

Instructor-initiated Suggestions in Office Hour Discourse: Emphasis on Modality*

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Abstract: From a discourse analytic approach, this study examines suggestion-response episodes in office hour interactions. The theoretical framework of relational work broadly informs the study. A total of thirty-eight office hour interactions constitute the primary data source, and the participants are 3 international instructors and their 34 Turkish students at two universities in the northwest of Turkey. The analysis demonstrates that the co-constructed suggestion-response episodes yield a large amount of instructor-initiated suggestions. Modality (modals and semi-modals) is crucial in instructor-initiated suggestions functioning especially to fulfill their institutional role as support provider in such office hour interactions. A closer analysis of the episodes also reveals that the international instructors fulfill a variety of functions (e.g., providing alternative ways as a solution; emphasizing expectations or requirements for assignments tasks and projects; expressing outcomes of a future action; suggesting a future action, etc.) while making suggestions with modals and semi-modals. Adopting a discourse analytic perspective, this study might pave the way for prospective research endeavors specifically in intercultural communication.

Anahtar sözcükler

Öneriler, ofis saati söylemi, edimbilimsel yeterlik, ilişkisel iş

Ofis Saati Söyleminde Eğitimci Tarafından Yapılan Öneriler: Kip Eklerine Vurgu

Öz: Bu çalışma, söylem analizi yaklaşımını açısından ofis saati söylemindeki öneri-cevap kısımlarını inceler. İlişkisel iş kuramsal çerçevesi genel olarak çalışmayı besler. Toplamda otuz sekiz ofis saati görüşmesi temel veriyi oluşturur ve katılımcılar Türkiye'nin kuzeydoğusundaki 2 üniversitedeki 3 uluslararası eğitimci ve bu eğitimcilerin 34 Türk öğrencisidir. Analiz, birlikte oluşturulan öneri-cevap kısımlarının çok fazla miktarda eğitimci tarafından yapılan öneriler bulunduğunu gösterir. Kip ekleri (kipler ve yarı kipler) eğitimci tarafından yapılan önerilerde, onların bu tarz ofis saati görüşmelerindeki destek sağlayıcı gibi kurumsal rollerini gerçekleştirmelerini sağlayarak önem arz etmektedir. Bu kısımların daha yakından analizi ayrıca uluslararası eğitimcilerin kip ekleri ile öneride bulunurken bir çok işlevi yerine getirdiğini ortaya koyar (ör. çözüm olarak alternatif yollar sağlamak, ödevler/görevler/projelerin beklentileri veya gerekliliklerini vurgulamak, ilerideki bir hareketin sonuçlarını ifade etmek, veya ileride yapılacak bir hareketi önermek, vb.). Söylem analizi yaklaşımını benimseyen bu çalışma, özellikle kültürlerarası iletişimdeki gelecekteki araştırma çabaları için bir yol açabilir.

1. Introduction

The speech act of suggestions play a key role in understanding pragmatic competence in second/foreign (L2) context (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1996; Jiang, 2006; Reinhardt, 2010) and examining suggestions more closely, specifically in office hour interactions, is of great importance for several reasons. First, given the goal and role of office hours as a type of institutional discourse (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Duff, 2010; Limberg, 2010; Sarangi & Roberts, 1999), suggestions in such interactions are likely to occur abundantly as both instructors and students desire to utilize such interactional space for collective solutions to their academic concerns. More specifically, in understanding intercultural communication (Scollon, Scollon & Jones, 2012), suggestions in office hours in this study are considered to have a fundamental role in displaying the dynamics of how international instructors and Turkish students employ certain linguistic choices while offering suggestions. As dyadic interactions where two parties are involved, it would also be quite likely to capture the moments of how international instructors and their Turkish students attend to interpersonal functions in the ongoing interaction and contribute to relational work (Locher, 2004, 2006; Locher & Watts, 2005, 2008).

Pragmatic competence as the umbrella concept in this study has been traditionally defined through the distinction between pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics by Leech (1983). Pragmalinguistics can be broadly defined as linguistic resources for performing communicative acts and constructing relational/interpersonal meanings. Such linguistic resources include, but are not limited to, several pragmatic strategies such as directness/indirectness, routines, and several linguistic forms that can be used to intensify or mitigate communicative acts. Sociopragmatics usually relates to “the social perceptions underlying participants' interpretation and performance of communicative action” situated in a certain social context (Kasper, 1997, p.1). For example, language learners' knowledge of available semantic formulas (e.g., *I can't lend you my car for the weekend*) and lexis to refuse a request in the second/foreign language relates to pragmalinguistic aspects whereas sociolinguistic aspects involve the ability to assess in/appropriacy regarding contextual factors in that specific interaction.

This study demonstrates how both pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics of office hour interactions are intertwined in the realization of the speech act of suggestions by addressing these two facets of pragmatic competence. It is highly important for Turkish students at universities which use English as medium of instruction (EMI) to use English for effective communication not only for in-class interactions but also other forms of academic interactions outside the class. Obviously, office hour discourse as one essential type of such interactions might be challenging for them while trying to convey their meaning to their international instructors, seeking a solution to their academic problems, and communicating throughout the tasks in hand. This usually requires awareness of and competence in both linguistic resources and social context. Therefore, this study is potentially significant to understand how Turkish students display pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic knowledge while participating in intercultural communication and also orient themselves to the institutional norms throughout their interactions with their international instructors.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Politeness: Brown and Levinson Model

Along with the two-faceted nature, as discussed above, the notion of pragmatic competence and realization of suggestions in this study is informed by and examined through certain

theoretical perspectives on linguistic politeness. So far, researchers have put a considerable amount of effort into providing a comprehensive account of linguistic politeness and its manifestations. Amidst various theories of politeness, Brown and Levinson's (1987) model has been immensely employed over the last three decades. Drawing mainly upon Goffman's (1967) notion of face, their definition asserts that face is "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.61).

