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Advice-giving, Power and Roles in Theses Supervisions

The interactions involved in postgraduate theses supervisions can be crucial to students' development of research skills, academic writing and their own sense of themselves as research writers. One relatively unexplored area of supervisory sessions, however, is the dynamic interplay of power in these interactions. This study examines advice-giving by two supervisors in supervision meetings with two L2 master's students at an English-medium university. Drawing on observational data and detailed analysis of supervision transcripts, we show how supervisors and students co-construct their interactions through shifting power relations to shape the Literature Review Chapter. Exploring participants' language choices in these encounters, we show how language helps to shape student and supervisor roles and enact *power* relations which in turn mediate students' understandings of research knowledge and their positioning of themselves as writers. The findings suggest that power is reproduced as supervisory advice is accepted and challenged through student agency during the interaction. *Power-over*, *power-gaining* and *power-maintaining* interactions helped to reinforce sense-making in the encounters, develop students' orientation to the task and increase their self-assured stance taking.

Keywords: advice-giving, power, supervisory roles, supervisory interactions, discourse analysis

1 Introduction

Supervision is an interactive, collaborative endeavour with the potential to determine the successful outcome of a student's learning in higher education. With many Honours and graduate level students now required to write a dissertation or thesis, the quality and character of supervision has come under increased scrutiny. Supervision is now regarded as 'pedagogy' with its own institutional roles and responsibilities (e.g. Firth and Martens, 2008) and this has created a growing scholarship into supervision models,

structures and relationships (e.g. Green, 2005), raising issues concerning best practice in students' success. A crucial, but often neglected, aspect of this, we believe, is the role of power. In this study we therefore focus on how supervisors manage their roles in giving advice to shift relations of power in the encounter and how this may impact student engagement and learning.

More specifically, we seek to answer the following research questions:

(1) How does power operate in specific supervisory contexts to mediate students' learning of research knowledge and positioning of themselves as academic writers?

(2) How does power shift during a supervisory encounter and how is this accomplished?

2 Advice-giving in supervisions

Advice exchanges comprise a communicative act that is subject to negotiation between a speaker and addressee. While much discussed in the pragmatics literature, classic conceptions such as Searle's (1969: 67) of an advice giver 'telling you what is best for you' masks the fact it is a contextualised interactional achievement. As researchers have observed, this can be a delicate and risky act for both parties and may involve asymmetries of power and knowledge (e.g. Locher, 2006), although it can be supportive and face-maintaining (Hinkel, 1997). Cultural expectations are therefore important, as are, crucially, the appropriateness of the advice and the way it is communicated. An understanding of the *speech act* thus requires an understanding of the *speech activity* (Gumperz, 1992).

In supervisory meetings advice is frequently delivered in talk-around-texts. It is embedded in the activity of the tutor giving feedback to the student on his or her developing manuscript. Thus advice is based on the student's problem and the adviser works towards a solution. Such advice performs two main functions: a) directing students' overall development as researchers and b) guiding the immediate research task (McAlpine and McKinnon, 2012). Advice-giving in this context is therefore developmental, seeking to shape both the writing and the writer, constantly influencing the student's personal and intellectual engagement with the task. Advice-giving helps construct a pedagogical context that involves complex negotiations of interpersonal relationships, personal positioning, and affiliation which mediate the student's progress. The tailored nature of supervisory feedback gives it a unique status as it occurs in a

private space and shapes the process of apprenticing novice researchers (Starfield, 2019).

Such supervisory interactions, of course, are influenced by the institutional context in which they occur. The participants bring certain expectations about the encounter, about their roles, the purposes of event and more general understandings such as face-saving and mitigation strategies and the adjustment of supervisory roles. Advice is provided with the expectation that students will see it as relevant and hopefully act on it. The fact that the adviser occupies a higher rank, and possesses knowledge that the student lacks, however, positions the participants asymmetrically. This means that there may not always be mutual alignment and negotiations may involve challenge and resistance (Vehviläinen, 2009). The fact that students arrive at the meeting positioned as advice-requesters, however, may help to lessen the tensions involved and make it more likely that the advice will be accepted (e.g. Heritage and Sefi, 1992). But equally, when EAL students bring different pragmatic expectations to the interaction, cultural differences in these expectations may affect how the advice is given and received. Importantly, students may fail to understand the illocutionary force of the supervisors' suggestions (Author 2, 2019) or interpret them differently (Xu, 2017).

Supervisory roles, such as expert, auditor and editor, display the ways in which supervisors manage their engagement in supervisions (Brown & Atkins, 1988). Supervisors may choose to adjust their roles to guide, encourage, challenge and edit student contributions depending on the occasion and needs of individual cases (Benmore, 2016). As Thornborrow (2002) suggests, the advisor's local, discursive roles (e.g. instructor, respondent), in contrast with his/her institutional role (e.g. supervisor), is an emergent phenomenon that shapes local interactional consequences. An example of a guiding role is provided by Paré, Starke-Meyerring, and McAlpine (2011). They analyse how a supervisor advises a student how to position herself in relation to the discipline and her research in her literature review (LR), suggesting who the student should include and who she might omit. Such a process reveals ways of scaffolding and experts as 'mediating agents' (van Compernolle, 2015: 10). These analyses encourage us to see supervisory roles as manifested in concrete, student-specific, writing-oriented actions.

