Exploring Elementary Students' Power and Solidarity Relations in an EFL Classroom

Exploración de las relaciones de poder y solidaridad entre estudiantes de primaria en la clase de inglés como lengua extranjera

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This article derives from a critical discourse analysis study that reports the characteristics of elementary school students' power and solidarity relations in English as a foreign language classroom in Bogotá, Colombia, while we were doing our teaching English as a foreign language practicum. The study was based on theories of power and solidarity. The findings suggest that there are different forms of exercising power and solidarity in the classroom. Power can be resisted, challenged, or exercised by means of reproaches. Solidarity can take the form of taking sides to protect friends. These findings allow us to be aware of the complexities of the English language class.

Key words: Classroom interaction, critical discourse analysis, EFL classroom, power relationships, solidarity relationships.

Este artículo se deriva de un estudio de análisis crítico del discurso que reporta las características de las relaciones de poder y solidaridad presentes en una clase de inglés como lengua extranjera, en un colegio de primaria. Para este estudio, que se realizó durante nuestra práctica pedagógica en inglés, empleamos la metodología de análisis crítico del discurso y las teorías de poder y de solidaridad. Los resultados reflejan que hay diferentes formas de ejercer poder y solidaridad en el salón de clase. El poder puede ser resistido, retado o ejercido con reproches hacia los demás, en tanto que la solidaridad puede caracterizase por tomar partido para proteger a los amigos. Estos resultados nos permiten ser conscientes de las complejidades que se presentan en la clase de lengua inglesa.

Palabras clave: análisis crítico del discurso, clase de inglés como lengua extranjera, interacción en el aula, relaciones de poder, relaciones de solidaridad.

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Introduction

During the teaching practicum, we implemented the Task Based Language Teaching Approach (TBLT), illuminated by Willis' (1996) theory and Richards and Rogers' (2001) methodology. We applied three stages as proposed by the previous authors: pre-task activity, task activity, and post task activity.

We collected data during the post task activities over a period of six months. Research was conducted in a fifth grade classroom with a population of nineteen boys and fifteen girls. The participants of the study totaled seventeen, selected according to the most relevant data collected along the research process.

During the pedagogical intervention, we found that the implementation of the TBLT theory was difficult to carry out in the classroom due to micro interactions between learners when working on tasks. We observed and investigated students' micro interactions and the possible reasons for the dynamics of classroom such as: problematic behaviors, resistance, discrimination, and unequal social status, among other issues. Guided by the TBLT theory, we realized that the symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships that were occurring in the EFL classroom during the development of the tasks were part of power and solidarity relations.

Taking into consideration that power and solidarity relations are present in any context when people interact with each other (Fairclough, 1989), we carried this study out in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom where power and solidarity relations were studied. This study was carried out under the guidelines of the critical discourse analysis (CDA) research method according to Norman Fairclough's theory (1989). In order to develop this methodology, we analyzed different interactions where students worked together.

According to the previous idea, the institutional educational goal of the Republicano School[1], where this study was carried out, states that learners must be the central part of the educational process. As such, Freire (as cited in Ramos, 2004) argues that learners' problems and needs are factors that must be considered by the teacher as those difficulties are part of the students' reality. Thus, we believe that observing students as generators of power and solidarity relations permits teachers and researchers to recognize students as whole persons that include their problems, interests, motivations, and learning difficulties. In that sense, Fairclough (1989) argues that students are sources in whom it is possible to observe different features that are inherent in learners' lives, such as home, social issues, and cultural background. We believe that there is a contradiction between the TBLT theory and the classroom's reality. Learners are not simple receptors that receive knowledge, but instead have backgrounds and beliefs that affect classroom dynamics and the understanding and observation of students' interactions is important, just as everything that students bring to the classroom is reflected in their own context and vice versa. We did not intend to observe how the relationships of power and solidarity affected the teaching and learning of the English Language, but instead focused the study on finding the way power and solidarity dynamics took place when learners were working together. It is important to clarify that as part of our pedagogical intervention project, this study took place in an EFL classroom.

Additionally, we found that some of the characteristics of power and solidarity relations determined the form in which the class worked or changed according to students' dynamics. For

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1   The Republicano is not the real name of the school. It was changed to protect the participants' identity.

example, being a good student, disapproving others' ideas, or aligning with others are factors that influence the development of the class.

