

## Article

# Through the Lens of Discourse Analysis: Transformational Leadership as a Leverage Point for Promoting Educational Sustainability

Enas Qadan <sup>1,\*</sup>, Abdelnaser Jabarin <sup>2,3</sup> and Wisam A. Chaleila <sup>4</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Department of Education, Faculty of Education, Al-Qasemi Academic College, Baqa-El-Gharbia 3010000, Israel

<sup>2</sup> Department of Arabic Language & Literature, Faculty of Humanities, University of Haifa, Haifa 3498838, Israel

<sup>3</sup> Department of Arabic Language & Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Al-Qasemi Academic College, Baqa-El-Gharbia 3010000, Israel

<sup>4</sup> Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, Al-Qasemi Academic College, Baqa-El-Gharbia 3010000, Israel

\* Correspondence: enasq@qsm.ac.il

**Abstract:** This exploratory qualitative study sought to understand the role of transformational leadership in promoting educational sustainability (ES) through examining three classroom critical incidents. For this undertaking, the study employed a quadratic method integrating four theories: Ethnomethodology (particularly indexicality and contextualization), Flanders' Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC), Interactional Sociolinguistics (IS), and Transformational Leadership (TL). Two of the three incidents took place during face-to-face classes, while the third transpired online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Analyses of teachers' TL and communication strategies were administered, and each respective event was unfolded, explored, and evaluated qualitatively through a bidirectional model designed by the researchers. Data were collected and the study revealed that teachers demonstrated varied levels of TL based on their perceptions of incidents, the awareness of their professional roles as leaders, and the linguistic choices they made. In addition, analyzing the results of teachers' discourses, TL was demonstrated to be a leverage point for promoting educational sustainability. Proven to be an effective tool, the bidirectional model can be advocated by policy makers to help teachers assume their roles as leaders, and even to qualify them as leaders.

**Keywords:** transformational leadership; sustainability; interactional sociolinguistics; classroom critical incidents; discourse analysis; teacher training; indexicality; contextualization



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## 1. Introduction

Bryant et al. [1] maintains that TL is crucial for “supporting society’s transition toward sustainability” (p. 190). Similarly, Li et al. [2] claims that “transformational leadership focuses on the long-term sustainable development”. In addition, such “leadership is strongly tied to discourses of management [and] change” [3] (p. 7). Hence, transformational leaders “integrate creative insight, persistence and energy, intuition and sensitivity to the needs of others to ‘forge the strategy culture alloy’ for their organizations” (p. 112). Considering the previous lines, together with the four components of TL [4], denoted as the four “Is” (Idealized influence, Inspirational motivation, Intellectual stimulation, and Individualized consideration), it is evident that the more “Is” components are used, the better the ES.

For a long time, textual analysis was confined to analyzing the sentence as a fundamental unit with only limited relationships between its elements, and without pragmatic discourse implications. In terms of modern linguistic studies, approaches to discourse analysis have developed over the last thirty years [5] (p. 6). Such development has stemmed

from the notion that language serves as a social and educational function and must have a “communicative effect” which linguists deem the essence of the socio-educational process [6]. Advances in linguistics have also distinguished the limitedness of previous studies dealing with discourse analysis. Consequently, many linguists called for conducting discourse analysis that surpassed mere sentences to uncover the entire textual implications, including those pertaining to education [7]. Maslova [8] likewise argues that “Now the sphere of interest of linguistics includes everything that meets the requirements of sign systems theory and allows to see the deep semantic foundations of language, human mentality and culture” (p. 172).

The first breakthrough to form this new linguistic approach can be attributed to Zellig Harris’ method of text analysis [9], which has shifted from analyzing language at the sentence level to incorporating the contextualizing discourse that has further evolved and thrived thanks to Van Dijk [10], commonly known as the father of text analysis [11]. Harris has set forth a clear foundation for textual interpretation, stressing that all dimensions of discourse should be taken into consideration (i.e., structure, context, culture, society, and education). Van Dijk maintains that texts have both a superficial structure and a deep structure and must therefore be examined thoroughly [12]. Linguists interested in textual analysis argue that to provide an efficient process for textual interpretation, communicative diversity—particularly differing contexts, attitudes, and styles—should be considered when analyzing texts. Since the structure of a text is based on the norms of the addresser and addressee alike [13], the relationship between the addresser and addressee, the forms of interaction between them, and the communicative diversity must all be examined [14]; all of which influence psychological states, social norms, and discourses [15].

### *Purpose of Study*

Drawing on the methods of discourse analysis, this study sought to understand the role of TL in promoting ES through examining the discourses and behaviors of three in-service teachers encountering three classroom critical incidents. We addressed the following research questions:

1. How can the analysis of incidents as an approach to discourse analysis serve the process of qualifying teachers as transformational leaders that promote ES?
2. How does linguistic discourse analysis help teachers examine their behaviors as leaders and understand their roles and responsibilities during classroom incidents?
3. How can teachers use discourse analysis to become transformational leaders handling the educational incidents they encounter?

## **2. Background Framework**

Since “spoken text constitute discourse events” [16], many schools of education in higher education institutions deliver discourse analysis courses. These courses develop teachers’ professionalism by providing teachers with tools to analyze the undercurrent meanings of spoken and written texts within social contexts of classroom incidents. More, they improve teachers’ performance encountering recurring dilemmas. They also help teachers understand the function of language and how discourse can be employed to enhance constructive social change. The background framework for the present research seeks to understand teachers’ roles’ behaviors and discourses in determining the caliber of their transformational leadership promoting ES.