These institutionally framed roles have been discussed extensively in the literature, although these studies are often based on interviews rather than observations of real advising sessions. As a result, they fail to capture the dynamic and progressive

nature of changing roles which are modified to respond to different moments of a meeting and at different stages in the process (e.g. Harwood and Petrić, 2017). We believe that paying greater attention to real-life events, rather than reported ones, can offer a more rounded and contextualised picture of supervisors' advice-giving and the complex issues involved in this, such as how the exercise of different roles enacts power.

Language is obviously a key factor in the complex negotiations in how interactants fulfil their tasks and shape their roles in a supervision meeting. Li (2017), for example, suggests that supervisory comments give coherence to a meeting by connecting different perspectives, motives, and goals of the two parties. Supervisors may forestall resistance by merging their advice with information-giving or fitting the advice to the recipient by grounding it in a specific problem in the manuscript (Zhang Waring, 2012). Language allows interactive partners to develop, manage and resist the control of negotiation (Bloome et al., 2005). It is also a 'potential instrument of power and inequity' (Harris, 1995: 119) as members of society can reproduce power through their language use (Thornborrow, 2002). This perspective positions postgraduate writers as agents capable of using their linguistic resources to respond to supervisory orientations in different ways, furthering their own communicative goals. The collaborative co-construction that occurs in interaction (van Compernolle, 2015), including the interactional practices of language use, is key to students' development as writers, which is however underexplored in supervision processes.

3 Power in supervisory interactions

A key aspect of these supervisory interactions is power. Power has been conceptualised in various ways, but, essentially, it is the ability of an individual to influence the actions or beliefs of others. While often seen as a thing that can be transferred, bestowed and removed, this fails to consider people's sense of self and the dynamics of real interactions. Power is not simply the ability to exert coercion but refers to how individuals work together to make social actions, such as learning, possible.

Power relations engage participants in individual acts of intentions and agency (Leezenberg, 2002). In this view, power does not determine interpersonal relationships. Instead it often shifts during micro-level interactions in discourse (Hutchby, 1996). While power may limit speakers' access to certain speech acts, that is, to how they might criticize or contest for example, it enables acts such as assertions, directives and

questions (Harris, 1995). Power can, therefore, be viewed as a set of strategies (Leezenberg, 2002), or a local interactive phenomenon that is contextually produced and (re)accomplished through conversational spaces (Thornborrow, 2002). Power is exercised through a range of resources and actions available to speakers (Leezenberg, 2002), as Thornborrow notes:

> power is observable in interaction through the shifting web of discursive positions and actions that speakers take up in talk and through the range of discursive resources available to them. (Thornborrow, 2002: 10)

As linguistic forms are indicators of power, we can reveal power in discourse by analysing how utterances allow speakers to gain 'access to' and 'occupy particular kinds of turn positions' (Thornborrow, 2002: 35). For us then, power is an empirical issue which is realised, and can be analysed, through discourse.

Conversation Analysts have often discussed power through the asymmetries of participants' rights, obligations, positions and resources. Hutchby (1996), for example, explored how speakers' switch between more or less powerful positions/roles (e.g. challenger or defender) by drawing on argumentative resources (e.g. self-interruption). Hutchby (1996: 493-494) points out that asymmetry is 'not an unchanging feature' of the talk, and power is a 'potential' instantiated in how people variably exercise, accept, or resist assertion, attack and control. Wang (2006) sees power in the unequal distribution of questions, which leads to varying degrees of control and turn-taking initiation. In supervisory contexts, Chiang (2009) has shown how two supervisors used the first personal pronoun 'I', as a discourse strategy to effect evaluative, directive, and explanative advice acts, exerting power in different ways. This play of professional power reflects how they chose to position themselves in the asymmetrical supervisory encounters.

For Bloome et al. (2005), power is a contested, negotiable and dialogic process which involves bargaining and compromise. In this view, the process of exercising power can vary across the period of supervision and during a meeting as students (re) engage with the supervision context. Clearly the asymmetrical knowledge of the participants regarding the writing task confers power on the adviser and can work to mediate students' interpersonal engagement with the advice. The dynamics of power can be observed in the ways students contribute to discussions and whether they reinforce or challenge the authority of the adviser by accepting or resisting the advice

(Li and Seal, 2007). The advice-giving process is therefore mediated by the different perspectives participants bring to the context (Belcher, 1994).

It is customary to distinguish two types of power (Noddings, 1984): *power over*, the common conception of power as force, coercion and domination, and *power with*, collective strength and finding common ground. Bloome et al. (2015: 165) characterise *power-with* in terms of 'caring relations', which they define as:

> a reciprocal and multidimensional process involving action, effort, achievement, accountability, respect, self-determination for self, community, and others and responsiveness.

