

## Students' use of power in Foreign Language classroom interaction\*

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### **Abstract**

This paper reports the findings of a study which targeted to explore the way as undergraduate students express and use power in classrooms. It also aimed at finding out the sources of students' power and their viewpoints about the issue. The population was two groups of prospective English teachers from the Modern Languages Program, at Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia. Direct classroom observation, a teacher's journal, and semi-structured interviews were the main sources for gathering information. The findings were grouped into four categories dealing with leadership, sources of students' power, the ideal type of power in classrooms, and some wrong assumptions about power.

**Key words:** classroom-interaction, collaborative learning, power sources, students' power relations, and types of power.

### **Uso del poder en la interacción de los estudiantes de Lengua Extranjera en el salón de clases**

#### **Resumen**

Este escrito relata los resultados de un estudio que tuvo por objeto explorar la manera como estudiantes de pregrado expresan y usan el poder en las aulas de clase. El estudio también intentó averiguar las fuentes de poder de los estudiantes y sus puntos de vista sobre el tema. Los participantes fueron dos grupos de futuros profesores de inglés del Programa de Idiomas Modernos de la Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia. Las principales fuentes para recolectar información fueron observación directa de clase, un diario del profesor y entrevistas semi-estructuradas. Los hallazgos fueron agrupados en cuatro categorías relacionadas con liderazgo, fuentes de poder en los estudiantes, el tipo ideal de poder y algunas creencias erróneas sobre el poder.

**Palabras clave:** interacción de clase, aprendizaje colaborativo, fuentes de poder, relaciones de poder entre estudiantes y tipos de poder.

## **Le pouvoir des apprenants dans l'interaction de classe en Langue Étrangère**

### **Résumé**

Cet écrit rapporte les résultats d'une étude qui a eu pour objectif celui d'explorer la forme comme les apprenants universitaires expriment et usent le pouvoir dans la salle de classe. Cette étude a tenté aussi de déterminer les sources de pouvoir des apprenants et leur point de vue sur le sujet. Les participants ont été deux groupes de futurs professeurs d'anglais, inscrits dans le programme de Langues Modernes de l'Université Pédagogique et Technologique de Colombie. Les principales sources de collectage d'information ont été : l'observation directe, un journal du professeur et des entretiens semi-structurés. Les découvertes ont été groupées en quatre catégories liées avec l'esprit d'initiative, les sources de pouvoir dans les apprenants, le type idéal de pouvoir et quelques fausses croyances sur le pouvoir.

**Mots clés:** interaction de classe, apprentissage collaboratif, sources de pouvoir, relations de pouvoir entre apprenants et types de pouvoir.

## **Uso do poder dos alunos na interação em aulas de Língua Estrangeira**

### **Resumo**

Este artigo relata os resultados de um estudo que teve como objetivo explorar como os alunos de graduação expressam e usam o poder na sala de aula. O estudo também tentou descobrir as fontes de poder dos alunos e as suas opiniões sobre o assunto. Os participantes formaram dois grupos de futuros professores de Inglês do programa de Línguas modernas da Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica da Colômbia. As principais fontes para a coleta de informações foram a observação direta em sala de aula, um diário do professor e entrevistas semi-estruturadas. Os resultados foram agrupados em quatro categorias relacionadas com a liderança, as fontes de energia nos alunos, o tipo ideal de poder e alguns equívocos sobre o poder.

**Palavras chave:** classe interação, aprendizado colaborativo, fontes de alimentação, as relações de poder entre os alunos e os tipos de poder.

*“Power and language are joined not only to promote learning, but also to promote social transformation since the members who are interacting in a specific context always share power”*

*(Freire, 1987, p. 19)*

## **Introduction**

In the social context of any society different types of social relationships take place, because of the social nature of human beings; thus, every person belongs to any type of group. Inside a group, a person behaves differently from the way he/she does outside it (Dörnyei and Murphey, 2003). Moreover, belonging to a group implies sharing common features and establishing different types of relationships with other members of the group, according to the role they play. In consequence, as told by Lench (2001), from these social interactions several natural power relationships in terms of gender, race, class, and ethnicity can emerge and be exercised spontaneously since power is a part of life and people need to have control of their lives and affairs.

