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## A Critical Discourse Analysis on Power Relationships in the Classroom: The Case of The School That Turned Chinese

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### Abstract

Our education system helps to build identities among teenagers. As is known to all, the Chinese education system is totally different from a western system. With the task of exploring which is the better teaching method, a documentary named *The School That Turned Chinese* was carried out. The documentary presents differences in many aspects, especially in classroom activities. In education research, teachers and students are in a relationship of power, as Benesch (1999) claimed that in class, even the class arrangements are signs of power. In the class, the language used by teachers and students may subvert, challenge, or distribute power. To examine that process, it's important to do text analysis. To this end, this study adopts Critical Discourse Analysis that involves the uncovering of covert forms of power and domination that underlie discourse (Fairclough, 1989: 55). This makes it a process of uncovering issues of asymmetrical power relations...which are largely hidden in texts and require procedures of "unveiling or demystification" (Fairclough, 1989: 141), with 'critical' being concerned with making visible the interconnectedness between language, power and ideology (Fairclough, 1989: 5). To this end, CDA examines how people obtain and maintain power in society through language (Wodak, 2001). In the light of CDA, this paper utilized descriptive qualitative method to deal with samples----which are teachers' and students' utterance chosen from segments of the documentary. Verbal elements, participants and circumstances are instruments for analysing. Besides, context and discursive practice are also taken into consideration. To conclude, this research looks deeply into how power relationship is built and challenged by teachers and students through language.

**Keywords:** Power Relations, Discourse Analysis, Classroom Talk, CDA, Teachers and Students

### Introduction

The Chinese education method is totally different from the western in terms of class capacity, teaching methods, student management, and evaluation modes. With the background that British students gain bad scores in international competitions contrasting to Chinese students' good appearance, the head of Bohunt School, which is located in the U.K., considered that it is necessary to know what is happening in China, and what education strategies can they adopt into their school. With the task of exploring which is the better teaching method, a documentary, *The School That Turned Chinese*, was carried out. This documentary invited 5

Chinese teachers to challenge teaching in Bohunt School in traditional Chinese way. The experiment covers study schedule, class organization, teaching and learning model and after-class activities. One month later, the class managed in Chinese way will take exams in maths, science and mandarian and makes a comparison with other Bohunt students in the ninth grade. To some extent, the result is supposed to illustrate which is the better teaching method. In this documentary, conflicts between teachers and students happens from the head to the end. Students claimed that the teachers' teaching strategies are boring and enforcing, while teachers complained students are lack of discipline, easily to give up and disrespectful. The verbal conflicts and different opinions in class can lead to the following questions: Is it power dominance and power resistance? what is the basic reason to cause those differences? When we talk about power, we need to look at identity. From the perspective of critical discourse analysis (CDA), power, identities and representations can be reflected by language and at same time, language is also building, shaping and challenging them. In this light, doing discourse analysis on this case shows great significant by revealing how power relationship is built in class.

To do CDA, descriptive qualitative method and quantitative method are both employed in the research. Some segments of the documentary video were picked out as samples in which the teachers' and students' utterances as well as the context would be analyzed in a discourse analysis framework. It can be told from the analysis that the power conflict between teachers and students thrives from the difference in the identification of the image of class teaching, the cultural background, and the understanding of their respective roles in the class, as well as the relationship between them. Through the analysis, the writer find that power exists not only in the surface such as ordering, punishing, pushing or claiming, but also in ideology transmitting, influence and challenges.

### **Literature Review**

According to Wodak and Meyer (2009), there are several theoretical levels of sociological and socio-psychological theory in CDA approach. Among these levels, the sociocognitive approach (called SCA) focus on the ways in which speakers or writers exercise power in or by their discourse, research focuses on those properties that can vary as a function of social power (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

Discourses exert power because they transport knowledge on which collective and individual consciousness feeds. This knowledge is the basis for individual and collective, discursive and non-discursive action, which in turn shapes reality (Maier, 2009). In this documentary, discourse on teaching work and learning work is full of instructions and resistance. Through the textual and contextual analysis, the differences between collective and individual consciousness could be discovered.