### *2.1. “IS” and “FIAC”*

“IS” was defined by Gumperz [17] as “an approach to discourse analysis that has its origin in the search for replicable methods of qualitative analysis that account for our ability to interpret what participants intend to convey in everyday communicative practice” (p. 215). Jaspers [18] argues that IS takes the view that talk is segmented in a sense that words do not convey meaning sufficiently; hence identifying prosodic features of contextualization (e.g., extracommunicative functions) is pivotal in deciphering meaning of speech. These features,

along with contextual know-how, tie up loose ends and create meaning. Along these lines, it is imperative to take the linguistic approach of contextualization into consideration when examining classroom incidents or dilemmas. This has been Gumperz' [19] main concern stating that he "seeks to develop interpretive sociolinguistic approaches to the analysis of real time processes in face-to-face encounters" (p. vii). Similarly, [20], has connected classroom incidents with an observation system of interaction analysis producing FIAC, classified into teacher talk and student talk. These classifications include ten categories subdivided into teacher and student statements and are branched under two headings: initiation and response. The teacher's part can be summarized as follows: (1) Clarifying feeling constructively, (2) Praising or encouraging, (3) Clarifying, developing, or making use of ideas suggested by students, (4) Asking questions, (5) Lecturing, (6) Giving directions, and (7) Criticizing or justifying authority. In turn, the student's part involves (8) Talking in response to the teacher and (9) Initiated talking. The last category (10) is Silence or confusion. It is evident that these categories underscore leadership principles and are in line with Bass' definition of leadership [21]: "leadership is an interaction between two or more members of a group that often involves a structuring or restructuring of the situation and the perceptions and expectations of the members" (p. 19).

### 2.2. Classroom Critical Incidents as Educational Dilemmas

The complex and dynamic nature of teaching is responsible for the fact that teachers encounter many classroom incidents or dilemmas in their work. Studies have emphasized the importance of understanding and analyzing such incidents from several perspectives, including personal, psychological, social, professional, and legal aspects [22]. Classroom incidents, sometimes referred to as critical incidents, involve educational dilemmas [23–30]. In general, scholars define dilemmas as conflicts in which there are multiple and equally viable alternatives, each of which has advantages and disadvantages [31]. Tending to similar critical incidents does not necessarily suggest a linear and a unified path of action because each critical incident has its specific nature and maintains its own singularity. In other words, critical incidents mandate one to choose between "courses of action," [32] (p. 319), and such a choice is subject to multiple reflections on benefits and shortcomings alike.

To deal with socio-educational contexts and incidents, there is a pressing need to view discourse analysis, educational incidents, and multiple social realities as an integrated and interdisciplinary cognitive system [33], while considering TL as a pivotal part of such incidents. Along these lines, language elucidates a teacher's behavior as a leader and educator—this directly reflects on the students themselves, as well as on the nature of the socio-professional communication between teachers and students, making the language of communication an important tool to analyze discourse. Hence, to examine the incidents under consideration, the behavior and language of both teachers and students must be inspected. It should be noted that teachers are not neutral but are part and parcel of a community with social circumstances, standards, societal knowledge, social norms, and professional ethics, all of which stem from linguistics (which itself stems from society).

### 2.3. Indexicality

Indexicality is one principle of ethnomethodology that is closely related to IS. Hence, the indexical meaning of words must be considered when conversations are unraveled and interpreted. Coined by Garfinkel, the term refers to the study of everyday reality and mainly entails social interactions fulfilled by the competencies of individuals [34]. Moreover, indexicality illustrates the context-dependent nature of language and language use, and it is mainly concerned with the power of language to indicate something without direct reference to it. One example is when someone says, "it's already 11 p.m.". This sentence may insinuate (among other possibilities) that "it is late" [35]. From this, we assume that settings and situations are an integral part of language contextuality, and that language cannot exist without such contextuality. In this respect, Jaspers [36] maintains that: "in order to describe and explain meaningful communication, we need to look at what

indexical meanings are implied by the words in a particular context rather than only at the words themselves" (p. 136). While some studies utilize conversation analysis which has evolved over several decades as a distinct variant of ethnomethodology, discourse analysis is broader in the sense that it focuses not only on interactions between two individuals but includes written texts and it largely exploits language in social contexts. Even more, it analyzes and deconstructs the hidden meaning in communicative texts [37].

#### 2.4. TL, and Classroom Discourse, Elicitation

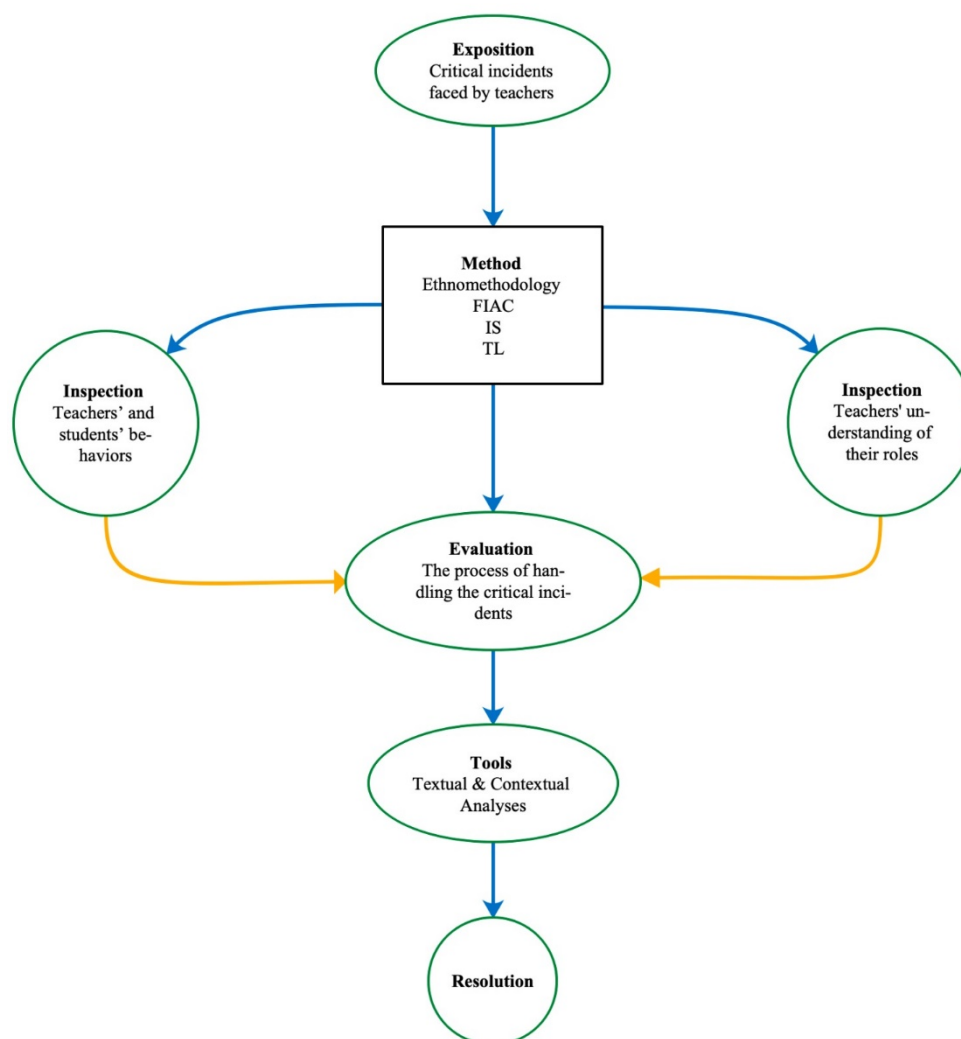
Along with this, sociolinguistics plays an important role in understanding the teachers' educational environment, and leadership behaviors particularly, when dealing with incidents. In this respect, teacher leadership has been characterized as a set of activities that teachers embrace as leaders. That is, teacher-leaders impact, improve, increase, guide, idealize, share, and acknowledge responsibility. They influence their coworkers, school principals, and staff members to achieve greater teaching and learning outcomes [38]. Hence, in many studies, leadership has been viewed as a display of 'leader-like' traits such as power or dominance in the construction of an identity [39].