Some people have the capacity to influence and control other's lives and minds. Others use power positively to build proposals that contribute to transform and improve life's quality (Manke, 1997). Yet, some other people can be using power to manipulate, take advantage, and oppress others, making these relationships inequitable. This double fold influence emerges from the type of social interactions experienced. Consequently, the social relationships people build day by day must become key contributors to achieve the quality of life they want. This educational, qualitative, case study precisely aimed at understanding the way power is used and manifested by students in the EFL classroom and its main importance lays on the construction of more tolerant classroom environments with equal opportunities for every learner.

There has certainly been research about power in the classroom such as the ones developed by Manke (1997), Knutson (2001), Ramos (2004), and Ortega (2005) among others; however, these studies have been focused on teacher-student or student-teacher power relations and do not emphasize the relevance of *power* exerted in the *student-student* interaction. These investigations do not state the students' power relations as one of the factors that can positively or negatively affect students' achievement, socialization, and development. What actually happens underneath those relationships among students is still rather ignored. That was another reason to encourage this type of classroom research and get a better understanding.

Furthermore, this study can be of great value to the preparation of prospective English teachers because they will help young people at schools to promote the construction of democratic and collaborative classrooms, too. The educators' role also includes the construction of strong socio-psycho-pedagogical relationships in order to handle classroom conflicts (transforming them into opportunities to negotiate) by encouraging interpersonal communication and cohesiveness in open and flexible environments. This can be achieved by implementing a praxis focused on critical pedagogy to foster critical and reflective thinking and coherent acting. Besides, the study can strengthen not only English language learning, but also can favor the pre-service teachers' attitudes toward their colleagues by constructing strong cooperative work nets. Finally, the promotion of democratic and friendly student-student relationships can become a means for maximizing social interaction, achieving sound development, and contributing to the improvement of integral education.

The main question of the study was: How is power manifested and used by some Modern Languages undergraduate students while interacting in the EFL classroom? The related questions were: What types of power can be observed and inferred from the interpersonal relationships among students in the classroom environment? What are the students' sources of power in the EFL classroom? And what are the students' perceptions about power and control in the classroom among them?

The current article has the following parts: introduction, methodology, findings, and conclusions.

## **1. Methodology**

The procedures to gather information in the study were direct class observation, field notes, audio-recording of some classes, an informal talk after classes, a teacher's journal, and a semi structured interview at the end of the process in order to complement the data and corroborate what had been observed in class. Next, these instruments will be described and connected to the study.

### **1.1 Classroom observation**

In the research, the observational procedure was as serious, systematic, and detailed as was possible. During the observations field notes were taken and an observation form was used. The main goals were to describe, firstly, the way the students interacted in small groups and with the whole class. Secondly, to explore the relationships that took place in two EFL classrooms in order to find out the way power was manifested and exercised among the students, and what the most remarkable sources of student-power were. The attention was focused on all power manifestations such as speech, glances, gestures, body language, feelings, expressions, attitude, actions, and other behaviors. However, I have to

mention that there were sessions when any power manifestations were found since the participants preferred to hide them rather than evidence them, due to the generalized and wrong conception of looking at power as something negative. This was why sometimes power became something subtle and almost invisible to perceive. In relation to this point, Zambrano (in Ortega, 2005) claims that power is exercised and expressed in different ways and uses thousands of faces in the classroom. Hence, sometimes power is visible, but others it is not as on occasions happened in the second stage of the research.

In the current study the observation was not structured since there was not a rigid format of observation. It involved three phases of direct classroom observation. The first phase consisted of observing with the specific function of piloting *observation* as one of the most appropriate instruments to gather data; the second one was to directly start observing the target population, and the third one was to observe some additional classes since while analyzing the data it was found that there was not enough information about power manifestations and more observation was needed to give the study more validity. Fortunately, it was counted on the valuable support and collaboration of a gentle cooperating teacher who allowed observing one of her courses where there were the same students observed previously.