Brown and Levinson (1987) further categorize our face or face-wants into two aspects: *negative face* and *positive face*. Negative face represents our claim for freedom of action and freedom from imposition, and positive face involves a positive self-image and our desire to be appreciated or accepted by others. In interpersonal communication, maintenance of positive face is closely linked to the desire or need for acknowledgment that we are liked, accepted and understood by others in a speech community. On the other hand, from the viewpoint of negative face, people want to be given independence or options in their actions rather than being imposed by others. The concepts of negative and positive face thus influence our linguistic choices in everyday communication. The speech acts that threaten or do not respect interlocutors' face-wants are considered face-threatening acts (FTAs).

Recent literature, however, highlights several caveats with respect to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and brings a less normative perspective to politeness with an emphasis on their notion of face (Dippold, 2009; Locher, 2004; Locher & Watts, 2008; Watts, 2003). Locher and Watts (2005) claim that despite its solid description, Brown and Levinson's model of politeness mainly relies on the concept of facework and linguistic strategies for mitigating FTAs rather than a theory of politeness. Thus, as a current way of theorizing facework, Locher and Watts (2005) propose relational work with an emphasis on "discursive dispute" in which interlocutors reproduce forms of behavior and evaluate these forms along the continuum of polite/politic/appropriate and impolite/non-politic/impolite verbal behavior (p.16).

2.2. Im/Politeness: Relational Work

One of the most intriguing aspects of Locher and Watt's (2005) relational work is that their reconceptualization of facework is in the form of a continuum of verbal behavior. Unlike Brown and Levinson's (1987) model that makes a distinction between polite and impolite language, this continuum incorporates both polite/appropriate and impolite/inappropriate forms of social behavior (Locher, 2004). Being informed by Goffman's perspective, Locher and Watts (2005) claim that interlocutors are involved in the negotiation of face in any interpersonal interaction. However, participants will perceive and evaluate such relational work that is situated in the social context of interpersonal interaction as polite or impolite only if it is a marked, or salient, behavior. This includes both negatively and positively marked behavior. A negatively marked behavior can be evaluated by the hearer as impolite/inappropriate or over-polite/inappropriate (Locher & Watts, 2005). By the same token, positively marked behavior will be considered as polite/appropriate. For example, it is possible to use the utterances '*Pass it to me!*' and '*Could you please pass it to me?*' in different interactions. At first glance, the first expression would sound too direct but be appropriate, and it would not be impolite in a routinized dinner with family members. Similarly, the second utterance would first sound more polite but would only be appropriate with someone socially distant rather than a family member.

One major idea Locher and Watts (2005) offer in their ‘relational work’ framework is the conceptualization of politeness as a discursive phenomena and its negotiation by the participants in a social context. Locher and Watts (2005) define politeness “as a discursive concept arising out of interactants’ perceptions and judgments of their own and others’ verbal behavior” (p.10). Putting emphasis on the necessity of seeking new ways of conceptualizing linguistic politeness, they argue that speakers and addressees produce a collective work for a common understanding among themselves in their interactional exchanges. Thus, framing politeness through a discursive approach embodies not only what the speaker produces but also the hearers’ evaluations and interpretations within longer fragments in genuine interactions rather than short examples provided by researchers (Kádár&Bargiela-Chiappini, 2010).

Likewise, this study embraces the notion of face through the lens of relational work as this offers several implications for the analysis of office hour interactions between Turkish university students and their international instructors. As one certain activity type within institutional discourse, the office hour discourse frames the type of interaction as the institutional roles of the interlocutors are known to each other (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Duff, 2010; Sarangi & Roberts, 1999). The status difference and expert-novice relationship from the overarching framework of institutional discourse seem to have an impact on language use by international instructors and their Turkish students. Yet, as long as the situation allows, the interlocutors might tend to negotiate or actualize their interpersonal goals as a part of their instructor-student relationship. At some points, certain speech acts such as making a suggestion and/or responding to a suggestion might be FTAs for either side of the participants in certain cases. In another interaction, however, the very same act of suggesting, or responding to a suggestion, might be face-enhancing or face-maintaining for each party. Therefore, a discursive analysis of relevant segments in the ongoing talk facilitates our understanding of such negotiations of face wants or needs between the participants.

3. Review of Literature on Suggestions

Suggestions are considered to be a type of directive (Searle, 1976), where the speaker’s purpose is to get the hearer to do a future action. Thus, as the speaker is performing a suggestion, s/he presumes a kind of response from the addressee, and that response depends on how the speaker communicates his/her suggestion (Martínez-Flor, 2010). Likewise, drawing on three conditions, Koike (1994) describes suggestions as complex speech acts. First, either the hearer states a problem/concern, or the speaker is aware of the problem/concern, and the speaker makes a suggestion. Second, the speaker believes that the proposed action in his/her suggestion will help the hearer, as the primary beneficiary, solve the problem/concern. Third, the hearer is expected to give a verbal response or abide by the suggestion.

In line with other speech acts, suggestions might involve numerous linguistic forms in their realization. A detailed taxonomy of suggestions by Martínez-Flor (2005) proposes a classification of linguistic strategies of suggestions in three focal types: *direct*, *conventionalized*, and *indirect* forms. *Direct* suggestions refer to strategies by which the speaker distinctly expresses what she/he means, and include performative verbs, a noun of suggestions, imperatives and negative imperatives. *Conventionalized* forms of suggestions afford a range of strategies such as interrogative forms, expressions of possibility/probability, suggestions through *should* and *need*, and the conditional. The third group of suggestions is *indirect* strategies that incorporate impersonalized expressions (e.g., *A good idea would be...*)

and hints (e.g., *I've heard that...*) where the real intention of the speaker is not clearly stated. Such indirect forms require the hearer to make inference about the proposed suggestion as they do not show the suggestive force in the utterance (Martínez-Flor, 2005).