Language has a key role here in helping to establish caring relationships and create power-with supervisory contexts. Thus power-with seems to underlie the question-prefaced advice Vehviläinen (2012) found in her Finnish supervisions and supervisors use of praise-criticism pairs, such as 'good, but..' to avoid face-threatening behaviour (Basturkmen et al., 2014). Manathunga (2007), on the other hand, sees supervision as a powerful form of normalization and a site of governmentality which serves to reproduce disciplinary subjects in a *power over* model. However, what is important for us is the idea that power is not possessed by a particular interactant but negotiated during an encounter. Nor is it a necessarily negative force, but a productive, intentional relation (Leezenberg, 2002). Kreisberg (1992: 66), puts this well when he notes that 'power over is characterized by rigid boundaries between self and other, by force and the confrontation of wills'. In contrast, power with 'emerges within a group of individuals committed to the process of dialogue and group problem-solving' (Kreisberg, 1992: 66). This creates a 'dynamic, dialectical interaction involving connection, synthesis, and mutual growth - co-developing power' (Kreisberg, 1992: 66). The *power-with* model also challenges us to rethink 'how power functions - both for domination and for liberation' (Kreisberg, 1992: 61).

Studies of power in supervisions have focused on examining interactants' co-operative behaviours, as well as the ways they manage criticism, resolve conflict, and enact politeness. One problem for L2 students can be the pragmatic competence required to follow the everyday, more conversational discourse that advisers often use to convey their expectations about research and disciplinary practices (Paré, 2011). Cargill (2000) confirms this in a rare observational study of supervisions, finding breakdowns arising from different beliefs about rights and what can be talked about, as affecting the uptake of feedback. Wajnryb (1998: 540), on the contrary, points out that

pragmatic space can be 'beautifully afforded by slipperiness of pragmatic competence', especially when they strategically shift possibly conflicting roles (e.g. helper, assessor) to address clarity and politeness. Li and Seal (2007), using a similar analysis of recorded supervision sessions, found that the effective management of criticism required collaborative efforts and interactional skills on the part of both participants. From a different perspective, Xu (2017), a Chinese student reflecting on her supervisions, found that while she complied with all directives from her supervisor, the *power-over* model, she also recognised that advisory comments allowed for negotiation and the exercise of her agency. Therefore she adopted a role of 'active inaction' as a choice not to respond to some comments, rather than simply passivity. She interpreted supervisions as a negotiation between the Confucian values of obedience and the institutional culture of critical and independent thinking which she was being socialised into by her supervisor.

In this paper we explore more explicitly how interactions in thesis supervision sessions are co-constructed and regulated by shifting relations of power to promote new understandings of writing. Locating the discussion of power in discourse, we view power as a shifting, interactional phenomenon activated and coordinated to serve communicative purposes, such as reaching shared understanding and harmonizing plans (Habermas, 1984, cited in Harris, 1995). We also conceptualize power as a set of strategies and resources that are discursively managed and expressed in discourse. Briefly put, power acquires specific meanings in a local context; and we seek to reveal how language and roles help to accomplish power shifts that support learning. Language, then, is an instrument of power and roles are tools which shape its use in specific contexts. In what follows we examine, through the observation of two L2 master's writers' engagement in sessions devoted to Literature Review writing, how supervisory advice-giving can promote reflections and learning.

4 Participants and methods

The data for the study consists of two adviser-student pairs selected following an invitation to all students and advisers engaged in a taught master's degree in Applied Linguistics at a university in Hong Kong. The pairs represent different genders, first language and experience. The supervisors were Mandy, a native English speaker from Australia, and Linda, a local Cantonese speaking teacher. Both had doctoral degrees from English-medium universities and were experienced supervisors, having worked on

the programme for some years. The two students, Tom and Ed, were from Mainland China and had Putonghua (Mandarin) as their first language. Both had previously worked in English language schools in China for two to three years. Tom had a bachelor's degree from a Hong Kong university and Ed had studied Business at a university in China. The students were in their final semester of a 12-month programme and had completed all their course work. They had different degrees of exposure to research/thesis writing and contact with their supervisors before their supervision began (see Table 1).

Table 1 Details of the two student/supervisor pairs

	Pair 1		**Pair 2**	
	Student	**Supervisor**	**Student**	**Supervisor**
	Tom	**Mandy**	**Ed**	**Linda**
Age	25-30	45-50	30-35	40-45
L1	Mandarin	English	Mandarin	Cantonese
Students' research writing experiences	undergraduate thesis		None	
Contact with supervisor prior to meetings	Writing consultations; Written feedback on coursework assignments		Written advice on assignments and proposal for master's thesis	

The analysis relates to the observation and audio-taped exchanges in two supervision sessions which focused on writing a literature review. These sessions were conducted entirely in English and advisers provided considerable suggestions to scaffold and direct the two students' development of genre knowledge, research skills, and authorial positioning. The topics raised and other details of these sessions are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Details of recorded supervision meetings on LR writing

	Tom	Ed
Recorded meetings	First meeting (51 mins) Third/last meeting (57 mins)	First meeting (32 mins) Second/last meeting (82 mins)
Key topics	Purposes of LR Awareness of readers Crafting a research project Positioning of research Linking to discussion	Approach to writing LR Contextualization Research focus Connecting LR and findings Critical awareness
Texts referred to	Supervisor written comments on outlines, and 1st and 2nd drafts of LR	Supervisor written comments on proposal, and the 1st and 2nd drafts of LR

The first author attended these meetings and made notes on topics, artefacts which informed the talk (books, written feedback, emails) and prosodic information. The accuracy of the transcripts was checked with the second author and member-checked with the students.