### **1.2 Field notes**

In the research, the field notes were taken when observing classes in the subject Communicative Project III (CPIII). First, a narrative and the description about the development of the lessons were carried out. The goal was to register every aspect related to the students' attitudes, behaviors, performance, verbal and non-verbal language, and all the events dealing with relationships of power as they occurred in the classroom interaction. Second, comments, reflections, and the interpretation of the most relevant facts were also written (e.g. type of relationships among the students, reactions, classroom environment, and manifestations of power, any type of influence, participation, and so forth). Power was expressed through the levels of intonation, the language used, the way of speaking, and the way of addressing each other.

The students also expressed power through glances, gestures, smiles, body language, attitudes, behaviors, actions, resistance, and feelings (i.e. "I am", "I can", *¡no!*, "they looked upset", "he smiled at them", "forget it!", "no!", "their faces showed discomfort when he spoke", "they gave him a dirty look", "you are on the wrong place!", and so forth), as could be observed and heard in the classroom environment of the investigated groups. Power was also evidenced through practices (leadership) and attitudes (collaboration) as well. The field notes also included the notes taken after the informal talks conducted at the end of some classes. The field notes were numbered chronological and kept systematically.

### **1.3 Teacher's journal**

During the study, the teacher's journal was kept similarly to the field notes since all the events dealing with classroom interaction and power manifestations among the students were narrated and described. The reflections and interpretations about the students' use of power were registered in the comments as well. The journal was written immediately after the lesson finished and methods of introspection and reflection were used. The journal was carried out chronologically, keeping the same format of the field notes; that is, date, place, class or population, career, number of students, number of males, and number of females, topic, activity, and time. The informal talks with some students, conducted at the end of the class were also included in the journal.

### **1.4 Semi-structured interviews**

Bogdan (2003) highlights that the qualitative interview is the interpretation and re-interpretation of what the interviewees expressed and perceived about them and about classroom interaction. In this research, it was necessary first to conduct some informal talks immediately after the class was over in order to corroborate events occurred during the development of the lesson. This means that no list of questions was prepared in advance. These informal talks were not tape-recorded. The cooperating teacher was also interviewed occasionally to confirm and clarify some details and facts that had happened in classroom interaction about the relationships of power among the students.

When the term finished, the five students of both groups who had shown to have more influence over their classmates were interviewed through a semi-structured interview in Spanish (to avoid losing information) in order to know their own perspectives about power and control in the classroom. To choose these students it was taken into account the type of relationships they had been able to establish with their partners along the semester. That means that those students who had shown some type of influence or certain kind of power over their groups were the chosen. A list of questions dealing with the students' relationships, leadership, power, its sources, collaborative work, conflicts, classroom environment, and student-control among others, was prepared in advance. These interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed for the analysis of the information; special attention to the interviewees' tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, pauses when speaking and hesitation was paid, as well as to the students' behavior, attitude, and the way they expressed their ideas.

## **2. Findings**

Using techniques from Grounded Theory method (Corbin and Strauss, 1990) four categories emerged after having re-read, analyzed, compared, and contrasted the data. In

order to find common patterns, a code system was applied to the data. That code system was, at the beginning, in terms of reading the data and naming the most outstanding aspects as they were related to the research questions. Colors were used to codify the data and to help group the most common and repetitive information. Comparisons among the basic units of information like incidents and events found in the analysis were made in order to establish various concepts, which later became categories and subcategories according to their commonalities and relevance in the study.

Thus, the most outstanding types of power relationships found during the study were: **Collaborative power**, where there was mutual help and fair negotiation among the students to reach common goals. This type of power was evidenced through the use of persuasive strategies to gain followers (e.g. students n°. 6 and 7) and also as a source of support, mutual benefit, and reciprocal cooperation (e.g. student 8). **Referent power**, which was manifested through affinity and identification with the agent who exerted power, with the hope to receive a future benefit (e.g. Students n°. 6, 7, 20 and 21). **Expert power** which was attributed on the basis of knowledge (e.g. Students n°. 7 and 8). The last one was **legitimate power**, which was self-attributed or self-granted because of the role (e.g. student n°. 1).

## 2.1 Categories

The following categories emerged as a result of the data analysis: 1) Leadership as an evidence of relationships of power among students, 2) English proficiency as an important source of power and acceptance among students, 3) collaborative power as the ideal type of classroom relations of power (It refers to reciprocal power relationships of mutual benefit and positive influence), and 4) the wrong assumption of power as something bad. These categories give response to the research questions which deal with power manifestations, students' sources of power, types of power among students, and the students' perceptions about power and control. Next, the categories are introduced.