Unlike Transactional leadership that enhances authority, performance, and supervision [40], TL draws heavily from the fact that both leaders and followers elevate each other to higher statuses of motivation and morality [41]. Enhanced by elicitation, such motivation has proved to be a successful strategy when it comes to boosting collaboration between them [42]. TL was later embraced by Burns [43] who, similarly to Downton, underlined the mutual and reciprocal relationship between both parties.

TL transpires when teachers are involved and play a significant role in their students' lives, and when they become leaders who affect the performance, fulfillment, and motivation of their students in various ways (e.g., rewarding learners when they achieve objectives, aiding to develop strategies concerning reaching desired goals, and providing uplifting surroundings). Although teachers' discourse steers learners' target vocabulary, eliciting the meanings of their words [44], a dynamic negotiation is needed to create an effective handling of incidents. That is, the interaction between teachers and learners should be encouraged and elicited by the former to create a reciprocal environment that advocates meaningful discourses where the addresser and the addressee will assume equal positions in terms of mutuality. Therefore, a leader is needed whereby two characteristics of both the learner and the environment must be considered. After evaluating the situation, the teacher-leader tries to aid the learner to determine objectives and then achieve them in the most competent way [45].

### 3. Method

People are a product of their environment; hence, it is impossible to separate the pedagogical educational process from social language. In this sense, discourse texts convey socio-cultural components and contexts [46–48], and reflect society at various levels. This study has employed a bidirectional model to examine educational critical incidents that have arisen during student-teacher interactions in educational environments (Figure 1). To further substantiate the analysis, four theories were exploited: Harold Garfinkel's indexicality [49], Ned Flanders' FIAC [50], Joseph Gumperz' [51] Interactional Sociolinguistics (IS), and Bass' and Avolio's [52] TL. In addition to the incidents reported and transcribed by the teachers, the next step was to demonstrate reflection-in-action [53] by conducting semi-structured interviews with three teachers whose incidents were the most popular in order to: (1) gain insights into teachers' comprehension and evaluation of the interaction, (2) identify additional details and aspects concerning the incidents in question, and (3) verify that teachers clearly understood the dynamics of the educational incidents. Evidently, these interviews contributed to identifying the interaction in terms of contextualization, indexicality, and interpretive norms. The researchers simultaneously analyzed leadership, educational, and social aspects of these three incidents linguistically, in addition to teachers' linguistic choices used in handling them.



**Figure 1.** Illustrates the bidirectional outsider-insider discourse analysis model.

### 3.1. Sampling and Selection

As part of a course in a teacher training master's program, 27 students who were also in-service teachers enrolled in the course reported "critical incidents" they had encountered in their classrooms. Three incidents faced by an equal number of teachers were selected for two reasons. First, because they were met with the greatest interaction through the reflective portfolio that the participants submitted via the course website, discussing their social, educational, and leadership aspects. Second, because many participants expressed a strong interest in these very incidents as they were similar to occurrences they encountered in their own classes or in one or more of their colleagues' classes.

### 3.2. Data Analyzing

A quadratic method integrating Harold Garfinkel's indexicality [54], Ned Flanders' FIAC [54], Joseph Gumperz' [55] Interactional Sociolinguistics (IS), and Bass' and Avolio's [56] TL informed this study. The method involved close and detailed examination of talk in its social and cultural contexts. Researchers using this tradition assert that learning situations cannot be understood without due attention to the nature and functions of talk [57]. This line of inquiry focuses less on the structure of spoken language and more on its content, function, and the processes by which shared understanding emerges. Usually, findings of qualitative sociocultural discourse analysis are shown through selected fragments of transcribed dialogue, while the data set maintains its relevance throughout the entire process of analysis, as with most qualitative methods. We, however, preferred to

characterize our reliance on interactional sociolinguistic approaches to discourse analysis as an analytic disposition together with the proposed method that needed to be followed. As such, our emphasis in analyzing the data focused on both the contents and the functions of the conversations, and not on specific linguistic features.

#### Insider (Teachers)

1. Inspect the critical incidents they encounter.
2. Inspect their own and their students' behaviors.
3. Resolution: demonstration of leadership by deciding how they would tackle the predicament.

#### Outsider (Researchers)

1. Inspect the critical incidents encountered by teachers.
2. Inspect teachers' and students' behaviors and try to understand how teachers comprehend their roles.
3. Use one or more components from the suggested quadratic method to conduct a thematic analysis.
4. Evaluating tools used in the process: textual and contextual.
5. Resolution: Deciding whether the teacher projected leadership and consider further steps for improvement.

It is possible that, if professionally trained, the insider will eventually turn into an outsider.

### 3.3. Analysis

The three critical incidents are described and analyzed below. Following this, the linguistic and educational theories connecting them are discussed, with the aim of uncovering how teachers' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities influenced the way they handled the educational incidents they faced at work. To this end, we examined the teachers' educational-leadership behavior, evaluating the discourse of the incidents.