The first author also enrolled in the same courses as the two students in the first semester of their study and got to know the supervisors before supervisions began. Access to the supervision sessions was therefore built on trustful researcher-participant relationships developed over time and strengthened by a range of informal conversations. As part of the research we also collected draft LR chapters and feedback on these which we read prior to the sessions and the students were interviewed immediately after them, primarily on what they had learnt from the advice-giving, their unresolved problems, and their plans for subsequent revisions. The transcripts, notes and interview data were analysed iteratively and inductively to understand each event and to generate categories of the interventions and determine key themes regarding the types of interactions. While the interview and text data inform our understanding of the supervision transcripts, we focus on the recorded transcripts here to emphasise the students' agency.

We employed a qualitative approach to examine how power operates in specific supervisory interactions. While power shifts within interactions are a focus of much of

conversation analysis work, we give greater emphasis to collaborative construction by drawing on notions of 'co-construction' and 'regulation' (van Compernolle, 2010: 2015) from sociocultural theory. What is unpacked in our analysis are: (1) the language choices involved in advice-giving which indicate power; (2) the sequences of utterances and turns (e.g. question-answer) that show shifts in power, roles and positioning. Like Thornborrow (2002: 33), we assume that 'power cannot necessarily always be read off from quantitative differences in the use of linguistic forms' and so our detailed analysis is centrally concerned with how power is located in shifting roles and specific advice acts. Our unit of analysis is the utterance and turn, exploring how these are associated with topic change and power. These help reveal how interactions realise different conceptualizations of power, as an ongoing reality based not only in the features of analysis themselves, but also the overall structure of the supervisions.

5 Modes of power interaction

Based on our reading of the literature of advice-giving, power and roles discussed above, we hypothesize that power interactions, and particularly their shifting character, are important for the collaborative construction of student learning in supervisions. Analyses of our data, however, indicate a more nuanced picture of power than generally accepted. While there are many examples of power-over, we found that *power-with* interactions could be more usefully sub-divided into *power-gaining* and *power-maintaining.* Thus, three types of power interactions were observed in the students' engagement with supervisory advice-giving (see Table 3).

(1) *Power-over interactions* are cases in which the asymmetries of knowledge are most transparent, characterised by directives and instructions.

(2) *Power-gaining interactions* respond to and encourage the students' increasing awareness of how they might orient, regulate and co-construct the direction of the talk, as well as their positioning of themselves in the encounter.

(3) *Power-maintaining interactions* display the participants' efforts to build caring connections that promote responsiveness, respect, and progress in the supervision.

Table 3 Modes of interaction observed in the two master's cases

Mode of interaction	Features of advice-giving	Student engagement	Supervisor's role
Power-over (Extracts 1 & 2)	• Predominantly authoritative • Explicitly directing, modelling, and/or elaborating	• Passive • Little intervention (e.g. acknowledging	Gatekeeper, teacher
Power-gaining (Extracts 3 & 4)	• Authoritative input to specific questions • Offering contextual cues	• Intervening • Inviting advice • Co-constructing direction of talk and learning	Instructor, negotiator, collaborator
Power-maintaining (Extracts 5 & 6)	• Authoritative input supporting the student's writing decisions • Confirming, scaffolding, orienting, questioning	• Negotiating, justifying, and/or clarifying • Self-assured stance making	Advisor and facilitator

Power is therefore responsive to the ever-changing context of supervisor-supervisee interactions, particularly the extent to which they are willing to participate as collaborators: the supervisor offering assistance and support, the student taking an active and developing role as a researcher and writer. The style of advice offered by the supervisor is therefore both regulated by, and constitutive of, the students' engagement with that advice. Supervisory and student roles shift frequently as the situation changes and serve to enact these power interactions while the language used in shaping these roles, mediates the power interaction as situated speech activity. In the following sections we illustrate how these interactions are co-constructed and help promote learning and engagement.

5.1 Power-over: asymmetrical authoritative input

Power-over interaction was characterized by a supervisor's extensive authoritative input directly prescribing and elaborating desirable research practices.

In Extract 1, from the first meeting, for example, Mandy informs Tom of the need to display knowledge of the research field and justify his theoretical understanding using modal directives '*you need to…so you need to…*' (lines 01-04). She goes on to explain how to demonstrate an understanding of the field (lines 04-05) and state a position (line 07). This is a highly didactic series of statements outlining expected standards of writing and allows little discussion. Tom's contribution is therefore confined to minimal responses (lines 3 and 6). Mandy then tones down the force of her advice by giving reasons for her assertion and emphasizing the benefits to Tom ('*you're an assessor…*' line 07) and ('*your knowledge of…*'), which is highlighted three times in line 08. Despite Mandy's switch from '*must*' to '*can*' (line 7) as her modal, softening necessity with possibility, Tom clearly feels under some pressure, replying by stating how challenging this all is.