Conceptual Framework

In the following lines, the reader will find the theoretical constructs: the concepts of power, power relations in the classroom and how power and solidarity circulated among students. Afterward, we present the CDA research methodology that was implemented and that permitted the discovery of the categories which will be explained through samples. Subsequently, we established the conclusions, pedagogical implications, and issues for further research.

Power

Power in the educational context has been studied by many authors who have evidenced its importance not only within a particular community but also in any place in which interaction occurs (Ramos, 2004). From a CDA perspective, power is a central condition of social life; power is not static but dynamic. Power is generated as a natural effect of human beings' interactions and it circulates among participants (Fairclough, 2003; Foucault, as cited in Gordon, 1980; Orellana, 1996; Ramos, 2004; Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

Along the same line of thought, Cubillos and Novoa (2005) state that power is an important factor that can be seen when people interact with each other. Similarly, power does not belong to any particular individual, but is something inherent to every person (Wertsch, 1998, as cited in Cornelious & Herrenkohl, 2004; Fairclough, 1989).

Power is not something alien to a specific group of people, but a trait that is exerted by the members of a community (Hitchman, 2000, as cited in Ramos 2004). Thus we could conclude, as Cubillos and Novoa (2005) state that power is

at the core of human interaction since humans are social beings that tend to create associations which allow them to attain common objectives. On the other hand, it has been established that power relations have a direct impact on reality and that language is a means through which power can generate deep changes in its structures (Freire, 1970 as cited in Moreno & Jiménez, 2005a). Those social issues have to do with people's decisions, thoughts, customs, and perceptions. In that sense, we consider that the role of language is central to this study as, in most cases, power is transmitted through language.

Power Relations in the Classroom

In this study learners tried to maintain control over certain situations depending on their interests or motivations with regard to specific issues. For instance, it was observed that some students chose a dominant role when they identified themselves with the activities or when they had an advanced English level. On the contrary when students were not engaged or when they lacked knowledge, they assumed less powerful positions, ceding the power move to another student. Power changed and circulated among learners.

Power relations also have to do with agreements and disagreements present in class. According to Toohey (2001), agreements and disagreements are means of negotiation of meaning and powerful positions among participants. Toohey examined the way children use disagreements about decision-making activities as a tool for the construction of their personality in terms of ideas, knowledge, and leadership. This study found that those disagreements reinforce students' understandings and help them state and share their opinions, positions, and thoughts.

Similarly, power relations among students are present thanks to the interactions that emerge in

the classroom. Those interactions are facilitated by the teacher providing students the opportunity to express themselves. Thus, power is constructed rather than imposed (Ramos, 2004). In this case, students were encouraged to work together in order to facilitate their making decisions and participating and in that way dominant attitudes of teachers toward students were eliminated. Taking this further, Ramos (2004) states there are two different kinds of power relations in the classroom: one, power relations that are constructed by students in which they have the chance to be heard with the consent of teachers; two, power relations that are related to the way teachers exert power without sharing it with students.

Power Relations Among Students

Orellana (1996) affirms "power relations are always relations of struggle, though those struggles may take different forms and assume varying degrees of intensity" (p. 336). In other words, when students exercise power they decide the form with which to express that power. One of the forms to exercise power is when learners remain silent. According to Sifianou (as cited in Liu, 2001), silence can be manifested in order to express domination or subordination depending on the situations, rules, and participants. Additionally, Lozano (2009) stated that in an EFL classroom different issues exist that affect student dynamics such as involvement, contributions, use of the language, and teacher assumptions that generate learner tension and force learners to make use of silence and code-switching. Similarly, Lozano argues that teachers usually see silence as a way to indicate lack of understanding; however, silence can also be used to force a member of a group to participate (2009).

Likewise, students can exert power through the way they use voice in the dynamics of the class. According to Bourdieu (1991), when people speak they wish not only to be understood, but also to be noticed in a group. Thus learners express their ideas through the use of voice not only to share their knowledge when they are working or participating in activities but also to call others' attention (Johnson, as cited in Moreno & Jiménez, 2005b).

We realized from our own experience in the classroom that students' voices play a predominant role in power relations as learners use their voices in order to complain about partners and/or to accuse others; for example, no matter which activities we were developing in class, students consistently talked about others' actions. Voice was also used by students to establish connections with their peers, especially with friends, to share opinions about the classroom topic or their own experiences, to participate in the activities, and to talk about things about which they felt a special interest.

