

## Students' power relations in the college English language classrooms and their effect on learning

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### *Abstract*

This study reports the results of power relation established among students in the English language classroom and their effect on learning. A descriptive-qualitative research design was employed to particularly explore the power relations among 49 English language major students in one government higher learning institution in the region. Data were gathered through observations, interviews, and video recordings. Results show that the observed power relation established among the English language major students were identified based on the pattern of behavior they displayed during the observation phase. These include submissive or neutral, dominant and marginalized. The students established these power relations through the display of high self-confidence by the dominant students through their tone of voice and feeling of being powerful, and their display of positive or negative image based on the role performed by the students either as the controller or the controlled, and active or passive. The effect of power relations on students' learning was seen in the way power relations disturbed students' concentration in class, hindered their participation, and affected the students' motivation to learn.

**Keywords:** power relations, dominant, submissive, marginalized, effect on learning

## Students' power relations in the college English language classrooms and their effect on learning

### 1. Introduction

Interestingly, there is a limited body of research on students' power relations in the ESL classroom. While there are only few studies that have explored power relations among students like that of Rocha and Rodriguez (2016), this study focused on power relations among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom and there are only limited studies documenting power relations among English as a Second Language learners particularly in the context of Ilokano college students majoring in the English language. With this perspective and interest, the researcher aims to explore the power relation among Ilokano college students in one public higher learning institution and to fill the gap in research that determines the effect on their learning in the English language classroom.

**Statement of the Problem** - This study aimed to determine the power relation established among students in the English language classroom and their effect on learning. Specifically, the study sought answers to the following:

- What power relation are established among English language majors in the college English language classroom?
- How are these power relations established?
- How do these power relations affect the students' learning?

**Importance of the Study** - The illustrations and accompanying analysis contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between power dynamics and group behavior in the English language classroom. By acknowledging and addressing these dynamics, the educators, particularly the English language teachers could work towards creating a more inclusive and supportive learning environment where all students feel valued and empowered to participate actively in their educational journey. Moreover, school administrators may design programs on promoting collaborative learning and fostering positive teacher-student relationships to create a more conducive atmosphere towards a more engaging and motivating classroom environment. Thus, the findings of this study could help them understand power relations among their students and subsequently would be able to make necessary actions to help those whose learning processes are affected by these power relations.

### 2. Related Literature

The following concepts present some views about power relations and how it operates in the classroom setting: Power relation have been a recurring issue due to their complexities in the academic institution. Focusing on the dynamics of the classroom social process does not mean an abandonment of the instructional goals. Classroom power relations are formed by certain variables such as time and space, while the equally important instructional goals may affect the utilization of the said variables. Wertsch (1998), on one hand, stressed that relationships of power exist on a balance scale, with situational factors causing the positions of persons in an environment to constantly shift and change with the potential of being tipped in different directions.

Focusing the power relations of students is the central task of this paper which may be maintained or challenged by the utilization of discourse and time and space. The ways that students and teachers define classroom relations and how students behave affects the development of their relations. Student's weaknesses and strengths in social interactions and human relations make the whole process complex. The complexity in the interaction process is a part of Foucault's concept of power. This is a mixture of relations that has a direct bearing on power as demonstrated from the context of classroom power relations. This power dynamic is "situation centered" and

emanates from both the teacher and students. On the one hand, the teachers manage and on the other, the students respond or react.

This power dynamics could result in either positive or negative relations. If the situation is strict and picky, the possibility of a negative effect on the students is not remote. A more democratic classroom however may be favorable for the development of positive social relations because power is related to perceptions that affect the personal, psychological, and social. According to Toohey (2001), agreements and disagreements are a means of negotiation of meaning and power positions among participants. She believes that students use disagreements about decision-making activities as a tool for the construction of their personality in terms of ideas, knowledge, and leadership. Power relation can not only be the source of conflicts, but also a way to give students the opportunity to exercise leadership and to generate discussions to make decisions collectively with the purpose of achieving common goals. As mentioned by Gutierrez (2016), this idea is being supported by asserting that students can strategically be assigned to work collaboratively in small groups and afforded the opportunity to share their views with classmates in supervised discussions. (Rosemary, 2004)

Taken from the works of Rocha and Rodriguez, Fairclough (1989) mentions that power in discourse is to do with powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants. Such verbal power can be effective with persuasion, warning, and threat. In this sense, discourse determines the individuals' roles, relations, ideologies, and hidden agendas to exert power. Through language, the theory of discourse analysis, individuals have the power to protect, to lead, and to do good to their fellowmen, but also to control, to dominate, and even to hurt others. Therefore, the use of language and discourse can be dangerous and negatively persuasive. Along this context, three power relations existing in the classroom were identified by Roca and Rodriguez (2016). These are: dominant, submissive/neutral, and marginalized.

