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## Teacher Power and Student Behaviors: Insights from Vietnamese Higher Education Classrooms

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### Abstract

Power is understood as a process exercised and negotiated in an English-as-a-foreign-language interaction. This article aims to fill the gaps of literature in researching the relationship between teachers' power and students' learning behavior in Vietnamese classroom interaction as there was little research on how teachers' use of power can exert educational effects on students, and which changes the way students acquire or learn in general and particularly language. The data came from an ethnographic approach, including audio-recording, classroom observation, and teacher interviews. By employing the tools of critical discourse analysis, the analyses bring together the view of the subject of the study with classroom power relations to give deep insights into the microlevel classroom discourse and the macrolevel of professional discourse (in this case, it is understood as pedagogical discourse). The findings show how power was negotiated over in different forms of classroom behavior. Besides, the discursive classroom practices reveal the relationship between classroom behavior norms that the teachers attempted to impose and the well-known student-centeredness. Implications have been worked out through a proposal of a classroom interaction structure where a constructivist learning environment or a classroom of happiness is aimed to create, which helps increase the learning potential and capacity of students.

**Keywords:** teacher power, student behavior, critical discourse analysis, constructivist learning, teacher discourse

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### 1. Introduction

Research on education, which has always drawn the attention of educational theorists and practitioners, recently has emerged corresponding with the ever-changing global issues, especially socio-cultural situations of the countries in the world. In this strand, we would like to focus on English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) research, which generally refers to studies that examine teachers and students in actual classrooms. This research trend draws discussion based on classroom interaction data. However, traditionally these studies focused on the structure or the general characteristics of classroom interaction, including teacher-student interaction patterns (Walsh, 2006; Saeedian, 2023), teacher talk (Mehan & Cazden, 2015), teachers' turn-allocation strategies in their instructional interactions (Ghiasvand, 2022) or teaching and learning behavior (Dembo & Seli, 2020). Much of this research has paid little attention to the holistic nature of classroom interaction in its social context (Derakhshan et al., 2023; Oral, 2013). In the meantime, EFL classroom research has yet to examine the influence of institutions on the classroom as well as EFL classrooms have usually been isolated from their socio-political concerns and power relations (Pennycook, 2000). These studies suggested that there be a more incredible amount of teacher-talk, an abundance of turns, and teacher ask-student answer sequences, which is an understanding of power as it is 'out there' or a form of power belonging only to the teacher. This is a structuralist perspective of power. Thus, students play little or no role in negotiating teacher-student power relations.

Besides, there is a growing interest in poststructuralist thought in language teaching and learning, which concerns the centrality of power and politics in how the teaching and learning processes happen (Apple, 2013; Apple et al., 2005; Pennycook, 2000, 2001). Under critical pedagogy, the central issue has been "to understand in much more subtle ways how power circulates at multiple levels" (Pennycook, 2000, p. 114).

Our bigger concern, besides, is how higher education (HE) teachers use power for a safe, accepting, and comfortable environment for all students. University teachers strive to encourage student learning and build satisfying relationships with students. Teacher-student interpersonal relationships play a crucial role in student learning (Derakhshan & Shakki, 2020; Worley et al., 2007). Especially, teacher positive communication evokes a profound effect on students' cognitive learning

and their learning outcomes (Shakki, 2022; Xie & Derakhshan, 2021).

This paper looks at the stances of teachers attempting to discipline students discursively, which results in a series of discursive events in the classroom contexts. We use Fairclough's (2015) critical discourse analysis framework to analyze teachers' discourses. The power structure in the classroom is represented in three forms: coercing, rewarding, and legitimating. Because merely uncovering the power relations is not enough, we use constructivist learning theory as a frame for our interpretation (Prawat & Floden, 1994), in which power is considered a social process and is negotiated. Furthermore, this article follows the tradition of ethnography of communication (EC) and examines the data from HE classrooms in the actual contexts of power in cultural encounters. While literature shows previous studies on teacher power mainly focused on seeing what types of power were exercised in classrooms and how often, this study which aims to analyse power in connection with its effect on students' learning behavior, basing the explanation of discursive practice on the classroom culture foundation, is supposed to make a real significance.

The purpose of this study was to give a representation of teacher power expressed in classroom interaction where the teacher's interpersonal instruction may serve to achieve relational learning outcomes. The research aims to find answers to these two questions: (1) *How are power relations enacted and reproduced in Vietnamese HE English classrooms*; and (2) *What discursive strategies are employed by teachers in teacher-student interactions, and how do they facilitate students' learning behaviors*?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Negotiation of Power

We are living through a period of intense social and cultural change, which is prevalent in its multidimensional effects from global, and national to local. We believe that social relationship is driven by economic change and the search for well-being. Part of this is the change of language use because the order of social life is the 'order of discourse' (Foucault, 1980). In an educational system, Foucault (1980, p. 64) persists that "any system of education is a political way of maintaining

or modifying the appropriation of discourses, along with the knowledge and powers which they carry". It is because the use of power in the classroom requires communication, and communication reveals power relations. In other words, negotiating power between teachers and students is the way the two parties choose to communicate and respond to each other (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2011).

Teacher power in discourse is to control and constrain students' contributions. The constraints include (1) contents of what is said or done; (2) relations of the teachers and students; (3) "subject positions" that teachers can occupy (Fairclough, 2015, p. 76). For example, when requiring (contents) a student to take an oral test, a teacher (relations) may say, 'Tell me about types of adverbs.' If the student has no response to the teacher's requirement and goes ahead with types of adverbs, the teacher, then, occupies the whole sphere. It appears that the teacher has the right to give orders and ask questions, whereas the student has only the right to comply and answer the questions.