Solidarity

Regarding the concept of solidarity as a value, Sequeiros (1997)[2] found that teachers and students consider solidarity as a sporadic, romantic value that entails closeness with others. In our study, we observed that students expressed solidarity toward the teacher when they asked their partners to pay attention to the teacher's explanations, even though this demonstration of solidarity was not regularly stated in the classroom.

On the other hand, the concept of solidarity is also illustrated in light of the linguistic perspective. Deborah Tannen has investigated the way solidarity is expressed through linguistic channels. According to Tannen (1996), solidarity and power have ambiguous relations as both can be generated using the same linguistic means. In that sense, when a person

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2   All Sequeiros's quotations were translated by the authors and were paraphrased keeping the meaning of the author's ideas.

expresses solidarity, elements of power relationships emerge depending on the intention of the speaker and the interpretation of the hearer.

Research Question

What are the characteristics of students' power and solidarity relationships in an EFL classroom?

Research Method

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a methodology within Discourse Analysis (DA) and has different approaches. However, this study is guided according to Norman Fairclough's socio cultural approach. This methodology has three stages: description, interpretation, and explanation. Also, this methodology helped us to describe, analyze, and interpret the relationships of power and solidarity that occur in the EFL classroom. These steps allowed us to establish connections between the linguistic features and the social context (Wodak & Meyer, 2001, p. 123).

In the same way, an interview was carried out in order to validate the interpretation of the data analysis results. It allowed for free response and flexibility from students that cannot be obtained by means of other procedures (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989).

Profile of the Participants and Setting

The class that was observed was made up of thirty-four students from fifth grade. Seventeen of the students were from low and middle-income households. The Republicano School is located in the northwest area of Bogotá, Colombia. The school has two shifts: morning and afternoon and provides pre-school, elementary, and secondary education. The school has a high student to teacher ratio that does not always allow for complete and focused development of the students.

Results

The CDA approach permitted the observation of data in three different stages: descriptive, interpretative, and explicative. The stages of analysis contributed to in-depth knowledge about the research process and the understanding of the way power and solidarity relationships manifest themselves when students interact in the classroom.

According to Fairclough (2003), description constitutes the analysis of the linguistic properties of the text, the first stage. Text is organized in different components: grammatical rules, meaning, lexical features (vocabulary, words, jargon, slang, among others), and phonological relations. The second stage is interpretation; in this step the discourse events that happened were analyzed and understood within their context. Thus, students' exchanges were analyzed while taking into account what factors influenced the production of those communicative events. The third stage is explanation. Students' discursive exchanges were compared with the social context to observe and report how learners' dynamics were a reflection of society and how those external factors shape students' actions, thoughts, and behaviors.

Once we established the data analysis procedures, students were video recorded while they were working in groups. Subsequently, we analyzed those video recordings using the data analysis procedures we explained above and found the emerging categories shown in Table 1. These categories were named by taking into account the students' own voices in certain relevant moments during their interactions since the study was carried out in an EFL classroom where the mother tongue was Spanish; hence, the categories and the samples are presented in both English and Spanish.

Table 1. Categories Found in Data Analysis: Characteristics of Students' Power and Solidarity Relationships

Research Question	Categories
	Categories of Power
What are the characteristics of students' power and solidarity relations in an EFL classroom?	"Bueno muestre su tarea, Rocío" (Well, show me your homework, Rocío) "¡Esa Karen es toda mentirosa!" (That Karen is a liar!)
	Category of Solidarity
	"No son novios" (They are not a couple)

Categories of Power: "Bueno muestre su tarea, Rocío" (Well, show me your homework Rocío)

"Power relations are exerted by what is considered to be a "good student" to fulfill the school duties" (Cornelious & Herrenkohl, 2004, p. 468).

The first category: "Bueno muestre su tarea, Rocío" (Well, show me your homework Rocío) exemplifies one form of exercising power in the classroom. Even though being a good student is a way to exert power, it does not mean it is the only form of exercising power. Students can be considered powerful no matter which way the power is positioned. For example, power can be exerted by a learner who did not do the homework or one who does not want to participate because they are assuming positions of power in front of peers. As Lozano (2009) states, the student exercises her/his power by means of forcing her/his classmates to participate by remaining silent.