### 2.1.1 Leadership as evidence of relationships of power among students

After a careful analysis of the data, it was found that in the EFL classrooms studied, the power relationships among the students were manifested by means of attitudes and behaviors of leadership. Certain students attempted to achieve leadership in order to exert power by using different strategies that showed their personal strengths, abilities, proficiency in the foreign language, and the most outstanding features of their personality.

This category answers the main research question "How is power manifested and used by some Modern Languages undergraduate students while interacting in the EFL classroom? Since it was found that power among students was mainly evidenced through leadership. The most visible cases of leadership within the two groups studied were evidenced



in the attitude and behavior of student n° 1 (CPII) and student n° 6 (CPIII). In order to respect to confidentiality of the participants the names of the students were omitted and replaced by numbers.

Considering that the type of leadership that these two students exercised was different, the category was subdivided into two subcategories: Laissez-faire leadership (the person performs little leadership behavior) and democratic leadership (the person tries to share some of the leadership functions with the other members of the group; there is agreement in decision making, negotiation, dialogue, tolerance, respect and collaborative work). Next, both subcategories are presented with the description of each student's leadership characteristics, their manifestations of power, and finally the outcomes.

### **2.1.2 Laissez-faire leadership**

According to the leadership characteristics displayed by student n° 1, this case was categorized as Laissez-faire leadership. The student was not congruent in what he preached and what he did; he had a strong personality to impose ideas on others and influence them; he looked a little arrogant, he used to make himself noticeable, and was not a good example of academic commitment. This student manifested his power through a high degree of initiative to interact in class and take active part in discussions (good communicative competence); also his assertiveness, persuasive strategies, and daringness became other manifestations of power.

When it is said that student N°1 was incongruent it means that through his speech he preached autonomy, freedom, and self-determination to make decisions critically each time he could; this student invited the class to join him to revolution, to support students' strike, and fight for the university autonomy and the students' rights. Conversely, he missed lessons very often, failed in the delivery of assignments, and the presentation of work projects. Besides, when the term finished he quit. These facts made him to lose credibility inside the group. Additionally, his tone of voice, his attitude, his gestures and certain aggressive physical posture (body language) made him lose followers.

This is why these types of students are not liked by a group; if they do not gain affinity (Richmond and McCroskey, 1992), they are not accepted. According to Rogers (cited in Dörnyei and Murphy, 2003, p. 93) a leader must have three basic attributes: empathy, acceptance, and congruence. *Empathy* is the ability "to get into another person's skin and to gain a sense of what it is liked to be the other person" (p. 93). Student n° 1 could not achieve his goal because he was not sensitive to his group's atmosphere. *Acceptance* involves a non-judgmental, positive attitude towards others; unfortunately, student n° 1 could not achieve being completely accepted by all his classmates because of his lack of

congruency. Being *congruent* refers to the ability to live, be, and communicate according to one's true self; this involves being honest with himself and appropriately honest with others. In regard to being congruent, Hook and Vass (2000, p. 93) consider that "personal congruence is the ability to have the verbal and non-verbal language fully supported by personal beliefs and values".

The following extract of the teacher's journal corroborates something of the mentioned above when some classmates drop hints to student n°.1 in the middle of a class discussion about suicide.

Many people became revolutionaries and give their lives, but they don't get anything...they lose their time' said R. looking at H.- 'Yes, said C., we have to respect and take care of our lives and not to do unnecessary sacrifices to become martyrs' -'Aren't you Christians? Responded H. . . . ' Jesus Christ gave his life to save us!' 'That says everything! . H. looked very excited! In that moment, C. said to H.- 'no man, talk to me in Spanish because I want to speak '. H. answered him: -'no man, in English! . . . try to say it in English' and he looked at me . . . isn't that true teacher? C. gave him a dirty look and ignoring his words, he decided to speak in Spanish. (Student n°.1 is H.).