Building on the premise of the HE context as highly contested, conflict-ridden, value-laden, and resistant, we attempt to study teacher power at three levels of classroom interaction: micro, meso, and macro levels. This study also borrows the conceptualization of power advanced by Raven (1993), in which power is divided into six bases: coercive, reward, legitimate, referent, expert, and information. The first three bases will be discussed in the next section. The three later bases are concerned with the knowledge the teachers use, which is not the focus of this present study.

## ***2.2. The Construction of Teacher Power in the Classroom Interaction***

### ***2.2.1. Coercive Power***

In discourse studies, coercive power is a game of "common sense" when teachers believe that they possess the power to coerce students to go along with them or win their consent (Fairclough, 2015, pp. 64-65). In this sense, teachers have the ability to punish or refrain from punishing both physically and non-physically. Students comply so as to get away with being punished or avoid punishment. Tauber (1985, p. 135) persists that 'the more students see that there is no avenue of escape, the more effective coercive power will be.' For example, in the case of students not doing their homework, a teacher at an education university may say that 'if you study like this, you can't be a teacher in the future.' The teacher is expressing a

negative consequence, and it is beyond the 'common sense' that a pedagogical student must do all the homework to be a teacher in the future. This way of power exercise controls students' behavior and opts for students' better learning achievement and cooperation.

Coercive power is used upon those who are weaker or in a lower social status and not vice versa. A student cannot exercise this base of power toward a teacher.

### 2.2.2. Rewarding Power

Teachers exercise reward power when they possess the ability to deliver rewards or to refrain from doing so. Examples of rewarding power are enormous: a smile, a merit mark, a positive comment, a reward, etc.

On the other hand, discouraging sick behavior through the selective granting of rewards is available in classroom interaction. This discouragement enables students to think about and modify or manage their behavior. In this way, a teacher publicly acknowledges status and authority (Fairclough, 2015).

McCroskey et al. (1985, p. 224) reported a striking finding that reward power is 'positively associated with affective learning.' Previously, McCroskey and Richmond (1984) believed that there was no connection between reward power and student learning behavior.

### 2.2.3. Legitimate Power

In the context of Vietnam, there is an old saying that goes, 'một chữ cũng là thầy, nửa chữ cũng là thầy' [if someone teaches you even a word or half a word, you have to see them as your teacher (authors' own translation)]. In this sense, students perceive that teachers possess the right to prescribe learning behavior. In this way, teachers can use discourse as 'a central role in the production and legitimation of inequality and stratification' because in a 'speech community,' 'some forms of communication are highly valued and rewarded while others get stigmatized or ignored; access to prestigious styles, genres and media are unevenly distributed' (Hymes, 1962 as cited in Fairclough, 2015, p. 24). This does not mean that legitimate power is bad; it can be a pedagogical tool in the classroom. However, when exercising power over students becomes open to critique, and it is

not legitimate, the teachers experience bad effects (Fairclough, 2015). For example, when teachers give unacceptable or inappropriate instructions, they can experience students' resistance or even conflict.

These days, we can no longer take it for granted that students will come to class with automatic respect for teachers as in the saying above. This should come as no surprise because many universities have defined their students as customers, products, or partners (Clayson & Haley, 2005). This means that students come to class with an attitude toward teachers' legitimate power, toward the institutions. Professional teachers need to take this into conscious consideration when asserting their legitimate power.

### 2.3. Teacher Power in Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is flourishing in education studies and in the wave of literacy studies (Rogers & Schaenen, 2014; Waugh et al., 2016). A foundation for CDA was the publication of *Language and Control* (Fowler et al., 2019), *Language and Power* (Fairclough, 2015), and *An Introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis in Education* (Rogers, 2011) and among other works concerning discourse and classroom by Cazden et al. (1972), (Mehan, 1979) and (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). The significance of CDA in education includes: (1) the nature of CDA is to study identity, power and ideology (Fairclough, 2015), in which the questions of learning, identity, and power have become densely intertwined (Castells (1999) as cited in Rogers, 2011, p. ix); (2) in the intellectual climate of our time - in the constructivism – there are strong connections among knowledge, teaching and power in education and that knowledge is something people can 'make', not simply 'learn' (Apple, 2013, p. 15, emphasis in original); (3) we do CDA to both understand and change the world because CDA stands up for emancipation (Fairclough, 2015) in the sense that communication is the mechanism of emancipation; (4) at a time of global crises, when grand theories and traditional methodologies seem little adequate to understand the complexity, uncertainty, and diversified circumstances, CDA is an optimism to solve global problems; (5) CDA looks at a communicative event vertically and horizontally: from micro-, meso-, to macro-level as well as contextually, co-textually and intertextually; (6) CDA is transdisciplinary when it can take in various social theories in a single study.

CDA helps reveal power represented in the underlying meanings of texts and the

ideology hidden behind them (Derakhshan & Shakki, 2019; Kanani & Zamani, 2022). CDA focuses on how 'systematic asymmetries of power and resources between speakers and listeners and between readers and writers can be linked to the production and reproduction of stratified political and economic interests [...] critical discourse analysis sets out to generate agency among students, teachers and others by giving them the tools to see how texts position them and generate the very relations of institutional power at work in classrooms, staff rooms and policy' (Luke, 1995, pp. 12-13). Thus, teacher power in CDA is produced and reproduced in discourse because 'it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse'. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body' (Foucault, 1980, p. 119).

CDA examines social activities which bear upon the possible constructive effects of discourse and upon the problem of where texts 'go to' (Fairclough, 2015, p. 25). For example, Fairclough (2015, pp. 30-31) argues 'if we properly 'compensate' (i.e., pay) the bankers, they will come to/stay in London, if they stay, they will produce economic growth, if they produce economic growth we shall have prosperity and opportunity for all (which is in the common good) – so we should pay them and accept the inequality.' In this example, if only the first conditional sentence (texts) was stated, listeners or readers may as well understand the consequences in a specific context. Constructivism is crucial in CDA because "a moderate understanding of social constructivism is necessary which takes account of conditions which are partly non-discursive which facilitate or impede constructive effects" (Fairclough, 2015, p. 39).