## 4. The Critical Incidents

### 4.1. The First Incident: Description

Salma is a full-time Arabic teacher with ample teaching experience at a primary school. She faced a dilemma with Adam, a fifth-grade student in a co-ed class at a public school. Adam is the eldest son in a family of five. His family is afflicted by socio-economic hardship, and lives below the poverty line. He does not speak much and occasionally exhibits violent behavior. He sits by himself and is very shy during verbal tasks. He does not participate in class discussions but excels in other educational tasks. His grades range from "good" to "very good", and he demonstrates a potential for excellence. However, it seems that his lack of motivation and low self-esteem stemming from his social situation are hindering his academic development.

A few minutes after Salma had entered the classroom, she noticed that Adam was acting differently—he seemed to be exceptionally anxious holding his hand against his cheek during the entire lesson. She waited for the bell to ring, and then asked him to accompany her to a private meeting room. There, she examined him closely and noticed blue bruises on his face that seemed to be the result of violence. Salma felt anxious and scared. She asked Adam to sit, and the following conversation took place:

Salma: How are you? Hopefully you're well and everything's fine?

Adam: Good, thanks.

Salma: Do you need anything? Do you feel like there's anything you'd like to tell me?

Adam: No.

Salma: Why have you had your hand on your cheek all day?

Adam: Nothing, teacher. I have a toothache.

Salma: Get well soon, dear. Did you go to the dentist?

Adam: No.

Salma: Do you want any help from me?

Adam: No, thanks.

Salma: Ok, Adam. Get back to class.

#### 4.1.1. Discourse Analysis of the First Critical Incident

##### Method in Practice

1. Showing interest in Adam's case and a willingness to devote time to meet with him personally in a separate room, to find out whether her suspicions of abuse were true, underscore the teacher's TL components. Her "Individualized consideration" attending to Adam's needs, despite his resistance, only demonstrates her vigilant and thoughtful attitude.
2. Her "idealized influence" discussing Adam's case with other teachers provides a role model for other teachers.
3. Her questions are in line with "FIAC categories" concerning "clarifying feeling constructively", "asking questions", "encouraging", and "giving directions" whereby she encourages Adam for further detailed answers. Contrariwise, the student's part is illustrated as only "responds" without "initiation".

##### Further Analysis

Along the previous lines, the teacher's use of three different expressions in one linguistic exchange to ask Adam how he was doing—"how are you?", "hopefully you're well", and "everything's fine?"—reveal her anxiety. At the same time her attempts to use "contextualization" and "indexicality" through unearthing of "prosodic features" or "extracommunicative" function agree with indexicality (ethnomethodology). However, Adam's laconic answer—"good, thanks"—is short and vague, insinuating he is not yet ready to divulge his feelings about what has transpired. Perhaps because, apparently, he has experienced violence, he is nervous about the consequences of admitting that. Adam's language conveys his anxiety, and it suggests that he has been affected psychologically. Additionally, the curtness of his reply, and his attempt to avoid discussing the matter, indicates the continuous mental impact of the trauma he has undergone. Adam's quick but obscure responses allude to his desire to avoid any additional communication, and to keep his teacher in the dark concerning his predicament. More precisely, "good" is a generic neutral answer in Arab culture, and is appropriate in all contexts, positive or negative, and thus provides no elucidation.

The syntax of the dialogue demonstrates the extent of the teacher's interest in the student's well-being, namely inquiring about his general situation by asking the same question in different ways, hoping to clear up her suspicions "Do you need anything? Do you feel like there's anything you'd like to tell me?". The sentence that incorporates three questions in a row conveys a sort of psychological reassurance to the student, and it can be inferred that the teacher is reassuring the student out of ethical motivations. Furthermore, it is deduced that there is a containment relationship between the student and teacher, along with several possible signs for the teacher's anxiety. Perhaps she cares about the student, or maybe she is unable to deal with instances of violence towards students. The teacher tries to question Adam more than once, because she senses his distress which she may have wanted to help him overcome. Noticeably, all her attempts to uncover the source of Adam's affliction ensues her stress and anxiety.

Employing "indexicality" and "contextualization" is obvious in her question—"Why did you put your hand on your cheek all day?" However, she shies away from directly questioning him after she notices the fear embedded in his "no". Despite this, she does not give up, because she feels an educational and ethical responsibility to help him. It is evident that she possibly wants to indirectly tell Adam that she knows he is lying out of fear. Therefore, she attempts to convince him that what has happened to him is not okay.

The student's persistent refusal to disclose any information by saying "no" indicates his refusal to accept any form of help from others at this stage—refusal can be a sign of fear,

stress, worry, or anxiety. Along with the student's insistence on withholding information, the teacher's persistence in trying to help is palpable in her repeated question "Do you want any help from me?"

The TL level of "Intellectual Stimulation" is detected in the end as the teacher struggles about whether to contact the authorities. She finds herself in a real predicament whereby a conflict may ensue if she reports the case to the authorities. That is, the family may fall apart in case one of the parents is or both are detained. However, if she does not file a report, then Adam may become a victim of abuse one more time. It is also evident that despite Adam's reluctance to share his experience with the teacher, using his words to foil her attempts to extract more information, the teacher succeeds to read between the lines and thus steps forward. The teacher has showed a caring, compassionate, and responsible character. Despite her stress and anxiety regarding Adam, she handles the incident with confidence. As Zhu [58] and Gunawan [59] believe, such anxiety does not prevent teachers from upholding professional values and educational beliefs. Later in the interview, the teacher discloses that she finally took full responsibility, informing the school counselor, and by so doing, she defied presumptions, ran the risks, and demonstrated "Intellectual Stimulation".

