CLASSROOM POWER AND WAYS OF SUBVERTING IT

Mihaela Beschieru

Transilvania University of Brașov, Eroilor Boulevard, No. 29, Brașov, 500036, Romania

Abstract

This paper focuses on power relations between teachers and students, on how they express and experience power in classroom interaction. The concept of power is defined as both teachers' and students' opportunities and capabilities to acquire control of a situation. The main objectives of the study are: to identify the power distribution patterns which appear in classroom interaction, to illustrate the discourse strategies employed by the teachers in order to exercise power, and to present forms of students' resistance. In order to reach these objectives audio-recorded classroom interactions have been used; these recordings include five different school subjects (Romanian language and literature, English, History, Biology, Chemistry) from a Romanian school. The transcriptions of these audio-recordings constitute the data which are analysed based on Mei-Yee Wong's (2015) patterns of teacher-student interactions together with Mary Phillips Manke's (1997) characteristics of direct and indirect discourse strategies used by the teachers in the classroom. These two approaches to classroom power relations are adapted to the data. Thus, there are two patterns of interaction, namely: teacher domination pattern and power sharing pattern. The former pattern is associated with the teachers' use of direct discourse strategies (among which I include the use of directives, the use of 'I' vs. 'you', and criticism); the latter pattern is associated with indirect discourse strategies (such as politeness formulas, inclusive 'we', attribution, humour/sarcasm, and small talk). Interruptions, lack of interest, silence, off-task chatting are identified as forms of students' resistance in the classroom. The conclusions indicate that power distribution in classroom interaction is currently changing as compared to more traditional classes.

Keywords: *teacher-student power relations, power distribution patterns, direct discourse strategies, indirect discourse strategies, students' resistance*

1. INTRODUCTION

When considering power in the classroom, the most common belief is that the teacher is the one who has it. The term 'power' is usually associated with negative and unequal human relationships rather than with positive aspects. But power represents more than teachers' authority and control. There are different approaches to the analysis of power in the classroom, such as: technical (which refer to identifying certain techniques that ensure a proper balance between teacher and student power), organizational (analysing power at macrolevel, how power functions in school as an institution), ideological (revealing racist practices of schooling and providing alternative pedagogies that change classroom power relations), empowering (shifting the balance of power in educational systems and institutions) (Gore 1995, p. 77).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Concepts of power

'Power' is a term used in a wide variety of academic disciplines. It is a complex concept and it is difficult to provide a comprehensive definition of it. According to the online Oxford Learner's Dictionary of Academic English power is perceived as the control, influence or authority someone has over other people:

> The ability to control people or things; the ability or opportunity to do something or to act in a particular way; the right or authority of a person or group to do something; strength or influence in a particular area of activity; the influence of a particular thing or group within society etc.

There are three main classical schools of sociological thought: the functionalist theory, the conflict theory and the interpretative theory. Each of these theories has different views on power; the functionalist theory perceives power as "the capacity to do something", while the conflict theory views it as "the opportunity to resist others" (Wong 2015, p. 2). While for the functionalist theorists power is a resource (not a personal possession) used by people to achieve efficiency and to maintain social order, for the conflict theorists power is produced when an individual achieves a certain goal and it is associated with the concept of resistance (having power over someone or something). Max Weber (1978) states that dominant groups use *power to control* minority groups while minority groups use *power to resist* dominant groups' control (Weber 1978 quoted in Wong 2015, pp. 2-3) (my emphasis). In contrast, the interpretative theory focuses on microlevel interactions between people in a group rather than on a macrolevel. From an interpretative perspective, power is neither a social resource, nor the property of any dominant group; it is the means by which an individual actively takes part in and shapes society. Consequently, the exercise of power is seen as a cooperative activity among individuals. This view on power is adopted in this paper.

Michel Foucault analyses the concept of power in terms of microlevel human relations, stressing its ubiquity and complexity:

> Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere (...) power is not an institution, and not a structure, neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. (Foucault 1981, p. 93)

In Foucault's view, power is exercised and experienced rather than possessed; it exists in action and it circulates from one individual to another, inserting itself into people's actions, attitudes or discourses. For him, it is not necessarily important what power is or where it comes from; he finds more significant the ways in which power is exercised and its effects. Foucault brings a new perspective on the productive dimension of power, i.e. what power produces.

> Power is not only negative, ruling, prohibiting, censoring, and uniform domination, but also positive, productive, and creative. (Foucault 1980 quoted in Simola et al. 1998, p. 68)

Similar to Weber, Foucault links the concept of power and that of resistance, in the sense that he perceives the latter as a possible result of the former. Resistance is a reaction to the exercise of power. It is due to resistance that power is never able to completely control things. Although Foucault's ideas offer a deeper insight into power relations, his theory has been criticised for being too abstract and lacking empirical analysis.

2.2. Classroom power relations

Power can be seen as "a structure of relationships" jointly built by teachers and students (Manke 1997, p. 1). Following Foucault's ideas, power relations are "simultaneously local, unstable, and diffuse, not emanating from a central point but each moment moving from one point to another in a field of forces" (Deleuze 1988 quoted in Gore 1995, p. 84). Two major types of power relations can be identified in the classrooms, namely: *power conflict* and *power sharing* between the teachers and the students. As the name suggests, power conflicts contain both conflictual and resistant forms of power. Power conflicts between teachers and students are reflected in the roles they play and in the strategies they employ. The conflicts between teachers and students arise from their different interests and aims. For instance, a teacher's purpose can be teaching his/her students the curriculum, whereas the students can be interested in their own private lives. In such a situation both teachers and students exercise power to influence the other and to achieve their own purposes. This may further affect the transmission of knowledge and students' learning. However, teacher-student relationship is not merely a conflictual one; there can also be cooperation and negotiation between teachers and students. In other words, alongside power conflict, power sharing is another key concept in teacher-student power relations. In power sharing, power circulates between teachers and students. Although teachers generally have more power than students, power sharing creates opportunities for students to exercise power. Bringing new practices into the classroom, recognising students' ownership over their ideas, making them active participants in their learning process are all methods of empowering students. Teacher-student power sharing constitutes the

basis of student empowerment. Student empowerment occurs when teachers afford students the possibility of developing a degree of power. Empowering practices such as cooperative learning, group/pair work, peer assessment lead to a greater degree of autonomy and make students take more responsibility over their own learning. Empowerment increases students' confidence in their abilities, as well.

