

Power Relations through Oral Interaction in an Adult EFL Classroom

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Informe de avance del proyecto de investigación «Relaciones de poder a través de la interacción oral en el salón de clase de inglés como lengua extranjera»

Resumen

Reporta los resultados de un proyecto de investigación llevado a cabo con el fin de explorar las relaciones de poder que se establecieron en un salón de clase de inglés como lengua extranjera para adultos. Dos profesores de un programa de Licenciatura en Educación Básica con énfasis en inglés, de una universidad pública, y cincuenta estudiantes de quinto y sexto semestres fueron observados, entrevistados y

cuestionados acerca de los patrones de interacción dentro del aula. Después de analizar la información a través de los instrumentos mencionados, se encontró que las relaciones de poder en este salón de clase de inglés como lengua extranjera para adultos eran coercitivas y colaborativas, dependiendo de las dinámicas de la clase.

Palabras clave: Relaciones de poder, Interacción oral, Patrones de interacción,



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Relaciones de poder coercitivas,
Relaciones de poder colaborativas, Salón
de inglés como lengua extranjera.

Abstract

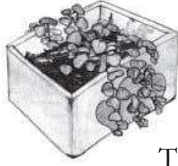
This article reports the results of a research project carried out to explore the power relations that were stated in an adult EFL classroom through oral interaction. Two teachers who belonged to a Teacher Education Program in Basic Education Majoring in English at a public university and fifty students of fifth and sixth

semester were observed, interviewed and asked about interactional patterns in the EFL classroom.

After analyzing the data obtained through those instruments it was seen that power relations in the EFL classrooms observed were both coercive and collaborative depending on the dynamics of the class.

Key Words: Power Relations, Oral Interaction, Interactional Patterns, Coercive Power Relations, Collaborative Power Relations, EFL Classroom.

Introduction



The motivation behind this project is the growing interest in classroom interaction.

This interest pursues a better understanding of the process of communication between teachers and students. However, most of the investigations in this area have been concerned with limited aspects of classroom interaction such as teacher talk, students talk, and silence among others, and not yet to explore other relevant issues such as the role of power that may equally influence the way the teaching-learning processes advances during classroom interaction.

This paper reports on the findings of a case study carried out at a public University in Bogotá. It explores the way power relations were stated in an EFL classroom and it is based on an analysis of the classroom discourse from a critical perspective that will pose power as a main issue.

Core Concepts of the Project

Central to this research are the concepts of oral interaction, power relations, empowerment and communicative competence in the classroom.

Classroom Oral Interaction

Chaudron (1995) argues that interaction is acting reciprocally, acting upon each other; that is to say, the teacher acts upon the class, but the class reaction subsequently modifies his or her next action and so on. Then, the learner's reaction becomes itself an action invoking

a reaction of the teacher, which in turn influences his or her subsequent action. There is a constant pattern of mutual influence and adjustment (Malamah-Thomas, 1987).

Ramos (2006) argues that most of the studies related to classroom interaction have analyzed how the teacher and the student talk is produced. These studies have found that teachers tend to control the talk and decide about the amount of talk their students produce.

One of the models usually considered by researchers is the Initiation - Response - Feedback model (IRF) that was also mentioned by Pineda et al. (2003). This model was attributed to Sinclair and Coulthard (1974). They proposed that the teacher initiates the conversation; the students respond and then create a feedback process on the students' responses. In her research, Pineda et al (2003) also suggests that when analyzing not only the model but the way interaction happens in an EFL classroom, there are many aspects to look at such as the role of gender, ethnicity, and power, among others.

Grundy (1997) claims that classroom communicative practices, such as the control and amount of talk by the teacher as contrasted to that by students, convey powerful messages to students about social power.

Power and Oral Interaction

Power, according to Foucault (1994), is something that circulates and is produced from one moment to another as part of the relationships human beings construct.

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Those negotiations of power may eventually happen in the interactions that take place in the classroom.