A leader, according to Palacio (2005), must fulfill what he says and must serve as an example and a model to follow. In this study, even though there was no coherence in student number one's actions, he tried to be polite and collaborative with his classmates in order to gain followers; nevertheless, most of his classmates did not follow, support, or accept him. Student n°.1 raised antagonism inside the group and some amount of friction among the students. This student did not gain the group's trust. Regarding this point, Blanchard (2005) asserts that there are three keys to achieve positive relationships: the build up of trust, the emphasis of positive aspects, and the re-direction of energy when mistakes are made. Student n°.1 was not able to establish a build up of trust in his group and for that reason he was not favored by the whole class and gained just few friends. This aspect can be evidenced in an observation taken from the teacher's journal:

I could perceive in the environment certain tension and disagreement against H's attitude. He was presenting his project and a great number of classmates looked at him in a different way from the others, like saying, "we don't like what you're doing, you're pretending to steal the show and the teacher's favor'. Finally, these students did not want to clap when the student finished his presentation. Their faces showed disagreement and certain boredom. They looked upset and annoyed.

Student n°.1 unintentionally instilled certain feelings of envy among the members of the group because of his communicative competence in the foreign language, which according to some of his classmates, was used to show arrogance. When interviewing his partners, they manifested among other things:

He was a disagreeable person, anybody loved him" (student n°.5). "Well, he could know, but he had a strange energy; he considered himself a leader, but many people didn't look at him like that... so he became a sort of problem", "he became a kind of politician...he said many things, but at the end, he did nothing" (Student n°.4). "He failed, but because he wasted his time in things he thought he could do besides his studies like the revolution at the university; he had a lot of potentials and English was easy for him, but he did not care anything" (student n°.5). "He tried to make us opaque and stand out in speaking. I felt bad when he did it; I was angry since he thought he was the only one who could take part in class. He had an egotistical attitude even though I am aware he had initiative to speak and was challenging; yet, this produced apathy among the group (Student n°.3).

### **2.1.2.1 Subcategory: Democratic leadership**

According to the leadership characteristics displayed by student n°. 6, this case was categorized as Democratic leadership. This student was sociable, charismatic, friendly, generous, collaborator, and talkative; he had an extroverted personality and a great sense of humor; he always showed a positive attitude and became a good example of academic commitment. The most outstanding manifestations of his power were ability to gain friends and followers, skill to easily establish social relationships based on joke and game. He had ability to persuade the teacher, capacity to gain empathy and affinity, and ability to easily become popular.

Palacio (2005) considers that a leader transmits enthusiasm and he/she is a charismatic person who is able to seduce and attract other persons. This author also states that a leader must own a personal magnetism to convince and persuade people. The following evidence taken from an interview shows the personality and charisma student n°.6 had. "He has a very special personality and is an unpredictable and open-minded person who always surprises us with a joke, a spontaneous expression or a funny word when everybody is in silence" (student n°.7).

Through classroom observation it could be verified that most of the members of the group liked student n°.6 and accepted him and his humor as a part of his personality (he used to be cheerful and be laughing, telling jokes, pulling the leg, and saying funny things). This student influenced his group and accomplished his goal of becoming a democratic leader inside the group through the relationships of mutual help he built. At the end of the semester, this student became very popular and gained many followers. This attitude could be corroborated through the interview to some of his classmates, too. Student n°.6 could accomplish affinity with the group by gaining their confidence, support, and acceptance which are some essential qualities to become a leader (Palacio, 2005). The student was granted certain power by his classmates to use his persuasion strategies to convince the

teacher in order to change dates, assignments, and previous agreements to profit the whole group. This is why he was categorized as a democratic leader by his partners.

Regarding this point, in an interview conducted to his English teacher, she stated that student n°.6 was a hyperactive student who was unable to be quiet or inactive for a while. The teacher confirmed that actually student n°.6 could have used persuasive strategies to manipulate:

He has power to be eh... accepted, yes! He's aware that he is loved since he helps here and there. He has power to be... a leader" "Although sometimes he is not disciplined and is absent- minded, he fulfills his academic commitments and assignments, I don't know how!; Furthermore, he perfectly knows that he's well-accepted in the group, and in any moment the teacher can make up her mind because he asked for it, and besides, he uses a special way to do it. Indeed, he's a very respectful person and he's got a good mood, but certainly, he can become to manipulate because of that (Teacher CP11).