*Dominant.* Dominant students were described as having followers who created a hard environment in the classroom to please the decision of the leaders.

*Submissive/Neutral.* Submissive/neutral students accepted the dominant groups' decisions, were impartial, indifferent, and silent to avoid having problems with any member of the dominant groups.

*Marginalized.* Marginalized students were ignored and excluded by the rest of the students, including the neutral ones. This group was located at the right back of the classroom which was isolated from the rest of the students.

More specifically, Roca and Rodriguez highlighted that power relations in the classrooms are usually established through actions of the dominant students and the responses of the marginalized ones. The first way is that power inequity is caused by the interruptions of dominant learners. Their sense of superiority makes them believe that they are superior and better than the other students. Also, power relations are established through the use of verbal bullying, gossiping, and ridiculing by the same dominant which subsequently cause distress and harm to the integrity and lives of the passive and marginalized learners. Additionally, power relations create attitudes of discrimination, exclusion, intolerance, and verbal violence because the dominant students form closed groups based on popularity, academic development, and social status, rather than on values such as respect, equality, solidarity, and authentic friendship.

In the context of English language classroom, students should not only develop language competencies but social skills because learning a foreign or a second language like English is a natural process of communicative interaction. When there are negative power relations that could affect or hinder the learning process in the classroom, like participation and concentration and attitudes toward learning, their learning experience could not be productive. In the study of Roca and Rodriguez (2016), they identified two general effects of power relations on learning. The first one is that power relations affect students' participation and concentration in the learning process. This is evident among the dominant group's sense of superiority, over self-confidence, conceited attitude, and their belief of being more intelligent and better students than the rest of their classmates that resulted to lack

of concentration and participation. This means that power inequity such as constant interruptions is a negative factor in achieving concentration and fair participation in class. The second is that power relations cause low investment in the learning process. This suggests that when students feel demotivated because of the influential power and sense of superiority of the dominant group, the submissive and marginalized group would not invest much in their learning because they would always feel intimidated. Thus, it has a negative impact on their disposition to learn better.

### 3. Methodology

**Research Design** - This study was conducted at the Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College, Sta, Maria campus during the A. Y. 2023-2024. The study made use of the qualitative descriptive research design. In the context of this study, the researcher observed, interviewed and examined in detail the establishment of power among the tertiary language major students and its impact on language learning.

**Theoretical Framework** - This study was anchored on Yulk's (2002) notion of power states that power is the capacity one person has to influence other's behaviors and attitudes. His theory of power, consisting of three perspectives, posits that *commitment* occurs when the dominated person obeys the orders of the leader without any objection; *compliance* happens when the subjected person accepts commands, but follows them apathetically in order to avoid possible recriminations from the leader; and *resistance* takes place when a subjugated person disagrees with and struggles against an authoritarian leader by making excuses, delaying, or refusing to complete orders. Yulk calls this a *power authority*. It is executed when each individual is assigned duties determined by his/her position in social organization.