In the process of interacting, what is conveyed in the classroom deals with what students bring to school, their previous knowledge and experiences. In other words, their background is brought to the language learning situation and it is the one that empowers them because making use of it, they interact in the classroom.

This same author cited in Lench et al. (2001) argues that power is not necessarily oppressive. It is an element in any relationship. In itself, it is neutral. Its effect resides in the way it is used in the relationship. In turn, Usher and Edwards (1994) suggest that power is both prohibiting and productive, functioning as a network of relationships, induced in the body and produced in social transactions. These authors also argue that the language we produce as teachers educators is, thus, one means by which we circulate the power - knowledge formation of literacy instruction.

According to Manke (1997), power is mutually constructed and negotiated between teachers and students. She suggests that students and teachers build power in the interactional space they live in. She further asserts that, sometimes, they can exercise power equally when teachers give them choices about their learning. Besides, they can efficiently engage themselves in the tasks designed to promote their learning.

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Cummins (1994) establishes that there are two main kinds of power relations. The first one is a coercive one in which it is assumed that power is not only limited, but also fixed and subtractive. Manke (1997) describes that when classes are teacher - centered and he/ she is the initiator, power is fixed. In turn, Holly (1990) suggests that the teacher is in possession of knowledge which the learner lacks and that knowledge or, at least, the possession of it by the one and not the other participant in the learning encounter necessarily defines the social relation between them. Then, when the knowledge students bring to class is not validated by the community and by the teacher, power relations are not shared.

The second one relates to collaborative relations of power that assume that power is infinitive; it grows and generates itself during collaborative interactions. At this point, Manke (1997) also suggests that when teachers work in collaborative learning groups they redefine their power vis -a- vis with students. Power is a web and a net of relations and it is connected to individual perceptions of social interactions.

Empowerment

After working on a project related to teachers' empowerment at Universidad del Valle and trying to come up with a definition of empowerment, Mejia (1999) points out that empowerment is the process through which the participants in research become aware of their capacities, knowledge and experiences in the area, so that they can assume responsibilities in the development of autonomy and full participation in the decision-making process. In turn, Rico (2003) asserts that empowerment is a way to involve participants in decision-making and so in transformation of a reality.

Cummins (1994) argues that empowerment in the classroom can be regarded as the collaborative creation of power insofar as it constitutes the process whereby students and educators jointly create knowledge and identity through action focused on personal and social transformation.

Rico (2003) further asserts that a possible way to empower people is giving them the possibility to recover their own culture, knowledge, history, experiences and needs. It implies that students' previous experiences and their culture and society are valuable when empowering them in the classroom. When students are empowered by the teacher to use their previous knowledge in the classroom through interaction, then real learning occurs.

On the other hand, Cummins (1994) suggests that Vigotsky's ZPD (zone of proximal development) is a way to empower students in the classroom through interaction since the ZPD is the

interpersonal space where minds meet and new understandings can arise through collaborative interaction and inquiry.

Communicative competence

Communicative competence implies a linguistic code competence that is related to the grammatical accuracy way of handling at the sentence level, including lexical items and rules of word formation, sentence formation, literal meaning, pronunciation and spelling (Canale, 1983). Besides that, communicative competence deals with an organizational competence related to the grammatical competence and the textual one. In addition, it includes pragmatic competence which includes illocutionary competence, that is related to the pertaining to sending and receiving intended meanings and sociolinguistic competence which deals with culturally related aspects of the language. (Bachman, 1990)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

The aspects mentioned previously can be analyzed from the critical perspective of the discourse analysis that according to Norton is centrally concerned with the way language is implicated in the reproduction of and resistance to the inequitable relations of power in educational settings. Bordieu (1986) and Foucault (1994) emphasize on the idea that language must be analyzed from a critical perspective since it is not only an abstract structure, but also a practice that constitutes, and is constituted by, some complex and unequal sets of social relationships.