2.2.1. Power strategies employed by teachers and students

Strategies have been defined as repeatable patterns of action which are intended to help an individual achieve his/her objectives or protect his/her interests (Wong 2015, pp. 6-7). There are many sociological studies which focus on the conflictual power relationship between teachers and students and fewer studies which focus on power sharing strategies between teachers and students. Andrew Pollard (1985), for example, identifies four types of teacher's power and control strategies used in the classroom: open negotiation (i.e. establishing a working consensus), routinisation (setting things in a specific order), manipulation (controlling students' actions in order to achieve teachers' goals) and dominance (in the form of threats and commands against students) (Pollard quoted in Wong 2015, p. 7). Others consider that talking and teaching are the only control strategies employed by teachers in the classroom (Delamont 1983 quoted in Wong 2015, p. 7). Students' strategies, on the other hand, are seen as a reaction to teachers' power and control strategies. These 'counter-strategies' usually imply a decrease in teachers' power and an increase in students' power. Some of these strategies are: lack of participation, indifference, disruption etc.

Jennifer M. Gore's studies (1995, 1998) focus exclusively on the strategies employed by the teachers and examine the teacher-student power relations based on Foucault's theory. She identifies eight teacher techniques of power: surveillance (supervising), normalisation (conforming to a standard), exclusion (from a standard), classification (differentiating individuals), distribution (arranging in space), individualisation (students' individual characters), totalisation (students as a group), regulation (controlling by rule) (for further details see Gore 1998, pp. 235-245 or Gore 1995, p. 81). Teachers resort to such techniques in their teaching process and in most of the cases these techniques occur in combination, demonstrating the unstable and diffuse characteristics of power. Surveillance and regulation are more direct and overt techniques while the others are more subtle and covert. Gore demonstrates that these covert techniques are more frequently used in the classroom. Her studies are valuable in the sense that she manages to demonstrate Foucault's theory about the ubiquity of power using empirical data.

2.2.2. Patterns of teacher-student classroom interactions

Power circulates in the classroom, but the exercise of it is not equal for all participants. Most exercises of power occur between teachers and students, rather than between particular students. Mei-Yee Wong (2015) identifies three modalities of power distribution: Pattern I – Teacher domination, Pattern II – Relatively balanced opportunities for power sharing, Pattern III – Student self-empowerment. Her model is adapted from Webster, Beveridge, and Reed's framework (Webster et al. 1996 quoted in Wong 2015, p. 15).

Pattern I – Teacher domination is characterised by teachers exercising more power than students. There are three basic features of this pattern: teachers' strict implementation of classroom rules, inflexible adherence to lesson plans, and students' obedience to these rules and teaching plan. The teacher-student power relation within this pattern is characterised by teachers' and students' roles and power strategies and by the connection between teacher domination and student disempowerment. In this regard, teachers act as *rule-* and *textbook-enforcers* and they use *manipulation strategies* in managing students' behaviour and teaching. On the other side, students' act as *rule-* and *learning-followers*, adopting a *strategy of compliance*. The employment of this pattern leads to students' disempowerment by reducing their opportunity and capability to manage their learning. Teachers' domination enhances their coercive power in classroom teaching. On the whole, this pattern reveals an imbalanced, unequal teacher-student power distribution in which teachers dominate classroom management and teaching.

Pattern II –Relatively balanced opportunities for power sharing is characterised by a greater degree of power being shared almost equally between teachers and students. It involves a relatively balanced

teacher-student power distribution as a result of their cooperation. The main features of this pattern are: teachers' facilitation of students' learning through appropriate support and guidance and increased student engagement in and responsibility for their learning. Teachers employing this pattern act as *learning-facilitators* and adopt a *strategy of intentionally giving-power* to students. This shared power is a situational type of power, different from the positional or personal power exercised in pattern I. Once students are given more opportunities to exercise power, they become *learning-partners* using a *strategy of cooperation*. Greater student involvement results in more student empowerment, which is reflected in student-centered teaching.

Pattern III – Student self-empowerment is characterised by a high degree of student power and a low degree of teacher power. Other features of this pattern are: minimal teacher involvement in student learning and students' acquisition of self-management skills. In pattern III, teachers act as *learning-assistants* and resort to a *strategy of passive support*, allowing students the space and freedom to learn through experience and collaboration. In consequence, students play the role of *masters of learning* and use a *self-governance strategy*, taking control of and responsibility for their entire learning process. All these factors lead to student self-empowerment (for further details on the three power distribution patterns see Wong 2015, pp. 47-84).

Mei-Yee Wong (2015) concludes that teacher-student power relationships are "a reflection of multileveled intertwined interactions" (p. 85). They are influenced by various factors, players and forces and are reflected either in student empowerment and teacher-student collaboration, or in student disempowerment as a result of teacher domination. An interesting observation, though, is the fact that student empowerment and disempowerment usually coexist in all three power patterns and, what is more, these patterns can appear in a single class alternating from one power pattern to another. A possible explanation for this phenomenon can be the fact that:

> teachers want to use sufficient power to teach but, at the same time, do not want to influence students in a negative way (…) teachers are aware of the risk and try to balance classroom order with giving students space. (Wong 2015, p. 92)

Teachers and students employ different approaches to interact with each other; they play different roles and use different strategies (as previously mentioned). This fact is a proof of the complexity of teacher-student exchanges.