Earlier research on suggestions in academic settings has been conducted by Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1990, 1993, 1996) by examining academic advising sessions. Their major focus is on the status congruence and suggestions, and they defined congruence as “the match of a speaker’s status and the appropriateness of speech acts given that status” (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990, p.473). The researchers also state that suggestions are status-congruent for advisors but not students in advising sessions. However, in the case of noncongruent speech acts, it is important to effectively negotiate them by appropriate status-preserving strategies for a reciprocal fulfillment. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993) also show that nonnative students acquired some pragmatic competence throughout advising sessions. For example, their suggestions, especially student-initiated ones, have increased in the number and rate of success (the acceptance of the advisor’s suggestion), but nonnative speakers have still kept responding to questions more than native speakers.

From a corpus-based perspective, Jiang (2006) has also examined suggestions in two types of authentic discourse. The study investigates how suggestions are realized in office hour interactions between professors and students, and study group interactions among students. Modals such as *have to*, *need to*, and *should* seem to be the most common ones in the corpus data. What is interesting about the use of modals pertains to the role of mitigation or the choice of hedges. For example, students in study groups employ more aggravators (e.g., *do*, *really*, *must*, etc.) to display the urgency of their suggestions whereas hedging in professors’ suggestions functions as lessening the degree of authority, urgency, or imposition. Thus, the social status of the interlocutors has been considered the essential factor for syntactic choices in suggestions in office hour and study group interactions.

Research on suggestions provides us with some preliminary insights into how they are performed in academic or institutional discourse. However, it is also argued that suggestions specifically from discourse-based perspectives have not been studied sufficiently in interlanguage and cross-cultural pragmatics when compared to other speech acts (Jiang, 2006; Martínez-Flor, 2005). This study aims to contribute to this line of research by exploring the subtleties of how international instructors and their Turkish students use language in intercultural communication with a specific emphasis on suggestion-response episodes in office hour interactions. Adopting a discourse-analytic approach and the framework of relational work (Locher, 2004; Locher & Watts, 2005), the study aims to eliminate over-reliance on isolated analysis of utterances involving a certain type of illocutionary force or speech act. To do so, the study presents an analysis of how both participant groups give and receive suggestions while co-constructing larger discourse segments of office hour interactions.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This study examined naturally occurring talk during university office hour interactions between the international instructors and their Turkish students. The data were collected and analyzed in an EMI setting involving two private universities in Turkey. Thus, this study embraces a discourse analytic approach (Gee, 2011) that is informed by interactional sociolinguistics and relational work. The theoretical and methodological perspectives

underpinning this study are closely linked in terms of their main tenets. First, they all rely on social interaction and naturally occurring data as it is in this study. It is the social context and factors that have impact on how participants use language to form their social relationships. Second, the expectations and conventions are culturally situated, and such shared knowledge of social context facilitates the participants' interpretations in the interactions. Finally, meaning in social interaction through language use is not only created by the speaker, but it is co-constructed and negotiated by all participants in the ongoing talk (Locher, 2004; Tannen, 2005).

4.2. Setting and Participants

This study was carried out at two foundation universities in the northwest of Turkey. Both universities offer EMI programs fully and students are expected to meet certain language proficiency before they start their undergraduate program. As for the specific setting in this study, the office hour interactions between Turkish students and their international instructors took place in instructors' offices, or in a meeting room allocated by faculties for such purposes.

Two groups of participants were recruited in this study: the 3 international instructors and their 34 undergraduate Turkish university students. Even though two of these instructors can speak Turkish at varying degrees, they prefer to use English in their interactions with students for both institutional and personal reasons. Thus, the interaction between the international instructors and their Turkish students constitute the instances of intercultural communication in Turkey. The 3 international instructors who participated in this study are Mike, Maria, and Amelia (pseudonyms). Mike is a North American native speaker of English and cannot speak or understand Turkish at all. Maria is an Italian non-native speaker of English. She is a native speaker of Italian and Friulian (a Romance language) and also speaks several other languages. Amelia is a Bosnian-Herzegovinian non-native speaker of English. She is a native speaker of Bosnian and also French and Italian at pre-intermediate levels. Both Maria and Amelia speak Turkish with a B2 level according to The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF or CEFR).

4.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The major data collection method in this study included the recorded and transcribed authentic interactions between the international instructors and their Turkish EFL students in their office hours. As the main data source in this study, naturally occurring office hour interactions were audio-recorded over four months using an up-to-date digital Olympus DM 620 audio-recorder. A total of 38 office hour interactions were recorded. Once it became clear that the data was repeating itself, and no new information was coming (e.g., the topic, content, or purpose for coming to the office hour), the researcher stopped recording office hour interactions deciding no more data was needed. That is, once data saturation was evident, the office hour interaction recordings ceased (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010).

The data analysis in this study was composed of a process that involved numerous stages. Transcribing the audio-recorded office hour interactions was the first step of not only preparing but also analyzing the data in this study. The process of turning the spoken discourse into a text is crucial in discourse studies where the primary data is the audio-recorded interactions. It requires considering the goal, theoretical framework, and scope of the research study in order to decide what and how to transcribe the spoken data (Du Bois, 1991; Edwards, 2003; Ochs, 1979). In this study, the researcher completed verbatim transcriptions

of all the recorded office hour interactions as the study involved examination of all the phases or stages of office hour interactions. This enabled immediate acquaintance with the primary data source. This study utilized the transcription conventions by Du Bois (1991) with slight adaptations and additions considering his readability principle. The transcription codes and conventions are given in Appendix A.