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Similarly, as cited in Penycook (2001), Fairclough and Wodak (1998) establish the following characteristics of a critical discourse analysis (CDA):

1. CDA addresses social problems; thus, the interest is not in language use itself but rather in the linguistic character of social and cultural processes and structures (p. 17).
2. Power relations are discursive, that is to say, the focus on discourse is also a focus on how power operates through language (p. 18).
3. Discourse constitutes society and culture.
4. Discourse does ideological work.

Research Methodology

This study follows the characteristics of a qualitative one. A case study was selected as my research method because I chose to study a particular phenomenon in order to analyze how power relations were stated in an EFL classroom through oral interaction. Cohen and Manion (1994: 106) argue that the purpose of the case study is to probe deeply and to analyze intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with a view to establishing generalizations about the wider population to which that unit belongs.

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Research Questions

What does oral interaction reveal about power relations in the EFL classroom?

How is power defined by teachers and students in an EFL classroom?

What kinds of oral interaction take place in the EFL classroom?

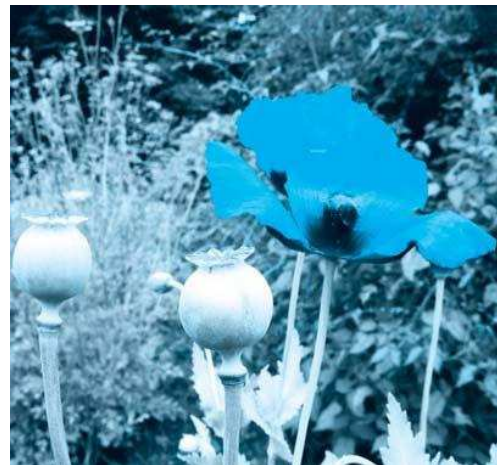
Context

The Students

The participants for this study were students in fifth and sixth semesters in a Teacher Education Program in Basic Education Majoring in English at a public university in Bogotá.

Students were between eighteen and thirty years old and they were interested in being English teachers as well as translators in their future.

As the focus of the research was the analysis of power relations in the EFL classroom through oral interaction, students were observed when interacting in the classroom. The group of students was selected because of the semester they were in, it was assumed their linguistic competence in the foreign language allowed them to communicate in a coherent and clear way and therefore, the observations were done in classes where they were able to participate actively during the sessions. Fifth semester students were observed when interacting in their English classes and sixth semester



students were seen when having their English Language Forms class (phonetics).

The Teachers

There were two female teachers involved in this project. One of them was a full-time professor, and the other one was a part-time teacher. They had taught fifth and sixth semester students previously.

I received consent forms from each participant as well as from the coordinator of the program at this public university and pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identity.

Site and researcher's role

This research was conducted in the Teacher Education Program in Basic Education Majoring in English which is offered by the curricular project of Modern Languages that belongs to the Sciences and Education School of a public university in Bogotá.

The program that is currently carried out emphasizes in English because of many reasons. One of them is because of the necessity of creating professional educators in English with a broad vision about pedagogy and with a good communicative competence.

My role was the one of a researcher in this study but I had previously shared pedagogical experiences with the participants since, by the time the study was developed, I had worked for that university for two years.



Data Analysis

Data collection: sources and procedures

Two groups of students provided me with information. One of them was composed of fifteen students of fifth semester and the other one was composed of thirty five students of sixth semester. Those students were observed rigorously during an academic semester. During those observations, I took notes and at the end of each session, I reflected upon those observations. The reflections were either comments I had about the way oral interaction took place in the sessions or questions that emerged from what I had observed. Besides taking notes, I transcribed six lessons and I wrote some comments about the aspects that called my attention in the transcription. I applied a survey to each of the students and I interviewed some of them to clarify their answers in the survey. I also transcribed the interviews which were done in Spanish because it was necessary for me to collect

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information most accurately about what they thought of their classes and it was easier for them to express their feelings in their native language.