2.3. Linguistic realisations of power

Power can be expressed linguistically and an individual can exercise or experience power in discourse; someone's speech in a certain situation can be interpreted as an effect of power. Power functioning at microlevel (for instance, in teacher-student interactions) usually remains invisible unless carefully studied. Teachers usually disguise their authority using *indirect discourse strategies*, such as: politeness formulas, indirect speech acts, inclusive 'we', humour, praising desired behaviour rather than criticising undesired behaviour, stating general principles of behaviour instead of scolding, correcting students' behaviour unobtrusively, asking for students' opinion and offering them choices. Politeness strategies include: using questions instead of commands, using statements showing preference, using requests (with 'please', 'thank you', 'excuse me') and conditional clauses (Manke 1997, pp. 77-78). Some teachers may use indirect strategies when it comes to correcting students' behaviour and direct strategies when referring to students' learning. Among the *direct discourse strategies* we mention the use of control statements and of threats, the distinction between 'I' – the teacher and 'you' – the students, and criticism.

2.4. Ways of subverting power – students' resistance

Power has been frequently related to the notion of resistance, which is defined as contesting or struggling for power. Resistance manifests itself in a multitude of ways; speech (someone's own way of speaking) can be interpreted as a form of resistance. Students' strategies of subverting power may refer to: students conflicting with designed activities to limit their responses (pretended misunderstandings, wiggling silently, withdrawing attention, commenting loudly or silently, moving around the classroom etc.); students rejecting the teacher's assumptions; students assuming roles that conflict with teacher's

expectations; students taking over the floor (Manke 1997, pp. 107-117). The teacher may sanction such behaviour or ignore it. In language classes, for instance, teachers can cut off students' talk by not responding at all to what is said, by insisting that correct vocabulary be used, or by responding to grammatical form not content. In this way teachers control students' responses without challenging the validity of what they say or their right to speak (Barnes 1992 quoted in Manke 1997, p. 157).

All these strategies represent students' direct contributions to the construction of power relationships. By using these strategies students somehow force the teacher to be more direct, to overtly reveal his/her power, so that they could oppose or challenge it. Students' oppositional actions are "a common legitimate mode of expression and reaction in the classroom" (Alpert 1991, p. 363). Bracha Alpert (1991) is interested in subtle forms of resistance such as alienation from learning, rejection of the contents and skills taught, and criticism of the knowledge and values transmitted by the school. She further identifies modes of resistance among which mention is made of reluctant participation (silence and mumbling) and arguing (disagreeing with the teacher or as a potential distraction to learning) (Alpert 1991, pp. 354-356). Some of the factors which influence student resistance in the classroom are the teaching approach, the students' dissatisfaction with classroom instruction, or the gap between adolescent culture. Peter R. Grahame and David W. Jardine (1990) introduce the idea that playfulness is part of the youths' agenda in subverting the teacher's intentions. They interpret students' certain behaviour as 'playful' rather than 'resistant'. A differentiation between deviance as resistance (violent disruptions) and deviance as playfulness (jokes, pranks, ludic activity) is made. For them resistance refers to "forms of intentional opposition to the structure and function of schooling" (Grahame & Jardine 1990, p. 283). They also point out the importance of perspective in judging students' behaviour. For instance, what teachers may perceive as disruptive behaviour, students may find as natural behaviour. Thus, students talking to each other in class is not resistance from their perspective but "maintaining a degree of control over a preferred activity" (Corrigan 1979 quoted in Grahame & Jardine 1990, p. 285).

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1. Research questions

The research was guided by three main questions:

What patterns of power distribution appear in classroom interaction?

What discourse strategies are employed by the teacher to exercise power?

Which forms of students' resistance appear in the classroom?

3.2. Data description

The data include audio-recorded classrooms interactions for which I used my personal mobile phone connected to a high-quality microphone. I instructed the teachers how to record themselves and I left them alone with their students. I resorted to this strategy because I did not want to intrude and make the teachers and the students feel uncomfortable with my presence. The only exception to this approach was a History lesson, in which I participated at the request of the teacher, and my own English lessons.

The data were collected during the first semester of the 2019-2020 school year and the first semester of the 2020-2021 school year. The recordings vary in length. The teachers could decide to record how much they wanted from their lessons. Only the classes in which I was present were recorded from the moment the teacher greeted the students up to the stage when she ended the class. In this way, the longest recording is 46 minute long, while the shortest is 20. A number of 7 classes were recorded on different school subjects, such as: Romanian language and literature (1 class), English (2 classes), History (2 classes), Biology (1 class), Chemistry (1 class).

3.2.1. Transcription

Each audio-recording was transcribed verbatim using simple transcription conventions (see Appendix). Most of these transcription symbols are adapted from Eggins and Slade (1997). It should be noted that some of recordings which were in Romanian were translated into English.

3.2.2. Participants

There were five teachers (myself included) involved in this research. They were all female teachers with a teaching experience ranging from 10 years to 30 years or more. The decision of recording different teachers and different school subjects was justified by my aim to have a wider range of subjects and increase the validity of my study. As far as the students were concerned, a number of 92 students participated in this study their ages ranging from 12 to 17 years old. They were students from lower (20 students) and upper secondary school. All the students and the teachers are Romanians, English being a foreign language.