#### 4.2. The Second Critical Incident: Description

Sara is a third-grade student. She has three younger brothers, all of whom were raised by different foster families after being abandoned by their parents. They did not have a stable home, and moved between different families for three years, studying at schools in the city center. During the most recent summer break, their mother contacted their father's family through the local Social Affairs and Welfare Office and asked them to take care of the children. Sara and her brothers moved in with their paternal aunt (a mother of eight children) who agreed to take care of them. The Social Affairs and Welfare Office was in regular contact with the aunt to check on Sara's well-being, as any negligence would prompt searching for a new foster family. Sara's teacher, Dalia, was fully familiar with Sara's social situation. In addition to being Sara's teacher, Dalia comes from the same city as Sara, where Sara's family's situation is known to the entire community. One day, Dalia encountered a confusing situation with Sara. Sara, as usual, arrived in class 10 min late. She took her seat, placing her palm on her elbow, and rolling up the sleeve of her sweater. Then the following conversation ensued:

Dalia: What's wrong with you, Sara?

Sara: My hand hurts, teacher.

Dalia: Come here. Let me see. What's wrong with your hand?

Sara: Yesterday my cousin was carrying boiling water and spilled it on me. It wasn't on purpose. She didn't see me.

While Sara was standing in front of the teacher and talking, Sara's aunt passed by the class and noticed her talking with Dalia. She entered the classroom.

Sara's aunt: What did she tell you? She's only good at complaining!

Dalia: It's nothing. She told me that water spilled on her and that it was an accident.

Sara's aunt: *\*loudly\** Don't tell me she's accusing me of burning her and you'll report me to the police.

a short silence

Sara's aunt: She didn't tell you to file a police complaint?

Dalia looked at Sara who was standing in silence and averting her gaze.

Dalia: No, she didn't tell me anything. She's just in pain, and I asked her what's wrong.

*\*Sara's aunt exited the classroom, muttering angrily.*

Two days after this conversation, Sara arrived in class two-hours late, and Dalia called Sara's aunt to inform her. The following conversation took place:

Dalia: Hello. I wanted to tell you that Sara just got to class now. I just wanted to check if she left the house late or was on her way to school this whole time.

Sara's aunt: No, she just left. We had a meeting.



Dalia spoke with Sara in private after class. Here is the transcript of their conversation:

Dalia: Why were you late?

Sara: We had a meeting at home. A foster family came. They came to see us so they could take us, and our caseworker and the consultant were there.

Dalia: And what happened?

Sara: I told them I didn't want to go with them. I told the caseworker I wanted to stay with my aunt.

Dalia: You'd like to stay with your aunt?

Sara: Yes.

Dalia: Why?

Sara: I get to see grandma every day and play with my cousins.

Dalia: So, the family wants to take just you or your brothers too?

Sara: (in a faint and scared voice) Just me. But I want to stay with my brothers!

#### 4.2.1. Discourse Analysis of the Second Incident

##### Method in Practice

1. We notice that the teacher's behavior has been consistent with only one category of FIAC's, that is, "asking questions".
2. As for IS, the teacher has used "indexicality" and "contextualization", to obtain information about the situation but she has not used such information for action.
3. The teacher has not demonstrated leadership as none of the "TL categories" were detected. Hence, we can say that this teacher is not a leader.

##### Further Analysis

By using curt responses Sara has tried to avoid divulging too much information, just like Adam in the first incident, but with one slight difference—Sara's reluctance was less severe. This might indicate Sara's willingness to open up later, (FIAC's ninth category of "initiation"). The teacher has tried to find out more details by FIAC's fourth category of "asking questions" about Sara's hand (Figure 2). Likewise, "What's wrong with your hand?" indicates her dissatisfaction with Sara's answer. However, based on Sara's reaction (i.e., looking at the teacher with fear and anxiety), we can deduce that she is still hesitant and withholding information. However, later Sara begins to divulge information. Evidently, Sara is aware that what has been done to her is unacceptable and dangerous but should be kept hidden from strangers (in this case the teacher). Additionally, her tone of voice indicates hesitation and fear, lending greater credence that the story has been fabricated.

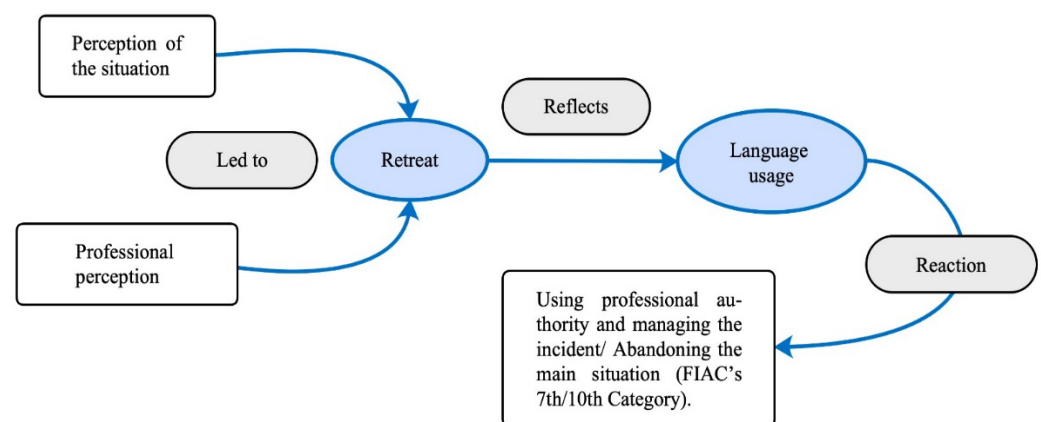


Figure 2. Illustration of the second case.

Noticing her niece and the teacher talking, the aunt enters the classroom defending herself by accusing Sara: "What did she tell you? She's only good at complaining!" Utilizing indexicality, she presumes from the scene that Sara is disclosing details about what really

happened. Still, by saying “It’s nothing . . . accident”, the teacher tries to avoid admitting what Sara has told her, assuring the aunt she will not have to submit a complaint to the authorities. Our analysis shows that the teacher is careful not to engage in confrontation with the aunt for several possible reasons. Perhaps the teacher does not possess the necessary professional resources to deal with such a situation, or maybe she does not believe it is her job to resolve the problem (the so-called “role-perception”). Obviously, the teacher takes a step back and begins to diffuse the situation by subduing the discourse. In contrast to the teacher in the first incident, who assumes responsibility and takes matters into her own hands, this teacher surprisingly retreats, recoils, and completely separates herself from the situation.