The persuasive strategies, used by student number six can be also corroborated in the entry of observation n°.6 on April, 2006 ('L' refers to student n°.6):

When the class finished some students circled the teacher, among them L, he took the word to request the teacher to change the due date for the presentations about 'educational systems'. He argued they had had too much work in the other subjects and all his classmates supported him. Finally, the teacher accepted his petition giving a new due date. "Today, L showed his argumentative capacity to convince the teacher in order to change the date for an assignment benefiting all the class. This shows his persuasive skills as a leader and the support he has gained from the class; when talking, he showed self-confidence and assertiveness. In fact, he knew how to do it because he is very polite and has a special charisma.

## **2.2 English proficiency as an important source of power and acceptance among students.**

This category refers to the second related question "What are the students' sources of power in the EFL classroom?" and deals with English proficiency, the most common source of power among the undergraduate students. Those students with this skill are usually granted power by the rest of the class or it is gained by them if they know how to handle their ability in the foreign language to be accepted within a group. In this study, English proficiency was taken as the ability to easily communicate in English with fluency, grammatical correctness, good pronunciation and intonation, not only during the class presentations, but also in any daily situation.

During the analysis, it was found that there were some cases of proficiency in English in the investigated groups (e.g. Students n°.1, 2, 4, 7, and 8). Nevertheless, the most

remarkable case corroborating that English proficiency is an important source to get power and achieve acceptance by the members within a new group was the case of student n°.8. This student showed English proficiency since the beginning of the course. The following entry, from the field notes, evidences it: "She makes just some small mistakes when speaking in English, but this makes her more human and available for others. Her pronunciation is lovely and her fluency very good" (February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2006). However, student n°.8 experienced hard times because of this skill. Sometimes, these facts were hidden rather than being openly expressed in front of the teacher. During the third class while discussing about jobs and professions, one student showed aggressiveness and a bad attitude toward student N°8 when stating in a sarcastic low tone of voice: "We are on the wrong place!" (this because student n°.8 answered a question related to jobs and professions and said 'I would like to be a doctor' (field notes, March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2006, observation n°.3).

After three months of classes, the exclusion toward student n°.8 was still evidenced in the classroom environment as follows (XX is student n°.8): "All the class was working by pairs. But as XX was the only student working alone again, the teacher asked AA to work with her." (From field notes; observation n°.7 May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2006). These events corroborate that class environment was not always pleasant for student n°.8, certain exclusion was felt in the atmosphere; yet, this student managed to avoid being arrogant or boasting about her English proficiency. On the contrary, she collaborated and showed a humble attitude. She never over-participated; she better tried to be just a helpful classmate. Through the interviews, her classmates stated that student n°.8 certainly showed fluency and knowledge. They agree that at the beginning she remained alone.

During the interview, student n°.8 expressed that the handle of English had certainly helped her to be accepted in the group, but she had felt isolated during the first lessons. She explained that thanks to her English level she had not been rejected by the class. She belonged to the Foreign Languages Program not to the Modern Language one.

Fortunately, student n°.8 could open herself doors into a new group where the competition between programs was very notorious. This student showed self-confidence and assertiveness because of her knowledge. Regarding this, Zambrano (in Ortega, 2005) states that knowledge is a manifestation of power. Thus, it can be said that this student's sources of power were English proficiency, knowledge, and critical attitude since although student n°.8 did not become a leader; she stood out over the others. Furthermore, the student accomplished to positively influence her classmates through her collaborative and humble attitude, her uninterested support, and kindness. This case became an example of discipline, dedication, and commitment with the English learning process for the rest of members of the group.

### 2.3 Collaborative power as the ideal type of classroom relations of power

This category deals with the first related question "What types of power can be observed and inferred from the interpersonal relationships among students in the classroom environment?" In this study, as mentioned previously, four different types of power relations could be observed and inferred (collaborative, referent, expert, and legitimate power). This category highlights one of the types of power relationships exercised in the EFL classroom, which may become the type of power that every person would like to experience in classrooms because of its positive reciprocity and mutual benefit, I mean *collaborative power*.