3.2.3. Ethical considerations

There are ethical issues to be considered when dealing with human participants in a research. In this regard, I obtained all the participants' written consent; I obtained the headmaster and the teachers' consent, as well as the parents' consent for the underage students. There were nine students whose parents did not want their children involved in the study. Their decision was respected and they were excluded from the transcriptions. I deliberately omitted transcribing these students' replies. All participants were informed that they could withdraw from the research whenever they wanted, and that their participation was not conditioned by any kind of benefits and/or costs. For instance, students should not claim higher marks if they agree to participate and the teachers should not be prejudiced against the students who do not participate. To protect the participants' identities, I did not use their real names in the analysis.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The present analysis relies on Mei-Yee Wong's (2015) patterns of teacher-student interactions combined with Mary Phillips Manke's (1997) characteristics of direct and indirect linguistic strategies used by the teacher in the classroom. By adapting these approaches to classroom power relations to the analysis of the data, I identified two main patterns of interaction. One pattern is characterised by the teacher's domination while the other reveals a tendency towards power sharing and empowerment. It is important to mention the fact that these two patterns are found in all the analysed lessons; there is no lesson which is entirely (from the beginning to the end) dominated by the teacher, as there is none exclusively based on cooperation. The pattern characterised by student self-empowerment does not appear in the data. In the last part of my analysis, I exemplify modes of students' resistance as they occur in the data.

4.1. Pattern I – Teacher domination

According to the data, this is the most common pattern of teacher-student power relations. The lessons observing this pattern develop according to a similar structure: they begin with a revision or consolidation stage for what has previously been taught, and continue with the teaching of new information. The teacher is the one who controls the topic choice, the succession of the lesson's stages, the turn-taking system and the amount of talk. The teachers also control the students and their learning using direct discourse strategies. In the following section, I will exemplify some of these strategies using extracts from the data.

4.1.1. Directives

The use of directives is quite common in classroom interaction. They usually appear in the teachers' instructions and explanations to support the students when they solve a task, for instance. See the following examples:

(1) Read the task to see what we have to do.

(2) Trebuie să completați spațiile punctate.

'You have to fill in the empty spaces.'

(3) Ia ziceți (...) aveți datele problemei. sunt date pe tablă. doar că trebuie să le selectați.

'Tell me (...) you've got the pieces of information. they're on the board. you just have to select them.'

When there are no volunteers for solving a task or answering a question, the teacher calls upon a random student regardless of that student's willingness to answer. In giving the floor and nominating different students, teachers use commands such as:

(4) 'Ia să-mi spună X.'

'Let X tell me.'

(5) Ia să vedem cine să răspundă (2) X.

'Let's see who should answer (2) X.'

Some of the teachers address the students by their last names which denotes social distance; others do not remember students' names or mistake them as in the following example:

(6) T: deci ce e digestia, X? sau cum te cheamă?

S: Y.

T: Y.

Ss: (râsete)

S: a::prelucrarea hranei?

T: so what is digestion, X? or what's your name?

S: Y.

T: Y.

Ss: (laugh)

S: a:: food processing?

We can see in example (6) that the teacher immediately notices something is wrong about the name and she directly asks the student to give her last name. The student complies, tells the teacher her last name, but she probably feels embarrassed judging by the other students' laughter and her hesitation when giving the answer. She is not sure about her answer as we can see from her rising intonation, which indicates that she needs the teacher's confirmation.

4.1.2. I vs. you

The clear differentiation between 'I – the teacher' and 'you – the students' represents another strategy of asserting authority and also distancing from the students. Examples (7) and (8) reveal the unequal power distribution in terms of knowledge. The teacher's superiority, as the one who possesses more knowledge (in this chemistry lesson) can be seen. The students are addressed as the ones with less knowledge, as the ones who need to study the same as the teacher used to.

(7) Mi-încercuiesc, mi-i fac colorați (alcanii) (3) eu v-am arătat (.) când am făcut ora (.) online. ă:: ați văzut că eu eram cu culori. și vă arătam. învățați-vă și voi tot așa.

'I circle them, I colour them (the alkanes) (3) I have shown you (.) in our online lesson (.) a:: you've seen I had coloured pencils. and I showed to you. you have to get used to that in the same manner.'

(8) Și-mi explici și mie așa cum ți-am explicat eu.

'Explain to me in the same way I've explained to you.'

4.1.3. Criticism

Scolding students and criticising their behaviour is another way of implementing classroom rules and a certain lesson plan. In the following two examples, we can see the teacher's frustration in her critiques related to the students' lack of interest in reading a novel.

(9) A fost captivant? de aceea nu l-ai citit pe tot că a fost ATÂT de captivant încât nu știai cum să:: (.) scoți cămașa.

'It was thrilling? that's why you didn't read it all because it was SO thrilling that you didn't know how to:: (.) get away.'

(10) Două planuri narative. e singurul lucru care ar fi putut să vă dea așa (.) puțin de furcă la lectură (.) într-adevăr. este destul de amplu. dar v-ați asumat și ați venit la filologie. iar filologia presupune ȘI lectura.

'Two narrative perspectives. that's the only thing that could have raised some (.) difficulties for you in reading (.) indeed. it is quite bulky. but you took responsibility when you came to philology. and philology means reading AS WELL.'

In example (9) the teacher reproaches a student for not reading the whole novel and she is also ironic when expressing her disbelief of the student who claims that the novel was a captivating reading. In example (10) the same teacher addresses the whole class when she tries to understand the students' lack of interest. The fact that it was a bulky novel with two narratives perspectives could have been the main reasons why the students did not read it. However, in the teacher's opinion these were not plausible excuses because it was the students' choice to study philology and they were supposed to be interested in reading.

4.2. Pattern II – Power sharing

Not all the analysed lessons follow the teacher domination pattern (pattern I); even in the lessons where pattern I predominates, there are still instances of power sharing. In other words, these two power distribution patterns intertwine in classroom interaction. This phenomenon demonstrates the fact that power is not stable, exclusively owned by the teachers; power in the classroom can be negotiated and shared between the teachers and the students in order to fulfil a common goal, i.e. student learning and empowerment. In the next section, I present some indirect discourse strategies used by the teacher to diffuse their legitimate power and transfer it to students, allowing them to express their opinions, letting them acquire control over their own learning process.