Following the transcription and data preparation processes, the coding of the office hour transcriptions as the primary data source was conducted in many steps and a layered analysis of the data. The process involved a manual data coding through color-coding, sticky notes, keeping a log, and the process took around two months to complete. In order to identify and code suggestions in office hour interactions, the researcher pursued a comprehensive review of previous studies on suggestions in English, which included various data sources, such as discourse completion tasks (DCTs) and multiple-choice data (Banerjee & Carrell, 1988; BU, 2011; Matsumura, 2001), oral and written questionnaires (Koike, 1996), role plays (Hinkel, 1994; Li, 2010), corpus data (Jiang, 2006; Reinhardt, 2010), and naturally occurring interactions (Alcón, 2001; Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993; Thonus, 2002; Locher, 2006). Overall, all these studies assured the understanding of how to recognize, code, and categorize the syntactic choices that were used by the participants in this study as well as the directness and indirectness levels of each syntactic type. Although directness/indirectness of suggestions played a crucial role in the analysis as well, it was preferable to categorize syntactic choices considering mood types similar to Koike (1994), Li (2010) and Locher (2006). The notion of mood types refers to the directness or indirectness scale of suggestions in this study. Thus, a multilayered coding scheme drawing upon abovementioned studies specifically for this study is shown in Appendix B.

5. Findings

5.1. Overview of Suggestions

The office hour corpus in this study yielded a total of 1,411 suggestions in thirty-eight interactions, which indicates that this speech act frequently occurs in this context. As shown in Table 1, more than half of these suggestions (N=880) were produced as declaratives (62%). The second most frequent category was imperatives (N=376 or 27%). Finally, interrogatives were the least frequent category of suggestion realizations in office hour dataset (N=155 or 11%). That is, the participants in this study used direct (e.g., imperatives) or conventionally indirect suggestions more than indirect ones. A closer look at Table 1 also shows that a great amount of all suggestions was produced by the instructors (N=1335 or 95%), whereas the students produced only 76 suggestions (5%) in the dataset. Again, declaratives were the most frequent forms in both groups (N=824 or 58% by the instructors, and N=56 or 4% by the students). Although imperatives were the second most frequent category, as stated above, none of the students used this suggestion form in office hour interactions. In other words, the students avoided the most direct form in their suggestions. Finally, interrogatives as suggestions were also mostly used forms by the instructors (N=135 or 10%) when compared to the students (N=20 or 1%). Yet, when we consider the total number of students' suggestions, interrogatives as suggestions appear to be one of the two most frequent categories.

To gain more insights into the dynamics of the suggestion-response episodes in each set of office hour interactions by Mike, Maria, Amelia, and their students, I now turn to instructor-initiated suggestions in office hour interactions in the next section. After providing an

overview, I present findings of one specific type of instructor-initiated suggestions: modals and semi-modals.

Table 1

Overall Number and Frequency of Suggestions

	Instructors		Students		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Imperatives	376	27	0	0	376	27
Declaratives	824	58	56	4	880	62
Interrogatives	135	10	20	1	155	11
Total	1335	95	76	5	1411	100

5.2. Instructor-initiated Suggestions

Looking at Table 2 immediately shows that all three instructors initiated a remarkable amount of suggestions (N=1335). All three instructors used a variety of suggestion realizations, though in differing amounts. More specifically, the use of modals and semi-modals as the subcategory of declaratives was the most frequent in instructor-initiated suggestions among all types of syntactic categories (39%). These were then followed closely by imperatives as the second most frequent suggestion type (28%). Interrogatives were next including both *yes/no* and *wh-* questions (10%). Such a difference in the instructor's use of suggestion forms might relate to the purposes and topics of office hour interactions as well as their communicative style as one solid type of institutional discourse.

Table 2

Number and Type of Instructor-initiated Suggestions

	Mike	Maria	Amelia	Total	%
	N	N	N	N	
Imperatives	104	85	187	376	28
Performatives	2	4	16	22	2
Modals and Semi-modals	214	69	244	527	39
<i>Want/need</i> statements	16	9	64	89	7
Pseudo cleft	8	1	15	24	2
Extraposed <i>to</i>	1	3	7	11	1
Hints	17	13	28	58	4
Elliptical	11	11	35	57	4
Other (formulaic expressions)	4	2	30	36	3
Interrogatives	30	15	90	135	10
Total	407	212	716	1335	100

Closer attention to the distribution of instructor-initiated suggestions, however, indicates that the frequency of these realizations is not the same for each instructor. Imperatives, for instance, were the top suggestion form for Maria, whereas it was not the case for Mike's and Amelia's suggestions. In other words, Maria used more imperatives when compared to other subcategories in her contributions, whereas Mike and Amelia used more modals and semi-modals than imperatives when producing suggestions. In what follows, I present only the use of modals and semi-modals in instructor-initiated suggestions mainly due to space limitations.

5.2.1. Modals and Semi-modals

As presented in the previous section, instructor-initiated suggestions in this study involved a high degree of modality, and the use of modals and semi-modals were classified as a subcategory of declaratives. Modal verbs in English have various semantic meanings, such as possibility, necessity and obligation, ability, permission, volition, prediction, and hypotheticality (Collins, 2009; Palmer, 1990). Several different modals and semi-modals can be used for the very same purpose or meaning as in the case of this study. Perkins (1982) names two broad categories of English modals as primary modals (e.g., *can*, *may*, *must*, *will*, and *shall*) and secondary modals (e.g., *could*, *might*, *ought to*, *would*, and *should*). Adding also the semi-modals *going to*, *need to*, and *have to* to the list, I examined the suggestions in office hour interactions with regard to the use of these modal auxiliaries. Table 3 below presents an overview of the number and overall frequency of the modals employed in instructor-initiated suggestions.