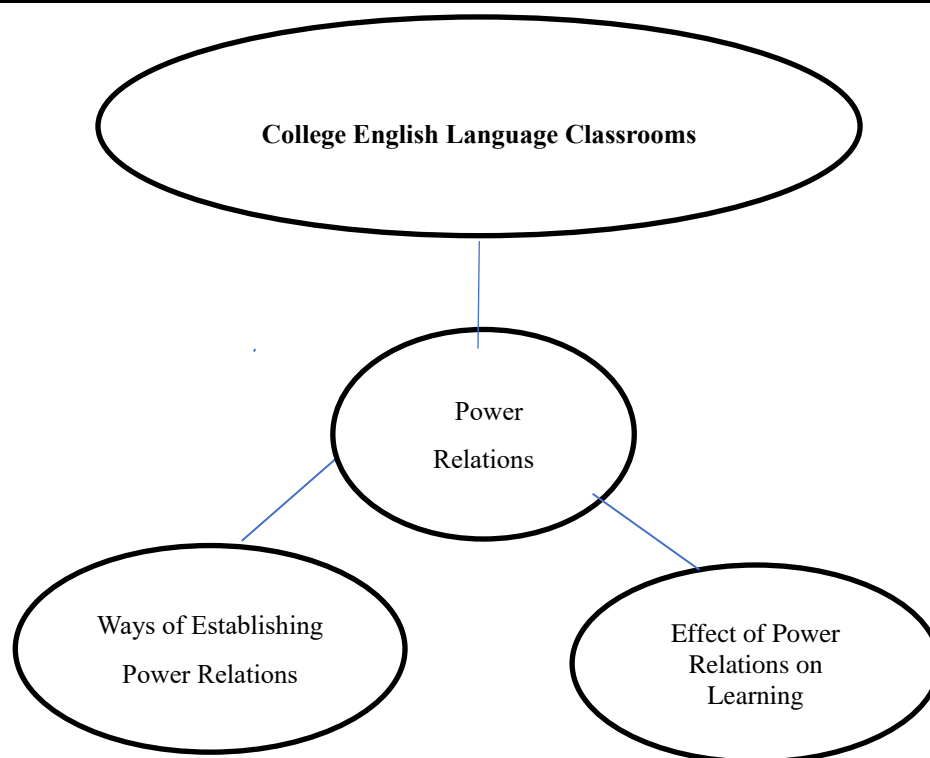
On one hand, Perloff's (2003) Theory of Language Power posits that language plays an important role in class management and the acquisition process of students. It describes that classroom language determines the success of teaching and learning activities as well as the medium to enhance students' knowledge acquisition in the classroom. Through language, individuals also have the power to protect, to lead, and to do good to their fellowmen, but also to control, dominate, and even to hurt others as shown in the theory of discourse analysis. Therefore, the use of language and discourse can either be dangerous and negatively persuasive as in any verbal power to be seen as destructive because this can be a means with which people are capable of requesting others to do something that is not beneficial for them or for the society.

For instance, a person can use persuasion in a negative way to legitimize power by means of aggressive verbal forms. Ironically, as when a person wants to insult others by using words that mean the opposite of what he/she says. In addition, exclusion and humiliation are relational strategies to exercise power through language when a person tries to harm another by damaging his/her social relationships" and reputation. (Scheithhauer, 2006) Thus, language is an ideal vehicle for building harmonious social relationships, but it is also a hazardous means that creates unequal relations of power.

Lastly, Kramer's (2007) concept of critical discourse analysis sees it as a system of analysis that attends to discreet portions of the language with a particular socio-historical context with an aim of providing a multi-layered analysis of how the language operates communicate surface level language as well as underlying dynamics of interpersonal relations, cultural traces, institutional influences, and ultimately power. In the context of this study, it interprets the prevailing situations in the English language classroom particularly on the observed power relations among the students majoring in English.

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#### *Conceptual Framework*



**Fig. 1.** The Research Paradigm

As shown in the figure, the research involves college English classrooms particularly those by students taking up Bachelor of Secondary Education majoring in English. For this context, power relations established in the classrooms are identified and the ways on how these relations are established are described. Subsequently, the effect of these power relations on learning are likewise described as digested from the casual conversations with purposively chosen students. These were carried out with the hope of providing insights and critical picture of the power relations that permeate the English language classroom.

**Data Gathering Procedure** - The researcher was guided by the following procedure throughout the course of study: First, the researcher submitted research protocols to the URERB for review. Upon approval, the URERB issued an ethical clearance to the researcher as a go signal for him to conduct the study. Second, the researcher requested permission from the president of ISPSC. After the approval, the researcher coordinated with the Dean of the College of Teacher Education about the class schedule of the students for their observations. Third, the researcher also coordinated with the subject instructors and the students to have an information on how the classes were observed and how the individual interviews were conducted. Finally, the gathered data were recorded and coded. Then, these were analyzed to determine the themes emerged in the findings of the study. The data were used as a take-off point for the analysis and discussions to explore the narratives' meanings.

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1 Power relation in the English Language Classroom

The table shows the observed power relation established among the English majors in the English language classrooms.

**Table 1**

*Power relation established in the English language classroom.*

	F	%
Dominant	18	36.73
Submissive/Neutral	21	42.86
Marginalized	10	20.41
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>100</b>

It presents how the 49 language major students were divided according to their power relations and the smaller groups they created. Overall, based on the data presented, 21 or 42.86% of the students were observed to be neutral or submissive. This implies that there still more students who are serious and attentive in learning in the English language classes considering that they are majoring in the subject. These are the more serious type of students who did not feel intimidated, despite the negative influential behavior of the dominant group they still managed to be serious and not affected in their learning. However, a minimal number equivalent to 10 or 20.41 % falls under the marginalized group. These are the students who spoke softly when asked by the teacher and did not feel confident and perhaps the less powerful within the class. This means that there really are students who feel excluded in class.