Findings emerged after reading, analyzing, and reading the data again. The grounded approach as well as process of disassembling and reassembling the data mentioned by Freeman (1998) was used during the whole process.

Data analysis procedure

Categories emerged after reading, analyzing, and reading the data again. In order to find common patterns, a code system was applied to all the instruments. That code system was at the beginning in terms of reading the data and naming the aspects that called my attention as they were related to the research questions. After naming some of the aspects I had observed, I used memos from different colors in order to write extra comments or questions that emerged about those concepts. Hence, I identified some initial patterns that took the shape of categories. One shows coercive power relations in the EFL classroom and the other one refers to collaborative power relations.

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The findings

Overall, I identified three categories and three sub- categories that evidenced that power relations in the classroom were coercive as well as collaborative depending on the dynamics of the class. Each category is explained briefly and illustrated with representative samples in the following paragraphs.

Power is Defined in terms of the Linguistic Competence of the People Who Participate in the EFL Classroom

During the analysis of the information, it was found that teachers as well as students exercise power in the EFL classroom by means of the language they manage. It was seen that students who had the best linguistic competence tended to be selected to answer process questions, thus creating more contact with the teacher. Besides, some of the product questions were directed to students by name. It was observed that the ones who knew more were called on more than the ones with lack of knowledge in the area. Then, outstanding students received a greater portion of teacher's attention in the form of praise and feedback.

Besides that, students with the best linguistic competence in English were selected by their mates to talk in front of the whole class and their thoughts and opinions were heard the most by the teacher and the other mates. It was clear that those students were not afraid of talking to the teacher and sometimes they argued about the topic of the class. On the other hand, students with a low communicative competence tended to be

quiet in the class as they felt afraid of being either corrected by their mates or by being misunderstood by the teacher.

In the following excerpt of an interview, a student mentions her feelings in relation to the students who participated the most in class. At the beginning, I asked the student about the turn-taking behavior in the classroom. After answering that the teacher was in charge of giving the turn, the student mentioned that the class was focused on those who had a better linguistic competence. In that sense, she further asserted that the oral interaction [they had] made them more powerful in the classroom as their opinions were heard and accepted by the classroom community.

37. S: There are many occasions in which the class
38. is focused on just some students, in those ones
39. who are good. It is to say, in those ones who are able to say
40. what they think. Then, if you don't feel able to express your opinions
41. because of the lack of vocabulary
42. the class is focused only on what good students say and then
43. they give their opinion, they argue and they have enough
44. power to make decisions related to the discussions,
45. the topics of the class and the grades.
(Sixth semester: T 1,I 1, L37- 45. Diana)

The previous information can be corroborated by means of the survey students and teachers answered at the beginning of the term. There, some students mentioned that they did not

participate orally in class because they did not know how to express their thoughts in the target language. Then, they preferred to keep quiet and let the students who had more linguistic competence participate and decide about the class. The question addressed in the survey was: what is your attitude towards your classroom interaction?

« I only listen my classmates and I try to learn from them. My attitude is not positive because I like listen and no more. If my partners know to communicate, they do it and they have the power to decide and to be listen». (Sixth semester: S.1, Q3. Ángela)

In relation to the ones who speak the most or are selected to speak by the others, Muñoz et al (1998: 25) establish that one grants a person the power to control and decide what is going to be said when one selects her or him as the representative speaker.

An aspect related to linguistic competence seen as power is the way feedback is given and the people who are involved in that feedback. Usually, teachers give feedback to students and in this research the same dynamic was followed. However, it was also observed that classmates with a good



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communicative competence gave feedback to the ones with a less communicative competence in terms of error correction. The next subcategory explains why feedback is a factor that is seen as a way to have coercive power relations in the EFL classroom.