A relevant characteristic of the subject 'Communicative project' is the work by projects. Thus, the students meet in small groups in order to socialize and apply what has been learned in the English class by means of a project presented in a creative way. This 'project work' aims at fostering the collaborative work among students, developing their linguistic competence, and using language for a real purpose. For this reason, collaboration among the students was a strong aspect in both groups which was evidenced during the class-work as students corrected their mistakes among themselves, through the work by pairs, and the group work. The following entry appears in the field notes:

It is good to observe the way the students correct mistakes among themselves. They have been developing skill to analyze mistakes, reflect on them, and help each other to overcome them. The most important part is that the students who are corrected by their peers do not get angry or upset; on the contrary, they show a good attitude. There is not sign of aggressiveness or misunderstanding because of that. They look grateful and cheerful with those who have helped them.

Student n°.21 corroborated the profit of collaborative work when accepting to have been benefited not only by student 20's help but also with the help of other classmates who lived with her. They did the homework together and helped each other. For her part, student n°.20 manifested that she enjoyed helping her classmates since she understood the topics much better and they all were benefited; besides, she said she had also learned from her classmates. In similar cases, it was found that several students liked to establish collaborative relationships among themselves; not only for the projects, but also for all the classes. This led them achieve common goals and better outcomes because of the mutual contributions, the positive interdependence, the face to face interaction, and the individual responsibility they assume in this type of relationships. In fact, all the members of a team work have the same possibility to succeed and improve previous outcomes (Johnson, 1970, 1972).

According to Cummins (2000), in collaborative relations of power there must be not only sharing of knowledge, but also dialogue, negotiation, mutual participation, support, and respect for individual differences, trying to maintain a balance of power through reciprocal

collaboration. This author claims that the *heart* of collaborative relations of power is ***human relationships*** constructed by participants. For example, if a student felt that he/she is liked, that others trust him/her, and value his/her contributions, this student will put much more effort on the assigned tasks than if he/she felt that he is not liked or considered not very capable. There is in fact, a necessity of reciprocal reliance and mutual encouragement among students to participate in the work.

The testimony of student n°.2 evidences how the collaborative work can give good results, it can become a source of mutual influence, and how the students are aware of this issue:

Well, sometimes when one does not understand, in the classroom there is confidence to ask any partner, or other times one oneself proposes: 'Why don't we do this? Or let's do this'; or when the other does not understand neither, we both decide to look for help'. I consider that the collaborative work does influence the students and the person one works with, too; besides, one's attitude to work, wish and initiative, as well (Interview, student n°.2).

#### **2.4 The wrong assumption of power as something bad**

This category deals with the fourth related question "What are the students' perception about power and control in the classroom among them?" It shows how the investigated students of Modern Languages at the UPTC perceive power and control.

In the current study power was taken as a double way process and as a matter of *construction and sharing of opportunities for all learners*. Also, power was manifested as the *ability to positively or negatively influence others' behaviors and attitudes* while authority was seen as a *negative aspect*, a matter of *imposition* involving just *one way process* where there is not discussion or negotiation at all.

The collected data showed that there was a strong consideration of power as something bad because of the remarkable negative connotations the word has, as mentioned by Jurado (in Ortega, 2005) and also because there has always been the tendency to assume power in a restrictive way. Power has been taken as a relation of *opposition* between people who exert it and people who do not. Jurado considers that people should be aware of power goes beyond the primary meaning of coercion and that it should be avoided to assume it from this superficial vision. This author believes that power must be taken as a human interaction since it is a kind of transaction being in both members of a relationship and not just in one.

Some of these negative assumptions can be evidenced in the response that student N° 2 gave during the interview. "Q.- So, you're taking power as something negative, aren't you?"

A.—Maybe, yes! Since sometimes there are people who abuse of authority; So, I think that power is certainly negative".

Like this, other negative views were evidenced through the interviews because the students were not completely aware of the power some of their classmates had exercised or even of the power they exerted themselves. For instance, at the beginning of the interviews, when the students were asked about their perceptions about power and control, they let see only the negative connotations they had. Thus, some interviewees manifested that there had not been leaders or leadership or a student with power in their classrooms. Moreover, these students mentioned classmates with egotistical attitudes who wanted to achieve personal benefits; they talked about protagonism, and over-participation by some classmates,

Particularly there was a person who tried to stand out because of his permanent participation in classroom interaction, but that became over participation and turned monotonous", "He wanted to stand out through his body language and gestures showing that he was the only one who knew how to speak English and was risky, but for me that wasn't power! (Student n°.3).