Table 3

Number and Overall Frequency of Modals in Instructor-initiated Suggestions*

	Mike N	Maria N	Amelia N	Total N	%
<i>will</i>	26	9	7	42	6
<i>would</i>	23	2	9	34	5
<i>going to</i>	13	2	9	24	3
<i>should</i>	8	6	22	36	5
<i>need to</i>	31	4	29	64	8
<i>have to</i>	11	14	30	55	7
<i>can</i>	85	25	113	223	30
<i>could</i>	8	4	9	21	3
<i>might</i>	4	0	16	20	3
<i>may</i>	5	3	0	8	1
Total	214	69	244	527	100

*negative forms of modals were also included in the numbers. However, they were not as frequent as the affirmative forms of modals (e.g., less than 10%).

Expressing possibility can be accomplished using different modals in English, and such modals involve *can*, *could*, *might*, and *may*. In addition to this semantic meaning, these modals fulfill the pragmatic function of giving suggestions in office hour interactions. In other words, telling the students what to do as a possibility is one common way of instructor-initiated suggestions in this study. As can be seen in Table 3, the modal *can* appears as the most frequent among all other types of modal auxiliaries (30%). The international instructors use *can* to express the possibilities or optionality of what to do with regard to their students' concerns or problems. Although other modals of possibility (*could*, *might*, and *may*) are also observed in instructor-initiated suggestions, the instructors typically use *can* for that purpose, and it is the most frequently used modal for all three instructors. It is also quite common to see *can* in suggestions with the second person pronoun *you* but these suggestions sometimes include the inclusive *we* or non-agentive subjects. Moreover, in some cases, the instructors employed *can* to express ability while internally completing their suggestions by using subordinate clauses (e.g. conditional clauses, time clauses, *because*, and *so that*). Amelia, for instance, uses a time clause in her suggestion saying, *once the bibliographic information is there, you can use it for both in-text citation and references*; and Mike realizes his suggestion

saying, *if you're having trouble getting more specific, you can come and talk to me*, utilizing a conditional clause.

In the following excerpt, which is quite typical of how Amelia formulates suggestions, she uses *can* to tell her student some ways of how to improve her grade with regard to her essay (she has already lost several points). The student is a 22-year old female majoring in Industrial Engineering. She has reported that she has been learning English for 12 years. Prior to this excerpt, the student asks how many points she has lost due to not providing an accurate list of references with essay by formulating the *wh-* question: *how many points did I lose from references?*

Excerpt 1:

- 342 Amelia: Half a point. That's I think quite generous. Half a point for this and
 343 S04: [hmm]
 344 Amelia: this.
 345 (0.3)
 346 Amelia: Four points for thesis. **Support definitely can be improved.**
 347 S04: [hmhm]
 348 Amelia: **Organization can be improved.** Linguistic level, I'm sorry, there
 349 are so many language mistakes. Please correct it. I mean read
 350 through it once again
 351 S04: [yeah I never] read it. I just wrote it.
 352 Amelia: I know, but you don't wanna do that again. **So you can do a lot of**
 353 S04: [yeah sure]
 354 Amelia: **this stuff tonight and come tomorrow with the rewritten**
 355 **version of it so that tomorrow you can just focus on**
 356 S04: °[that's kind of impossible] because we
 357 have physics midterm°
 358 Amelia: Well, I don't know. I'm just saying.

The sequence starts with a quick account of the missed points. Then, Amelia makes two suggestions in sequence by using *can* for possibility in lines 346 and 348. These suggestions both have non-agentive or inanimate subjects (e.g., support and organization) and passive sentence construction. This can be easily associated with lowering the level of imposition on the hearer because of the fact that the doer or the agent of the action is not emphasized in such utterances. Instead, it is the action itself that is being focused. Thus, it can be argued that indirectness is doubled in these two suggestions with the use of *can* instead of a more direct strategy (e.g., imperative) and a lack of an explicit agent. However, the illocutionary force of the first suggestion as a possible action to take is also boosted with the adverbial intensifier *definitely*. In the second set of suggestions with *can* in this excerpt, Amelia introduces her suggestion with the connector *so* and switches to the second person pronoun *you* in line 352, which makes it more direct too. This happens after the student's confession that she never reads what she writes in the previous turn. In her longer sequence of suggestions, Amelia comes up with two connected suggestions of how the student might proceed to revise her essay (e.g., *do a lot of this stuff tonight* and *come tomorrow with the rewritten version of it* in lines 352, 354, and 355).

As illustrated here, *can* is, by far, the most frequent modal auxiliary in instructor-initiated declarative suggestions in office hour interactions. In combination with an agentive/non-

agentive subject, it mitigates or softens the illocutionary force of suggestions when compared to more direct syntactic forms (e.g., imperatives) for instructor-initiated suggestions. Additionally, it sometimes co-occurs with several internal modifiers, such as lexical downgraders (e.g., *a little bit, stuff, kinda, maybe, and just*), and intensifiers/upgraders (e.g., *very, definitely, easily, usually, and actually*). In other words, depending on the context of giving/receiving suggestions or their communicative and interactional goals, the international instructors either mitigate or boost the illocutionary force of their suggestions. Overall, the use of *can, might, and may* allows the instructors to give options or alternatives to their students. Without directly imposing on their students, the instructors tell them the possible paths to follow future actions.