The aunt continues defending herself saying “Don’t tell me . . . me to the police”, and adding “She didn’t tell you to file a police complaint?” This reiteration demonstrates the aunt’s concern over possible legal troubles related to her niece’s injuries. We notice here that the aunt was abrasive when trying to deny involvement, preemptively placing the blame on Sara who apparently “always complains”.

The teacher’s reply “No, she didn’t tell me anything . . . wrong”, further confirms her avoidance of any confrontation with the aunt (and perhaps the entire family). This situation also reflects the influence of the culture of the local community on the teacher, illustrated clearly both in the manner the teacher handles the conversation, and in her linguistic choices. These two factors denote that she is evading responsibility and has no intention of intervening between the student and her family.

In this conversation, the teacher adopts a technical role employing FIAC’s seventh category “silence (or confusion)”, maintaining a specific distance between herself and the incident. When inquiring about Sara’s injury, she first attempts to broach the subject indirectly and neutrally, being aware of Sara’s family’s situation and does not feel that it is her place to interfere in such familial matters. Perhaps this is a result of her feeling as someone who is not professionally equipped to intervene, or that she does not want to intervene despite Sara’s openness (FIAC’s ninth category of “initiation”).

A few days later, Sara arrives in class late (at 9:30 a.m.), and the teacher calls Sara’s aunt to inform her of Sara’s tardiness. The teacher initiates the conversation with the aunt without questioning Sara about her tardiness, as though she wants to prove a sort of loyalty to the aunt which also might be indicative of the teacher’s fear of the aunt and her family.

The teacher does not investigate the aunt’s vague, short reply “No, she just left. We had a meeting” with questions, as if telling the aunt “It’s not my place to interfere.” At the same time, the teacher wants to discover more details, so she questions Sara after class, asking her: “Why were you late?” The fact that the teacher approaches Sara privately implies that she wants to glean details without being seen. However, she refrains from providing Sara with emotional or social support and does not try to solve the problem, seemingly contenting herself with adopting a passive approach. In other words, seeking for the family’s approval and validation hinders the teacher from providing moral support, despite her knowing of Sara’s quandary. She continues asking Sara more technical questions with the sole aim of bringing more information to light. Nevertheless, she remains neutral by not mentioning Sara’s psychological or social situation.

Sara’s response as to possible adoption, “Just me. But I want to stay with my brothers!” does not motivate the teacher into action. She does not comment on Sara’s painful situation, nor does she assert her leadership to change the situation. She does not try to solve the issue or show solidarity despite Sara’s depressing statement in the last sentence.

Examining the text more closely, the teacher’s intonation indicates her neutrality and represents her confusion regarding tackling such a situation. That is, intonation is what we characterize in “ethnomethodology” as one of the prosodic features or extracommunicative functions used as a linguistic tool bearing syntactic significance to clarify the pragmatic implications of the sentences. Intonation often provides significant elucidatory context for the other party (in this case, the student and her aunt). The teacher’s intonation here plays a functional role in differentiating between different syntactic structures, as well as

between reporting and interrogating. It further denotes the end of a sentence, and expresses surprise, satisfaction, anger, amazement, pain, denial, interrogation, and more [60,61].

The above incident allows us to make some suggestions to sharpen the concept of professional aptitude, a term that is particularly useful in educational research and studying the role of the teacher in the classroom [62,63]. Accordingly, we should note that the teachers' aptitude is based on their roles, and particularly their role-perception—as opposed to the official definition of their job. We can also note that, in the second incident, Dalia, the teacher, seems to perceive her role as purely educational, limiting herself to classroom material, and not stepping up as an educational figure with an overarching responsibility for the education and social welfare of her students. In this case, Dalia does not assume a responsible role in her school. By avoiding conflict with the aunt, she expresses personal or professional incompetence, and fails to give Sara a feeling of personal safety. According to Bandura, a teacher's role, both in the classroom and as part of a school, includes expressive, informal aspects that derive from the relationship between teachers and the people who make up their working environment [5].

It should be noted that the Arab family is usually judged in view of traditional collective norms and values. These accord a place of primacy to respecting one's elders and preferring the greater good—be it the family's or the collective's—over one's personal good [3]. Indeed, it seems as though this description adequately explains the teacher's response to her student's aunt, which comes at the expense of her student's welfare and personal safety.

#### 4.3. The Third Incident: Description

After the transition to distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Arabic teacher, Ramy, noticed that his student, Huda, was not attending class, so he sent Huda's mother an email inquiring about the reason. The mother replied that there was a problem with their home internet, making it difficult for her daughter to participate. She promised Ramy she would do her best to settle the matter. At the time, it did not occur to Ramy that this might not be the real problem. More than two weeks later, several teachers expressed concern that Huda had not been attending online lessons, especially as she was known to be very studious. As a result, Ramy scheduled a Zoom meeting with Huda's mother, during which the following conversation took place:

Ramy: May peace be upon you, Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_. Hello Huda. How are you both? We've missed you, Huda.

Huda's mother: Fine thanks. How are you, sir?

Ramy: Fine, thanks, but I've noticed that Huda has been absent for two weeks. She hasn't been attending classes or completing her assignments. The strange thing is that we're used to her eagerly participating and being very studious. I hope everything is fine?

\*Huda nods and tries to get out of view\*

Huda's mother: Thank you very much for your concern. To be honest, I expected the school administration would be in touch to ask why Huda hadn't been attending her online classes.

\*Huda's mother asks Huda to leave the room for a few minutes so that she can speak with Ramy in private. \*

Huda's mother: I don't want to disclose all the reasons for Huda's absence, because it's a sensitive topic. God knows how worried I am about how her mental state has been since the beginning of the Coronavirus Pandemic. I don't want anyone other than you to know, because people in our community wouldn't believe it.

Ramy: Oh my God . . . you're really scaring me. What's going on?

Huda's mother: Huda has been terrified since the outbreak of the pandemic, because her older brothers scared her by talking about COVID-19, especially since she had the common cold, so they started teasing her telling her she was infected. I'm afraid that if I tell anyone about her mental state, they'll think she's crazy and has a mental illness. You know very well what that means in our community, especially for girls. I was hesitant to tell you

these private details, because her father doesn't want me to tell anyone, but I can see it's important that you know. Please keep what I told you between you and me and don't let anyone find out.