Overall, based on the data presented, almost half (42.86%) of the participants are neutral or submissive which implies that there are still more students who are serious and attentive in the English language classes considering that they are majoring in the subject. However, a minimal number of marginalized students equivalent to 20.41% shows that this power relation can either help or hinder the English learning process. Further, the results provide valuable insights into the power dynamics and group divisions observed among the college students in the English language classroom. By acknowledging and addressing these dynamics, educators can work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable learning environment where all students feel valued and empowered to participate actively in their educational journey.

#### 4.2 Ways on How Power relation are Established in the English Language Classroom

**Display of high self-confidence by the dominant students.** It was evident in the observations that the dominant students identified in the English classroom always displayed high self-confidence and they usually get the attention of their classmates. They were seen to always assert themselves, speak up, and participate actively in class discussions. Notably, this high self-confidence was observed to be manifested in the dominant students' behaviors such as speaking loudly and projecting that feeling of being powerful.

**Tone of voice as a demonstration of high self-confidence.** Based on the observations made, students who feel confident in their abilities and knowledge tend to project a sense of empowerment through their tone of voice. They express themselves with a tone of voice that commands attention. This is particularly true when they answer questions posed by the teacher. One dominant student in the second-year class admitted:

*I believe in my own competence; hence, I always assert my presence in the classroom. - LS2c*

Moreover, the identified dominant students always speak confidently in class thereby garnering attention from their peers. It was also noted that the confident students often assumed leadership roles and actively participate in class activities and discussions. One marginalized student from the first-year class said that she looks at the leaders of their class as knowledgeable and authoritative thus feel powerless and disregarded. From this, it was observed that the tone of voice reflected high or low confidence and made some students more powerful than the others. Those whose voices were louder during class discussions or activities were the ones heard by the class and their opinions were likewise heard and acknowledged by the teacher from which she would continue the class.

This tone of voice, according to Tannen (1995), is called linguistic style: Everything that is said must be said in a certain way, in a certain tone of voice, at a certain rate of speed, and with a certain degree of loudness. Once a tone of voice is not normal, such as when a speaker has a loud voice, it suggests that there is power in that tone of voice, implying also that the speaker is more powerful than others having a soft tone of voice.

**Feeling of being powerful.** Students who feel confident in their abilities and knowledge tend to project a sense of empowerment by demonstrating an image that shows their feeling of being powerful. These students

believe in their own competence and consequently assert their presence in the classroom, further reinforcing their perceived power and influence.

The same was evident in the college English language classroom. The dominant students exuded confidence through their tone of voice and assertive behavior thus they would always attract attention, assume leadership roles, and actively participate in classroom activities. Conversely, students with low confidence levels manifested a marginalized stance; hence, they were hesitant to participate, leading them to remain silent and passive in classroom discussions. These findings are further supported by the following excerpt from one of the individual interviews conducted:

*My goal in life drives me to always be active in class. Also, my interest in a particular subject influences me to be active in class. – LS3b*

From the response above, it could be inferred that students' power relations in the college English language classroom are established by the dominant students' display of high self-confidence in class. This indicates how power dynamics is manifested in class and some students emerge as leaders while others become less active and participative.

Students with high confidence levels tend to dominate class activities and discussions. They often assume leadership roles and command attention from their peers. These confident students are more likely to participate actively and assertively, showcasing their competency in the English language. Their confident tone of voice and assertiveness contribute to their perceived power in the classroom. Conversely, students with low confidence levels tend to be marginalized and hesitant to participate. They prefer to remain silent, fearing judgment or criticism from their peers. This reluctance to speak up stems from underlying feelings of shyness and insecurity, which may have developed over time. Bandura (1997, as cited in Brown, 2020) discusses self-efficacy beliefs and their influence on behavior. Students' levels of self-confidence and their beliefs about their abilities to perform certain tasks (such as participating in class discussions) are central to his social cognitive theory. Additionally, Deci and Ryan (2019) explored the role of intrinsic motivation in driving behavior. Students' interests in specific subjects or activities can significantly impact their levels of engagement and participation in the classroom. Similarly, Rosenholtz and Simpson (2019) investigated how classroom organization and teacher-student interactions contribute to student stratification and the formation of peer hierarchies. It highlights how certain students may be marginalized or empowered based on factors such as confidence and participation. In a separate study by Wentzel (2019) on Social Relationships and Motivation in Middle School, it was found that there is an influence of social relationships on students' motivation and academic performance. Accordingly, peer perceptions and interactions play a crucial role in shaping students' self-concept and engagement in the classroom.