In the research of education, teachers and students are in a relationship of power, as Maftoon & Shakouri (2012) claimed that a teacher must have considerable amount of power to create the environment conducive to learning and for teacher power to exist, it must be granted by the students. That is to say, when the teacher failed to make it a suitable environment for learning or students presented nonsupport towards the teacher, power will lose its function in teaching activities. The case located here is a special one. As Yan (2007) reports, in China, teachers and students are deeply influenced by cultural tradition, mostly by the Confucian

tradition. Teachers in this documentary also put Confucius quotes onto the wall. That is to say, teachers stay in great power over the students and students should always used to obey the teacher in the class. However, as stated in the documentary, with the student-centered thought, teacher power shows not that important in the British class. Due to those differences, inharmonious appears frequently in class. From the sight of critical discourse analysis, the language used by teachers and students may subvert, challenge, or distribute power. To examine that process, it's important to do text analysis. Therefore, this study adopts Critical Discourse Analysis that involves the uncovering of covert forms of power and domination that underlie discourse (Fairclough, 1989: 55). This makes it a process of uncovering issues of asymmetrical power relations...which are largely hidden in texts and require procedures of "unveiling or demystification" (Fairclough, 1989: 141), with 'critical' being concerned with making visible the interconnectedness between language, power and ideology (Fairclough, 1989: 5). To this end, CDA examines how people obtain and maintain power in society through language (Wodak, 2001).

### **Methods**

This case study is carried out using descriptive qualitative method and quantitative method in the light of critical discourse analysis. To present how the power relationship is shaped, the writer should analyze the content of the context, including historical context, participants, circumstances, which can be significant important in revealing what is being said and why (Oppelt, 2020). Consequently, the inter textual research of the present work raises questions such as: what does the announcer speak and why it is said in this way? What is his/her purpose and position? How does he/she contain his/her power relation through language? Is it affective? As suggested by Wodak (2015), linguistic indicators listed here will be taken into consideration: stress and intonation, word order, lexical style, coherence, syntactic structures, speech acts, turn-takings, repairs and hesitation. These will be analysed in samples.

Adopting quantitative methods, behaviour attributes and utterances are statistics can be observed directly how much does teacher's power effect on students and what's the reaction of the students.

### **Methodology**

#### **Participants**

This documentary *The School That Turned Chinese* is 153 minutes long and divided into 3 episodes. In this paper, we will select the 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> minute in the first episode, 6'30" to 7'43" in the second episode as samples. The teachers are Li Aiyun and Yang jun, and students are Sophie and Angelina. These couple of samples shows conflict both in practice and ideology, representing a struggle power relationship between teachers and students. Statistic on behaviour attributes and utterances covers the whole three episodes about 150 minutes in total for sample, but only look at activities in Bohunt School.

#### **Instrumentation**

The framework for analysis of teacher talk and student talk comes from Fairclough (2005), texts is formed by three types of elements: processes, participants and circumstance. Processes are represented by verbal elements; participants can be represented as subjects objects, etc.; circumstances can be materialized by adverbs (Fairclough, 2005). Textual

analysis will be carried out basing on the framework, and presented in a tabular form. Besides that, discursive practice and social practice will also be explored in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

### Data Collection

The data is collected from the whole documentary, consisting teachers' and students' interactions from the videos of classroom activities, personal interviews and comments. For the word limit, we only choose two segments to analyze in textual analysis but the statistic is made from the whole episodes.

### Data Analysis

The analysis involves textual analysis, to explore who gives power or from whom he receives it. The writer examines those identities by analyzing their communication in class and personal interviews after class. As is known, discourse practice includes production, distribution, and consumption of texts. In this paper, the writer will explore how and from which position the discourse is produced, the effect of the discourse and the comprehension of the receiver. Using CDA, the analysis considers the following perspectives: verbal elements; subjects and objects in presentation; hypothetical sentence; adverb of degree and some other special grammar structure sentences. Table 1 and Table 2 illustrate textual analysis on teacher's and student's utterance. Context analysis and discursive practice as well as social practice will be examined in the following contents.

