

Representation of Power in Class Discourse: A Study of Communication Ethnography

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Abstract: This research is aimed at describing the use of power in class discourse covering representation of power in speech act, representation of power in communication patterns and function of power in class discourse. Communication ethnography and pragmatic methods were used. The research results show that the use of directive, assertive, and expressive acts in class discourse represent the power with certain domination; that the control of speech topics, interruptions, and overlapping tend to represent the power with certain domination that also effect the legitimacy of the user of this strategy. In relation to its function, power in class discourse is applied as a preventive, supportive, and corrective acts in order to achieve instructional objective.

Keywords: power, discourse, communication ethnography, pragmatics.

Essentially language is a cultural product. As a cultural product, language owns a variety of functions. Thompson (2003:83) notes that language is not only a means of communication and knowledge, but also serves as a means of power. This is based on the fact in that the process of communication, one tries not only to be understood, but also to be trusted, obeyed, honored, and distinguished.

In its realization, the function of language as a means of power exists in the process of verbal communication, either transactional or interactional in

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nature. In the discourse study, this fact is justified. Fairclough (1998:34), for example, states that there power can exist in relationships among social classes, among groups in an institution, among ethnical groups, between men and women, and between parents and children.

As one of social institutions, schooling also constitutes a domain subjected to the process of using power. The use of power in this domain is affected by the characteristics of class discourse. Fairclough (1998:38) states that schools have social order and discourse order involving a given social structure. This can be seen in many cases, i.e, in a set of situations in which discourse exists, in a set of social roles that are approved by participants in the discourse, and in a set of goals that are accepted for the discourse – learning, exams, and maintenance of social controls.

It seems that the use of power in the learning process is subjected to the underlying educational system. Related to this, Freire (2002:191) distinguishes between two educational systems, they are dominative and humanistic ones. Dominative educational system negates the principle of active conscience. Such education carries out practices that are used to “domesticate” humanistic conscience, and then transform the conscience into an empty container. In contrast, humanistic educational system offers learning processes that are different from dominative educational system. In this educational system, learning processes carried out in the classrooms allow students to recognize and capture actual life in a critical manner. Learning is not reduced into an attempt to uniform thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The application of power does not serve as a means of suppressing learning freedom, but exactly functions as motivator for appreciating the existence of students as the objects of education who make self-preparation in facing their future critically and creatively.

In relation to the two educational systems, the question is which system to use in our schools. In other words, in the learning processes in classrooms, do teachers develop communication culture that indicates the use of power as a means of dominating, or as a means of empowering students to learn in a humanistic manner so that their habits of thinking critically and creatively can develop?

This research is carried out to respond to those questions. It focuses on how power is represented in class discourse of the SMA Negeri 1 Malang. The focus is divided into sub-focuses of (a) how the representation of power is in the directive, assertive, and expressive speech acts; (b) how the representation of power exists in the patterns of controlling speech topics, interruption,

and overlapping; and (c) how the representation of power for preventive act, for supportive act, and for corrective act occurs.

METHOD

This research belongs to a case study with a single site in the process of learning in the class discourse of the SMA Negeri 1 Malang. The sources of data were the teachers and the second year students of that school. There were two methods used in the study, namely communication ethnography brought forth by Hymes (1974) and pragmatic one. With these approaches, the explanation of power representation is based on an emic perspective, that is based on symptoms really existing in the field.

The data gathered in this research consisted of two types: speech and field notes. The two types of data were obtained using the techniques of observation and thoughtful interviews. In the process of gathering data the researcher used a tape recorder and the research instruments. Observation technique was used to collect data on the use of power in classroom learning. Thoughtful interview was used to conduct triangulation to ensure data validity.

In line with Miles and Huberman (1992), to analyze the data the researcher used interactive model. With this technique, the analysis of the data was carried out since the data was collected.

RESULTS

In its realization, representation of power in class discourse can be identified from the use of speech acts, speech strategies, and its function in the process of learning. In relation to the representation of power in directive acts, speech participants in the class discourse use six types of directive, namely command, request, prohibition, invitation, suggestion, and question. The use of directive act of command and prohibition implies high degree of restriction, thus representing dominative power. Meanwhile, the use of request, invitation, suggestion, and question implies low degree of restriction so that they represent humanistic power. The degree of restriction and the traits of power influence the user legitimacy of directive act. In accordance with their institutional roles, teachers have legitimacy of commanding and prohibiting students, but not vice versa.