4.2.1. Politeness formulas

Politeness strategies are frequently used by the teachers to maintain cooperation and a good learning environment. All the lessons from the data include polite requests with 'please'. In example (12), the teacher's polite request disguises a critique of a student's incorrect way of solving a certain task. We can infer that it was not the first time students made that mistake, and the teacher prefers to express her reproach in a polite way in order not to sound too harsh.

(11) Vă rog să scrieți următoarea aplicație.

'Please write the following exercise.'

(12) Te rog frumos nu mai pune ca indice.

'Please do not write them as index numbers anymore.'

Using questions instead of commands is another strategy used by teachers to disguise their authority. In example (13), we can see how the teacher 'invites' the students to answer before naming them directly:

(13) Cine îmi spune și mie o definiție (.) să zicem (.) a dinților?

'Who can give me a definition (.) let's say (.) for the teeth?'

Such questions mitigate the teacher's authority, giving students the impression that they can actually choose when to answer. This strategy offers the students the possibility of expressing their ideas if they want to. Teachers also thank their students after they provide a good answer or when they come up with an interesting idea or suggestion. In example (14), the teacher thanks a student, in the name of the whole class, for providing a relatively easy answer. After the teacher's disappointment because of the students' lack of cooperation, a good answer may trigger this kind of appreciation. This could be the reason why the teacher is so thankful in this particular context.

(14) Mulțumim, X.

'We thank you, X.'

4.2.2. Inclusive 'we'

If pattern I is characterised by the use of personal pronouns 'I' and 'you' to show a clear-cut difference between teachers and students and an imbalanced power distribution, in pattern II there are many occurrences of the personal pronoun 'we' which is inclusive, meaning that both the teacher and the students act as one entity. The use of inclusive 'we' is a common strategy in teaching. The teacher positions herself at the same level as the students, as if she is one of them and they are all together involved in the process of learning. This strategy induces the idea that both the teacher and the students have the same goal and they exercise the same level of power in achieving that goal. There are many examples in this respect; they can be encountered in every stage of a lesson, from the beginning to its end. Examples such as *Let's write/think/see/provide* and their Romanian counterparts are illustrative in this regard. Other examples are:

(15) Vom ajunge la concluzia că (...)

'We will draw the conclusion that (…)'

(16) Noi le-am făcut ora trecută dacă mai ți-aduci aminte.

'We studied them (some phrases) last class if you remember.'

(17) Plante insectivore le zicem.

'We call them insectivorous plants.'

In the above examples, we can see that the teachers take part in students' activities, task-solving, thinking process and they adopt an equal power position which leads to cooperation and to students' empowerment.

4.2.3. Attribution

Empowering students may also occur when teachers attribute value to the students' ideas. Teachers reiterate what students say for learning purposes, but also to validate or recognise a student's good answer or idea. Formulations such as *X said/added* are very common in this regard:

(18) Și a completat X omniscientă și omniprezență.

'And X added omniscience and omnipresence.'

(19) Arată exact ce a spus X. că viața merge mai departe.

'It shows exactly what X said. that life goes on.'

The next examples are slightly different in the sense that there is 'collective attribution'. This time the ideas are attributed to the whole class (example 20) or to some of the students (example 21).

(20) Roman obiectiv. ați spus voi.

'Objective novel. you said.'

(21) Așa cum am vorbit mai devreme. și-au spus colegii voștri. opera e structurată pe două?

'As we have mentioned earlier. and your classmates said. the literary work is divided into two?'

Giving students ownership over their ideas boosts their confidence. It is important to mention that the teacher uses this kind of strategies only when the students' answers are correct or pertinent to the topic of discussion. It is a good opportunity of demonstrating to the other students that they can also come up with great ideas, they can also possess valuable knowledge.

4.2.4. Humour and sarcasm

There were several instances which caused students' laughter and relaxed the atmosphere, especially in those classes where the teachers were more authoritarian. For instance, when the lesson is interrupted by a student who enters the classroom by mistake, he apologises and the teacher replies:

(22) E ok. e pandemie.

'It's ok. it's pandemic.'

The fact that the teacher justifies the student's confusion as due to the pandemic (referring to the Covid-19 pandemic) makes the other students in the classroom laugh. Another funny moment occurs during the chemistry lesson when a student tells the teacher that her classmate, who was solving an exercise at the board, miscounted. The teacher's reply, after checking the results, is meant to be a joke, but at the same time, she draws students' attention to be careful when calculating:

(23) Dacă aude doamna de matematică ne lasă corigenți.

'If your maths teacher finds out about this she fails us in the semestrial exam.'

Example (24) starts with the teacher's sarcastic remark about a student's basic knowledge of the alphabetical order. The student was supposed to write ethyl and then isopropyl in their alphabetical order, but she forgets about the former and starts with the latter. The teacher 'accuses' her of not knowing the Romanian alphabet and continues with memories about her primary school teacher. The whole reply is slightly exaggerated, but the student is not intimidated by that, on the contrary, she immediately acknowledges her mistake; she corrects herself and explains to the teacher that she has simply forgotten about the ethyl. The teacher's choice of correcting the mistake indicates the teacher's support and sympathetic attempt to make this student as well as the others pay more attention to details.

(24) T: băi tu știi alfabetul?

S1: ce?

T: alfabetul limbii române (.) nu englez (.) nu::

S1: de ce? ce-am făcut?

S2: scrie mai întâi etilul.

T: n-ai și etilul?

S1: ah, da::

T: eu așa am învățat. așa m-a învățat pe mine doamna învățătoare. că e-ul e înaintea i-ului. /poate că s-o fi schimbat că suntem într-un mare fel./

S1: /am uitat, doamna, că am și etil./

T: girl, do you know the alphabet?

S1: what?

T: the Romanian language alphabet (.) not the English one (.) not the::

S1: why? what have I done?