Table 1

*Textual analysis on teacher's utterance*

texts	Processes	Participants	Circumstances
<b><i>Listen, listen. (to one student) Turn around, please. Thank you</i></b>	imperative sentences	Subject: I (the teacher) Object: You (the students)	The teacher tried to quiet the students and discipline one student in a polite way.
<b><i>It's a big class and a big room, I as one teacher in this room I cannot doing the practical and discipline you in the same time.</i></b>	Emphasis on identity—teacher; "cannot" emphasis disability	Subject: I (the teacher) Object: You (the students)	The teacher showed some disability to give reason for the requirement.
<b><i>If I see any of you misbehave, I will separate you immediately.</i></b>	hypothetical sentence	Subject: I (the teacher) Object: You (the students)	Immediately contains order, stable attitude on misbehavior.
<b><i>And I don't have problem with that.</i></b>	Supplement to the words above	Subject: I (the teacher) Object: that (the punishment)	Again, emphasis on discipline.
<b><i>Discipline is really important.</i></b>	in an emphasis tone	Subject: Discipline	Give reason for observing discipline; give knowledge

<b><i>Without discipline, you don't learn well.</i></b>	Double negative sentence	Subject: the teacher Object: students	Give deeper reason for observing discipline----to learn well
<b><i>That's a matter of fact, sometimes it annoys other students as well.</i></b>	repeat and confirm the importance of her statement and supply another reason to support it.	Subject: fact Object: other students	Give another reason for observing discipline----not annoy others

*“So I’m going to teach you in a traditional Chinese way. Chinese students, they don’t turn to waste other people’s time. Now I would like to introduce you these quotes here. I have all picked Confucius’s quotes here. I would like you to look at these. Knowledge makes humble, ignorance makes proud.”*

The background of this claim is in the first class by Mrs. Yang. She wanted to lay down some disciplines. Most students were chatting and relaxing when Mrs. Yang went into the classroom. In this paragraph, Mrs. Yang implied some imperative sentences such as “listen”, “Turn around, please.”. This might imply she is used to discipline students in this way, which turns out useful at least in Chinese class. Emphasizing that she “cannot” do the practices and discipline students at the same time, she passed the responsibility onto the students as self-controlling, thus released the pressure to conduct teaching activities while organizing the students to comply with disciplines. In this way she made it clear that the claim she raised hereinafter are all reasonable, and thus acceptable.

“If I see ....., I will .....” is a hypothetical sentence, which can be explained like this: a). Obeying discipline is an unchallenged rule in her class; b). Her punishment is to separate someone. The implication of “immediately” is an adverb of degree, highlighting a strong mood towards misbehaved students. It seems like a warning and teacher’s punishment power over students. In fact, this teacher did do so after one student Sophie chattered in class. This is the consumption of the teacher’s texts while the student did not recognize or agree with that. Adverb of degree “really” indicates the importance of discipline in study effects in Mrs. Yang’s cognization. “Without discipline, you don’t learn well.” Double negative sentence carries stronger tone on the subjects.

The teacher picked Confucius’s quotes to educate students and referred twice about disturbing others----“sometimes it annoys other students” and “don’t waste other people’s time”, which show a collectivism realization. But from students’ confusing expression, they seems cannot understand that.

Table 2

*Textual analysis on student's utterance*

texts	Processes	Participant	Circumstances
<b><i>I think she is trying to embarrass me through that way.</i></b>	subject-verb-object structure	I think she is trying to embarrass me through that way.	subject-verb-object structure
<b><i>And she is trying to make you think you don't want to do it again because you will fall into trouble in front of class.</i></b>	subject-verb-object structure	Subject: she(the teacher)	And she is trying to make you think you don't want to do it again because you will fall into trouble in front of class.
<b><i>If I see any of you misbehave, I will separate you immediately.</i></b>	hypothetical sentence	Subject: I (the teacher) Object: You (the students)	Immediately contains order, stable attitude on misbehavior.
<b><i>But you don't feel like that.</i></b>	Use second person instead of first person	Subject: you (the interviewer)	The student thinks differently with the teacher she surmised
<b><i>You feel it funny.</i></b>	Use second person instead of first person	Subject: you (the interviewer)	The student presents a totally different feeling
<b><i>I don't get embarrassed because I know everyone in the class.</i></b>	Response to the earlier sentence and give a reason	Subject: I (the student)	Reveals the shame concepts the student and the teacher holds are different
<b><i>So I think it is ridiculous.</i></b>	The conclusion feeling of the student	Subject: I (the student)	To illustrate that teacher's words and activities (actually is power pattern) are noneffective