Feedback is Seen as a Way to Validate the Linguistic Competence of the Individuals in the EFL Classroom

As part of the analysis of this research, it was observed that the feedback was a way of showing the linguistic code competence of the teacher and of some of the students. This means, that not only the teacher, but also the most outstanding students in the class took the role of correcting and praising their lower peers. Rather than stimulating their participation, this event seemed to discourage further involvement of those students.

Corrections were aimed mainly at pronunciation mistakes and they were done by repeating the word that was mispronounced.



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The next quotation taken from an interview shows how students felt constrained when they were corrected by a classmate and how that event was seen as a show-off of those students who made corrections. This agrees with Hudicourt Barnes (2003) when he affirms that in many classrooms, some students would rather remain silent than subject themselves to possible negative evaluation by their teacher or their mates.

The student quoted below showed her feelings about being corrected by a

classmate. Those students negatively affected other student's oral participation and decision making during the sessions and so impersonated a dominant role, whether intentionally or accidentally.

156. S: I have too many problems when speaking in class,
157. because I'm very nervous and then if a person interrupts
158. me or corrects me I feel even more nervous and
159. I begin confusing everything. For example, I remember
160. my classmates correcting me in a presentation.
161. The good English students corrected me and then,
162. I forgot what I was going to say because I knew I was wrong.
(Sixth semester: T 1,I 1, L156- 162. Diana)

The following observation was done with students of sixth semester when they were working in groups. At the beginning of the class, the teacher told them to work in groups to discuss what they wanted to do for the final paper. As she walked around answering their questions, the groups worked and spoke to agree about the project. I observed that while some of them shared their ideas in English, others preferred not to participate too much; nevertheless, when they did it, they expected a correction by the partner they considered with the best linguistic code competence in their groups. In the excerpt above again it is seen that when students felt they were going to be corrected, they preferred not to participate.

Through the analysis of the data it was noticeable that the feedback given by



classmates in terms of error correction was not well accepted by the mates who were corrected and it was seen as a negative aspect that affected the oral interaction in the classroom allowing only some voices to be heard.

«The class is very relaxed as they are working in groups, while working in groups, some students speak in English and correct the project they are going to present.

In one of the groups students are speaking in English, the one who speaks the most is Danny, he knows he is the one who has the best English level from his group. That group is composed of three students and the other two who are in the group are mostly passive students and whenever they participate they expect correction in terms of the pronunciation by Danny». (Sixth semester: O. 14, p 1. Oct 7th)

Having in mind the data mentioned previously, it can be stated that feedback was a way of telling students how well they were doing in relation to the foreign language they were using in the classroom.

In other words, feedback was used in the classrooms observed as a way to inform students about the linguistic code competence they had.

The provision of feedback according to Annet (1969, as cited in Chaudron, 1995)), is a major means to inform learners [of the accuracy] of both their formal target language production and their other classroom behavior and knowledge' accuracy.

Based on the previous information, power relations in the EFL classroom were established according to the linguistic competence of the people in the same classroom. It was seen that just a few times students negotiated the dynamics of the classroom with the teacher and the interactions that took place in the EFL classroom were based on the teachers' decisions. Therefore, teachers' oral interaction affected students' oral interaction because based on the questions asked by the teachers and on the turns given by them, students interacted orally. Place et al (2001) argue that the relationship between teacher and student is symbiotic -one affects the other.

In relation to the ones who speak the most or are selected to speak by the others, Muñoz et al (1998: 25) establish that one grants a person the power to control and decide what is going to be said when one selects her or him as the representative speaker.

Teachers' Oral Interaction Affecting Students' Oral Interaction

This category relates to the question «What kind of oral interaction takes place in the EFL classroom?» since the interaction that is given in the EFL classroom is based on what the teachers decide about the dynamics of the classroom. It was observed that teachers tended to follow a model where they dominate the floor.

Teachers began the interactions by asking questions. They also gave feedback, usually by rephrasing what students said or else by repeating the word mispronounced or misunderstood or by asking questions to check comprehension. They interrupted students to correct immediately the word that was not clear. When praising, the teacher invited other students to discuss the issue. The teacher also repeated what the students had said and included the word «yes» at the end.