**Display of positive or negative image based on the role performed by the students.** The image displayed by each of the students in the classroom based on the role they performed was found to be contributory to the establishment of power relations in the said classroom. As projected by the students, a positive image meant more power than a negative image. Specifically, this image was particularly based on the role that the students performed: either as the controller or the controlled, and/or active or passive.

**The controller vs. the controlled.** Students were identified either as the controllers or the controlled during the data collection process. The *controllers* are usually the dominant students who often participated in class activities and the submissive/neutral and the marginalized students who are considered the *controlled* group. The former type of students displayed a more arrogant behavior because they know they are more powerful than the other students. They showed confidence because they assumed to be the *controller* of their classmates thereby creating the power relations identified earlier.

**The active vs. the passive.** The *active* students were observed to be more participative and more expressive during class activities. On the contrary, the *passive* students were more engaged in listening and participated only when they had something to clarify from the teacher.

The researcher noted that the discussions and presentations were often dominated by a group of more performing students. These students tended to assert themselves and controlled the direction of the discussion, while the less performing students remained timid and quiet. This resulted in the less performing students feeling inhibited in their roles as assigned reporters and primarily listening to the more active students. Interestingly, the following excerpt from the individual interviews highlights one of the individual students' reasons for their activeness in class. One submissive student mentioned that having prior knowledge about a topic motivated him to actively participate in class discussions, despite the power relations that were felt in class. Advanced reading and possessing stock knowledge contributed to his confidence in sharing insights during class. His active participation is driven by his confidence in his understanding of the subject matter, which empowers him to contribute to class discussions.

*Having prior knowledge about a certain topic makes me active in the discussion. It helps me to actively participate as long as I've done advanced reading. Also, if I have stock knowledge that makes me confident to share in class. -LS3d*

This finding suggests that students' level of activity in class is influenced by their mood. There were times when they did not feel like speaking and preferred to remain silent. They expressed that silence brings them peace and serves as a form of therapy. Being quiet allows them to reflect on their life decisions and contemplate their thoughts.

*Sometimes, I am not in the mood to speak, that's why I stay silent in class. I don't talk a lot but I listen a lot. When I am silent, I feel at peace. Staying quiet and silent is my therapy. I got to realize a lot of things and reflect on my life's decision. I am always a silent girl but I am trying my best to communicate and cooperate with my classmates. -LS1e*

Despite their inclination towards silence, the students acknowledged the importance of communication and cooperation with classmates, indicating a willingness to improve their participation levels. Some students claim that when one focuses his or her attention by attentively listening to the discussion, he or she is able to cope with the discussion and not be affected by any class interruption specifically by the dominant students. Addressing power dynamics in the classroom requires a multifaceted approach that considers both teacher and student behaviors. Educators should strive to create an inclusive environment where all students feel valued and respected. Strategies such as promoting collaborative learning, providing opportunities for student voice and choice, and fostering positive teacher-student relationships can help mitigate the negative effects of power dynamics on students' attitudes toward learning. (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

#### 4.3 Effect of Power Relations on Students' Learning

**Power Relations Disturbing Students' Concentration** - Based on the observations made, impolite interruptions and a sense of superiority affect students' concentration. Students exhibited a range of behaviors, from polite interaction to impolite interruptions by the dominant group. Throughout the discussion, instances of impolite interruptions were noted, where some students rudely interjected or spoke over their peers. These disruptions hindered the flow of conversation and contributed to a tense atmosphere, potentially impairing students' ability to concentrate on the topic. A transcript of the video captures this scenario:

*T: Please arrange yourselves in five groups for your activity today by counting one to five...*

A student stood and shouted:

*Ma'am, can we have the same group? We have formed our group already!*

Another student raised his voice:

*Yes ma'am, I agree! (Other students showed their support by shouting, Yes ma'am!)*

From the above situation, some impolite interruptions leading to a sense of superiority was evident among specific students, who dominated the discussion and disregarded the contributions of their peers. These students displayed arrogant behavior, asserting their authority over the conversation and marginalizing others in the process. Such dynamics resulted in an unequal distribution of power within the classroom, with some students feeling marginalized and less empowered to actively participate because they are distracted by the dominant students' arrogant behavior. One marginalized student admitted:

*I would just remain silent in class because I am disturbed by the loud voices and interruptions of some of my classmates. -LS1b*

The observed behavior may be connected to the impact of power relations on students' participation and concentration. Impolite interruptions and a sense of superiority contribute to a hostile learning environment, where students may feel discouraged from engaging in meaningful discourse. Consequently, this affects their ability to concentrate on the topic being discussed, as they navigate the challenging dynamics of the classroom. This is further confirmed in the following field note:

*In the subject, Structure of the English Language, the topic was on Otto Jespersen's Language – Origin hypothesis. A group activity was given by the teacher. It was noticed that most students were actively engaged during their presentation. However, the discussion was informal due to the rude and domineering behavior of some students in answering the reporters' questions, (Field notes, June 14, 2023).*

The observation underscores the significance of acknowledging power dynamics in comprehending students' learning experiences. By recognizing how impolite interruptions and a sense of superiority manifest in classroom interactions, educators can strive towards establishing a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. Addressing these dynamics is essential in promoting equitable participation and enhancing students' concentration on their learning objectives, ultimately fostering a more enriching educational experience for all. Furthermore, a study conducted by Jenssen (2019) found that a classroom environment characterized by impolite interruptions and a sense of superiority inhibits knowledge-sharing and collaborative learning among students. This lack of collaboration can impede students' overall academic progress and subject mastery, ultimately affecting their learning outcomes. The long-term educational implications of prolonged exposure to negative power dynamics are also noteworthy. According to research by Jones (2007), students who repeatedly encounter impolite interruptions or perceive themselves as inferior may develop a negative attitude toward learning and a lack of confidence in their abilities. This can have detrimental effects on their long-term academic success and overall educational experience.

**Power Relations Hampering Students' Participation** - It was observed that students dominating the discussion and dismissing the contribution of their peers, hamper students' class participation. In this excerpt from the field notes, the researcher observed dynamics related to group interactions and power relations within the context of power relations and the interactions in the class. For instance, in a class session, the topic of discussion revolved around Otto Jespersen's language origin hypothesis. The teaching methodology employed for this topic entailed a group activity centered on the concepts of icon, index, symptom, signal, and symbol. The objective of this activity was to foster student engagement and deepen their comprehension of the subject matter through collaborative learning. In this activity, it was noted that most students were active and responsive to the assigned reporters, but the discussion was not formal due to the domineering behavior of students in answering or responding to the reporters' questions.

Despite the structured nature of the activity and academic significance of the topic, an interesting observation was made regarding student behavior. While many students actively participated and responded to the reporters facilitating the group activity, the overall atmosphere of the discussion appeared informal. As verbalized by one of the students during the report:

*Ok... let's try to find out based on the theories of language that we are going to tackle in this lesson. (Then, the theories were presented by the reporter in power point) Now that we have learned the language theories, let me once again ask, do animals talk or communicate?*

Another student answered:

*Yes! It's obvious that language originated from different sounds! (in a loud voice)*

This evidently illustrates that there are impolite interruptions and a sense of superiority. Students may lack of respect for other's perspectives or a desire to assert dominance in the classroom interaction. Also, they interrupt others to showcase their knowledge or disagreement without considering the impact on their peers. Voices of others could contribute to a sense of superiority among some of the students, leading to dismissive or disrespectful behavior towards their classmates and thereby hindering these students' participation in class.

There is also informality in the class interaction among the students. They felt more comfortable expressing themselves in a relaxed manner among their peers, especially if they have established relationships or shared interests. They facilitate open communication and freely exchange expressions and ideas informally during classroom interaction. As one of the students said:

*That is correct! (again, the same student stood and answered in a loud voice trying to affirm his first statement)*

Another student hastily responded as:

*Hahaha...*

As observed throughout the discussion, instances of impolite interruptions were noted, where some students rudely interjected or spoke over their peers. These disruptions hindered the flow of conversation and contributed to a tense atmosphere, potentially impairing students' chance to share their opinions on the topic. These observations indicate that certain students exhibited a sense of superiority, dominating the discussion and dismissing the contributions of their peers. This behavior created an uneven distribution of power within the classroom, with some students feeling marginalized and less empowered to actively participate. Thus, power is only attributed to students who have the courage to speak with confidence in class, particularly the dominant group who displayed arrogance in their behavior during class activities.