S2: first you have to write the ethyl.

T: don't you have ethyl, as well?

S1: oh, yes::

T: this is what I learnt. this is what my primary school teacher taught me. the fact that the letter 'e' is before the 'i'. /maybe this has changed in the meantime cuz everything is possible nowadays./

S1: /I simply forgot, teacher, about the ethyl./

4.2.5. Small talk

Among other strategies intended to create a friendly atmosphere in the classroom is the use of small talk. It does not appear frequently in the data, but I include an illustrative example for the Covid-19 pandemic.

(25) T: nu te mai freca la ochi.

S: mă mănâncă foarte rău și::[neclar]

T: păi nu. dezinfectează-te pe mâini și după aceea te freci la ochi. pentru că prin ochi se transmite foarte ușor. el. virusul este masă grăsoasă. și se prinde foarte ușor pe mucoasă (...) și s-au produs modificări genetice (...)

T: stop rubbing your eyes.

S: it itches me badly and::[unclear]

T: not like that. first disinfect your hands and then rub your eyes. because it is transmitted through the eyes very easily. it. the virus is oily mass. and it sticks easily to the mucous membrane (...) and genetic mutations have appeared (...)

This small talk is not meant to relax the classroom atmosphere; it is a proof that, beyond lessons, grades, and curricula, teachers care about their students. The teacher also teaches the student how to protect herself from the virus, which she combines with transmitting content specific knowledge (the virus is oily mass).

4.3. Students' resistance

In the lessons analysed, some of the students' forms of resistance are visible, overt while other are more subtle and covert. In the following sections, I exemplify some of the most common strategies employed by the students in order to subvert the teacher's power. I interpret these strategies as forms of students' resistance.

4.3.1. Interruptions

Interruptions occur mostly in the teacher domination pattern when the teacher is controlling the topic of discussion. However, the data reveal that the older students usually comply with the teacher's authority, while the younger students do not. This is why younger students tend to interrupt more and they also produce overlapping speech, i.e. speaking at the same time with the teacher or with the other classmates. Interruptions and overlaps are not only impolite linguistic behaviour, but they are also strategies students use in order to make their voice heard, to draw the teacher's attention or to challenge the teacher. It is the students' method of claiming power under the 'mask' of paying attention to what the teacher is saying. There is one particular student – S1 in example (26) – who has developed his own way of interrupting by repeating either some words the teacher says or only the last syllables of those words. This student pays attention and when he finds the possibility to infer the next word the teacher is about to say, he does not hesitate. This strategy can be another way of challenging the teacher's authority by indicating that what is taught is not new.

(26) T: supranumele de AU-GUS-/TUS/

S: /**tus**/

T: și hai să vedem ce înseamnă? PREAmăritul (4) a:: să știți că acest supranume de Augustus face trimitere la luna au/gust/ (.) luna în care Octavian era născut /(2)/

S1: /**gust**/

S2: /și eu/

T: și:: vorbeam (.) a:: când am pus în discuție calendarul lui? Iulius /Cezar./

S1: /**Cezar**./

T: și vă spuneam. CÂND începea anul la romani? odată cu luna martie.

S2: da?

T: DA. și fiecare lună era închinată câte unui zeu (3) o să învățăm și exemple de zeități pentru că romanii au fost politeiști. adică au crezut în mai mulți zei.

T: the name of AU-GUS-/TUS/

S1: /**tus**/

T: and let's see what does it mean? the VENErated (4) a:: you have to know this title of Augustus refers to Au/gust/ (.) the month in which Octavian was born /(2)/

S1: /**gust**/

S2: /me too/

T: a::nd we were discussing about this (.) a:: when we mentioned the calendar of? Julius /Caesar./

S1: /**Caesar**./

T: and I told you. WHEN did the year begin for the Romans? starting with March.

S2: really?

T: YES. and each month was dedicated to a god (3) and we shall learn examples of deities because the Romans were polytheists. meaning they believed in many gods.

We can see in example (26) how the teacher is constantly interrupted by the two students. The overlapping speech, even though brief (see the repetition of the bold syllables and single words), should have not occurred at those points. The teacher is not allowed to finish her ideas; thus, the flow of the presentation is discontinued which makes it harder for the teacher to resume, as indicated by her pauses and hesitations. However, the students' inferences do not always coincide with what the teacher is about to say. In example (27), the teacher corrects the student's wrong assumption providing further explanations to make sure everybody understands the idea. This student's inopportune intervention puts him in a delicate position – that of losing face. In example (28), the same student adds another comment. To not lose face this time, the teacher repeats the student's exact words – *the biggest* – which validates his answer.

(27) T: ATENȚIE. nu-și permiteau toți să::/și construiască/ (2)

S: /să se spele/

T: NU! se spălau. dar nu toți aveau baie acasă, cum avem noi.

(about the Roman public baths)

T: pay ATTENTION. not all of them could afford to::/build/ (2)

S: /to wash themselves/

T: NO! they did wash themselves. but not all of them had a bath at home, as we have.

(28) T: și nu un împărat oarecare, ci CEL mai /important/ (2)
S: /cel mai mare/
T: cel mai mare (.)

T: and he was not an ordinary emperor, but the MOST /important/ (2)
S: /the biggest/
T: the biggest (.)

4.3.2. Lack of interest

Another form of students' resistance is showing lack of interest in school matters. An illustrative example of this phenomenon is the literature lesson in which the students were supposed to have read a novel. The teacher's entire teaching process was based on the assumption that the students would read that novel and she will be able to elicit from them the main features of that literary work. But, at the beginning of the lesson, the teacher discovers that very few students accomplished their task: the majority did not read at all, others just a few pages, and only a couple of students (6 out of 33) read the whole novel. Moreover, when those students who read the novel are asked whether they like it or not, some of them state they did not enjoy the reading – a situation which amazes the teacher. Another sequence which reveals lack of interest occurs during the English class when a student changes his place, moving from one desk to another:

(29) T: why are you sitting there in the middle of the row? mmm?