In the next extract of observation, for instance, students discuss about sports and specifically about biking. Notice that the teacher holds the floor of the interaction and the student's oral interactions are based on questions asked by the teacher. Besides, when giving feedback, as it is seen in lines 254, 256 the teacher tended to

Through the analysis of the data it was noticeable that the feedback given by classmates in terms of error correction was not well accepted by the mates who were corrected and it was seen as a negative aspect that affected the oral interaction in the classroom allowing only some voices to be heard.



rephrase what the student was saying. This rephrasing was also related to error correction as in line 256, the female teacher rose her tone of voice and rephrased the sentence to show there was a mistake in the way the verb was used.

251. T: have you ever been riding a bike.
 252. yes? when you were a kid
 253. S: when I was a kid, yes.
 254. T: When you were a child, OK, where did you ... when
 255. did you learn to ride,... to ride a bike
 256. S: Ehh, my mother taught, my mother taught me.
 257. T: My mother taught to me. OK; how old were you then?
 258. S: well I was ten years.
 259. T: Ten years old? very old. OK; did you , did you ride on
 260. a bike or a tricycle?
 261. S: NO, ehh.. a bike
 262. T; A bike, OK. So did you ride on tricycles?

(Fifth semester: T 2, p 12, L251- 271)

The previous excerpts show a tendency to maintain the IRF model (Initiation - Response - Feedback). According to Sinclair and Coulthard (as cited by Pineda at al, 2003) the teacher initiates the oral interaction, then, the student responds and finally the teacher provides feedback. This is clearly a dominant model.

Hudicourte- Barnes (2003), after working on a research related to the use of argumentation in Haitian Creole Science classrooms, argued that a common pattern in the classrooms is that classroom conversations are teacher - centered and often involve a fraction of the students who believe they may have the right to answer. In the same way, a study done by

Young (1987: 25) concludes that the IRF cycle constitutes 60% of classroom talk. In the following extract, students answered the question, «what is classroom oral interaction for you?» Notice that the answers given considered the oral interaction in the classroom as a process in which only the teacher and the students could interact, not one in which students could share ideas among themselves.

... Oral interaction are all the communicative acts that are presented in the classroom. Especially between the teacher and the students. (Sixth semester: S.1, Q1. Franky)

...Oral interaction is when the teacher asks and someone answers (very few) (Sixth semester: S. 1, Q1. Helver)

In the answer given by one of the teachers to the same question, she considered oral interaction as a way used by students in order to ask her any concern they may have or to show their understanding of the topic being addressed.

...oral interaction is whenever I elicit questions and my students provide responses/ when they express their understanding and concerns on the topic or other. (Fifth semester: S. 1, Q1. Amparo)

Another aspect related to teachers deciding about classroom dynamics and so on student's oral interaction is the way the turn to talk is given in the class. During the observations I did, it was clear that teachers decided on the person who should talk in the lessons. Sometimes it was done by calling them on by their names or by



pointing at them. The next sub category relates to how teachers decide on the classroom dynamics and as part of that, to how they manage the turn taking in the EFL classroom and student's oral interaction.

Teachers as Turn- Givers

As teachers are the ones in charge of deciding on the dynamics of the class, they are also the ones who decide on who takes the turn to speak. In relation to turn taking, it was seen that teachers managed the turn taking as they were the ones who decided what to ask and to whom. In the excerpt, the researcher was interviewing a student by giving him situations that may eventually happen in their classrooms. I realized this student felt classes were mechanical because of having the teacher as the one who controlled students' oral interaction.

89. S: Everything is very mechanic, the teacher gives
90. people the turn to talk, every person says some words and then,
91. the teacher gives the turn to another person.

The provision of feedback according to Annet (1969, as cited in Chaudron, 1995)), is a major means to inform learners [of the accuracy] of both their formal target language production and their other classroom behavior and knowledge' accuracy.