### **3. Methodology**

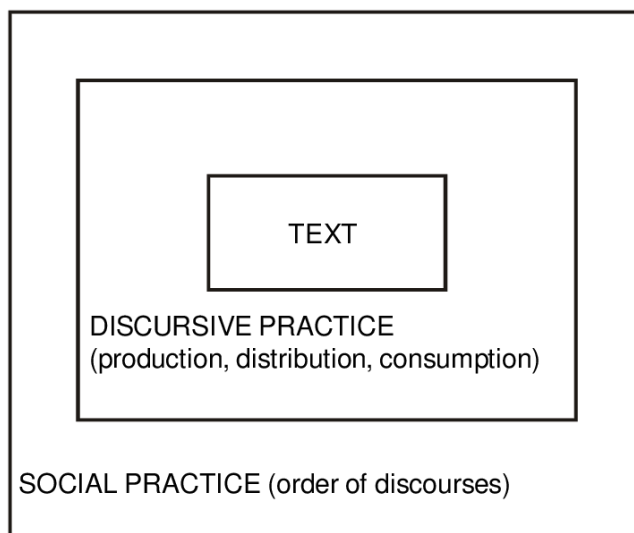
#### **3.1. Research Design**

In this study, we applied the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) research tool that is believed to help recognize teachers' use of power and unveil the ideology embedded in teachers' classroom discourse. In particular, the study will examine the language that teachers used in the context of HE classroom interaction and how it contributed to developing a favorable classroom practice as well as promoting students learning behavior. We applied Fairclough's three-dimensional model for CDA, which outlines the analysis of a communicative event in three aspects: text, discursive practice, and social practice.



**Figure 1**

*Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model for CDA (Fairclough, 2015)*



*Note.* A Communicative event

The general aim of the analysis is to uncover the power execution in the classroom through teachers' use of language. The first dimension is a descriptive analysis that will help examine whether the language of teachers was formal or informal; in active or passive voice; what types of sentences teachers used and for which power; what modality verbs, and what expressive words were used. These evaluations show the intentions that teachers had for the subject, which is the language of instruction. The second dimension is an interpretative analysis of discourse (Fairclough, 1992, p. 73) that aims to unlock the hidden meaning behind the words and therefore disclose the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power imbalance. We would identify the relationship between speakers (i.e. teachers) and listeners (i.e. students) and analyze the discourse of teachers at a processing level. Surjowati (2021, p. 326) explains the aim of this process 'when related to a large social context, a text through which power is exercised may be interpreted and induced by readers or listeners differently according to the rules, norms, and mental models of the society they live in'. The last dimension is the social level of analysis. At this stage, we aim to mention the underlying background of the research findings so the readers will be able to view how influential the social structure is in determining teacher discourse in the context of classrooms. This results in the explanation, which helps 'portray a



discourse as part of processes of social struggle within a matrix of the relation of power' (Fairclough, 2015, p. 135) of how and why particular structures of teacher discourse are seen as a social process, would be produced, what social structures influence those discourses and reversely, those discourses can sustain or change the social structures.

### **3.2. Context and Participants**

The research context was six tertiary English classrooms in Northern, Central, and Southern Vietnam. The participants were six teachers (one male and five females) and 255 first- and second-year English-major students. The courses were named English language skills. The primary focuses were to develop four English language skills: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Each teaching hour lasted 50 minutes and each teaching section contained two hours. Textbooks varied from one university to another, but the commonly expected levels were all Pre-intermediate (B1- CEFR-the Common European Framework of Reference) for the first year and Intermediate (B2-CEFR) for the second year. All the teachers were Vietnamese with five to fifteen years of teaching experience. They all have submitted consent forms to participate voluntarily in the study.

Vietnam belongs to collectivism and was under the influence of Confucius for a thousand years. This concept has been embedded in the context of classroom practice for long though it has become more and more flexible today and is less observed in the HE setting. However, it is worth mentioning it as a foundation for the explanation of teacher discourse in relation to social practice because it underpins the concepts of power and authority in a specific social-cultural setting.

### **3.3. Data Collection Procedure**

The data of the current study were a combination of ethnographic field notes, audio recordings, observations, and interviews with the teachers following critical ethnography in education by Carspecken (1996). A two-hour teaching section by each of the six teachers was audiotaped and videotaped. Audio recordings were transcribed using the N-Vivo software of the latest version (2021). The transcription was then double-checked for accuracy and translation into English, where there

were talks in Vietnamese. Teachers' discourse was coded and categorized into three types of power (coercive, reward, and legitimate), according to what was prescribed for these three types in Raven (1993). Besides, observation sheets and video recordings would support the deeper analysis of context. Teachers and senior teachers were randomly consulted through semi-structured interviews to better understand the construction of the curriculum and to support the researcher's interpretation of the discursive strategies that they employed during the classroom sessions.

### 3.4. Data Analytical Framework

The data analytical framework used in this study is adapted from the model of McCroskey in McCroskey et al. (1985).

**Table 1**

*The Analytical Framework of Three Types of Power (adapted from McCroskey et al., 1985)*

Power	Technique	Samples
Coercive	Punishment from student behavior	You will lose one mark if you don't do this ...
	Punishment from teacher	I will punish you ...
Reward	Positive reward from teacher	You will enjoy it ...; I'll give you a reward if...
	Negative reward from teacher	You were wrong...
	Reward from others	Your classmates will admire you.
Legitimate	Teacher as authority	Do it ...
		If you don't do it now, it will ...
		I told you ...