Most of the students manifested not to have perceived power, leaders, or leadership in the classroom; however, at the end of the interviews, students 2, 3, 8, 9, and 10 changed their initial position. They talked about issues such as collaborative work, mutual help, the multiple sources of student-power, positive influence of one student over others, and the existence of power constructing favorable relationships. Their same answers made them see power as something positive as well. For example, students n°.8 and 2 recognized having exercised some type of power or have influenced in any manner one or some of their classmates, throughout the semester:

"Q. Do you finally consider you exerted power? A.-"well, I think so" (Interview student n°.8). Q.-"Do you think you had power to influence your partner in any way? A. -"Yes, I did it. Fortunately, I could help one of my best friends who was going to quit since he felt very pessimistic and had a negative attitude regarding the study. Finally, he didn't quit" (Interview student n°.2).

This student was aware that she had influenced her friend positively, but she did not want to express it openly. Thanks to her advice, friendship, and support in hard times, the mentioned student was encouraged by student number two to go on studying the program.

For his part, student number three finally accepted that one of his classmates exerted a little power and did influence the group. This student also recognized to have had a little leadership, too.

Q.-"Do you think H influenced the group? A.-"For me positively, no much. However, when he went to class he made the difference since he always interacted in English



spontaneously. He used to ask and showed initiative. He made us try to do the same he did and improve our performance". Q.- "Finally, I want to know if you exerted any kind of power over the group or at least over some classmates. A.- 'yes, I think that had a little of leadership!'

Foucault (2003) asserts that it is a failure to see power relations as something bad, something that people have to break free, since a society cannot exist without power relations. This author holds that "the problem is not to dissolve them in a utopia of completely transparent communication, but to acquire the rules of law, the management techniques, and also the morality, the ethos, the practice of the self, that will allow us to play these games of power with a little domination as possible" (p. 298).

To finish, in regard to control it could be evidenced that various students perceived control as a positive and necessary aspect for students in the learning process, since they looked at it as self-control, autonomy, management of responsibilities, and the duty that every student must have and maintain. Thus, control was assumed as something good and beneficial. That is why, for example, student n°.4 stated that control strengthened students in classrooms. For him, control was something positive, useful, and necessary now that this was a right and a duty of all students for their personal development. Besides, the student asserted that every student should have control of the classroom activities, of his/her learning process, of the topics, and nerves in the oral presentations; it is, control in all his/her performance. Lastly, student n°.4 manifested that the old paradigms of teachers being the only owners of power and control have changed too much and that is the way it must be.

## Conclusions

The investigation concluded that power is a complex structure of relationships of mutual influence between two or more students which are established while communicating and aims at modifying and provoking a change on others' behavior to achieve specific outcomes.

It was also concluded that EFL (English as a Foreign Language) undergraduate students express and exert power relationships among them in classroom interaction through the verbal and non-verbal language they use when communicating; also, by means of diverse strategies they create to persuade, convince, and accomplish their goals. This confirms that language and power are joined and power is expressed through language. Moreover, it was also found that some students manage to establish relationships of power with their classmates to gain and play the role of leaders and thus, be granted certain status, acceptance, and recognition in their groups.

Furthermore, the most remarkable positive sources of student-power are students' English proficiency and knowledge. In second place classroom participation, collaboration,

and support. In third place the argumentative competence, problem solving capacity, experience, popularity, personality, and cognitive skills. In fourth place, the capacity of decision making and students' autonomy. Leadership and other sources of power go at last.

A list of negative sources of student-power was also found. The most outstanding negative source of power among the students was over-participation in the classroom interaction. In second place, on the one hand control of people and events and on the other hand, money. In third place manipulation and influence. Next, being advantageous, authoritarian, and who makes vigilance to other students. The least common sources of power are physical force and coercion.

To close, in contrast to the perception of power as something bad, it was found that control was perceived by the participants as something good. Control was assumed as a requirement for the integral education since they perceive it as an individual responsibility. The students look at control as the power shared and granted by the teacher like an important part of their role as prospective English teachers.

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