92. As I said, it is the same all the time. (Fifth semester: T 2,I 1, L89- 92. Antonio)

In the following extract, a student was writing about some of the patterns related to oral interaction in his EFL classroom. The student mentioned that it was the teacher who decided who had the right to speak by giving turns.

... My teacher decides if I speak or not. If she points me, I speak but if she does not I do not. She always decides who speaks and at what time» (Sixth semester: S.1, Q5. Hernan).

Cazden (1988), points out that in a typical classroom, the most important asymmetry in the rights and obligations of teachers and students is over control of the right to speak. In the same train of thought, Hudicourte- Barnes (2003) states that the limits of the students rights to speak are usually defined by each classroom teacher, as are the rules of politeness and the definition of competence.

The previous excerpts show a tendency to maintain the IRF model (Initiation - Response - Feedback). According to Sinclair and Coulthard (as cited by Pineda et al, 2003) the teacher initiates the oral interaction, then, the student responds and finally the teacher provides feedback. This is clearly a dominant model.



asked usually by the teachers as they usually initiated the interactions.

Questions at the Core of the EFL Classroom Oral Interaction

Through the analysis of the data, it was seen that questions constituted a big amount of the English classes and those questions were asked essentially by teachers. In the next observation, the teacher began by asking a display - product question about heroes. Notice that all the oral interaction that took place was focused on the questions asked by the teacher and as they were product questions, the answers given by students were very short.

The teacher begins asking about heroes «do you remember heroes?» Students answer. superman, Chapulin, spider». the teachers corrects: spider no, Spiderman «then she continues asking «what is the thing that you most like about superman?» Students say: He can fly. The teacher corrects: «he doesn't fly, he navigates» «navigates right» After that, the teacher continues asking what about batman? And students say «He has a secret life». (Fifth semester: O. 5, p 1. Sep 15th).

Chaudron (1995) affirms that teachers' questions constitute a primary means of

engaging learners' attention, promoting verbal responses, and evaluating learner's progress. In other words, questions are the initiation of the oral interaction. After that, there is a response by students and finally a feedback is given. Then, according to the kind of question that is stated by the teacher in the classroom, the patterns of oral interaction may change.

Finally, in order to answer the main question related to power relations in the EFL classroom, the evidence on oral interaction offered here illustrates that power relations in the EFL classroom are both coercive (as it was seen in the previous categories) and collaborative as teachers negotiate their power by allowing students be heard in the lessons. Besides, teachers try to help those students who are quiet so that their thoughts and opinions could be heard.

Coercive and Collaborative Power Relations in the EFL Classroom

Related to power, Cummins (2000) suggests that there are two kinds of power relations. The coercive and the collaborative ones. Coercive relations of power refer to the exercise of power by a dominant individual, group, or country to the detriment of a subordinated individual, group, or country. As it was stated in the two previous categories, power relations in the EFL classrooms observed were coercive because they were not shared; they were executed either by the teacher or by those students who had a good linguistic competence.

However, in this research it was also seen that the power relations that took place in the EFL classroom were collaborative.

Cummins (2000) suggests that students whose schooling experiences reflect collaborative relations of power participate confidently in instruction as result of the fact that their sense of identity is being affirmed and extended in their interaction with educators. Students also know that their voices will be heard and respected within the classroom. Schooling amplifies rather than silencing their power of self expression.

The next piece of transcription shows the opinions given by one of the fifth semester students, when she was given a situation in which she was asked if in her English classes her feelings, ideas, and previous experiences were valued. It is remarkable to see that she considers that when expressing her feelings and previous experiences she feels motivated as she sees that her thoughts are valued by the community.