Being considered a good student is an example of an underlying feature that is present in the EFL classroom. Students can exercise power by demonstrating their discipline in class as long as teachers contribute by having the necessary conditions in which learners feel recognized and that they are valuable members in the development of activities (Cornelious & Herrenkohl, 2004, p. 468). In other words, the teacher has to value the fact that a student stays quiet, obeys the instructions, and pays attention, among other school duties.

The following excerpt illustrates the way two students (Dora and Karen) exercise power towards their partners to gain control with regard to the activity[3]. The teacher asked the students to work in groups of four; they had to talk about traditional celebrations in Colombia and in the United States.

Excerpt 1

82. Dora: Bueno, muestre su tarea Rocío.

83. Rocío: ¡Ayy ya!

84. Karen: Trae tus cosas allá, como te la pasas es acá parada.

85. Dora: Rocío muestre su país.

86. Karen: Ella no hizo tarea, casi tampoco no tiene nada que hacer porque no sabe

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3   We used different symbols in the transcriptions to make the reading of interactions comprehensible:
…   Long pause
(.)   A pause of a second or shorter
[ ]   Description of the situation
xxx Speech that could not be deciphered.

87.   qué es lo que hicieron.

88.   Dora: ¿Nosotras dos solo hicimos la tarea? (Referring to Karen and to herself)

89.   Karen: ¿Cómo hacen? ¿Cómo hace? Si a lo bien.

90.   Nelson: Para qué si yo quiero ayudar y se ríen.

91.   Karen: Yo lo hice bien.

92.   Dora: Y ni siquiera escogieron Irlanda, Alemania, Japón, Corea, Australia.

93.   Nelson: Finlandia.

94.   Dora: ¿Y yo?

95.   Karen: ¡Ah ya! Ustedes nos ayudan a comenzar. (To Rocío and Nelson)

96.   Dora: Como ustedes no trajeron la tarea. (C17 08/26/10)

English version

82.   Dora: Well, show me your homework Rocío.

83.   Rocío: Hey stop!

84.   Karen: Take your things there, as you stand over there.

85.   Dora: Rocío show your country.

86.   Karen: She didn't do the homework. She doesn't even have anything to do as she doesn't know

87.   what they did.

88.   Dora: Are we the only ones who did the homework? (Referring to Karen and to herself)

89.   Karen: How do you do it? How do you do it? Seriously.

90.   Nelson: What for if I want to help and you laugh?

91.   Karen: I did it right.

92.   Dora: Even they did not choose Ireland, Germany, Japan, Korea, and Australia.

93.   Nelson: Finland.

94.   Dora: And me?

95.   Karen: Ah stop! You help us to start. To Rocío and Nelson)

96.   Dora: Since you did not bring the homework. (C17 08/26/10)

In line 82, Dora took the initiative to start the activity by using the phatic adverb "bueno" (well) to establish contact with other participants. Additionally, Dora includes Rocío in the activity when she asked Rocío to share her homework with the rest of the group through this imperative: "Muestre su tarea" (Show me your homework). In line 85, she repeated her request using the same grammatical structure, in this case with a more conciliatory tone.

In the lines 86, 87, and 88, Karen and Dora distanced themselves from Rocío and Nelson with regard to the development of the homework. For instance, in line 86, Karen expresses: "Ella no hizo la tarea" (She didn't do the homework). Karen was referring to Rocío in the third person singular. Karen used the verb "hacer" (to do) in the preterite, which was used to denote that Rocío was not responsible because she did not worry about the homework and as a result she did not contribute to the exercise.

Subsequently, Dora also asked Karen in line 88: "¿Nosotras dos solo hicimos la tarea?" (Are we the only ones who did the homework?). She used the second person pronoun in plural to include herself and Karen to explicitly indicate they were the only students that had done the homework. In that moment, Dora recognized Karen's power and then Dora expressed that not only she did agree with Karen but also established distance from the other members of the group (Kramsch & McConnell-Ginet, 1992). Similarly, as a consequence of the previous situation, Rocío is judged by her partners because of her lack of commitment.

According to Covarrubias and Moratilla (2008), homework is a tool that helps students enhance their performance while promoting student responsibility towards their learning process. Additionally, the authors mention that homework is not only indispensable in the learning development of the child, but also contributes to reinforce what was learned in school. In the case of the EFL classroom, homework plays an important role as

learners review, check, and clear up doubts about topics studied during class.