Returning to Table 3, expressing obligation more directly is also common in instructor-initiated suggestions in office hour interactions. However, unlike modals of possibility, the affirmative form of such modals strengthens or aggravates the illocutionary force of suggestions (Williams, 2005). As can be seen in Table 3, *must* is not included because the international instructors in this study never use it; instead, they employ *have to, need to, and should* to express necessity. All three instructors use *have to* and *need to* mainly for emphasizing the expectations or requirements for their students with regard to assignments, exams, procedures, and other academic issues. In contrast, they employ *should* when it is a more opinion-based suggestion.

In the following Excerpt 2, Maria and her student talk about the TOEFL exam because the student plans to take it soon, but he is unsure about how to prepare for it. He is a 22-year old male student majoring in Energy System Engineering, and he attended the university's English preparation program. He has been learning English for 10 years and stayed abroad for about 7 months, where he could use English. At the beginning of the office hour interaction, Maria's student expresses his intention of taking the TOEFL exam by saying, *u:h, (0.2) I like to take TOEFL exam and uh there are some sections, reading, listening, speaking, writing*. Following Maria's acknowledgment that she herself took the exam before, the student continues and indirectly seeks advice on the TOEFL exam: *-u:h but I don't know how to study or how can improve*. Prior to the excerpt, Maria shares her opinion and experience with the exam and already gives a couple of suggestions making connections to her course.

The sequence starts with a six-second interturn pause followed by the student's taking a new turn. The student's turn (*so you got TOEFL, or IELTS? or both?* in line 46) starts with him restating the fact that Maria took the TOEFL exam, and then turns into an inquiry as to whether it was also IELTS or both. Following this, Maria repeats her student's utterance and once again acknowledges that she took the exam by also adding new information; her experience with the GRE exam as well (*I got the TOEFL first and then I got GRE* in line 47). Then, Maria ends her turn by implying that she is an experienced test-taker (*so I kind of have everything you need*), which invites her student to seek more suggestions on taking such standardized exams. Meanwhile, the student's overlapping utterance (*GRE yeah* in line 48) shows his familiarity with or acknowledgement of this exam too.

Excerpt 2:

45 (0.6)

46 S05: so you got TOEFL, or IELTS? or both?

47 Maria: I got the TOEFL first, and then I got GRE. So I kind of have

48 S05: [GRE yeah]

- 49 Maria: everything you need.
 50 S05: [everything] yeah
 51 Maria: but as I said, it's more about how you manage your time.
 52 S05: hmm
 53 Maria: It's very long. **So you need to take some break because it's very**
 54 **very long.**
 55 S05: Is it long and easy? Or not?
 56 Maria: No, you have to use uh (0.1) your brain. So you kind of get tired
 57 by the end of it, and **you have to be very concentrated through**
 58 S05: [oh]
 59 Maria: **all the exam.**
 60 S05: hmm

In line 50, the student's overlapping repetition of *everything* also shows his agreement with Maria's utterance, followed by the agreement token *yeah*. These initial turns between Maria and her student functions as a warm-up to Maria's two additional suggestions on taking the TOEFL exam in this interaction, prefaced by her utterance *but as I said, it's more about how you manage your time* in line 51 and the student's agreement again (*hmm*, in line 52). Following this, Maria initiates her new turn with a statement of fact about the TOEFL exam (*it's very long*, in line 53), and she links it to her suggestion using the connector *so*. Maria then makes her suggestion (*you need to take some break because it's very very long* in line 53-54) by using the same fact in her prior utterance as a reason, this time with the repeated intensifier *very*. The student inquires into the relationship between its length and difficulty level by asking, *Is it long and easy? Or not?* This is responded to by Maria negatively first to preface her implication that it is not difficult but tiring (*No, you have to use uh (0.1) your brain. So you kind of get tired by the end of it*, in lines 56-57). The student's overlapping *oh* in line 58 shows his surprise with probably this new information for him. These statements of facts are again utilized by Maria to introduce her next suggestion in this sequence (*you have to be very concentrated through all the exam*, in lines 57 and 59), which is then agreed to by the student (*hmm*, in line 60).

Relying on the analysis of Excerpt 2 above, the international instructors increase the force of the suggested act when they make suggestions on certain course-related requirements or expectations from the students in language-based exams. As can be seen in the analysis of the excerpt between Maria and her student, the use of semi-modals to express such requirements or expectations is also supported by giving reasons and justifications with regard to the suggested act. While delivering their expertise and experience through the act of giving suggestions, the instructors increase the level of imposition on their students.

In addition to commonalities in the use of *have to*, *need to*, and *should* in terms of their function in instructor-initiated suggestions, a closer look into each instructor's preferences reveals some divergence. Mike and Maria, for instance, use lexical and phrasal downgraders (15/50 and 5/24 respectively), such as *kinda*, *maybe*, *I think*, *you know*, *just*, *well*, and *I mean*, whereas Amelia uses them less frequently (4/81) despite her relatively overall higher number of occurrence in these modals. Instead, she often employs passive sentence construction with *have to*, *need to*, and *should* (17/81) when compared to Mike and Maria. This was also different from her use of other modals while making suggestions.

In the office hour session that Excerpt 3 below belongs to, Amelia's student comes to talk to her about his argumentative essay that is one of the major assignments in her course. The

student, however, has a problem with the organization of ideas and details. This almost monologue-like excerpt takes place towards the end of a twenty-minute session after a longer stretch of turn-taking sequences, and it is even preceded by a negotiation of disagreement, which is then realized to be a misunderstanding.