S: [unclear]

T: please. have a seat.

S: n-am ce-mi trebuie. 'I don't have what I need.'

T: why not?

S: am uitat cartea acasă. 'I forgot my book at home.'

T: and the notebook?

S: trebuia să vină X (.) și facem cu schimbul. o zi eu. o zi el. și n-a venit. 'X was supposed to come (.) and we take turns. one day my turn. the next day his. and he didn't come.'

T: ok. but (.) what about your NOTEbook? (3) caietul? 'the notebook?'

S: aa::

T: WHERE is your notebook? and have a seat (.) PLEASE (.) somewhere (.) not there (.) in the middle of the room (5) ok. and now (.) let's continue (2) stay there (2) you can come here.

S: lăsați. 'leave it ma'am.'

This episode reveals the student's improper behaviour which is ultimately perceived as impolite by the teacher, but normal by the student. Although the student sounds apparently polite in trying to justify his acts, his overall behaviour during the class is highly impolite. Let us consider the wider context: a couple of minutes before this exchange sequence, the student has moved his chair to join two other classmates without the teacher's permission; they start chatting while the other students are doing a speaking exercise. This is the moment when the teacher does not tolerate this behaviour anymore, she interrupts the activity and asks the student for an explanation. The teacher tells the student to take a seat in a free desk, but he refuses claiming that he does not have his coursebook. What the student actually implies is that the reason for sitting there, next to a classmate who has his book, is that he can look at the exercise from the coursebook. The student provides a lengthy explanation to justify the absence of the book (he

mentions his desk mate who was missing that day and who was in charge of bringing his book according to an agreement between the two of them). Not only had he left his book at home, but also his notebook, so he was not prepared at all for the English class. This denotes utter lack of interest in the subject. The student has no further comments to make, he probably realises the teacher is not convinced by his arguments and accepts to move to another place. The teacher points to a free seat somewhere in the back of the classroom but she soon realises there is a free seat in the front row, near the teacher's desk. Once again, the student refuses the second alternative using the word *lăsați* (*'leave it'* but used in the second person plural a form of politeness in Romanian). So, even though the student contests the teacher's idea of sitting in the front of the classroom, he submits to her suggestion, acknowledging her social status and power. After this episode, the lesson continues, peace is restored and the teacher gains all the students' attention. Another interesting remark is the fact that all these student's replies are in Romanian although he was supposed to speak in English. Using the mother tongue in an English class can also be interpreted as a form of resistance, as a form of asserting one's identity, or a way of not losing face due to poor knowledge of English.

4.3.3. Silence

Being silent when a teacher requests an answer has a twofold meaning: either the student does not know the answer or he/she is not willing to cooperate. There are situations when it can mean both lack of knowledge and resistance. The data reveal quite many silent moments in different stages of a lesson. Students are silent when teachers check their previous knowledge but also when teachers are trying to elicit some answers from them, make them think and infer some new pieces of information or ask for their opinion. This kind of situations, in which the teacher is willing to share power with the students and the students refuse that, can be considered a mode of resistance.

4.3.4. Chatting

The opposite strategy of being silent is off-task chatting. Some students are silent and refuse to get involved in the lesson activities, while others are too talkative and like chatting with their peers on different topics according to their preferences and interests. These chatting and off-task commentaries are disruptive for the teacher and even for the other students who pay attention and participate in the lesson. Usually teachers try to ignore this kind of behaviour, maybe because they do not want to interrupt the flow of the lesson or because they hope that it is only an evanescent episode. But when the level of noise is too high and the behaviour becomes repetitive, the teachers draws students' attention using polite requests such as:

(30) Can you please be more quiet?

The above example reveals that some students were talking with each other in the background, while the teacher was having a dialogue with other students who were participating in the classroom activities.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In the last part of my paper, I review my research questions and draw some conclusions based on the data, and I also mention some limitations of my study and the need for further research.

5.1. Reviewing the research questions

5.1.1. RQ1: What patterns of power distribution appear in classroom interaction?

There are two main power distribution patterns present in the data, namely one pattern in which the teacher domination prevails (pattern I) and another one in which power is shared between the teachers and the students (pattern II). In spite of the fact that these two patterns intermingle in the lessons analysed, pattern I is the most common pattern in the data. I summarise the two patterns in the following paragraphs.

In pattern I, power is seen as authority and control reflected in a microlevel teacher-student power relationship during classroom teaching and learning. When managing their classes, the teachers require students to be obedient; when teaching, they adopt a one-way kind of knowledge transmission. This

pattern is more obvious when teachers assess students, teach new content and give instructions. This pattern leads to student disempowerment, meaning that they are deprived of the opportunity to develop learning autonomy. Learners comply with the rules, follow the teacher's plan and rely on model answers, because they are requested to do so. Students' viewpoints are not accepted, being either ignored or discouraged. We can notice the reliance on textbooks and other teaching materials, and the pre-determined learning content established by the teacher. Students absorb this content rather than interpret it. They cannot develop their critical learning skills; they are simply passive learners, cooperating and accepting whatever they are taught. Teacher domination and manipulation strategies lead to student disempowerment. The main factors facilitating pattern I could be the traditional cultural respect for teachers, the curriculum content and the teachers' and students' personalities.

In pattern II, teachers facilitate students' learning, supervise them but they do not dominate the classroom. Students exercise power when expressing opinions. This pattern is characterised by an interactive teaching mode in which teachers offer explanations and instructions but at the same time let students share ideas and comments. Furthermore, there are many guided questions instead of direct instructions; these questions facilitate students' reflection and learning by exploring. Teachers also provide hints and feedback to support students in finding their own answers which further allow them to go beyond a superficial level of understanding. Teachers manage to create a pleasant classroom atmosphere in which students feel safe to raise questions and express their opinions. In terms of power distribution, teachers intentionally minimise the effect of their authority and give power to students by giving up control over classroom learning and by creating opportunities for students to manage their own learning.

