

POWER-SOLIDARITY RELATIONSHIP OF TEACHERS WITH THEIR FUTURE COLLEAGUES

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ABSTRACT

Classroom talk is an example of institutional discourse, based on asymmetrical distribution of communicative rights and obligations between teachers and students. Teachers hold power and solidarity relationships with their students. It has been assumed that, in general, women are more concerned with solidarity while men are more interested in status and being powerful. In this study the interactions of 2 female and 2 male teachers of Mentally Disabled Department of Education Faculty are recorded during their face to face teaching. The study is centered on an analysis of 3 discourse features: the occurrence of questions, rhetorical questions and first person plural usage. The results emphasized the existence of professional solidarity between the teachers and students of Mentally Disabled Department.

Keywords: Power-solidarity relationship, gender, sociolinguistics, linguistic differences of the teachers of Mentally Disabled Department

INTRODUCTION

The organization of classroom discourse is based on asymmetrical distribution of communicative rights and obligations between teachers and students. Teachers take turns at will, allocates turns to others, determines topics, interrupts and reallocates turns judged to be irrelevant to those topics and provides a running commentary on what is being said and meant.

Mchoul (Thornborrow 2002:111) notes that most of the talking is done by the teacher in monologic form so that the possibility for students to take equal turns is reduced. Hence, teacher occupies a role of authority and power structured by the demands of the curriculum. From this point of view, classroom talk is institutionally structured, and it can be considered also as a strategic discourse which is power laden and goal-directed, in contrast to ordinary conversational interaction between participants of equal status.

Classroom Discourse as Institutional Discourse

As for institutional discourse Thornborrow (2002:4) offers some of the primary characteristics which fulfil classroom discourse criteria:

1. It is a talk that has differentiated, pre-inscribed and conventional participant roles, or identities wherever it takes place such as in a school classroom.
2. It is a talk in which there is a structurally asymmetrical distribution of turn types between the participants such that spakers with different institutional identities typically occupy different discursive identities; that is, they get different types of turns in which they do different kinds of things (for example, teachers nominate which pupil will talk next, pupils respond).
3. It is a talk in which there is also an asymmetrical relationship between participants in terms of speaker rights and obligations. This means that certain types of utterances are seen as legitimate for some speakers but not for others.
4. It is a talk in which the discursive resources and identities available to participants to accomplish specific actions are either weakened or strengthened in relation to their current institutional identities.

Consequently, classroom discourse is a form of interaction in which the relationship between a participant's current institutional role, that is the teacher's current discursive role such as asking questions, giving answers or opinions, emerges as a local phenomenon which shapes the organisation and trajectory of the talk.

Power and Solidarity Relationship in the Classroom

Teacher is in control of what happens in the classroom, in other words he/she has power of controlling the linguistic behaviors of students. This power is determined by the institutional role that the teacher undertakes. However, teacher has also solidarity relationship with students. In a joint activity, such as in the classroom, closeness necessarily brings teachers and students closer.

As Tannen (1996:22) claims power and solidarity are paradoxical relation with each other. That is, although power and

solidarity closeness and distance seem at first to be opposites, each also entails the other. Any show of solidarity necessarily entails power at the same time, any show of power entails solidarity by involving participants in relation to each other.

On the other hand, it has been stated that, in general women are more concerned with solidarity and “connection” (Chodorow 1974, Gilligan 1982) while men are more interested in status and being one-up (Tannen 1990).

Therefore, this study assumes that gender differences of teachers in the classroom will reveal linguistic differences regarding power and solidarity relationship.

METHODOLOGY

The concern of the study is to examine the linguistic differences of female and male teachers of Special Education Department in Anadolu University Turkey. Data comprised of the teacher-student interactions, the setting is classroom. The participants are 2 female and 2 male teachers of Mentally Disabled Department having at least 3 years of teaching experience, and are between the ages of 30-40.

The teachers who participated in the study are asked to record 45-50 minutes of their class. The recordings are transcribed and utterances which fulfil communicative functions of each participant are counted as 250, where 140 utterances belonged to female teachers and 110 belonged to male teachers during face to face teaching.

Then the study is centered on an analysis of 3 discourse features: the occurrence of questions, rhetorical questions and first person plural usage. The other discursive markers such as tag question, back channeling and addressing type analyzed in other departments, by the author (Acikalin 2001) were not significantly used by the teachers of this department.