Excerpt 3:

- 315 Amelia: okay, physical health. **This needs to be structured according to**
 316 S06: [hmhm]
 317 Amelia: **(0.1) the hamburger principle. So, you need a topic sentence.**
 318 The support goes here. You talk about cancer, and u::h you know
 319 all these diseases I guess there is some mentioning ((unintelligible))
 320 and so forth. Okay, so all the physical stuff is in this one, and the
 321 psychological stuff is here.
 322 S06: [this one]
 323 Amelia: hmhm. Again, body paragraph structures are problematic. **So you**
 324 **need a topic sentence. You need a concluding sentence. You**
 325 **need all these supports. So, the paragraphs, first of all the thesis**
 326 **statement has to be written. The second thing is the topic**
 327 **sentence has to be rewritten, and then the third thing is each**
 328 **paragraph has to be structured according to that hamburger**
 329 **principle.** I'm sorry I'm teaching almost like a formula, but if you
 330 know how to use this formula, then you can expand it, then you can
 331 go experiment it, and be creative and, and you're creative here as
 332 well.
 333 S06: okay ((very low))

One such suggestion involving a passive construction comes at the beginning of the sequence (*this needs to be structured according to (0.1) the hamburger principle* in line 315 and 317). This is immediately followed by another suggestion with the second person pronoun *you* and active construction (*so you need a topic sentence*, in line 317). Even though these two suggestions convey necessity, a *need* statement (e.g., *need* + a noun) does not involve the illocutionary act, whereas *need to* requires a verb that specifies the suggested act. The second set of suggestions takes place in lines 323-329. After listing three suggestions with *need* statements (*so you need a topic sentence* in lines 323-324; *you need a concluding sentence* in line 324; and *you need all these supports* in lines 324-325), Amelia shifts to a passive construction in three more sequential suggestions in the same turn in lines 325-329. All these suggestions that contribute to her lengthy turns are again accepted by the student at the end of the sequence (*okay* in line 333). Amelia maintains her turn by “bombarding” the student with many aspects to be considered (e.g., a topic sentence, support, concluding sentence, and structure). She does so by switching from active to passive voice in her suggestions and producing “lists” of features for the student to attend to.

Last but not least, the instructor-initiated suggestions included *will*, *would*, and *going to* (14% of total). The international instructors in this study use *will* and *going to* typically to express certainty, and thus they strengthen the force of their suggestions. Some interactional functions or goals achieved by the instructors' use of these forms include stating the outcome of an action or condition, suggesting a future action, and conveying a necessary action to be done. The following Excerpt 4 provides instantiations of suggesting a future action to be taken in instructor-initiated suggestions. The office hour interaction takes place between Mike and his

student in his Advanced Reading and Writing II class offered at the Department of ELT, in which the student is expected to narrow down her topic for an argumentative essay.

The sequence starts with Mike's two sequential questions (*Do you have the topic for certain? Did you choose the topic?* in line 48) because his main concern is to ascertain that the students have certain topics for this major task at this initial stage of the course. Upon the student's response that involves her choice of a certain topic, Mike asks further questions in his next turn to see if the topic is narrowed down or not (*What about bilingual education? What are specifically you gonna about?* in lines 50-51). This is responded to negatively by the student (*I didn't know* in line 52) implying that she does not know she is supposed to narrow it down. Mike then takes a new turn where he produces a set of suggestions on how to proceed with narrowing down the student's topic. Two of these suggestions involve a future action to be taken (*U:h so you'll just have to, once you give your ten sources, we'll look at it next week*, in lines 53-54, and *we'll narrow it down*, in line 56). Mike uses inclusive *we* in his suggestions lowering the imposition on his student in these suggested future actions.

Excerpt 4:

- 48 Mike: Do you have the topic for certain? Did you choose the topic?
 49 S07: Yes. Bilingual education I choose.
 50 Mike: What about bilingual education? What are specifically you gonna
 51 about?
 52 S07: I didn't know.
 53 Mike: okay, that's fine. You don't need to know yet. **U:h so you'll just**
 54 **have to, once you give your ten sources, we'll look at it next week.**
 55 U:h and if you're having trouble getting more specific, you can come
 56 and talk to me, and **we'll narrow it down...**

As for the use of *would*, the international instructors in this study employ it in their suggestions mainly in two ways: hypotheticality and tentativeness (Palmer, 1990; Perkins, 1982). In a conditional situation in English, the meaning is communicated through conditional clauses (e.g., *I would talk to him if I saw him*). However, as argued by Perkins (1982), the conditional meaning is sometimes implicit when it is not realized through explicit use. Similarly, the use of *I would* without an explicit *if* clause is not uncommon in instructor-initiated suggestions (10/23 for Mike, and 5/10 for Amelia).

The following excerpt shows how Mike uses *I would* as a reminder of what to do for the student's end-of-semester project, or even as a mild warning. The sequence takes place in an office hour interaction where Mike's student comes to talk about his final project but his topic is still too broad, and he is not quite sure about what to do for such a project. Prior to Excerpt 5, it takes Mike and his student 22 turns of total to clarify the expectations and frame the requirements and steps to take.

Excerpt 5:

- 67 Mike: So, (0.2) yeah you can tie that in with your own experience.
 68 S08: hmhm
 69 Mike: Uh or experience of other people that maybe you interview, or how
 70 you intend to do it, **but I would come down, I would kinda skim**
 71 **those chapters or read them.** Uh (0.2) and think about what you're
 72 gonna do, and come back and talk to me when you have something
 73 (0.2) uh a little bit more narrow.

- 74 S08: okay
 75 Mike: **Like I would even come up with the thesis statement.**
 76 S08: Uhm
 77 Mike: Uh this is what I'm specifically gonna look at.