5.1.2. RQ2: What discourse strategies are employed by the teacher to exercise power?

I have identified two main strategies used by the teachers to exercise power in the classroom: direct strategies and indirect strategies. The direct discourse strategies reveal the teacher's authority and domination in an overt manner. Hence, they represent a main feature of pattern I. The direct strategies identified in the data are: the use of directives; nomination – the use of students' last names; the use of the personal pronouns 'I' and 'you' in contradiction as a way of asserting authority and distancing from the students; criticism. On the other hand, the indirect discourse strategies used by the teachers are a feature of pattern II and are meant to mitigate authority and to create a relaxed atmosphere. Among these strategies I include the use of politeness formulas, attribution – giving students ownership over their ideas, small talk, humour and sarcasm.

5.1.3. RQ3: Which forms of students' resistance appear in the classroom?

The main forms of students' resistance which appear in the data are: interruptions, lack of interest, silence, and off-task chatting. Teachers interpret these students' attitudes as disrespectful, but to the students, they could be something normal or a good opportunity to draw attention, to express their feelings and/or identities. Resistance in all its forms is a form of students' struggle to counter teachers' authority. Can resistance be a form of student self-empowerment? My answer is no if the learning outcome is considered. Student empowerment leads to student learning, to the autonomy of learning and to critical thinking. In contrast, resistance does not lead to such outcomes. It is not an action taken in order to improve learning.

An important observation derived from the data is the fact that resistance appears not necessarily as a result of teacher domination but as a result of teacher power sharing. According to the data, teacher domination mostly leads to students' compliance, not resistance as we may be inclined to think. On the contrary, many forms of resistance identified in this study occur in the power sharing pattern. My explanation for this phenomenon is that not all the students in a classroom are willing to collaborate and improve their learning; some of them may have different goals and interests and they take advantage of the teacher's flexible style of teaching (probably seen as a flaw) and his/her willingness of sharing power. Once they take over that power they do not direct it towards their own learning and empowerment, but they transpose the power into resistant forms of expression. That is why teachers should be very careful regarding the way they exercise power. Teachers could look for ways to mitigate their legitimate power by doing things differently in the classroom. This may bring a change in

perspective, a change in how power is perceived. Understanding classroom power as jointly constructed may also bring along changes in how schooling is perceived. Sharing power/authority and providing options for the students may lead to a more positive view on schooling. Teachers, students and parents could perceive power not only in a negative way (as domination), but also in a positive way (productive and creative) that leads to student learning. Teachers as well as students are responsible for successful learning. Sharing and cooperating seem to be the key to an empowering education.

5.2. Limitations

There are both strengths and limitations related to this research paper. The relatively limited number of lessons analysed can be a drawback and the outcomes are limited in their generalisability to other students and classroom settings. I am aware that further research is required for a more comprehensive approach to classroom power. Power is an abstract notion and its complexity is not easy to be grasped in an analysis. For this reason, a more comprehensive approach to classroom power could include politeness and impoliteness strategies and the role of the evaluative language used in classroom interaction. Of course, other analysts may analyse and interpret classroom power in a different manner.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor who read the drafts and provided comments on the content of the paper. She offered me valuable guidance and feedback throughout my research. I am also grateful to all the students and the teachers who participated in this research and allowed me to record their classes. This paper would not exist without their help.

REFERENCES

Alpert, B 1991, 'Students' Resistance in the Classroom', *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, vol. 22, pp. 350-366.

Eggins, S & Slade, D 1997, *Analysing Casual Conversation*, Cassell, London and Washington.

Foucault, M 1981, *The history of sexuality: An introduction*, 1st American ed., translated by R Hurley, Pantheon Books, New York.

Gore, JM 1995, 'Foucault's Poststructuralism and Observational Education Research: A Study of Power Relations', in R Smith & P Wexler (eds), *After Postmodernism: Education, Politics and Identity*, The Falmer Press, London, pp. 77-89.

Gore, JM 1998, 'Diciplining Bodies: On the Continuity of Power Relations in Pedagogy', in TS Popkewitz & M Brennan (eds), *Foucault's Challenge: Discourse, Knowledge, and Power in Education*, Teachers College Press, New York, pp. 231-251.

Grahame, PR & Jardine, DW 1990, 'Deviance, Resistance, and Play: A Study in the Communicative Organization of Trouble in Class', *Curriculum Inquiry*, vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 283-304.

Manke, MP 1997, *Classroom Power Relations: Understanding Student-Teacher Interaction*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, New Jersey.

'Power' in *Oxford Learner's Dictionary of Academic English* [online], viewed 3 February 2021 <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/academic/power1>.

Simola, H, Heikkinen, S & Silvonen, J 1998, 'A Catalog of Possibilities: Foucaultian History of Truth and Education Research', in TS Popkewitz & M Brennan (eds), *Foucault's Challenge: Discourse, Knowledge, and Power in Education*, Teachers College Press, New York, pp. 64-90.

Wong, MY 2015, *Teacher-Student Power Relations in Primary Schools in Hong Kong*, Lexington Books, Lanham.

Appendix. Transcription conventions

Symbol	Significance
.	clause final falling intonation
?	clause final rising intonation
(.)	short hesitation within a turn (less than 2 seconds)
(2)	inter-turn pause longer than 1 second, the number indicating the seconds
//	the onset of overlapping speech
: :	lengthened syllables or vowels
‘’	translation
[unclear]	non-transcribable segments of talk
(words in between brackets)	further explanations
CAPITAL LETTERS	word stressed
T	teacher
S	student
Ss	students speaking at the same time