Ramy: What can I do to help you? Can I call every day to talk to her and reassure her?

Huda's mother: Yes, thank you. I appreciate your understanding . . . but I don't want Huda to know I informed you of her situation . . . I mean you can talk to her but pretend you don't know anything about her problem, and we don't want any interference from a caseworker or the school, because we don't want word to get out.

Ramy: I respect that, but may I speak to Huda now?

Huda's mother: Of course. \*She calls Huda and tells her to sit in front of the webcam. \*

Ramy: How are you, Huda?

Huda: Fine, thanks.

Ramy: I was expecting you to participate in the Zoom meetings like your classmates.

Huda: Daddy lost his job because of the Pandemic and our internet got cut off.

Ramy: Ok, Huda. I'm going to speak to you every day on the phone to check on you and fill you in on what your classmates are learning. Try to do the classwork so you understand the subjects and we return to normal.

Huda: Ok, sir. Thanks.

Ramy: I'll send you the worksheets with Manal since she lives the closest to you. She will drop off the daily assignments for you. Be sure to wear the mask when you open the door for her. Please let me know if you have any problems.

Huda: \*hesitates\* I can't get close to anyone. I'll have mother open the door for her.

Ramy: Don't worry, I know you're an excellent student, Huda, and I'm sure you will overcome this, and we'll see you in class again.

#### 4.3.1. Discourse Analysis of the Third Incident

##### Method in Practice

1. In terms of TL, Ramy is a leader as he demonstrates "Individualized consideration", by initiating the call and expressing genuine interest in the student's feelings. He has been attentive and mindful to the student's situation; he has supported and bolstered her. The second level of leadership "Inspirational motivation" is also evident as, despite her psychological condition, the teacher has motivated the student reminding her that she is a studious student, and yet he challenges her utilizing "Intellectual stimulation" saying that he is looking forward to having her back in classes soon. Gaining both the mother's and the daughter's trust, he has invested time initiating one-on-one conversation, showing high ethical standards of commitment to his role as an educator, or, as termed in TL, "idealized influence".
2. IS: Through "contextualization", the teacher realizes that Huda has been distressed. Therefore, he offers further help although calling Huda every day is not an easy task.
3. FIAC: It is clear that the teacher has employed most FIAC's categories, "clarifying feelings constructively", "praising and encouraging" Huda, "asking questions", and "giving directions" so she can overcome her predicament. As to Huda's part in this concern, feeling safe and reinvigorated, she "responds" to the teacher's questions, but later she also "initiates" the talk when she says that "I'll have mother open the door".

##### Further Analysis

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, schools were shuttered in March 2020 in several countries worldwide. In Israel, although schools began partially reopening two months later in May, pervasive limitations have remained in place, and forecasting an end to the closures seemed very unlikely. It should be noted that our particular incident took place during the above-mentioned period, hence it will be approached accordingly.

Greeting both Huda and her mother, the teacher creates a relaxed atmosphere and opens a good channel of socio-emotional communication from the beginning. He sympathizes with their well-being. By saying "We've missed you, Huda", he indicates that

Huda normally has fantastic attendance (and thus several of her teachers have noticed her absence). The teacher's concise reply "fine, thanks", immediately shifts the topic to the student's absence (the focus of the conversation). The teacher's assertion "but I've noticed . . . assignments" presents facts and real data. It also shows he is keeping track of his students' attendance and follows up when they are absent (giving himself legitimacy to inquire about Huda's absence), or in other words, FIAC's seventh category ("justifying authority").

By saying "The strange thing . . . very studious", the teacher shows special interest in Huda since she is an active and diligent student, stressing that several of her teachers have wanted to check on her. "I hope everything is fine?" emphasizes the teacher's intuition that something is impeding Huda from online education and that he wants to find out the root of the problem and utilize the tools at his disposal to try and solve it.

Asking Huda to leave the room alludes to the mother's willingness to confide in the teacher about her daughter's sensitive situation. The teacher takes control by directing the conversation, "Oh my God . . . What's going on?" affirms leadership and initiative—his last sentence makes the mother feel safe to trust him. His utterance "You're really scaring me" indicates genuine concern, prompting the mother to open up and provide details about her daughter's and family's situation: "Huda has been terrified . . . anyone find out." On the one hand, this statement re-asserts the teacher's position as an educator and the mother's conviction that she can trust him. On the other hand, it demonstrates that the mother has high expectations the teacher will help Huda, as he is the only person she has informed about the situation, increasing his responsibility.

By asking "What can I do to help you?" the teacher switches from the theoretical conversation stage to the practical implementation stage. Here he indicates his flexibility regarding how he can help. This question also demonstrates actual educational authority and asserts his self-confidence and professional competencies that enable him to provide various forms of assistance and support. Furthermore, he is evidently prepared to deal with the situation at hand. His readiness to call Huda every day to check on her indicates that he is very caring and sympathetic towards her.

The mother's statement "We don't want word to get out" indicates that the teacher can draw upon his social awareness to fill the role of both the caseworker and the school administration and can transition from theoretical discourse to implementation (shifting from the backseat and taking the initiative to find and implement a solution).

The teacher's following statement "I was expecting you to participate in the Zoom meetings like your classmates", lends him an air of politeness; instead of asking Huda directly about her absence, he focuses on his high expectations of her, thereby sparing her any possible embarrassment and avoiding making her uncomfortable or causing her undue emotional distress. The discourse tool the teacher employs here is known as "softening speech." The manner in which the teacher poses the question suggests his awareness that language can positively influence how the addressee interacts with the addresser (as we will see later in Huda's interactions with him). Huda's reply, "Daddy lost his job because of the pandemic and our internet got cut off", implies that the family's economic situation has been so difficult they have not been able to pay the internet bill. Although she interacts in the conversation, she does not confess the real reason she has not been attending her online classes, indicating that she does not want to talk about her mental health situation at that time.

The teacher continues his socio-emotional communication, trying to help her indirectly, saying: "Ok, Huda. I'm going to speak to you every day on the . . . we return to normal". Since she does not admit the real reason for her absence, and because the teacher stresses his interest in her education, Huda feels reassured and motivated to continue learning. The teacher's addition "I'll send you the worksheets with Manal . . . have any problems", determines the teacher's practicality, implementing steps to solve the problem with Huda's best interests in mind.