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Teacher's Exercise of Coercive Power

Coercive power in the classrooms can be realized potentially in grade penalties, being criticized or disciplined in front of one's classmates, or losing favor with the teacher (Schrodt et al., 2007). Diaz et al. (2016, p. 7) reported that 'students experienced instructors interfering negatively with instruction, being absent, confusing students, using sarcasm, grading unfairly, showing favoritism, purposely

making tests too hard, humiliating students, and being verbally abusive'. Coercive power as observed in university English classes in the study was reported under slightly different categories as degrading or giving minus marks, depriving of study chances, denying performance or confirming poor performance, threatening, criticizing/complaining, showing unhappy feelings, and giving advice or recommendations. As the topic of classroom discourse is teaching English language skills, there are several topical vocabularies relating to this setting were produced, and they also connected to the coercive power topic as well. During the observation hours, there were hardly any 'coercive terms' like 'punish', 'punishment', 'penalize' or 'execute' ..., which are believed as words for punishment. Instead, to give students a sense of punishment with an intention to adjust students' behavior, teachers used words and phrases like *charge*, *wrong*, *not confident*, *redundant*, *lose control*, *practice more*, *promise me*, *not happy*, *be more serious...* or negative words like *lose* (in contrast with *win*), *wrong* (not right) or *fail* (not succeed), as in a few quotations as follows:

Examples:

(C1) - Nhat, where are you? I told you many times. If only I see you face to face. I'd **charge** you ten thousand VND for this mistake. (an act of fine)

(C18) - Because it's gotta be **redundant** and **you're gonna lose control** of your answer. (an act of denying and threatening)

(C32) - I was **not very happy** when I visited some breakout rooms because the students there were busy doing anything else and then. They could also like four or five questions. That was **not really efficient**. (an act of complaint or showing unhappy feeling)

There was a sense of discontent in the teacher's talk to comment on the student's performance (C32). By using negations and descriptive adjectives, teachers showed their dissatisfaction with students' learning behavior, via complaints and requests for correction.

In terms of grammar use, teachers employed conditional sentences to speculate about what could happen, what might have happened, or what they wished would happen in the class. The modal 'should' and 'could' were used frequently to give advice, and imperative sentences were also used to make recommendations or requests, such as:

(C3) - So if you do not want to say here more, I *will* move to the last one and it is optional.

(C23) - You *should* not spend more than one minute on the challenge. And then you gotta learn to speed up when you are practicing.

(C26) My recommendation is that you *should* pay more attention to pronunciation.

In the examples above, 'should' was used to give advice, but it could also take on the meaning of moral obligation or duty of something (see Coates, 2015).

It was observed that teachers used the linking words 'so' many times to connect discourses, as in:

(C3) ... *So*, if you do not want to say here more...

(C10) ... *So*, you need some more practice.

(C24)... *So*, this election giving it some thought, it is very important in the learning process.

Besides, teachers used 'I' and addressed 'you' to highlight the identity and relationship with students, while the use of 'we' also means rather inclusive than exclusive, which signaled a combination of responsibility between speakers and listeners. In addition, the politeness strategies were utilized with 'please', even when giving punishment, which served to build up an intimate relationship with students. The tone of punishment was also very neutral and even though an act of threatening or denial would not cause a tense feeling between teachers and students.

The use of modality verbs, personal pronouns, and connectors in the utterances perform the ideological function of teacher discourse in establishing a close and harmonious relationship with students while maintaining a coercive power platform for their authority in the classrooms.

One may consider why and to what extent language teachers may exercise their coercive power or whether they should punish students who are biologically mature. The basic nature of classrooms has remained unchanged for many decades in Vietnam, where there should be ranking and relevant classroom authority between the person who has more and less power. Students, though today considered as 'clients' or so, need some kind of punishment for bad or misconduct

behaviors, disobedience, or unfulfillment because these penalties are measures to diminish poor performance and help correct, then promote students' learning behavior. Learner autonomy is targeted, but students need to be aware of possible punishment if violating classroom regulations. These all explain why teachers needed to use more language that exerts an effect of punishment on those who broke classroom rules.

#### 4.2. Teacher's Exercise of Reward Power

Teachers possess another ability to reward their students in many forms, with the intention of giving a positive influence on student behavior, and that form of influence is regarded as reward power.

Diaz et al. (2016, p. 8) have pointed out that 'reward power will further help English language learners increase their low levels of self-competency by fostering encouragement and the perception that they can succeed academically and that rewarding forms may be, but not limited to giving high grades, compliments, recognition, prizes, praise, privileges... that may show the acknowledgment of teachers towards students' performance.

In terms of reward power categories observed in the study, teachers gave out rewards by giving compliments, appreciation for students' performance, recognition, highlighting outstanding results, encouragement, and especially offering 'bonuses'. First, topical vocabulary for rewarding mostly ranged from 'thank you', 'appreciate' for appreciation to 'excellent', 'good job', 'well done', 'perfect', 'like/love', 'enjoy', 'agree' and other adjectives of compliments like 'amazing', 'wonderful', 'marvelous' ... for recognition and compliments. No negation was found for teachers' discourse of this power type.

Examples:

(R5) You have *very good* writing. Excellent. Well done.

(R8) Oh *wonderful*, yeah nearly 45 seconds. It's amazing. Yeah, you had a very good potential intonation and it is marvelous

(R18) I'm *so happy* that you haven't changed your mind

(R27) OK, thank you, Phuong. Yeah, it's just a *whole second attempt*, yeah.

Additionally, to give students a sense of intimate reward, teachers used nice words like ‘my dear’, ‘honey’, and ‘các con’ (my dear children)

(R31-32) I love your heart. Keep your positive energy as usual, các con! (my dear children)

The most special rewarding word by teachers in the study was giving ‘bonus’. The bonus may range from giving good marks, granting more time for fulfilling tasks, or skipping some kinds of homework(!).

Examples:

(R37) Okay, okay, *six stars* for all members.

(R 38) I had second thoughts because you need to spend some time brainstorming about what to do with silver lining so there will be *no more homework* with you today.

(R39) So now, as usual, I will *give you the time* to practice.