In the process of learning, there is also the use of assertive act. There are four types of directive act dominantly used, i.e., the acts of asserting, indicating, maintaining, and valuing. The use of the four assertive types has a certain degree

of restriction and a certain nature of power. The acts of maintaining tends to imply higher degree of restriction, representing dominative power, whereas the acts of asserting, indicating, and valuing imply a low degree of restriction and tend to represent humanistic power. However, as a whole, assertive acts tend to represent humanistic power.

Meanwhile, the degree of restriction of expressive act depends on its usage. Expressive act implies a high degree of restriction when used to express a feeling of dislike. The expression of dislike feelings is used to stop behaviors unsuitable to the educational and instructional measures. Therefore, the use of expressive act tends to represent the power of compulsion and tends to be dominative in nature. On the other hand, the degree of restriction implied in an expressive act becomes low when used to indicate feeling of like.

Representation of power in the speech strategies also implies a certain degree of domination. In controlling speech topics, power is represented in the strategy of identifying, developing, and closing topics of speech. In relation to identifying topics of speech, the strategy of identification directly tends to represent dominative power, while the identification of topics by means of strategies of topics perception and negotiation is inclined to represent humanistic power. Meanwhile, related to developing topics of speech, the strategy of argumentation represents dominative power, while the strategy of example, comparison, definition, description, process, and classification represents humanistic power. In relation to closing of topics of the speech, the use of direct strategy, indication that lesson period is over, and critical comment represents dominative power, while the strategies of example, comparison, definition, description, process, and classification represent humanistic power.

Interruption is a common sign found in class discourse. In general, interruption implies high degree of restriction so that it represents dominative power. It is teachers, and not students, who often use interruption to students' speeches. In class discourse, the strategy of interruption is used to improve students' attitudes when speaking, their voices, their manner in discussion, to stop noises in the classroom, to improve their answers, to stop their doubts, to provide enforcement, and to give clarification.

The use of overlapping represents power that is more humanistic than interruption. Overlapping is a type of accelerating positive or negative responses, but does not break the turn taking. Overlapping is used to improve students' wrong responses, to give positive enforcement for their behavior, to overcome their hesitation toward the substance of learning, and to confirm the materials of learning.

In class discourse, power has a number of functions. They are functions of preventive, supportive, and corrective acts. The functions of power in class discourse is not only limited to enforcing discipline in schools. In addition to enforcing discipline, there are other functions in class discourse. In relation to preventive act, power serves to prevent the breaking of discipline, obstacles in the process of learning, unavailability of student groups in the implementation of learning, unavailability in the means of learning, occurrence of mistaken concepts, students' carelessness in understanding symbols/formulae/terms, ineffectiveness in implementing discussions, students' indecency in conducting laboratory work, and delays or errors in doing tasks.

In relation to supportive act, power serves as motivating students to become smart: enforcing students to have bravery in asking questions, to think critically, and to present ideas; giving enforcement to the students so as to be able to respond to questions correctly; encouraging students to be brave in providing assesment of other students' work and performance; and encouraging students to result in works or do their tasks properly.

Meanwhile, related to corrective act, the functions of power are to improve the breaking of discipline; to stop behaviors of students who are often late to school/do not do their tasks; to improve their unpreparedness in conducting discussion; to stop their habits in asking questions/giving answers in complicated manner; to stop their habits in breaking discussion rules; to improve the direction of discussion; to solve problems students cannot do themselves; to stop students' habits in questioning or answering in low voices; to stop noises in classrooms; and to stop students' confusion in understanding the subctance of learning.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research show that speech acts represent users' power. With directive, assertive, and expressive acts, the speech participants in class discourse influence each other's thought, feeling, and behavior in order to achieve the objectives of learning. Thus, the use of three speech acts represents power used by teachers and students to achieve the objectives of learning.

These findings are in accordance with that of Mey (1996: 261) that speech acts reside among instruments used to control our environment, and in contrast among instruments to adapt to our environment. In the process of communication, speech acts used to control the environment or to adapt to it represent power with a certain dominative nature.