In a study conducted by Jenssen (2019), he found that a classroom environment characterized by impolite interruptions and a sense of superiority inhibits knowledge-sharing and collaborative learning among students. This lack of collaboration can impede students' overall academic progress and subject mastery, ultimately affecting their learning outcomes. The long-term educational implications of prolonged exposure to negative power dynamics are also noteworthy. Furthermore, another observation underscores the significance of acknowledging power dynamics in comprehending students' learning experiences. This is a clear example from the field notes from the second-year class:

*The topic was centered on mythology – echo and narcissism. The activity was a video presentation of the topic. It was observed that the reporter who was well prepared had the power to hold the attention of her classmates, relating superiority to power and some dominant interruptions of reactions of other students. However, the same students were active in the class activities, (Field notes, June 13, 2023)*

It was noted that a well-prepared reporter along with the active students demonstrated responsiveness during the session. The reporter was able to command the attention of his peers, implying a sense of superiority and power dynamics. In addition, interruptions caused by some students made it difficult to understand the contents that resulted to lack of participation and concentration among students. Thus, impolite interruptions and a sense of

superiority as a mechanism of power among students were negative factors in achieving concentration and fair participation in class as proven by Rocha and Rodriguez (2016).

#### 4.4 Power Relations Affecting Students' Confidence Level

Based on the findings of the study, the following observations emerged in terms of the effects of power relations on the students' level of confidence:

**Submissive students demonstrated higher motivation level compared with the dominant students.** It is interesting to note that the submissive students generally demonstrated higher motivation level in the classroom compared with the dominant students. This is because they manifested an undisturbed state and simply focused on the lesson at hand. While the dominant students were displaying high confidence through their tone of voice and feeling of superiority, the submissive students remained focused on the lesson and were more hooked in the discussion with the teacher. For example, in one field notes when the teacher asked the students to make an annotated reading list and shared it in class after an introduction of the lesson on the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Philippine Literature, there was a limited participation of the students on the lesson because it was almost discussed by the teacher. On this topic, there were only a few students, the submissive students, who were able to share their annotated reading list even without looking at their notes, the rest were merely reading their notes. This shows that the students who gave importance to their lesson, those did not allow themselves to be disturbed by the dominant students, demonstrated a higher motivation level in terms of their engaged connection with the lesson.

In this field note excerpt, the researcher observed limited student participation with the teacher predominantly leading the discussion. Few students actively engaged by sharing annotated reading lists, while others relied heavily on their notes. The level of participation seemed linked to student motivation: those valuing the lesson, most of them the submissive, showed higher motivation, actively participating without needing to reference notes, while others, mostly the dominant, appeared primarily motivated only by compliance with course requirements. It is also noted that students attempted to maintain control and power within the classroom based on their motivation levels. Motivated students were observed to assert themselves more actively in discussions and activities, potentially influencing the direction of class interactions. On the other hand, students who were somewhat bored or less motivated exhibited lower levels of participation, leading to shifts in power dynamics within the classroom. This is evidenced in the following excerpt of an interview:

*Well, it depends how interesting the topic is and how engaging the teacher is to her students. And if you feel motivated to do so, the teacher is concerned for his or her students' welfare. The students will also be motivated to exert more effort in learning and engaging in class activities. – LS2d*

The student expressed that the level of activity in class is influenced by the topic's interest and the teacher's engagement with the students. When the topic is engaging and the teacher shows genuine concern for their students' welfare, they feel motivated to actively participate. This highlights the significance of both the content being taught and the teacher's approach in fostering student engagement.

*Sometimes, I feel bored of the topic. There should be more activities that are more engaging like games so that everybody will participate. – LS1e*

In this interview excerpt, the student shares that apart from the power relations in class affecting their motivation level, they also tend to be shy and not participative when they feel bored with the topic. It suggests that incorporating more interactive and engaging activities, such as games, could encourage greater participation from all students. This underscores the importance of varied teaching methods and strategies to maintain student interest and promote active involvement in class discussions. These responses emphasize the critical role of both the content and delivery of instruction in motivating students to participate actively in class at the same time keeping watch on the power relations circulating in the classroom. Luke (2021) claims that it is likely power when addressing why those subject to domination seem to acquiesce willingly. In his three-dimensional view embraces

the various means by which power relations are reproduced and in which they in turn reproduce, sometimes through interaction, in unconsidered ways and across generation.