One teacher even used a special expression, as if she was offering to transfer energy to her students as a ‘gift’ or in other words, as a reward:

(R43) I will *send you a lot of energy*.

As most of teachers’ language to deliver reward power may entail future consequences, the types of suitable structures are conditionals and modal verbs ‘may’, ‘will’ to give out promises, observed very often in teachers’ utterances.

(R40) *If* any of you does not feel well today, you *may* take a rest during this time and you may complete the writing later, OK?

(R41) You *will* get the most points from me.

(R42) I *will* give you good marks. Yeah, I *will* give you good marks if you volunteer to share.

To conduct classroom practice effectively and achieve expected learning outcomes, it is quite essential for teachers to build up a favorable and supportive learning environment. The classrooms in the study are not exceptions. We learned that students felt cheerful and learned quickly when being encouraged by teachers’ rewards such as bonus points, positive feedback, praises, and compliments..., through which they were motivated to perform well or better. When giving rewarding words and building rapport with students, teachers expressed their

positive attitudes towards students, with a wish to set up an encouraging communication setting and show students that they would expect similar good learning behaviors from them. This also reveals the common ideology of teachers, as shown in their discourses, that students' proper learning behavior and responsible fulfillment of learning assignments are 'musts'.

#### 4.3. Teacher's Exercise of Legitimate Power

Legitimate power relates to the teacher's authoritative role in relation to students. It was observed in the study that teachers' utility of legitimate power was far more often than the other two types (coercive and reward). Legitimate power was mainly employed through teachers' giving and checking instructions, making requests, giving orders, eliciting, making questions, giving feedback, and evaluating students' performances. The following examples show how teachers' talk in language classrooms is linked to their legitimate power.

(L2) If someone knows about this, please raise your voice and explain it to us.  
(*making request*)

(L17) So can you list some food that you like? (*eliciting*)

(L23) I do not really understand, I may need you to explain more to me, so if you don't mind, please explain more in the chat box. (*giving feedback*)

(L35) Type in the chat box, open the chat box now. (*giving order*)

(L41) Ok, so I will divide the class into groups of four and you will spend some time together with this task. One, two, three, four... (*giving instructions*)

In order to make requests or give orders, teachers used more modality with a high degree of formality, though they were giving orders to those who had less power than them. There was a high frequency in the use of *can*, *could*, *will* and the imperative sentences were observed quite often to give orders or guide classroom tasks. However, they were added with '*please*' which showed a degree of politeness throughout the teaching hours. Short sentences instead of more extended discourse helped teachers offer clear commands or guiding instructions.

It was observed in almost all classroom sections that though maintaining the authoritative role in the classrooms, teachers were aware of the need to build up a formal setting and persist in politeness for the interaction with students. The issues



of power and authority are identified clearly via interviews with senior teachers but implied very tactically in the classrooms, as they knew it was more important to let students respect them rather than fear them, as in the following:

*'I don't think teachers were fully aware of their potential power. They knew they had that kind of authority but did not use it on purpose. They just followed the methodological instructions of their actual roles in the classrooms. While they tried to maintain good interaction with students, they might employ some kinds of tactics which were flexible enough to have their students perform the tasks well, which led to the fulfillment of lesson plan objectives.'*

(An interview with teacher N.Th. - a senior teacher; translated by the author)

Teachers' authority is not a matter in Vietnamese classrooms as it was largely admitted that teachers' central roles in the classrooms are indispensable and the degree of respect that students reserve for their teachers is apparent. In this stand, the authoritative roles of teachers mean teachers need to conduct classroom tasks like giving instructions, making requests, giving feedback, and making evaluations... and students are believed to strictly follow them. That is why we found that there were many more utterances that show the legitimate power of teachers than those of the other two types.

## 5. Discussion

This study aims to investigate teachers' power patterns via classroom discourse and explore how the discursive practice exerts impacts on directing students' learning behavior, through which proposes a classroom interaction structure to maximize students' learning capacity. The analyses of the classroom interaction transcripts and field notes have provided an overview of teachers' execution of power through employing a range of discursive strategies in classroom discourses. Findings indicate teachers' enormous use of discourse strategies in their interaction with students and these utterances revealed a relative dominance of teacher talks in some periods of classroom instructions, which showed the teacher's power over their respective students in all examined classrooms. During the pre-lesson stages and feedback stages, teachers seemed to dominate most of the talks while trying to maintain a fair relationship with students in a learner-centered atmosphere. This

was evidence of their powerful positions in the classroom discourse. Within the context of Vietnamese culture, this dominant discourse shows an identity of teachers in the classrooms as having more (or the most) power than students who, though negotiating to have interactive power from their roles, have very little influence on the way their identity is constructed. This is similar to the studies by Snowdon and Eklund Karlsson (2021) or Kang and Dykema (2017) where a degree of inequality and imbalance of power was observed between two specific relevant communities, and confirmed by Foucault's concept of power (1991) that these inner foundation representations of power are subtly legitimated by the government through its systems of the network. Though it is not set out in any official documents by the government, teachers in Vietnamese classrooms possess the right and central authority which defines their possible roles in the pedagogical settings where they frequently interact with their 'inferior' less-power partners (i.e. students) and their dominant discourse is allowed and expected as a norm within the context. This is also aligned with the Confucian concept embedded in the Vietnamese culture, which highlights the essential authority of teachers towards their students in classroom interaction. Moreover, the significance also revealed teachers' ideology in conducting classroom practices, where their learner-centered roles of an expert, a facilitator, a resource, and a feedback giver were exploited. However, the discourse dominance took place parallelly with an encouraging manner where teachers chose at which stages to lead their talks and left room for students' responses, which recognized their contributions to the interaction platform.