Extract 1 Two purposes of a literature review (1st meeting, 12/04/16)

01 Mandy:	I think you need to think about a literature review having two purposes.
02	Number 1 is to show your knowledge of the field yeah?
03 Tom:	um
04 Mandy:	So you need to be able to show that you have read enough you have familiarized with your field and you have positioned your research within that field.
05	Okay and then second is to justify what you're doing in your own research.
06 Tom:	um justification.
07 Mandy:	So in your research you can show that you're an assessor your research is theoretically grounded
08	and that it's based on some um you know your knowledge of what has been done previously your knowledge of what needs to be done and also your knowledge of how it should be done as well depending on you know what you are focusing on.
09 Tom:	Yeah I think that's very challenging.

We see something similar in Linda's interaction with Ed in Extract 2. Once again the supervisor dominates the interaction with authoritative input concerning the development of a literature review.

Extract 2 What a literature review seeks to do (1st meeting, 27/06/17)

01 Linda: okay then that means going back to your literature review

02 that means you have to justify why you decided to choose this one.

03 But to justify that means you also have to go back

04 and then say you have looked at where is others.

05 That means what I'm saying the literature review should help to really um give your readers um the background about the development in this topic and um in relation to the main variables in your study right?

06 So that means they are about students' perspectives, right, and what else?…

07 Ed: you mean the research questions?

08 Linda: the variables the main variables of your study

09 the literature review purposes to provide the background right? Of the past studies um in relation to your studies.

10 So that means by reading your literature review your readers can understand more about your topic

11 before they go on to looking at what you plan to do what you did and what results you found.

12 It is important to help the readers to see the development in past studies.

Here she uses the imperative '*have to*' twice in the first few lines and the phrase '*that means*' no fewer than 6 times, giving added emphasis to her view of LR writing. This repetition of the same formula underlines her attempts to stress the importance of the literature review and its role in contextualizing the research. She does, however, seek to engage Ed by the use of addressee mention ('*you*' and '*your*' occur six times in lines 01-05) and comprehension checking with '*right?*' (lines 05 and 09) and '*what else*' (line

06) (Author 2 2005). This attention to Ed's perspective softens the power-over character of the interaction by offering him space to respond and the opportunity to gain and co-exercise power. Ed's response, however, does not help him regain any control of the discussion, as he simply seeks clarification of what Linda means. This leads to Linda's further explanation of the function of the Literature Review (lines 09-12) which accentuates, once again, the supervisor's control and views of what is '*important*'.

These extracts are characterised by power-over interactions, highlighting the asymmetries of power positions and highlighting the supervisor's authority, where the advice-giving is in one direction and largely takes the form of declarative statements. The interactions highlight the supervisors' endeavors to covey information almost as a monologue, reinforcing a definition of the situation as supervisor-controlled direction and sense-making. The supervisors' maintenance of control is shown by holding the floor for an extended period and making extensive use of assertion and obligation modals. Power is enacted by these advice acts as a resource, formulated to facilitate the students' understandings of thesis writing conventions. The asymmetries of supervisor-student knowledge create a space for power to be performed and accomplished. It does not mean the power-over model can be reduced to directive advice; yet, such advice is clearly a means of realising professional power which offers students limited opportunities to articulate their thoughts.

This is not to deny the usefulness of the advice provided and the delivery has the advantage of making explicit the kinds of research skills required of them. The content, however, is more *research-issues oriented* than *research-writer oriented* and appears to be addressed to the development of the text rather than the writers. These power-over interactions, then, fail to involve the two students in negotiating or demonstrating their understanding of research.

5.2 Power gaining: towards equality

The two students developed their skills in positioning themselves as writers when they more actively intervened to co-produce the direction of the discussions. In Extracts 3 and 4 we find the students expressing their choices in what information to add, clarify or leave out.

In Extract 3, we see Mandy indicating the importance of anticipating a marker's reaction to the thesis (lines 01-05), again, she employs a number of addressee markers to engage the student and present the issue from his perspective. Tom requests more

guidance by raising a question ('*So, what can I do?*' line 06), which assists in creating a collaborative space for concrete advice and clarification. This act helps promote and balance both parties' topic control and their co-regulation of what is expected in the thesis. In lines 07 and 09, Mandy responds with the imperative '*need*' and by agreeing with Tom that he should provide an example for the metaphor he has used. Mandy is taking the role of an instructor and negotiator at this point as she explicitly gives directions to reinforce the expectation of academic writing (line 07). Tom again seeks validation from Mandy to reach an interpersonal agreement with '*so am I right to…*' (line 10), thus developing what van Compernolle (2010: 76) refers to as a 'shared orientation to the unfolding task'.