Also, when teachers check learner's homework, they give feedback that allows the student to confirm and evaluate errors or mistakes made during the development of the task. Learners sometimes see homework as a tool they can use to express their interests, skills, and motivations and as a way to obtain recognition from their peers, family, and teachers (Wigfield & Eccles, as cited in Beltrán & Bueno, 1995).

Today education is more flexible in terms of methodologies and approaches. Students are no longer thought of as mere receptors but instead as the core of the educational system. Students are more autonomous with respect to their learning process because the teacher acts as a monitor or supporter (Richards et al., as cited in Nunan, 2004). This first category –"Bueno muestre su tarea, Rocío" (Well, show me your homework Rocío)– exemplifies what can be observed in the dynamics of the class. In the structure of the school, the task constitutes an essential element of the learning process. Tasks are essential aspects of the classroom since they complement the learning process. In Cameron's (2001) words, tasks are activities and dynamics implemented to evaluate processes that occur in the classroom.

Additionally, Cameron (2001) argues that the main objective of tasks is to do more significant language learning with regard to the learners' lives. From this line of thought, tasks are important vehicles that reinforce what is developed and studied in class while students become autonomous concerning their own learning process. In the case of Karen, when she was asked what the homework meant to her, she answered that homework was important because it helped her to better understand different issues about the task and encouraged her to research the topics.

Categories of Power: ¡Esa Karen es toda mentirosa! (That Karen is a liar!)

"Power relations are exerted through reproaches"
(Tainio, 2010, p. 2).

Reproaches are a way of exercising power that is mostly employed by teachers in the classroom to criticize students' actions (Tainio, 2010, p. 2). In this study, students adopted the reproach to show disapproval and complain about their peers' work and performance. The reproach is problematic for both teachers and students, as it causes embarrassment to learners who receive a reproach. According to the preceding author, the mode and voice plays an important role in the way the reproach is understood. Assuming that the reproach was made in a humorous mode, the receptor will follow the same mode in their reply. On the contrary, if the reproach was made in a rude way, the receptor will respond in the same manner.

The following excerpt was taken from the transcription of a video recording; it corresponds to class number 17 that took place on August 26th, 2010. Excerpt 2 illustrates the way three students, Nelson, Karen, and Dora, were arguing with regard to the activity they were working on together. In this case, Nelson's reaction is due to the fact that he did not bring his homework to class and Karen told the teacher when she arrived to monitor the activity.

Excerpt 2

111.   Nelson: ¡Esa Karen es toda mentirosa!

112.   Karen: (To Rocío) Cierto que yo dije eso; de conversar; si quieres pregúntale a Dora.

113.   Nelson: Pues sí admito, usted dijo que conversáramos pero, pero usted dizque (.)

114.   ¿Usted no decía que dizque qué? Eishh.

115.   Dora: A mí se me había caído el brazo detrás. xxx

116.   Karen: Sí es así, ya cada uno sabe dar explicaciones. ¿Ves? Ya tú no sabes nada. Si

117.   acá estuvo la profesora... (Karen shows her notebook to Rocío). (C17/08/26/10)

English version

111.   Nelson: That Karen is a liar!

112.   Karen: (To Rocío) I said that, right? About talking, if you want, ask Dora.

113.   Nelson: Well, yes I admit it, but you said we talked, but you supposedly.

114.   You did not say supposedly eh? Eishh...

115.   Dora: My arm had fallen behind me. xxx

116.   Karen: Yes that's how it is, and everyone knows how to give explanations. See? You know nothing. Yes.

117.   The teacher was here ... (Karen shows her notebook to Rocío). (C17/08/26/10)

After the teacher explained to the students what they had to do, Nelson became upset and blamed Karen for guiding them mistakenly during the activity. He affirmed this in line 111: "¡Esa Karen es toda mentirosa!" (That Karen is a liar!). The demonstrative personal pronoun "esa" (that) indicates that Nelson distanced himself from Karen and referred to her in a contemptuous way. In his opinion, Karen had wrongly explained the activity. Nelson uses the manner adverb "toda" (a) adding the adjective "mentirosa" (liar) (completely a liar) to emphasize Karen's mistake.