Sophie is the first student punished by Mrs. Yang in the class. She was asked to leave her seat and sit in the first row. This interview is carried after that class. These sentences are mostly stating in subject-verb-object structure. "She" is always the subject and "I" is always the object. It is a view from a power receiver and passive person because Sophie uses lots of verbs such as "embarrass", "make", "fall" to describe the teacher's influence on her. "I think" appears twice, indicates she surmised teacher's motivation instead of communicating with her to make her purpose clear. When speaking these words, Sophie frowned her nose to show unsatisfied on this power relation. No following step was taken to solve the problem. Transition begins from the "But" and Sophie presents her contemptuous of the teacher's behavior. When facing the interviewer, Sophie's words show opposite senses of what she surmised teacher's intention through the punishment. It shows a sense of resist to teacher's punish power. Interestingly, she implied "you" instead of "I" attempting to seek for empathy

and affinity. As Van Dijk (2009) assumed, ideologies are organized by a general schema consisting of the basic categories such as membership devices, typical acts, relations with others, etc. From her presentation and behavior, she defaulted to be a bearer and receiver in class (obeying teacher's instruction) but denied in identity.

Table 3 contains another segment in society education class, some interactions in class and some are interviews on students. It is more directly to observe the difference in acknowledges between teachers and students.

Table 3

*Textual analysis on teacher and student's interaction*

Texts	Processes	Participant	Circumstances
<b>Teacher: children should follow their parents and love their parents, right?</b>	"should" means natural duty	Subject: the teacher	Teacher: children should follow their parents and love their parents, right?
<b>Teacher: According to Confucius and Confucianism, parents are always right.</b>	in an emphasis and firm tone	Subject: the teacher	Teacher: According to Confucius and Confucianism, parents are always right.
<b>Student 1: Parents are not always right!</b>	In a rising intonation	Subject: the student	Student 1: Parents are not always right!
<b>Teacher: You have to adjust yourself to be suitable to the society instead of everything to suit you.</b>	Using "instead of" is presenting more denying on another practice	Subject: the teacher	Teacher: You have to adjust yourself to be suitable to the society instead of everything to suit you.
<b>Teacher: Angelina, stand up.</b>	Smiling, peaceful tone and ready to receive disagreement	Subject: the teacher	Teacher: Angelina, stand up.
<b>Angelina: In my opinion, I think it is wrong. I think we should be our own person, not...</b>	In a high volume and exciting way	Subject: Angelina	Angelina: In my opinion, I think it is wrong. I think we should be our own person, not...
<b>Students: Yeah...</b>	Students are all with one voice show agreement with Angelina	Subject: the students	Students: Yeah...
<b>Angelina: You should not preform what you are told to</b>	Angelina used "should" to argue a	Subject: Angelina Object: the teacher	Angelina is freely announcing her

<i>be, you should be who you are. (students clapped)</i>	different behaving pattern		opinion, without hesitation.
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*"I really don't like society education class in China. Your parents are always right. No!"*

*"They could be racism. They could be homophobia. They could be sexism. They could be misogynistic. ."*

*"what's that?"*

*"Against women, basically."*

*"But if they say their opinion is always right. No."*

The interview after class is still surrounding one topic of the teacher talked in class. Students showed opposite opinions in a straight and natural way, rather than advising or discussing. The words and tones they used challenges the teacher's knowledge, which we regard as a symbol of power. When the teacher is convincing the students in an obeying whatever parents say pattern, she is actually attempting to admonish students to behave like Chinese students. As French and Raven (1959) referred, referent power is the ability of whom can make other people like himself. But the student's disapproval in class illustrates her referent power does not make sense.

Utterance of students	amount	proportion
<i>Permitted and positive</i>	9	31%
<i>Not permitted and negative</i>	20	69%

Figure 1. Students utterance attribute

Figure 1 contains a statistical information about the number of times of student's talking. It is separated by permitted talking and unpermitted talking. Permitted talking also contains some positive information in talks while unpermitted talking contains negative discourse.

Student execution	amount	proportion
<i>Positive</i>	14	28.5%
<i>Negative</i>	15	30.6%
<i>refuse</i>	20	40.8%

Figure 2. Students execution attribute

Figure 2 contains students' behaviour attributes when they received teacher's directions. As we can see in the figure, negative execution and refusion account 70% of all executions.

## Results

From that analysis, it can be inferred that in the sample 1, the teacher attempted to build up a dominant power in the class. She claimed discipline for the first time mainly for three reasons: a). She assumed British students are lack of discipline; b). She treated discipline as the most important tool to guarantee study effect; c). In a totally new teaching environment facing students from another nation, the teacher was maintaining a complex teaching manner. As a rule constitutor, she desired to defend her position. Through the claim with strict attitude and punishment, the teacher built a dominant role in the class. As a result, the



relationship between the teacher and students is simply treated as conductors and receivers, without communication. Yet she still used polite expressions such as “please” and “thank you”, to show mild attitude towards British students for maintaining the image of Chinese teacher.