The results are evaluated according to the hypothesis of Holmes (Bergvall 1999:291), which states that women tend to interact in ways that will maintain and increase solidarity, while men tend to interact in ways that will maintain and increase their power and status.

RESULTS

Questions:

The corpus examined contained 47 instances of questions asked by the teachers in 45-50 minutes of teaching. Of the total 47 tokens, female teachers used question forms 36 times and male teachers used it 11 times.:

- a) Başka örnek söyleyebilir *miyiz* ?
(Can we give another example?)
- b) Bunu anladınız *mi*?
(Did you understand this?)
- c) Sizler ne düşünüyor *sunuz* bu konuda ?
(What do you think on this matter?)
- d) Bir sonraki basamağı çocuk yapabiliyor *mu*?
(Can the child do the next step ?)

Questions are an important means of generating talk and are interactionally powerful devices (Fishman 1983:94, c.in Holmes 1995:39). Questions can be used to seek information, to encourage another speaker to participate in talk, to introduce a new topic or to check the view of other participants.

Rhetorical Questions:

Among 29 instances of rhetorical questions in 45-50 minutes of teaching, female teachers used it 9 times and male teachers used it 20 times. Rhetorical questions do not expect answer. Through using them teachers invite students to confirm the shared knowledge of their jointly negotiated discourse. Rhetorical questions are also termed by Clarke (1996:377) as “staged communicative acts”; where its purpose is to point out the obviousness of a current issue without leaving any space for an answer:

- e) Diğer becerilere ne demiştik ? Giyim zamanı..
(What did we say for other skills? Time for dressing.....)
- f) Nasıl diyelim? Düşündüğümüzde.
(How can we say it? When we think about it....)
- g) Ne tür sosyal-mesleki becerilere gereksinimiz var? Zihinsel engelli çocuklar

(What type of social- professional skills do we need ? Mentally disabled children are....)

h) Temel yönergeler nelerdir ? Gözden geçirelim..

(What are the basic instructions ? Let's look at them)

First Person Plural Usage

First person plural use is repeated 76 times by female teachers and 70 times by male teachers.

- i) Öğretceğimiz modelleri ikiye bölebiliriz.
(We can divide into 2 the models that we are going to teach)
- j) Az önce söylediğimiz konularda ekleme yapmak mümkün.
(It is possible to add more to the subjects that we have just mentioned)
- k) Özetleyecek olursak, hemen hemen hepsi doğrudu.
(If we are going to summarize, everything that we have talked about was right.)
- l) Bu kaynaklara erişmeye ve farklı bir gözle bakmayı öğrenebilirsek...
(If we will learn how to reach to these sources and look at them from different perspective..)

In Turkish, first person plural usage appears as a pronoun or as an inflectional morpheme as a suffix in verb endings and it is conditioned according to the mood and tense aspect of the verb. In class interactions, the teachers used it frequently in order to be in involvement with their students. This involvement is shown by sharing attitudes, common knowledge, and view with the students.

Scollon and Scollon (1995:40) give us a general idea of what involvement means in linguistic strategies. Among 10 types, in this study "claim common point of view, opinions, attitudes, knowledge, empathy with hearer" is used frequently because of the peculiarity of teachers' talk of the department.

The results show that both female and male teachers used this strategy quite often almost in equal amounts. (76-70) in their classes.

Figure 1 shows the results of question, rhetorical question and first person plural usages according to the gender differences of teachers.

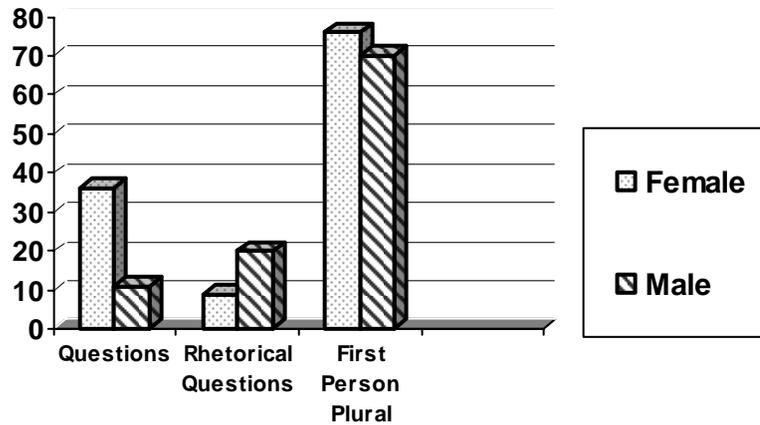


Figure 1.

