments:

*His lessons are so good anyway that unless I sit there and tell him he's wonderful there isn't much you can say, so I think perhaps we've moved more into discussing our teaching as a whole rather than the particular lesson. (Extract from S1's participant perspective interview)*

The confidence this affords Saul perhaps partly explains his reluctance to engage in mutual positive identity construction - he doesn't need to.

Saul's resistance to S1's display question is an interactionally powerful move because he does not fully comply with S1's identity of manager and supervisor. An interview comment sheds some light on this resistance:

*I seem to be going through the motions with the feedback; I possibly felt awkward about the situation as this was the first time [S1] observed me and at the time I still didn't really regard him as a person in a supervising role. Perhaps [S1] in his new role also felt*

*slightly awkward giving feedback to me.* (Extract from participant perspective interview with Saul)

Extracts 4 and 5 come from the first meeting between Saul and S1 after S1's promotion to supervisor, having previously been a teacher on the same team as Saul. Saul doesn't regard S1 as '*a person in a supervising role*' and this comes out in the feedback extracts as he subtly resists S1's manager identity. He also recognises that S1 feels '*awkward*'. This raises the idea that feedback may be difficult for supervisors, not just because of the much-discussed tension from juggling evaluative and supportive roles (Brandt 2008; Farr 2011; Louw, Watson and Jimarkon 2014) but because often ELT supervisors or managers are observing former peers. S1 seems to believe that he is in a precarious position with respect to experienced teachers and Extracts 4 and 5 show that feedback with these teachers can be challenging. When I asked S1 explicitly about identity, he recognised that he, as well as the observed teachers, used the feedback meeting to claim a positive identity:

*Feedback is a time to construct positive identities ... perhaps this needs to be done in different ways with different people. With newer people like Aisha maybe I'm allowing **her** to build the experienced identity, perhaps with [Saul] it's **me** that's in need of building it.* (Extract from participant perspective interview with S1)

This comment highlights the importance of identity work for *both* participants i.e. supervisors as well as teachers.

## **Discussion**

The analysis above has shown that display questions give the teachers and supervisor the opportunity to voice their knowledge and expertise thereby enabling them to claim positive identities. In his interview, S1 talked about building relationships during feedback:

*Observations are a big thing [in this institution] ... they are the most important part of your evaluation so people are under enough pressure without adding to it. I think [feedback] should also serve to reassure. With a large team, observation feedback is one of the few times we get serious one-to-one time together, and it's about building relationships.* (Extract from participant perspective interview with S1)

S1's comment that feedback should serve to reassure is revealing. He uses display questions to highlight teachers' good practice and thereby reassure them that he recognises them as effective teachers. However, he also uses display questions to claim a practising teacher identity for himself in order to reassure teachers he is fit to observe, lead, and fulfil the role of supervisor.

The analysis above reveals that a supervisor new to the job can feel insecure when giving feedback to long-serving, experienced teachers, especially if they are former peers. These aspects of feedback are rarely mentioned in the ELT literature which often shows supervisors to be powerful and authoritative (Copland 2011; Hyland and Lo 2006; Vásquez 2004). This may be because the feedback research to date has focused primarily on pre-service contexts.

Display questions also allow the supervisor to invoke the powerful and authoritative identity of manager/assessor through controlling the topic of conversation, claiming the right to ask questions, and enabling the supervisor to evaluate the teacher's actions. Teachers verify this manager/assessor identity by giving the required answer. However, one of the teachers subtly

challenges this identity by resisting the display question and answering the supervisor's questions with reluctance, boredom and irritation at the obvious nature of the answers he is required to give. These actions of verification and resistance show that identities are discursively accomplished in situated feedback talk and that they are fluid and contestable. Identities are also shown to be relational: the supervisor's claimed identity of manager/assessor relies on the teacher's cooperation to be sustained.

The fact that all the teachers seem to know what is required of them and that they comply (although in Saul's case reluctantly) suggests that display questions may be common to the feedback genre. However, the analysis above raises questions about the value of this type of question. Dan, Aisha and S1 may appreciate the opportunity to construct positive identities via display questions but for Saul they are a source of irritation. Display questions in the ELT classroom have been criticised as inauthentic, associated with disingenuous communication, and resulting in mechanical interaction (Walsh, 2002, 2011). These criticisms could also be levied at display questions used in feedback. Teachers like Saul may benefit more from discussions involving authentic questions about their teaching instead of being required to demonstrate what is already known. Display questions are perhaps more useful and appropriate in preservice feedback, especially group feedback in which novice teachers could learn from hearing about each other's effective classroom practises.

The analysis above points to the importance of further research into feedback with experienced teachers, especially as this seems different to preservice feedback in terms of identities, relationships, and power. A better understanding of in-service feedback may also help support

supervisors in managing feedback, especially those transitioning from the position of teacher to supervisor. Analysis also suggests that it may be useful for supervisors to become more aware of the feedback resources they use, such as display questions, and to consider how useful these are in accomplishing feedback goals.

## **Conclusion**

This article has examined the use of display questions to construct positive identities involving knowledge and expertise for teachers and a supervisor. Analysis has drawn attention to aspects of feedback not previously discussed in the ELT literature, in particular the insecurity new supervisors can experience in feedback with experienced teachers. This article has shown that feedback is a rich resource for examining teacher identity and that teacher identity is an illuminating lens with which to study feedback.

The linguistic analysis of situated, work-based talk has provided insight into how teachers and supervisors see themselves and has shown the linguistic resources feedback participants use to claim, ascribe, verify and contest identities. This leads me to argue that LTI research should include more studies of naturally occurring institutional interaction. In addition, combining linguistic analysis with ethnographic data and analysis has afforded a deeper understanding of feedback talk and participants and I have been particularly fascinated by the relationship between linguistic analysis and post-analysis participant validation interviews. This process strengthened my own analysis and brought further insight into participants thoughts, interpretations and feelings.

This study suggests practical training implications. Supervisors at the research institution received little (or no) training in how to do feedback. Additionally, and in contrast to teachers, supervisors had few institutional professional development opportunities and seldom, if ever, studied aspects of their own practice such as giving feedback. This situation is not unusual: those responsible for observing both preservice and in-service teachers have limited opportunities for professional learning (Baeher and Beaumont 2017), despite the fact that these observers are often key to teacher development. Researchers are increasingly suggesting the use of data from feedback recordings/videos to help observers become more aware of their talk in feedback (Baeher and Beaumont 2017; Copland, Ma and Mann 2009; Engin 2013; Farr 2011; Vásquez and Reppen 2007). The post analysis discussions I had with S1 were mutually beneficial, giving me added insight into my linguistic analysis and giving him a greater awareness of his practice. The extracts also stimulated much discussion about feedback in general and contextual difficulties, convincing me of the benefits of using discourse extracts with observers as a means of examining practice and promoting professional growth. Using selected short clips from recorded feedback as a stimulus could help supervisors and trainers become more reflexive and critical practitioners.

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## Appendix: Transcription Conventions

[	indicates the point of overlap onset
(.)	a very short untimed pause
WORD	indicates a stressed word
we:ll	the:: indicates lengthening of the preceding sound
-	a single dash indicates an abrupt cut-off
(xxxx)	a stretch of unclear or unintelligible speech
(guess)	indicates transcriber doubt about a word
(sighs)	additional information
(laughs)	indicates laughter
↑	rising intonation, not necessarily a question (Note: this convention is only used when directly referred to in analysis)
↓	falling intonation (Note: this convention is only used when directly referred to in analysis)
eh, ah	fillers

mm/mmhm     backchanneling indicators

non-standard forms: cos (because); yeah (yes); ok