Drawing on Brousseau's theory [9], the student's preconceived notions have resulted from her mutual and continuous interaction with the teacher. This is known as "didac-

tic contract”, a commitment that binds the teacher and the student and stimulates the educational process. In our view, didactic linguistic activity spans many areas, going beyond the typical student–teacher situation in the academic environment and extending to deeper and more vital aspects. The didactic contract seeks to uncover how a group of interactive relationships between the teacher and the student create common denominators that extend beyond the norm. An effective deployment of discourse stemming from such a didactic contract can be seen in this incident whereby the teacher employs a multi-faceted discourse, including intonation, behavior, and word-choice to assert himself as a leader and handle an atypical emergency, whereby the didactic contract has the power to search out innovative solutions [9].

McCroskey [40] proposes the idea of “perceived caring” as a core instructor view of students. He thinks it is preferable if a teacher genuinely cares about the student, but he also recognizes that it is difficult for any teacher to feel deeply about every student, especially when teaching in large-sized classes. Hence, it is imperative for a teacher to learn how to communicate in such a way where students can see that the former really cares about them.

## 5. Results

Three questions relevant to discourse analysis and TL were explored and answered. The results showed significant new insights about employing discourse analysis as a tool for understanding teacher’s behaviors and improving teachers’ TL and educational sustainability:

1. Using analysis of incidents as an approach can serve the process of qualifying teachers as leaders that promote educational sustainability.
2. Using linguistic discourse analysis as a tool can help teachers examine their behaviors as leaders and understand their roles and responsibilities during classroom incidents.
3. Using discourse analysis can help teachers become leaders handling the educational incidents they encounter.

It should be noted that these results illustrate the effectiveness of the bidirectional model for both present and future incidents. From understanding the present to improving future roles and leadership skills, the model could be a powerful tool not only for handling educational incidents and dilemmas in different ways, but also for avoiding the shortcomings of such incidents and dilemmas, by advocating ways that could be more ethical, supportive, and practical.

## 6. Discussion

This study aimed to understand how teachers dealt with educational critical incidents they faced in terms of TL. For this purpose, it adapted and exploited a bidirectional model to examine teachers’ discourses and behaviors as educators and leaders in addition to understanding their roles and responsibilities in the proposed incidents. The model provided an understanding of teachers’ roles and the level of responsibility they took, or failed to take, in responding to moral and ethical components that characterized these incidents. The conversations in all three incidents considered denoted the teachers’ interest in their students’ well-being, as expressed by their linguistic choices. In the first and third texts, the teachers inquired about their students’ well-being several times in different ways. These linguistic choices indicated varied degrees of professional responsibility and demonstrated the teachers’ awareness that solving the dilemmas involved was part of their profession as educators. In contrast, the teacher’s behavior in the second incident communicated her apathy, as she was more reserved and less inquisitive about her student’s personal situation.

Furthermore, there were differences in the leadership roles played by the three teachers. For instance, the teacher in the first incident took control of the situation and assumed responsibility, initiating and asking questions. The teacher in the second incident, however, asserted a lesser degree of leadership and did not take responsibility for solving the issue, choosing instead to be a passive observer. In contrast, the teacher in the third incident

was the most distinguished in his role as an educator and leader in that he took the most responsibility and initiative, involving the student's family in a plan meant to solve the problem. By cooperating with the mother, he earned the family's trust and together they were able to help the student. This contrasts with the teacher's behavior in the first dilemma, who, despite taking the lead, was unable to suggest and implement a practical solution. Based on these examples, we could posit a relationship between the effective employment of linguistic culture, the teachers' self-perception of their educational-leadership role, and the teachers' behaviors when faced with critical incidents characterized by moral dilemmas. The COVID-19 pandemic, and the challenges of distance learning, have furnished real tests of language and educational leadership in crisis. Along these lines, we can see that teachers' perceptions of their educational-leadership roles influence their relationship with their students. Social and professional developments may influence these perceptions and the link between educational environment and educational perceptions consciously and subconsciously influence teacher–student interactions. Thus, a teacher who is also a leader is one who is interested in students' expected behaviors. In other words, he or she can recognize a student's typical behavior based on the previous interactions. In this regard, studies have shown that teachers' positive expectations concerning their students' success contribute to students' achievements—such teachers are leaders who help their students overcome obstacles, motivating them to succeed, and provide them with practical solutions to their dilemmas [9]. Indeed, leadership is not merely about demonstrating 'leader-like' traits, neither is it about the behavior of those having "institutionally defined titles." Leadership is a "semiotic action" that is aborning through interaction; it is a frame through which others function [36].

#### *Limitations and Recommendations*

Despite the effectiveness of the proposed model, it should be noted that this study has two caveats that need to be addressed in future research.

1. The model was applied on three participants who encountered critical incidents and the results revealed that some teachers displayed better TL than others while differences between incidents were not considered. The question to be asked is how would each of the participants behave in case the incidents were switched? We believe that each case should be evaluated separately, each according to the facts of the particular situation.
2. Two of the critical incidents took place before the breakout of COVID-19, whereas the third took place during the pandemic. It is worthwhile mentioning that to minimize disruption during the pandemic, most governments worldwide provided schools with guided support platforms, digital educational programs, multimedia appliances and kits, and emergency helplines to aid teachers and students alike. Hence, it is possible that the TL of the teacher in the third case has already been enhanced by these productive solutions. Therefore, in case of emergency, such additional elements should be investigated.

In our opinion, there is a pressing need for additional studies that merge linguistic fields with components of TL, particularly regarding communication between teachers and students and different educational modes and processes. Such leadership can be applied in many educational stages to ensure students' well-being that has recently been hailed by education policy makers, especially in light of how rapidly the pandemic has changed educational processes (i.e., face-to-face vs. distance education). Distance education has highlighted the importance of language in an array of educational contexts, as language is perhaps the only effective tool in this form of education. To conclude, we believe that the ministry of education should initiate programs that enhance and boost teachers' leadership and heighten their professional and moral responsibility toward their students for the sake of accomplishing educational sustainability.

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