Tom then makes his longest contribution, revealing a more assertive and engaged positioning by incorporating Mandy's advice ('*…what the readers probably need to know*') into his own turn. Here we can see Tom venturing an understanding as a researcher and writer. While Mandy did not prompt this reflexivity with facilitative input such as questions, her advice was highly contextualized (line 09) and includes a focus on 'problem-solving in writing'. This strategy evokes the writer's attention and triggers collaboration. We interpret this instance as a power-gaining interaction which is also an empowering process that enhances the student's awareness of self in the negotiation.

Extract 3 Awareness of readers (1st meeting, 12/04/16)

01 Mandy:	You need to anticipate what your reader does and doesn't know.
02	You know what I do and don't know but you have no idea what your second marker does and doesn't know.
03	So your use of for example like weather in climate okay that's a very common metaphor that is used to explain 'instantiation'
04	And I know what you mean there but your second marker might not know what you mean there.
05	So if from you know the perspective of the second marker that's not gonna to be very helpful in order for them to understand.
06 Tom:	So what can I do?
07 Mandy:	So if you want to mention that it needs to be explained.

08 Tom: By examples or?

09 Mandy: Yeah so another sentence when you say something like 'for example um climate is the more abstract concept whereas weather is the example' some kind of one or two sentences which I mean the purpose of this use of the metaphor is supposed to help exemplify something make it clear.

10 Tom: So am I right to put that in this way

11 like um I should add up some general description or linkage between the metaphor that Halliday has used and to what the readers probably need to know

12 Mandy: Yeah or leave it out.

Ed's negotiation with Linda also became more interactive when he played a more active role in co-constructing and contextualizing the discussion (see Extract 4). When Linda gives advice on how to discuss tests in Mainland China (line 03), Ed immediately completes her utterance (lines 04-05) and seeks to verify what should be included in that section (lines 06 and 08). This demonstrates a high degree of involvement in the discourse and restricts Linda's contribution to confirm the need to discuss test validation (lines 08-09). Ed continues to act in a collaborative manner by supporting Linda's advice-giving with more contextual details (line 12). During this discussion, Linda was reinforcing academic writing conventions, clarifying the approach to the LR and directing Ed's development of a research focus (line 13). She delivers her expert knowledge and maintains the power of her academic position to promote the completion of a literature review chapter of expected standards.

But while she provides little room for disagreement, as shown by her use of '*have to*' (line 14) she softens this with '*we*', intimating that they are involved in a joint project. Here she is a negotiator and partner encouraging a 'mutual obligation' (Dysthe, Samara, and Westrheim, 2006: 310) between them. Authority is shared at this point as Linda moves away from a gatekeeping role, authorizing expert knowledge, towards a *collaborating* one by avoiding dominance. Linda is responding to Ed's thoughts he reciprocates with his understanding of her advice with '*so you mean to relate the literature…?*' (line 18). His response seeks clarification, but reinforces the collaborative maintaining of intersubjectivity, which depicts mediation as 'a contingent action' (van Compernolle, 2010: 76).

Extract 4 What to discuss in a literature review? (1st meeting, 27/06/17)

01 Ed:	yeah about tests some literature about these tests
02	because there are some studies about these tests in mainland China.
03 Linda:	And the studies also talk about maybe some…
04 Ed:	why the tests are high-stake
05	but not to discuss student evaluation of the courses.
06	Is it proper to put into this part?
07 Linda:	yeah yeah you need to so why they are high-stake tests and do they also maybe discuss…
08 Ed:	like the validation of the tests?
09 Linda:	yeah okay mention about those
10	and do they also discuss whether these tests are you know can find out students' abilities
11	you know that means students' advantages maybe still some disadvantages
12 Ed:	it's also a student proficiency test in mainland China.
13 Linda:	okay right remember a literature review is not a report on what you have read
14	so we have to put it in the discussion
15	that means that's your thoughts about what you have read
16	as I emphasized earlier comparing and contrasting to bring out what you see
17	as what you put in here for the literature review to help to bring out your…
18 Ed:	so you mean to relate the literature I have read to my topic?
19 Linda:	yeah.

In these interactions, the supervisors' shifting roles (e.g. from *gatekeeping* to *collaborating*) relinquish their power (Haworth, 2006), and this helps to set up

conditions for power transfer. We can also see this co-regulation of the power process where the students take more control of the discussion and gain some power within it. Their use of their contextual knowledge enables them to activate their power and to create space for questioning, interrupting, raising concerns and re-positioning themselves. These shifts of power can therefore be seen as a strategy to achieve shared understanding, increased responsibility and equality.

5.3 Power-maintaining: mutual self-assurance

As discussed above, supervisors shifted between an instructor/gatekeeper and facilitator/collaborator role in dynamic ways to communicate their authority, enact politeness, and promote collaboration. The enactment of supervisor roles, however, requires the agreement of other parties to the interaction to either challenge or endorse their performance. Roles thus involve corresponding roles performed by the students and entail interactive work (van Compernolle, 2010) to build equality in power interactions. As we have just seen, students more actively engaged in the discussions to co-construct their developmental potential in power-gaining interactions, but a third type of interaction involves a more balanced distribution of agency and involvement: power-maintaining. Here we find interactions that display more caring and encouraging connections.