The use of directive, assertive, and expressive types of speech act in class discourse implies degree of restriction. The difference in degree of restriction and the nature of power represented influences the use of the three types of speech acts. The use of speech acts in class discourse relates to socio-cultural dimensions in the given class discourse.

In the perspective of Austin's or Searle's speech act theory, the socio-cultural dimensions have not been used as the material of prediction and explanation for the characteristics and behaviors of speech acts. According to Thompson (2003: 85), the speech act theorists should pay attention to social condition of communication, but they never acknowledge the characters of the social conditions. In the same case, Bourdieu (1994: 73) argues that effectiveness of performative speech revealed by Austin or Searle cannot be separated from the existence of an institution defining the conditions (such as place, time, agent) that must be met. In its realization, the institution gives authority to the language users to bring forth an action by presenting speech acts.

For Bourdieu (1994: 67), the term *institution* is defined not only to a certain agency or organization but also to all social relations in human life. All social relations provide various forms of power, status, and living resources for individuals. It is this institution that gives an authority to speakers and listeners to carry out actions as a speech they utter in a performative speech. Therefore, the value of a speech is dependent on the relationship of power established in a concrete way between speakers' linguistic competence understood either as their capacity for production or for appropriation and appreciation. But the relationship of language power is not determined entirely by language strengths given that a language is used by a speaker in groups that are limited by appropriateness of ownership and social structure existing in any interaction.

The above description suggests that socio-cultural dimensions influence the characteristics of power representation in a speech act. An institutional authority of speech participants, valid discourse conventions, shared speaking norms, speech objectives to be achieved, also determine the characteristics of representation of power in a speech act. Therefore, not only should the study of representation of power in a speech act focus on behaviors of a speech act from a linguistic aspect, but the speech act is worth being associated with the encompassing socio-cultural dimensions.

In relation to the representation of power in speech strategies, it is found that the use of speech strategies in controlling speech topics, interruptions, and overlapping represents power in the class discourse. Each speech strategy

represents power with a certain trait of domination. In addition, the findings show that representation of power in a speech strategy is also subjected to socio-cultural dimensions that exist in the class discourse.

These findings have implications in the use research approaches to representation of power strategy. Understanding power in a conversation requires early understanding on characteristics and elements of a conversational discourse. However, to explain the relationship between the representation of power and socio-cultural dimensions needs a theoretical approach that takes an account of socio-cultural dimensions in its analysis. Therefore, the research of representation of power in a speech strategy needs a theoretical approach that synergies the theory of conversational analysis and the one that takes account of social-cultural dimensions.

Meanwhile, in relation to representation of power functions in the class discourse it is discovered that power in the class discourse is used for preventive, supportive, and corrective actions. At a theoretical level, Froyen (1993) sees the three functions of power in relation to enforcement of discipline for students. Nevertheless, the results of this research show that the use of power in the class discourse is not only to improve the breaking of discipline, but there are also functions used to support the achievement of learning objectives.

In the class discourse, the establishment of school rules constitutes the form of power functioning for a preventive action. The school rules that have been established functioned as preventing the breaking of discipline or behaviors unsuitable for the measures of education and instruction. However, the establishment of school rules has not involved students yet. School rules are still entirely determined by schools or teachers. Students are not involved actively in exploring or at least in giving inputs for the school rules. According to Dreikurs (in Cangelosi, 1993: 31), it is better to involve students in the process of determining rules so that they can realize the logical consequences of their conducts and they are motivated to run the rules due to advantages obtained from rules formulated together.

When presenting the substance of material to be taught and the evaluation system to be used, it seems that teachers use their valid power in dominative manner. In this context, teachers do not make an attempt to involve students in determining the materials of learning and the evaluation system. It seems that the two things are still teacher's prerogatives. It is the students who have to accept the two things without any right to think about, let alone to criticize. In contrast, in the modern learning system, things associated with the materials of learning, evaluation systems, and learning strategies that are

applied can be discussed together with students. Nunan (1999) has showed the rationale and given a good example concerning a way to involve students in process of determining materials of learning, evaluation systems, even in establishing learning strategies. Mechanisms of communication used in the process of learning have been tried to reduce the use of dominative power. In this context, teachers have made an attempt to encourage students to have bravery in asking questions, expressing ideas, evaluating their classmates' work and performance, and thinking critically. However, from their use of ways to control speech topics and their use of interruptions, teachers have not been able to dismiss an impression in their use of dominative power. In the control of speech topics and the use of interruptions it seems that teachers are still dominant in taking turns. In equal conversations, turn takings are distributed evenly and equally. Uneven and unequal turn takings represent unbalanced power in conversation (see Fairclough, 1998: 43-47).