The findings suggest a dynamic interplay between student motivation, participation in class activities, and power dynamics within the classroom. Tschannen-Moran (2018) conducted a study on teacher efficacy. It explores teachers' beliefs in their ability to positively impact student learning and influence classroom dynamics. Understanding teacher efficacy can shed light on ways educators can foster a sense of control and autonomy among students, contributing to more equitable power dynamics in the classroom. By fostering a sense of engagement, educators can enhance learning outcomes and promote holistic development among students. This finding is related to the study of Jennings (2009), which discusses cooperative learning, and highlights the effectiveness of interactive teaching strategies in promoting student engagement. Implementing cooperative learning strategies can create a dynamic classroom environment where students feel motivated to contribute and learn from their peers. Hidi (2006) in her four-phase model of interest development, likewise, provides a framework for understanding how students' interests evolve over time. By tapping into "students' interests and passions, educators can design instruction that captures their attention and encourages active participation.

**Marginalized students displaying low confidence level due to always being passive.** The findings from the observations from class sessions underscore the importance of addressing power imbalances in the classroom to enhance students' attitudes toward learning. As such, one of the effects in terms of attitudes toward learning is identified among the marginalized students who displayed low confidence level due to always being passive. The findings are further supported by the following excerpt from the focused interview with one of the marginalized students:

*I always stay silent in class because I'm scared that they will judge me from what I will answer in recitation. I'm shy because ever since I was still in the elementary grade, I always tell myself to stay quiet. - LS1c*

From this response, it could be inferred that students' power relations in the English language classroom, sheds light on how power dynamics manifests and affects learning outcomes. This finding could be explained by the fact that the classroom environment is observed to be initially characterized by camaraderie and active participation among students. However, a shift occurs during presentations, where certain students emerge as leaders while others become less active and participative.

Also, this was demonstrated in the transcript of the recorded video. When the teacher asked:

*Describe the interrelationship between and among culture, language and society. Anyone from the class?*

The students did not respond at all. This only shows that these marginalized students who were asked by the teacher manifests low confidence level. Their participation in classroom interaction could diminish confidence especially when they are asked to speak in class. Understanding these dynamics can inform educators' approaches to creating inclusive learning environments that support active engagement and participation for all students, respecting their autonomy and individual characteristics. Foucault (1975 as cited in Gabriel, 2020) speaks of power dynamics and discipline and provides a theoretical framework for understanding how power operates within social institutions such as the classroom. The concepts of control and domination explored in this work resonate with the sub-category of Controller vs. Controlled identified in the study. Similarly, Bourdieu (1986) examined social hierarchies and cultural capital and sheds light on how individuals position themselves within groups and navigate power relations. The distinction between active and passive students in the study reflects Bourdieu's concept of habitus and the ways in which individuals express their social status through participation styles.

Goffman (1959) in his seminal work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, explored how individuals present themselves to others in social interactions. The sub-category of *controller vs. controlled* in the study

resonates with Goffman's concepts of frontstage and backstage behavior, where dominant individuals perform roles of control and power within the group. Similarly, Freire (1978 as cited in Chen, 2018) in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* emphasized the importance of dialogue, empowerment, and critical consciousness in education. The study's findings on power dynamics within the classroom align with Freire's critique of traditional education systems, where dominant individuals exert control over less assertive students. Freire's work provides a theoretical basis for understanding the implications of power imbalances on learning and participation. These empirical insights complement the findings of the study, providing deeper understanding of the complex interplay between individual characteristics, group dynamics, and power relations within the classroom.

## 5. Conclusion

According to their categories, findings indicate that of the 49 students included in the study, the biggest participants were the neutral or submissive, followed by the dominant, and a minimal number of the marginalized students. The students established power relations through the display of high self-confidence by the dominant students through their tone of voice and feeling of being powerful, and display of positive or negative image based on the role performed by the students either as the controller or the controlled, and active or passive. The effect of power relations on students' learning showed that power relations disturb students' concentration in class, hinder their participation, and affect the students' confidence level.

**Implications** - The implications of those power relation showed that one key aspect is in the classroom interaction where positive interpersonal relations should be built and established in the academic development of students. Negative interpersonal relations of power should be considered as an important factor in the learning process. The participants of the study who are future educators should be aware that the classroom should be created as a conducive place where students are encouraged to develop social and interpersonal skills so that learning the language become more effective and productive.

**Recommendations** - Future researchers in the field may consider conducting longitudinal studies to track the long-term effects of power dynamics on students' learning outcomes and academic performance. By following cohorts of students over multiple years, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how power dynamics evolve and impact students' educational trajectories. Additionally, future studies may explore the intersectionality of power dynamics with factors such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status to uncover how these intersecting identities shape students' experiences in the classroom. This comprehensive approach will provide valuable insights into designing targeted interventions and support systems to foster equitable learning environments for all students.

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