We can see something of this in the next two extracts. In Extract 5, Tom opens by showing uncertainty about discussing CDA in his thesis as it potentially conflicts with his original research interest and the approach preferred by Mandy. This reluctance is evident in his use of hedging, with the mitigated assertion '*I know maybe there is interest there*' (line 01) and '*I don't know if it's right*' (line 02). Mandy engages with this hesitation by suggesting ways to discuss CDA (lines 05-06) and reinforces a clear orientation towards that (line 11). This facilitates Tom's perception of how to position himself in relation to different theoretical perspectives (line 07). Mandy's confirming and supporting acts (lines 08-10) express her orientation to an advisor role, with an attempt to support Tom in gaining confidence in his judgements and assist him towards a more agentive role. This is an important step in Tom's progress towards becoming a researcher as he had previously, in an interview, expressed himself as "not having enough power" in voicing his thoughts.

We can see a more assertive and confident positioning in Tom's final utterances in the extract (lines 12-17). It seems that he has been empowered by Mandy's previous confirming and supporting acts as he explains his research intention and clarifies why he chose not to focus on CDA. His willingness to express a stance shows a high degree of confidence in his research direction (marked by the utterances '*I would have other purposes…*', '*It is different from…*', and '*it's necessary…*' lines 14-15). Thus while Mandy's advice remains authoritative and directive here, it serves to empower Tom's self-assured stance taking (lines 12-17), which is in marked contrast with his uncertainty and self-doubt in Extract 1. Tom's shifting of positioning is partly due to changes in his familiarity with different research issues as the topics changed within the meeting. We can, however, see a growing confidence in his willingness to exercise agency. He thus sought to use the discourse to construct and occupy 'particular subject positions' (Thornborrow, 2002: 6). We see this interaction as power-maintaining, as the supervisor's advice-giving built connections that promoted the student's repositioning of himself as an emergent knowledge-contributor.

Extract 5 Discussing theoretical perspectives (3rd meeting, 15/08/16)

01 Tom:	I know maybe there is interest there.
02	But in my research I don't know if it is right to talk about you know something like that.
03 Mandy:	Why would you say you don't want to do things from the Critical Discourse Analysis perspective?
04 Tom:	Because it is also criticized by … cause my study is about the language use and not too much about…
05 Mandy:	So to position yourself you know from the SFL perspective
06	and to justify that you don't need to say that Critical Discourse Analysis is wrong
07 Tom:	Ah okay it's not wrong.
08 Mandy:	yeah it's not wrong yeah
09	It's clearly a valid form of discourse analysis otherwise um

10		But that you believe um that um that SFL presents um theoretical orientation that you believe in
11		and you want to base your research on this…
12	Tom:	Cause basically I think what I'm going to do is about to look at the language use.
13		That's the purpose of the research.
14		If I'm going to do some Critical Analysis then basically I would have others purpose beyond seeing the language as the social purpose.
15		It's different from you know what I'm currently doing.
16		But I think it's necessary to point it out
17		because it's about the topic it's related to some related topics as well to say you know the differences between my research the purpose and the others.

Similarly, Ed initially found it difficult to express his theoretical positioning in his literature review. In Extract 6 he explains his difficulty in integrating relevant literature and finding a framework to integrate prior work. Linda responds as an insider, relating her experience as a research writer to the problem faced by Ed, here she takes the role as an advisor by adjusting the writer's revision process (lines 10-13). Linda switches her position between a *collaborator* of thesis research and an *immediate reader*, engaging Ed in reinterpreting her suggestions in a way that minimizes her evaluative power. Linda's repeated use of '*we*' (line 13) acknowledges her sharing of the pedagogical responsibility for tackling Ed's problem and her attitude towards Ed's learning. The admonishment '*now you should have read more*' (line 11) is softened in the next line by the statement this is a usual circumstance (line 12). This demonstration of empathetic understanding seems to encourage Ed to reframe the issue he has (line 27) and Linda's concession to Ed's perceived difficulty with '*If you… that's fine*' (line 31) shows further understanding and offers a route for Ed to handle the problem and 'turn potentially debilitating fear and ambitions into working energy' (Dysthe, Samara, and Westrheim, 2006: 309).

Extract 6 Linking the literature review and discussion (2nd meeting, 15/08/17)

01 Ed: yeah firstly I would like to ask questions about the comments on this chapter.

02 You mentioned that in chapter 2 I should 'compare and contrast the related studies and point out strengths and weaknesses to identify the research gaps'.

03 But the problem is um before I start my project I haven't read so much.

04 That's what I do

05 I started what I do with my project.

06 So I started with a general framework to look at the private center students' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of different courses

07 but it's hard to relate to the previous studies.

08 Somebody already dig down into these variables related to the studies

09 It's difficult to write these chapters I think.

10 Linda: Because as you said you wrote this based on what you read um maybe before you started it the research right.

11 But now you should have read more

12 It is actually very common

13 in fact we should do that um when we are really working on our study we keep reading.

……..