The above description suggests that the use of power in the class discourse can be dominative and humanistic. Therefore, in the process of learning, power can be used for the coercive purposes and also can be made use of productive ones. Power that is used for coercive purpose tends to result in a dominative model of learning, while the one used for productive purposes tends to produce a humanistic model of learning.

In the dominative model of learning, students serve as passive objects of teachers' actions. As the passive part, students are not required to participate actively in the process of learning because they just have to receive teachers' words. In this framework of learning model, teachers teach to students as if they are separated from real life, as if the language of thinking can emerge without the factual reality (see Freire, 2002: 175).

Meanwhile, humanistic model of learning places the process of learning as an attempt to condition students to be familiar with and reveal the factual life critically. According to Freire, to achieve that objective, the process of learning should use dialogue as a choice. In the dialogue-based learning, teachers' role is to describe issues on existential situations that have been codified to help students have more critical insights of realities. Philosophically, teachers' responsibility is to place themselves more as students' partners in dialogues rather than just transferring information that has to be memorized by students.

In the future development, it seems that the system of learning in our education world should be directed to develop a humanistic system of learning. In the humanistic system of learning, power is empowered as a means of

developing students' potential maximally in facing their future in a critical and creative manner. With the humanistic system of learning, it is hoped that our education world can anticipate educational challenges in the-21th century as being established by UNESCO, that is *learning to know*, *learning to do*, *learning to live together*, and *learning to be* (see Delors et al, 1999).

In the future development, the system of learning in our school should make power function as creating a humanistic system of learning (Freire, 2002: 191). In the same token, Budimansyah (2002: 7) proposed a democratic system of learning. Democratic learning is one that is based on democratic values, that is learning that appreciates ability, promotes justice, and pays attention to the diversity of students. In practice, students should be placed as human being whose abilities have to be appreciated and who should be allowed to develop their potentials. Therefore, the climate of learning should be open, intimate, and respectful to each other. On the other hand, the climate of learning that is rigid, tense, and full of commands and instructions that make students passive, discouraged, easily bored, and tired, should be avoided.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

Based on the general illustration of findings above, some conclusions can be drawn as follows. Power is an integral part in the class discourse. The use of power in the class discourse is influenced by socio-cultural dimensions that build up the class discourse. The use of directive, assertive, and expressive acts in the class discourse represents power with a certain degree of domination. The degree of domination of the three speech acts influences the speech act users' legitimacy. The strategies of controlling speech acts topics, interruptions, and overlapping represent power with a certain degree of domination. The degree of power domination of each strategy gives effects on the users' legitimacy. The use of power in the class discourse has a number of functions, i.e. preventive, supportive, and corrective.

Suggestions

It is worth giving suggestions to teachers, principals, and future researchers. For teachers, these findings can be used as an input for designing or implementing humanistic learning as power is an integral part of the class discourse. Thus, all activities of learning by teachers' relate to the use of power.

In this context, power can be used to develop students' potentials maximally. The development of potentials can be carried out by involving students actively in planning and implementing learning.

For principals, these findings serve as inputs to create the climate of humanistic learning in their schools. With their authorities, principals can make an attempt to encourage teachers to use power as a means of developing students' potentials maximally. This can be done in any meeting and followed up by monitoring classrooms and providing instructions through circulars. In addition, principals can cooperate with related institutions (such as universities) to hold seminars or training in their schools concerning the models of learning that make use of power to develop students' potential. Training on quantum models of learning, for example, can be established in order to create the humanistic climate of learning in their schools.

For next reserchers, it is expected that they can conduct research taking the same substance with different site so that results of research, showing the use of power in various sites, may be achieved. Besides, they may use research methods relating linguistic and sociocultural aspects in the theoretical construct and its analysis model.

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