The sequence starts with the connector *so* and a short pause functioning as turn-framing devices. Then, Mike makes a suggestion (*yeah you can tie that in with your own experience*, in line 67), and this is accepted by his student (*hmhm*, in line 68). Following this, Mike takes another turn; and contrary to his previous suggestions, he switches to *I would* in his next suggestion and even downgrades it by using *kinda* in lines 70-71. Interestingly, Mike then goes on with a direct style using imperatives (*uh (0.2) and think about what you you're gonna do, and come back and talk to me when you have something (0.2) uh a little bit more narrow*, in lines 71-73) to finish his very same turn. Following this, Mike again switches back to *I would* once more in her final suggestion in this sequence (*like I would even come up with the thesis statement* in line 75). Considering the fact that the student has some vague ideas about his final project, Mike's choice of implicit conditional conveys his effort to tell his student what to do as a starting point. By using the first-person pronoun *I*, Mike still lessens the imposition on the student when compared to other alternatives (e.g., the second person pronoun *you*).

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study has scrutinized the suggestions in office hour interactions between international instructors and their Turkish students at two foundation universities in the northwest of Turkey. One of the most intriguing aspects of analyzing suggestions in discourse is that the suggestion-response episodes are negotiated and co-constructed by the international instructors and their Turkish students as both parties are actively involved in the process of soliciting, giving, and accepting or rejecting suggestions in office hour interactions. As Locher (2004) puts it, deciding if an utterance is perceived polite/appropriate is directly linked to the hearer's interpretation. Indeed, it is the hearer "who judges the relational aspect of an utterance" regarding his/her own understanding or perception of norms, frames, and expectations (p. 90). Hence, looking into the suggestion-response episodes with a focus on the speaker and hearer, this study demonstrates that the giving and receiving of suggestions is a co-constructed and negotiated speech activity. This co-constructed and negotiated nature of suggestion-response episodes comprise various acts, such as request for help, initiation of the suggestions, accepting or negotiating the suggestions.

Modality as the most frequent linguistic category played an important role in the formulation of instructor-initiated suggestions in this study. The use of modals and semi-modals as declaratives has enabled the international instructors in this study to fulfill their institutional role by showing their readiness or willingness to give suggestions to their Turkish students. Furthermore, the analysis of modality in suggestion-response episodes uncovers a variety of functions (e.g., providing alternative ways as a solution, emphasizing expectations or requirements for assignments/tasks/projects, expressing outcomes of future actions, suggesting a future action, etc.) realized by the international instructors in their suggestions. In alignment with their interactional goals, they employ diverse forms of these modals and semi-modals to express possibility, obligation, certainty and uncertainty, and hypotheticality. Thus, rather than the linguistic form or pragmalinguistics only, it is the communicative or interactional goals of office hour interactions that play a role in the instructors' choice of modals and semi-modals, which also involve sociopragmatic aspects.

In contexts where English is an additional/foreign/new language, it is usually quite limited to find opportunities for users to be involved in authentic interactions in English. Therefore, further research on pragmatic competence and linguistic politeness should be conducted in other types of academic and institutional contexts specifically from discourse-analytic perspectives. Moreover, the interlocutors' expectations and perceptions seem to be crucial in their language use as well as the type and nature of relational work in office hour discourse. Thus, future research should also consider using retrospective interviews with the interlocutors after office hour interactions take place. Such reflective and qualitative data in further research will provide more in-depth and genuine insights into what both parties expect from each other, and how they perceive their own and each other's roles in office hour discourse. Finally, further research should include several other pragmatic features of office hour interactions other than suggestions (e.g., repetitions or discourse markers).

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Appendix A: Transcription Conventions and Codes

bold	Key utterance that is being examined
:	Lengthening of a sound or syllabus
(#. #)	Pause in seconds (e.g. (0.2) for a two-second pause)
[]	Speech overlap
(())	Researcher’s transcription comments
<X X X>	Uncertain hearing or unintelligible
?	Rising intonation or appeal
°word°	Quieter speech
...	Continuing turn

Appendix B: Coding Scheme for Suggestions and Examples

Mood Types	Syntactic Forms	Examples
Imperative	Imperative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Start trying to find more sources on that particular issue.</i> • <i>Just practice it as well.</i> • <i>So please check which referencing style you’re using for that class.</i>
Declarative	Performatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I suggest you put an extra source such as a dictionary or an encyclopedia maybe, okay?</i> • <i>So my advice is that you train at home first so that you learn how to manage time.</i>
	Want/need statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>So you wanna have a topic sentence.</i> • <i>You do wanna add that second u:h source from LMS.</i> • <i>You need the publisher.</i>
	Modals and Semi-modals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>And that would be your counter-argument paragraph.</i> • <i>I would summarize that into one little paragraph about five sentences long.</i> • <i>You’ll have a better idea of what there is to talk about.</i> • <i>If you’re still having problems, you can even change u:h to something else other than play-based learning.</i> • <i>You have to fill each part of the form.</i> • <i>But still I mean you need to have some support to it.</i>
	Pseudo cleft	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What you need to do is prove that this is true.</i> • <i>What I would do is I would go and read.</i>

Extraposed to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>And therefore, it's useless to try to paraphrase.</i> • <i>And it is very easy to correct it.</i> 				
Hints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The problem is that you're not arguing.</i> • <i>You are not there to give an overview, okay?</i> 				
Elliptical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ten sources with the little summary of each.</i> • <i>Just a little bit more extensive.</i> 				
Other (formulaic expressions, such as <i>If I were you, I would..</i> , and <i>Let's</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>So let's just agree to discuss the introduction, conclusion, and the transition tomorrow.</i> • <i>And let's just see the list of references.</i> 				
Interrogative	<table> <tr> <td>Yes/No questions</td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Have you found anything that (0.3) has given reasons why uh the expensive is worth it?</i> </td> </tr> <tr> <td>Wh- questions</td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>But how can you connect that to consumerism?</i> </td> </tr> </table>	Yes/No questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Have you found anything that (0.3) has given reasons why uh the expensive is worth it?</i> 	Wh- questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>But how can you connect that to consumerism?</i>
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Wh- questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>But how can you connect that to consumerism?</i> 				