27 Ed After I write so much I find it's hard to select the literature really so closely related to my study.

28 So that's the problem.

29 You mentioned that I wrote something which maybe not so closely related.

30 But I think it's part of the aspect.

31 Linda: Okay. If you see you can connect that part of the literature review with what you have done and could be related to the discussion then that's fine.

We interpret these interactions as a power-maintaining process essential to the effective negotiation of learning and more self-assured stance taking. The supervisors respond to the writers' difficulties and emotional needs in a way that allow learning to be successfully managed rather than resisted. Here the supervisors' assumption of local positional power appears to be conceded and shifted to encourage the students to speak and perform personal power. Power is therefore instantiated in the supervisors' rhetorical effort in building the students' self-assurance and directing them away from a discursive struggle. The caring connection established in these supervision sessions is a key factor in potentially promoting the 'achievement, accountability and respect' which is integral to power-with relations (Bloome et al., 2015: 165). Underpinning these extracts is the articulation of trustful academic relationships which support these novice writers, encouraging greater self-awareness, responsiveness, and mutual understanding. The students' articulation of their difficulties is important as they contribute to more dialogic, self-empowering conversations. It is because this articulation entails recursive evaluation of what to align with, resist, contest, reinforce and omit, which communicates the writer's personal positioning, reflexivity, and emergent awareness of a writerly self.

6 Conclusions

Supervision sessions are crucial sites where students participate in the highly situated, interested, contingent, and constantly evolving process of learning how to write and the ways knowledge is produced in their fields. Within the sessions we have analysed here the participants worked towards these research writing goals by acting upon each other to create different dynamics of power. It is the main argument of this paper that these power interactions are collaboratively constructed, making power an interactional resource discursively utilized to mediate the supervisory advice-giving process. Obviously, we recognise the limitations of a study of just two student-supervisor pairs and the clear need for further research to determine students' experiences of supervisory feedback and how they process and respond to it and its pragmatic intentions, particularly when English is an additional language of both parties. We believe however, this work is important.

Power interactions in supervisions are a mediated system regulated by the ways that the parties co-produce the direction of progress towards writing development. They are (re)formed as the supervisors enact their roles and utilize language to convey their

intellectual engagement and attitudes. Language choices can represent a perspective of research supervision as a collaborative activity of mutually distributed responsibility through advice giving in the role of *negotiator*, *collaborator*, and *facilitator* which allows students room for manoeuvre and the possibility of cooperation or contestation. Inherent in this view is the idea that students are capable of adapting themselves to the complex negotiation of positioning, affiliation and conflict. Interactions in supervision, then, can be understood as a dialogically co-regulated process.

We have noted that power-over interactions are characterized by limited space for negotiation as the supervisors primarily seek to explain through declarative and imperative statements what research knowledge is needed and what is expected of thesis writers. Power here, enacted in extensive supervisory assertions, involves inequality and a relationship of domination and control, and there are clear 'boundaries between self and other' in the conversation (Kreisberg, 1992: 66). Alternatively, when a supervisor explicates these learning expectations, using examples, questions, placing themselves in the student's position, and using hedges and addressee pronouns, this is more likely to encourage engagement. Power as a local and negotiated phenomenon shapes the student's learning potential. If this input is responded to by the student, through questions, clarifications requests, more textual details and uptake more generally, this regulates the supervisor's advice-giving and indexes a power-gaining/maintaining process. Therefore power can be activated by the (student's) occupation of the conversation floor, as a strategy for collaboration, and here both parties are 'committed to the process of dialogue and group problem-solving' (Kreisberg, 1992: 66).

We have also stressed that advice-giving in supervision meetings not only creates a social context that mediates the learning of what is considered appropriate research practices and disciplinary writing, but also a site for culturally-meaningful interactions that support students' formation of academic identities. The kinds of interaction that occur around this learning are, we believe, crucially important in scaffolding students emergent sense-making and positioning as future academics and have the capacity to expand or inhibit their growing confidence and voice. These interactions show us that power not only functions for domination but also liberation, encouraging us to rethink the role of collaboration and mutuality in the power process. These interactions also suggest that caring connections play a vital part in empowering research writers and are key to building both mutual respect and a shared orientation.

As part of this process, the two students gradually came to articulate tensions between their own interests and orientations and what they saw as the academic expectations of disciplinary writing. Their earlier inability to create an appropriate researcher voice was possibly, in part, due to the fact they did not know how to appropriately position themselves in relation to their supervisors' authority. This suggests that we should consider the part that cultural assumptions might influence students' engagement in the interaction, affecting how they take up advice and negotiate disagreement, for example. We are also encouraged by the research to consider how we might provide scaffolded support to supervisees, a setting that encourages their expression of messy thoughts and culturally specific understandings. Paré (2011: 71), for example, advises us to adopt an open discussion that develops 'a shared meta-knowledge of textual conventions'. This suggests that supervisors adopt roles which display a sensitivity to writers' emergent learning needs, self-awareness and independence as it is critically important for supervisors to respond to not only issues of *research* but also to students' perceptions of *themselves*.

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Table 1 Details of the two student/supervisor pairs

Table 2 Details of recorded supervision meetings on LR writing

Table 3 Modes of interaction observed in the two master's cases