In the preceding lines, Nelson was not working towards the development of the activity. Additionally, he had not brought the homework but he was going around disrupting other groups. Nelson also disqualified Karen's effort to guide the group during the activity. Here it is clear that Nelson exercised his right to criticize Karen's procedures with regard to the activity.

In society, human beings have the tendency to judge others' actions through the stressing of their

own shortcomings. This is reflected in Nelson's criticism. Additionally, today it is also common to discredit individuals' work without bearing in mind their contributions. In the interview Dora expressed that she was annoyed with their partner's (Nelson's) lack of commitment to the activity, so Karen and Dora had to do it without any help.

Category of Solidarity: "No son novios" (They are not a couple)

"Showing solidarity with my partners"
(Tannen, 1996, p. 342).

We understand solidarity as an alignment act that a learner could take in a specific moment of an interaction. In addition, individuals can exert power and solidarity simultaneously because there is an overlap between them (Tannen, 1996, p. 342). Solidarity in the classroom has an important connotation: students tend to align with their partners regarding specific issues such as interests, topics, agreements, and activities. When there is solidarity, learners establish more equity among themselves and this permits them to achieve working relationships. However, in the EFL classroom those solidarity relations respond to individual or common interests of the learners towards class activities. For example, when students participate together in games they show solidarity towards their team partners in order to obtain a benefit for the group. The same happens with students that have a better command of the topic when posing as allies in order to be successful in the development of the class. In that sense, it is clear that the school is a place in which solidarity is constantly developing. Learners identify themselves with others and it makes them feel comfortable because they express communalism towards them (Elmesky, 2005, p. 324).

In the following excerpt, students were divided into different groups. They had to find the different pieces of an object jigsaw around the classroom. In this specific moment, Javier, Cesar, and Andrea had already assembled the puzzle and were asked to write a description of the object.

Excerpt 3

21.   Javier: ¡Huyyy ehhh sepárenme la cámara, por favor! (Andrea está sentada en las piernas de Marcos)

22.   César: Son novios.

23.   Andrea: No, ya no más.

24.   César: Son novios.

25.   Javier: No son novios.

(C18 09/02/10)

English version

21.   Javier: Ehhh move away from the camera, please! (Andrea is sitting on Mark's legs)

22.   César: They are a couple.

23.   Andrea: No, not anymore!

24.   César: They are a couple.

25.   Javier: They are not a couple.

(C18 09/02/1910)

When Javier declares in line 21: "¡Huyyy ehhh sepárenme la cámara, por favor!" (Ehhh, move away from the camera, please!), he employed an interjection to call his partners' attention because two of them (Andrea and Marcos) were in a position that prevented Javier from observing the entire group in the camera.

On the other hand, when Cesar expressed: "Son novios" (They are a couple) in line 22, Andrea immediately responded with an imperative mood: "¡No, ya no más!" (Not any more!). According to Fairclough (2003), there are three different grammatical moods: declarative, interrogative, and imperative. In this case, Andrea used the imperative mood to express her desire to avoid Cesar's reproach.

In line 22 Cesar said Andrea and Marcos had a close relationship: "Son novios" (They are a couple), possibly because of the fact that Andrea was sitting on Marcos' legs. Additionally, one of the factors that could have caused Cesar's affirmation was the fact that Javier had provoked Cesar's reaction towards this situation. Nevertheless, the research suggests Javier did not say: "Son novios" (They are a couple) with the purpose of suggesting that Andrea and Marcos were in a romantic relationship, but instead was making fun of the situation. Consequently, after Cesar's reaction, Javier tried to calm the situation down by denying Cesar's affirmation: "No son novios" (They are not a couple), in line 24.

Similarly, when Cesar, Andrea, and Marcos were asked about this particular issue in the interview, it was confirmed that Cesar's reaction was because Cesar did not agree with the fact that Andrea sat on Marco's legs despite the three of them being friends. We observed that he was concrete and relevant in his assertion, using a minimum of words and displaying a clear intention of teasing Andrea and Marcos because of their behavior (Brown & Levinson, 1978, pp. 94-95).

Excerpt 4

Profesora: Ese día Adriana se sentó en las piernas de Cristian. ¿Para ti eso está mal visto?

César: Pues sí.

Profesora: ¿Por qué?