Regarding types of power, it was observed that legitimate power discursive strategies were employed the most frequently in all classrooms, followed by rewarding power, and coercive power stood at the last line. The punishment seemed not always to produce the best effects, especially in the HE environment, where learners' cognitive perception is rather high. Teachers also admitted that learners favored more friendly interaction and rewarding nice words, which brought them more encouragement than any other type of teacher's conduct. Gaventa (2003, p. 2) also affirmed that 'Foucault ... recognized that power is not just a negative, coercive or repressive thing that forces us to do things against our wishes, but can also be a necessary, productive and positive force in society'.

More specifically, the *structural analysis* revealed teachers' use of a wide range of linguistic strategies like employing topical vocabularies to correspond with coercive, reward, and legitimate power; modality for establishing a relationship

between teachers and students; connective elements for formal and extended discourse... to conduct classroom tasks and facilitate students' learning. These exercises of three types of power go in line with the studies of Reid and Kawash (2017) and Babaii et al. (2017) which affirm that various types of power should be paid attention to and highlighted in accordance with the strategic discourse used by teachers in the classrooms. This helps enhance the learning environment and exerts behavior impacts on students to a great extent. Teachers' proper execution of power via discourse strategies in the classrooms is believed to contribute to the learning environment and successful classroom interaction, like Walsh (2006, p. 16) pointed out in his study. The teachers' ability to control their use of language would either increase learner learning potential or block learner participation in classroom interaction, through their choice of language.

Next, the *interactional analysis* shows evidence of the relationship between speakers (i.e. teachers) and listeners (i.e. students) in the classroom interaction as two components of negotiating communication via classroom discourse. Politeness was observed frequently in every single speech act of teachers, even when they gave out punishment. Teachers used language with a high degree of formality to address students' needs during most interactions though they are those who possess more (or most) authority. They would maintain a polite encounter with their students to create harmony, and they believed this setting would increase the success of communication to the greatest extent while producing no threats to their power status in the classrooms (according to answers in the 3 interviews with teachers). Communication strategies employed by teachers such as using kind and nice words, giving out rewards, sharing power through negotiating roles with students, and the student-centered approach of instructions... all were to establish a rapport with students and maximize students' motivation and self-confidence, which contributes to their positive learning behavior in the classrooms. This is aligned with Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which hypothesized students' possibility of success in second language acquisition depends to a great extent on motivation, self-confidence, and low anxiety. In addition, the frequent appearance of linguistic modality use by teachers in all teaching sessions was considered an expression of social power, like what Winter and Gärdenfors (1995, p. 137) have advocated in their study "The semantics of the linguistic modals is argued to be determined mainly by the power structure of the participants in the interaction".

Finally, the *interdiscursive analysis* allowed us to confirm Foucault's claim (1991) on aspects of power formation. Foucault (1991) asserted that it was the ideology hidden under one's discourse that defined the power formation within that person. Vietnam has undergone a great renovation of the 'Doi Moi' policy for nearly forty years since 1986 and participated in the globalization process later. There have been major changes in the political, economic, science-technological, and social patterns. Changes in educational policies have not been exceptional. This shift in social practice in Vietnamese society entails changes in the social relationship between teachers and students and their respective roles in classroom settings. In language classes, the adaptation of the Communicative Approach has become more prevalent and popular. Teachers became more negotiable in terms of role sharing with students in communicative language classrooms. They are not hesitant to step back and become a facilitator, resources, feedback givers... and even a participant in students' group work (see Dung & Két, 2022). This platform creates favorable conditions for teachers' exercise of hidden power, as they remain their authority in the classroom, but this type of authority is to facilitate students' learning and better their performance in the learner-centered approach. In the study, students' roles and power were also recognized in such settings, which helped explain why teachers were not hesitant to share roles and were not afraid of losing their authority. The issue of empowerment has also been realized when teachers exercised their power in the way that they were voluntarily willing to hand the authority over to students by sharing roles in the teaching-learning process. This is a prerequisite for the development of students' competence by giving them a chance for self-exploration, self-initiation, and self-constructive learning.

The social practice analysis of teacher discourse also led us to another remark that the imbalance in the proportion of teachers' execution of three power types is due to the shift in the social order of teachers' prescribed role as knowledge transmitters (in the old days). Thanks to the development of science and technology, computers and the internet have become so popular and powerful that one may rethink of whom or which to rely on for information and knowledge. Teachers have, therefore, not been regarded as the only source of wisdom. Instead, they take the role of taking initiative and fostering students' learning behavior. That is the reason why teachers in the study did not believe in coercive power, which counted on punishment as the main measure to correct students but shifted to utilizing more reward power to encourage students to learn and more legitimate

power to guide or conduct classroom practice.

Another remark goes on with the response to the hypothesis of whether imposing power would be appropriate in today's classrooms. Through the study, we could realize that this type of power execution is no longer the key to the success of teaching practice. There have been changes in classroom paradigms in the direction that favors the student-centered approach. The trend influences teachers' flexible choices of teaching methodology and classroom instruction strategies that facilitate interaction with students in the light of constructivist learning theory. According to Hein (1991, p. 1), constructivism refers to the situation where learners individually (and socially) construct meaning or knowledge for themselves through their learning process. In this study, we learned that whenever a teacher built trust in students that they could do well and teachers offered compliments or constructive remarks, they gave students encouragement that helped students direct their learning behavior accordingly and construct the knowledge for themselves. We could conclude that by aiming at building classes of happiness, teachers would find ways to construct a supportive learning environment where encouragement, guidance, and adaptation are the appropriate powers they may employ as they believe students' real happiness, leads to their successful endeavor in learning, would be their teaching objectives.

## 6. Conclusion

The teacher discourse analysis revealed how power relations were represented and reproduced in different forms of classroom behavior within Vietnamese HE English classrooms, and the discursive classroom practices signified the relationship between classroom behavior norms that the teachers attempted to impose in the targeted student-centeredness setting. Through the study, the researchers could point out the reality of teachers' execution of power in classroom interaction to influence learners' learning behavior. It found out that the imbalance of power between teachers and students did exist in the Vietnamese tertiary language classrooms and it was realized through discursive practices, which frame teachers as an advantaged group over students within the Confucian-culture setting of Vietnamese culture. However, this imbalance did not result in teachers' overwhelming control of classroom interaction. Instead, teachers were willing to use power to direct a student-centered approach to teaching, which facilitates students learning behavior. They were also willing to share power with students via

negotiating roles in classroom instructions.