EVALUATION OF THE RESULTS

There is a pervasive assumption that teachers occupy a role of authority and power. This authority is inherent, structured by the demands of the curriculum where the teacher is in control of what happens in the classroom, by directing the discourse, by asking questions, and by reformulating the answers. Therefore, the notion of power is a resource that belongs to teachers not to students.

On the other hand, solidarity is the opposite end of a single continuum. For the teachers to be authoritative in classroom is not the only attitude. For the sake of an effective communication solidarity relations with the students is also necessary and important.

From this point of view, my purpose was to investigate the linguistic gender differences of female and male teachers through the concept of framing, which is stated by Tannen (1996) as a way of simultaneously balancing the dimensions of status and connection. Therefore, in this study the linguistic gender differences of teachers are searched during their professional activity.

The most common linguistic devices used by the teachers of Mentally Disabled Department were questions, rhetorical questions and first person plural usages.

Questions: According to the results of the study female teachers asked more questions than their male partners (36-11) during 45-50 minutes of their teaching.

Questions are potentially powerful linguistic forms. Various studies have established that powerful speakers, such as teachers, doctors use more questions than less powerful speakers.

Questions have a particularly important role in language use. They are used to demarcate roles such as those of more expert and non-expert. But when they are used primarily to draw others into conversation, to minimize expert status, and to affirm the importance of the group rather than the individual as the teacher, then questions are a powerful tool for promoting connection. (Coates 1996:201) Questions are also a useful resource for minimizing social distance, therefore questions are a way of expressing solidarity and connection.

So according to the results, female teachers' more question usage than their male partners indicate their tendency to express solidarity and to encourage their students to contribute to the discussion and generate explanatory talk which is favoured by educators as most beneficial to learning (Barnes 1976; Barnes and Todd 1977; Marland 1977; Atkin 1978; Cazden 1987).

Rhetorical Questions: According to the results, male teachers used rhetorical questions more than female partners (20-9). In asymmetric discourse as in classroom interactions, rhetorical questions are used by teachers in order to repeat, to remind or to explain something to students. Teachers, by means of this device attract the attention of students for a certain period of time and keep them in alert position. The essential function of rhetorical questions is to check the taken-for-grantedness of what is being said. For students no time is left for an answer.

Consequently male teachers' more rhetorical question usage than their female partners can be an indication of men's tendency to maintain and increase their authority by keeping students attentive and alert to the lesson.

First Person Plural Usage : As for the first person plural usage, I can say that both of the genders used approximately the same amount (76-70). This may not appear as a surprise when we think of involvement with students in normal classes. But, the peculiarity of the department, which is concerned with the mentally disabled people's education plays a very important role. Beside the lessons in the department, the students start to work also in private establishments in an early stage of their education. This means that they start to deal with the mentally disabled children as student teachers. And this also helps them to become practical in handling the cases that they come across.

During their academic education in the department, they share their experiences and views with their teachers, and this relationship is the professional solidarity which holds them together. By means of the first person plural usage, teachers show their involvement with their future colleagues, therefore this usage is used in real sense in this department.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, I can say that female teachers, by using more questions than male teachers in the classroom, tried to maintain and increase solidarity with their students while male teachers, by using more rhetorical questions than their female partners, tried to emphasize their power and status in the classroom. However, the first person plural usage used approximately in equal amounts by both genders, emphasize the professional solidarity between the teachers of both genders and students. As a result, this shows that this usage is not a habitual usage that teachers normally use in their classes, but it is the indication of professional solidarity that the teachers of Mentally Disabled Education Department share with their student teachers. So, I can say that although there are differences of power-solidarity relationship of teachers with their students in their interactions depending on gender differences, because of the peculiarity of the subject matter of Mentally Disabled Department, the professional solidarity can be considered as having an important role in teacher interactions.

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