César: Sí porque ella siempre donde está Marcos o algo(.) ella va y se le sienta y si a veces están peleando ehh, no sé sin pedirle permiso o si me puedo sentar solo va se le sienta y ya.

Profesora: ¿Si hubiera sido otra niña la que se le siente en las piernas a Marcos eso estaría bien?

Cesar: No.

Profesora: ¿O sea que no te parece que ninguna niña se siente en las piernas de ningún niño?

César: Solo en las de Marcos.

English version

Teacher: That day Adriana sat down on Cristian's legs. Is it embarrassing for you?

César: Well, of course.

Teacher: Why?

César: Yes, because she is always where Marcos is (.) and she sits on Marcos' legs and they are sometimes fighting and she does not ask him to do so and she just does it.

Teacher: Would it have been fine if another girl was the one who had sat on Marcos' legs?

César: No.

Teacher: It means that you disagree for any girl to sit on any boy's legs?

César: Only on Marcos' legs.

Excerpt 4 was taken from a semi-formal interview we applied to the students after analyzing the transcriptions in order to support the data analysis. It is important to clarify that when comparing the transcription and the interview, we realized that Cesar's affirmation, "Son novios" (They are a couple), was not only a simple declaration, but entailed deep meaning for him because he expressed in the interview that a girl sitting on a boy's legs was not accepted by society. What is more, he expressed that the previous action could damage Andrea's reputation. At the end, it was confirmed that Cesar's intention from the beginning was not to tease or reproach Andrea and Marcos' attitude but to tell them their behavior could be badly interpreted by other students.

Andrea's response in line 23: "Ya no más" (Not any more!) shows that after Cesar's affirmation she did not stay quiet but immediately replied to Cesar in order to gain respect from her partners. Moreover, she did not feel inhibited about expressing her ideas by rejecting Cesar's utterance. Similarly, when Javier affirms: "No son novios" (They are not a couple), Javier took sides with Andrea against Cesar's declaration. Regarding this action, Castañeda (2008)

claims that students assume more or less powerful positions in order to support their classmates.

In our society it is possible to observe this phenomenon in multiple contexts as power and solidarity relationships change depending on the circumstances, situations, and individuals (Orellana, 1996, p. 336). In the same vein, through Andrea's example, the way human relationships are mediated by physical contact was analyzed. Rodríguez (1999) affirms that "physical contact as a form to manifest affect is fundamental as it facilitates the connections among students" (p. 76). Rodríguez also states that physical contact is a common aspect in the educational settings and can be easily expressed by learners to show affection towards peers.

Conclusion

We sought to report on the main characteristics of students' power and solidarity relationships in an EFL classroom: how power flowed and changed among participants during class. The role of CDA methodology was fundamental for this research project as one of its main characteristics is the study of power relations. In the same way, the CDA methodology allowed this study to link the pedagogical and research areas through an analysis of students' discourse exchanges in the classroom. During the research process, it was observed that some of the characteristics of students' power had to do with discipline, responsibility, fellowship, resistance, reproach, and silence, among others.

Additionally, we found that the same student did not always exercise power; power took different shapes during interactions. Likewise, it was interesting for us to observe that solidarity acts demonstrated in class were consequences of the exercise of power and vice versa. For example, this study identified the existence of different forms of exercising power and solidarity. Silence can be used

to express agreement or disagreement; reproach is a way to show dissatisfaction and disagreement about someone's behaviour or a situation. Additionally, activities and discussions that take place change according to external factors that are not part of classroom development.

This study has important pedagogical connotations since the analysis of power can be done in any sphere, including the classroom. The result of this study opens the way for further research about the way power and solidarity relations affect the EFL classroom.

As mentioned before, our intention was not to establish the way power and solidarity relationships affected EFL classroom development; instead, we wanted to show how power and solidarity are present during class regardless of the subject, context, or environment. The findings of this research could be applied to the EFL field because power and solidarity are present here just as much as in any other setting.

According to the micro dynamics that occurred among students, our contribution to the EFL field has to do with the observation and questioning of the TBLT theory, as it seemed to be perfect on paper but varies in practice. When teachers are aware of this, they can improve and create better EFL teaching and learning environments.

Finally, we advise future researchers to be more proactive and go beyond boundaries, exploring new research fields and bringing about new academic contributions. Carrying out an innovative research project is worthwhile since we acquire research skills, increase knowledge, and most importantly, grow as researchers.

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