In the last sentence, the teacher tried to protect the interest of the class as a community by emphasizing the class discipline. It shows a typical thought pattern of Chinese, as well as one of the foundations the Chinese society runs upon. Passing down from Confucian, the thought of communism contributed in the thriving of Chinese civilization. The thought of organizing the class as a group, telling the students not to disturb others, are like social instinct to the teachers, taken as the responsibility and for granted.

In the sample 2, the teacher adopted more mild way as convincing students to comply with parents’ thought. Actually as referred in the documentary, Chinese students are educated to honour the teacher and respect his teaching, making themselves suitable to the society from childhood. Therefore, the teacher attempted to persuade British students these thoughts to smooth her teaching. But students showed strong resistance on her opinions. The power fight in surface is on discipline, but deeply in thoughts and identities.

### **Discussion**

Through those analysis, we can find that people speak and behave in more than one position. For example, Chinese teachers tried to build a dominant power over the students because only in this way, their teaching methods will function well, and to guarantee students to get good scores at last. However, they ignored those British students are used to learn in a low pace and independent exploration way. Besides, they are full of rebellious spirit, which is found in the table 3. In this research, teachers are always building his/her dominate power upon students, from two perspectives: a. behavior requirement b. ideologies.

Figure 1 illustrates that 2/3 of the students talked in unpermitted situation. This proportion means students indeed ignore and even break teacher’s discipline requirement. Some of them randomly chat, or complain about the teachers to say whatever they want. In the interviews, some of them referred that they just wanted to violate discipline, to be different. As we can see in the figure 2, negative execution and refusal account 70% of all executions. Negative execution means when the teacher requires someone to do something, he/she do that but looks bad on his/her face or even speak some negative things. The number 70% is large, from which we can assume the class is out of control sometimes. Those thinking could be considered as challenge to teacher’s authority. Both figures are reflection of student’s attitude towards teacher’s instructions, in another word, they resist teacher’s requirement, which we could say, is unacceptable on the teacher’s power execution.

### **Conclusion**

According to Reisigl and Wodak (2017, 2015), power is discursively exerted not only by grammatical forms, but also by a person’s control of the social occasion by means of the genre of a text, or by the regulation of access to certain public spheres.

Through analyzing discourses between the Chinese teacher and Western students, the writer

analyzed the power relationships in the class, and explored the cultural and psychological differences hidden underneath. As a new and foreign leader, the Chinese teacher falls in the dilemma of conducting an organized class and providing a rather mild and welcomed environment. In this research, teachers are always building his/her dominate power upon students, from two perspectives: a. behavior requirement b. ideologies. The discourses of the two groups showed the difference between the two cultures and that brought the power imbalance, giving rise to the conflicts and cooperation of the two parts.

As the analysis shows, the Chinese teacher adopted a polite but principled manner in communicating with British students. They stick in Chinese traditional teaching method and principle, and consciously export Chinese educational ideals in handling specific events and managing class. But the manner turns unreasonable and even unacceptable when it faces British students with totally different way of behaving and thinking. Power exists in class not only in handling and executing, but also in outputting and receiving of what is right and valuable between teachers and students.

### Limitations and Future Studies

Due to limitations on longevity, this paper can not carry out the whole discourse analysis. Announced by Van Dijk (2009), doing discourse analysis should not only abstractly describe text but also explain how real language users go about producing and understanding discourse, how their personal and socially shared beliefs affect discourse production and vice versa. In the documentary, not much evidence could be found to support how discourse is able to affect beliefs. As the documentary itself is a reprocessing work that carries some intentions of the editor, it is not as convincing as the origin materials.

The result of this one-month-teaching experiment is surprised because the Chinese way teaching class gained ten more scores than British way teaching classes in average. Although conflicts in practice and ideologies exists from head to the end, students' learning effect is better than desired. In that case, how to manage student in an effective way? Is power almostly gathering on the teacher a better teaching way? How to deal with students who are challenging teachers? Exploring a better teaching pattern to guarantee both power harmony and knowledge acquirable is the subject we need to do in the future.

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