Finally, looking at teachers' classroom discourse as a social practice through the interdiscursive analysis allowed us to conclude that teacher discourse takes place in a particular context, with its own features of culture and values, similar to what Lillis (2001) has claimed. The context of Vietnamese culture imposes implications for the teaching methodology to fit in well with the student's needs. We can also have some remarks on the 'continuum' between teachers and students. The teachers' beings and their knowledge are at one end, connecting with the world in the context of Vietnamese cultural-rooted Confusion, allowing themselves to form an inter-relationship with students at the other end, where they expect their power would have genuine impacts on students' learning behavior. All acts teachers have made along this continuum aim to enhance the positive environment and correct learners' negative behavior for the harmony of classroom interaction.

The study, besides, highlights the role of CDA as a growing interdisciplinary research approach to the study of language and as an effective tool for social discourse analysis. It proved how CDA theorists and practitioners view language as a form of social practice and aim at systematically investigating hidden power relations and ideologies embedded in discourse.

From the results of the study, we would like to propose a model of classroom interaction where teachers properly use power as a tool to build up a constructivist learning environment or a classroom of happiness to maximize learning potentials and increase the learning capacity of students.

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**Appendix****EXAMPLES OF TEACHERS' DISCOURSE CLASSIFIED INTO THE THREE TYPES OF POWER****1. COERCIVE (C1-C33)**

C1. Nhat, where are you? I told you many times. If only I see you face to face. I'd charge you ten thousand VND for this mistake.

C2. Now, promise me not to repeat this mistake next time. Don't, no, no, don't cry

C3. So if you do not want to say here more, I will move to the last one and it is optional.

C4. I'm so sorry you don't enjoy this, but it's OK, anyway. It's a pronunciation practice, right? So if you don't enjoy it, you had many other chances to practice your pronunciation in other activities.

C5. I see, now a lot of you have a problem. Wait a bit, let me see, then ... you should have told me from the beginning.

C6. Lan Anh, 'user' should be in plural form.

C7. You were very shy. That makes the audiences feel you are not a powerful and confident speaker.

C8. You had a tendency to look at the screen and you just read aloud all the sentences on the screen. And then you had spent a lot of time looking at the screen, hence you did not have any eye contact with the audience. Need to look around. One more thing, you should pay attention to ending sounds.

C9. Như Quỳnh, hơi dài à? Rất nhiều bạn chưa xong ha?

C10. So, you need some more practice.

C11. And for the sound like deforestation, you did not pronounce it clearly.

C12. Yes, you should pay attention to 'pro'cess'. If it is a noun, you pronounce it as 'process'.

C13. But your pronunciation should be improved in the future.

C14. Too many words on the slides.

C15. Because if you have enough practice your speaking performance will be improved and you will benefit from that.

C16. If you practice more, you will ....

C17. Make sure that you will prepare at home. Practise many times and you have to do some kind of rehearsal

C18. Because it's gotta be redundant and you're gonna lose control your answer.

C19. Nếu không ai chia sẻ thì cô gọi nhé?

C20. Remember that we have four questions and there's no need for you to tell lies.

C21. If only I see you face to face. I'd charge you ten thousand VND for this mistake. Now promise me not to repeat this mistake next time. Don't, no, no, don't cry!

C22. Nhưng con bỏ phần giới thiệu đi thì mới được 50 phút chứ, thêm phần giới thiệu vào tự nhiên nó bị mất thời gian, đúng không?

C23. You should not spend more than one minute in the challenge.

And then you gotta learn to speed up when you are practicing.

C24. Spending time with selecting on what you do, it really makes you learn a lot of things. Instead of just learning and then just leave it there. So this election giving it some thought, it is very important in the learning process.

C25. So I want to tell you that being in a new environment, university lives, so there are many new and challenging things, it is just a tiny thing. You can earn more scores later. But I told them in order to live successfully in university, at first you have to feel ok with the fact that at present, you are not good at something. But in the future, you can improve that.

C26. My recommendation is that you should pay more attention to pronunciation. You have a tendency to speak too fast and when you speak fast, the sounds are unclear. So, speak slower. Speak slower and don't forget the ending sounds. There is quite a few mispronunciations in your presentation.

C27. Oh my God, it's freaking noisy.

C28. I cannot access your folder

C29. so some of you on and off.

C30. You didn't submit and being you just now at first this morning when I checked your writing, you didn't submit yet.

C31. But when you speak in English, we pay more attention to grammar. Grammar

is very important. Some of the students have the tendency to use the wrong tenses. So, if you report about a past event, you should use past simple, past perfect.

C32. I was not very happy when I visited some breakout rooms because the students there were busy doing anything else and then. They could also like four or five questions. That was not really efficient.

C33. And I'm not very happy that you were not really serious in preparing for these questions.

## **2. REWARD POWER (R1-R43)**

R1. Thank you, Trang for good answer.

R2. Excellent / great/ right / Very good/ interesting, OK, good.

R3. Yes, very good.

R4. That's correct.

R5. You have very good writing. Excellent. Well done.

R6. Yeah, in terms of time is perfect.

R7. Doing very good, That's very amazing.

R8. Oh wonderful, yeah nearly 45 seconds. It's amazing. Yeah, you had a very good potential intonation and it is marvelous.

R9. Very good that you remember from the phrases.

R10. Anyway, it's good, just a little improvement here.

R11. You used good phrases.

R12. Excellent sharing for you. So when I listen to your sharing, I could notice you tried your best, to convey your own ideas.