287. S: We have had the opportunity to participate
 288. in debates in the classroom. The teacher presents
 289. a topic and then, we participate. In those debates we have the
 290. possibility to participate by arguing based on what we think,
 291. our beliefs, our ideas. Then, here you see that the classroom
 292. has a human sensitivity because what you think, feel and live is valid.
 (Fifth semester: T 1,I 1, L287- 292. Diana M)

The following student considers that not only the teacher of English Language Forms but also some other teachers allowed her to argue and give opinions by considering her feelings and previous

In the following extract, students answered the question, «what is classroom oral interaction for you?» Notice that the answers given considered the oral interaction in the classroom as a process in which only the teacher and the students could interact, not one in which students could share ideas among themselves.



experiences. She considered that it was a key aspect to have the teacher valuing students' ideas and opinions because it helped them to feel more comfortable in the classes. Cummins (2000) argues that one of the roles teachers may assume is to affirm and promote language and cultural background within the school.

27. S: During the whole semester teachers have
28. validated our ideas and then, you feel supported by the teacher.
29. You feel, you can continue talking about the topic because
30. your ideas are bases for others to participate.
(Sixth semester: T 1,I 1, L27- 30. Andrea)

... My teacher decides if I speak or not. If she points me, I speak but if she does not I do not. She always decides who speaks and at what times

According to Cummins (2000), collaborative relations of power, reflect the sense of the term «power» that refers to being enabled, or empowered to achieve more. In the previous samples, there is a clear tendency in teachers to empower

students and then, create collaborative power relations in the EFL classroom.

It can be concluded that in order for power relations to be collaborative there is a need for teachers to validate students' previous knowledge, experiences, culture and in general students background. This research shows that students were empowered by teachers when their voices were heard. However, there is a tendency for teacher to continue conducting students' interventions and in that sense empowerment is not achieved at all.

Implications

During the development of my research, some elements deserved further research, for instance, the way gender makes a difference in the oral interaction that takes place in the EFL classroom. I observed that gender definitely is a fact to be seen in depth because in this research male students tended to interact more orally and to be more in contact with the teacher. Females' oral interaction was especially seen when working in small groups. Besides, male students were called more on by the teachers to answer product questions.

Another aspect that conveys a wider scope than the one I analyzed here is how all the dynamics of the class affect power relations in the class. In my research only some aspects of those dynamics were seen since my focus was on questions, turn-taking and feedback but it would be worthy to continue working on aspects such as gender and ethnicity, among others that are related to the way power relations are constructed in the EFL classroom.

Conclusions

Oral interaction in the EFL classroom evidenced that both coercive and collaborative power relations in the classroom were present and that they varied with the dynamics of the class.

Coercive relations appeared when the teacher dominated the class. It was seen that teachers decided on students' oral participation. Then, the teachers gave the turns for students to speak, asked the questions students were supposed to answer, initiated the interaction by means of those questions and provided feedback in terms of error correction or praising. Also, when students with a higher level of competence prevailed or when they discouraged slower learners by correcting them.

Furthermore, those people who provided feedback were validating the linguistic competence of the other members of the class. Usually, the teacher validated the communicative competence of the students because, when they were understood, their ideas were used during the lesson.

In addition, the teacher and those students who could communicate their ideas in a clear way held the floor of the class. So, these people took the power of deciding and speaking for the quiet ones. Thus, power was not shared; it was exercised by a limited number of people.

On the other hand, in some cases, power was shared as students' experiences, beliefs, and feelings were taken into account during the lessons. The teachers created situations where the students were able to share their opinions and thoughts with other members of the class. This was more obvious when working in small groups or discussing about a topic that appealed to them. It was at that moment that students who felt their communicative competence was not the best shared, that they and their thoughts were empowered to talk in the lesson.

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The teacher begins asking about heroes «do you remember heroes?» Students answer: superman, Chapulin, spider». the teachers corrects: spider no, Spiderman «then she continues asking «what is the thing that you most like about superman?» Students say: He can fly. The teacher corrects: «he doesn't fly, he navigates» «navigates right» After that, the teacher continues asking what about batman? And students say «He has a secret life».



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