R13. You have prepared well.

R14. Good work.

R15. Your friends got all correct, right?

R16. Ok, nice work. Good job.

R17. That's true. Right, right?

R18. I'm so happy that you haven't changed your mind.

R19. I'm so glad if many likes her.

R20. And I'm quite happy with your writing.

R21. Thank you, Hường. I especially like the upbeat.

R22. Thank you, Dang, for raising your voice.

R23. Thanks to your being here and your presence and your collaboration.

R24. We really enjoyed words.

R25. OK. So I do agree with her that....

R26. Yeah, in terms of time is perfect.

R27. OK, that's very good. OK, thank you, Phương. Yeah, it's just a whole second attempt, yeah

R28. I agree with your opinions.

R29. That's correct

R30. Tons of good loads may still survive if we keep positive energy, so the keywords here are.

R31. I love your heart. Keep your positive energy as usual.

R32. My dear / honey.

R33. Các con. (my dear children)

R34. I will always smile. I'm really looking forward to meeting you.

R35. Các bạn cố lên nha, cô thấy là rất nhiều bạn làm tốt này. Ồ, Nhật, 48 giây, rất tốt. Lan Anh làm rất tốt, có nỗ lực chèn nhạc vào này,

R36. Five stars/ four stars.

R37. Okay, okay six stars for members.

R38. I had second thoughts because you need to spend some time with brainstorming about what to do with silver lining so there will be no more homework with you today.

R39. So now as usual I will give you the time to practice

R40. If any of you does not feel well today, you may take a rest during this time and you may complete the writing later, OK?



Five more minutes for the weekend.

R41. You will get the most points from me.

R42. I will give you good marks. Yeah, I will give you good marks if you volunteer to share.

R43. I will send you a lot of energy.

### **3. LEGITIMATE POWER (L1-L58)**

L1. Explain why you just love sleeping

L2. If someone knows about this, please raise your voice and explain it to us.

L3. Please join the breakout room. Please join everyone.

L4. So please be specific and be focused at the very beginning paragraph here.

L5. Can you work in pairs and you will spend about 5 minutes to do it.

L6. can you tell me some ways that we can cook eggs? Yeah, yeah, please.

L7. watch the video, and after 10 minutes and tell me what the challenge is all about. type 'yes', and if you're not really sure what

L8. you might have to do, type 'no' in the chat box.

L9. Work on that and give me another version.

L10. Now, take a deep breath. You can breathe in. And then breathe out. You may put your hand over your stomach.

L11. Tell me. Show me, persuade me.

L12. Can you work in pairs, and you will spend about 5 minutes doing it?

L13. Whose fault is that? Can you explain how you feel?

L14. What is the whole challenge or voiceover challenge events?

L15. what do you want to learn today?

L16. Now, do you have any queries?

L17. So can you list some food that you like?

L18. what do you want to learn today?

L19. Ok. So, you want a question like when you want to refer or talk about a person but you don't want to mention their gender, which pronoun do you use? So, you don't want this he or she.

L20. Ok, now. Paragraph number two, what is the main idea? Who can? The first sentence and the last sentence, what's the main idea?

L21. What is the main idea of this paragraph? anything else?

L22. you should spend time explaining why it is pointless in your opinion.

L23. I do not really understand, I may need you to explain more to me, so if you don't mind, please explain more in the chat box.

L24. All right, group four, are you ready? Okay, so you invite someone to share the answer that have been prepared.

L25. For those who have finished the challenge, I recommend you listen to the voice again and then find out any areas for improvement.

L26. Why wouldn't you describe something that is very cheap?

L27. I'm waiting for more answers.

L28. You wanna feel confused, right?

L29. I'm gonna give you 10 minutes to finish this one.

L30. I will always smile. I'm really looking forward to meeting you

L31. Read again carefully.

L32. So basically, it is about your challenge yourself to read the scripts of different, uhm, for different commercials and then you finish the full script in 50 seconds

L33. Ok? I'll set the time for 50 seconds and you are supposed to finish the 4 scripts here.

L34. So at first we intended to have a self-study week for all the students, but then we decided to make it as an unusual week and I will focus more on reading.

L35. Type in the chat box, open chat box now. While you're typing in the chat box, I'll assign this activity on the classwork.

L36. First I will check your homework and give some brief comments and we do the check-in session, but today's check-in session we do not do it on the chat box,

but we will use the SLIDO, and then we will have the discussion and writing practice.

L37. we will do the peer review in the classroom and then at home, you can write your final version

L38. Are you ready and can you catch up with my instruction?

L39. Did I explain what you wrote properly? Have you implemented the ideas well enough?

L40. Yes, who says yes, you can raise your hand!

L41. Ok, so I will divide the task into groups of four and you will spend some time together with this task. One, two, three, four,...

L44. Do you understand? Do you understand

L45. So that each of you will be responsible for only 10 sentences. It's going to reduce the hard work for you

L46. you will discuss the topic of our writing practice today

L47. you will have a total of 12 minutes for group discussion.

L48. You will have 20 minutes for the writing practice, so please write until 2:20

L49. It is a quite little question that you will be asking at the end of term test in all tests.

L50. Right, so you will be working in groups and in your group, you can share your screen to choose a video of the choice and make sure that the video is short enough and then you got to discuss it.

L51. You will ask the question which process, which course process?

L52. We have 4 groups; you will do the same.

L53. I will divide the task into groups of four and you will spend some time together with this task.

L54. I will ask questions and you will ask questions too.

L55. I will suggest a topic and make sure that you will prepare at home

L56. Now we move on to the textbook and you will have unit number three.

L57. OK, so today we're gonna a beginner lesson today and before that, I think

you're going to have a very short break, but before that, I'd like to spend about 5 minutes talking to you about the silver lining thing.

L58. I will give you further guidelines and you will do a kind of peer review.

### **About the Authors**

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