



Voice in Research Consultations: Affects of Power and Hegemony on Supervisees' Discourses

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ABSTRACT: *Student voices are not given their due regard in higher education in Pakistan. This came as a common concern from the research student body of MS (Masters in Science) in a private university of Pakistan, in their informal discourses with the first writer, which penetrated this study. The paper reports on a qualitative case study in critical research paradigm, aimed to investigate the notion of student voices and how they are submerged by the power and hegemony in research consultations. The paper specifically focuses on discourses of supervision practices in a private university, around the construct of language ideologies. The study used the analytical approach of Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (1989; 2003). It selected two MS (Education) research supervisees with their supervisors as two case studies. The findings of the study revealed how language became a source of power relations between the research participants. The study recommends equity and voice to be given to the research supervisees. It is hoped that this research would lead the academicians towards more democratic styles of supervision.*

Keywords: Critical discourse analysis, language ideologies, power and hegemony, research supervision

Introduction

Research supervision holds a pivotal role in higher education. Built on a discursive relationship between the supervisor and supervisee, they continually process meanings, and negotiate on power and identity in their texts (Ivanic, 1998; Lea, 1998; Lillis, 2001). The term 'supervision' itself suggests that there is an unequal power relationship between the supervisor and supervisee (Maxwell & Smyth, 2011). According to the Macquarie dictionary (Delbridge, 1986), to supervise is to 'oversee (a process, work, workers etc) during execution or performance; superintend; have the oversight and direction of' (p. 629).

The purpose of the study was to investigate the notions of power and hegemony in research supervision meetings between the supervisors and supervisees. The aim of

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the study was to analyze the research supervisees' and their supervisors' "voices" in spoken discourses during the research consultations and interviews.

The study aimed to explore the issue of "voice" emerging in critical discrete moments in discourses in which power and domination were built discursively by the participants. Based on the background of the problem and the study purpose, the research question formulated was: What aspects of power and hegemony are embedded in research supervisees' and their supervisors' discourses in higher education around the construct of language ideologies?

There are studies which demonstrate how power is compromised when supervisors react to students' writing (Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001). Studies in the field of research supervision explore students' and supervisors' misunderstandings and beliefs about the nature of feedback, issues of relationships between students and supervisors and identities of both the partners (Tuck, 2010). Another relevant study by Clughen and Connell (2012) look at the contestation of power and control between students and their supervisors in the supervisors' support provided to students in writing. Studies in the field also explain how meanings are negotiated differently between students and their supervisors in institutions (Lea and Street, 1998); variance in the interpretation of the writing task between them (Cohen, 1993; Lea, 1994; Street, 1995; Stierer, 1997); and a growing trend towards new dialogic approach in research supervision (Vehviläinen & Löffström, 2016).

The principle author's informal interactions with the MS students in a well-reputed private university of Pakistan gave her first-hand experience about the students' concerns regarding supervision. Students wanted that their voice should be heard but most of the time it was ignored by the supervisors. Students' informal discourses also expressed a general trend towards English language related issues which were a source of anxiety for them. Students felt that English language disadvantaged their position in relation to their supervisors. This could be a disenfranchisement of the student body as more power and control was extended to the supervisors of research.

Pakistan, with its four provinces, is ethnically, linguistically, and culturally a typical plural society, as no less than 24 major languages and a number of dialects are spoken here. Urdu is the declared national language, and English is the official language, and as such these are the dominant languages of the country. English is largely used in the domains of power like offices, press, media, education, and

employment (Rahman 1996). Given the country's multilingual and multicultural make-up, deciding on the medium of instruction choice has never been easy at the level of political leadership or civil bureaucracy.

In Pakistan, language planning is an outcome of the status planning: the educational processes have had immense ideological affects on the social lives of people of the country. The Language Policy, 2009, Clause 73 talks about the factors that led to the differences between elite schools and the public schools: among these, management, resources and teaching quality are the main dividing factors. Due to disparity in education and medium of instruction, the student population faces innumerable difficulties in educational and professional forums. Inconsistencies in language policies & MOI obstructed education goals in Pakistan (Javed, 2017). The major entry into postgraduate levels is by students from public institutions. 70 % of the Pakistani population get education through public institutions (Razzaq & Forde, 2014) where the medium of instruction is Urdu.

The context of the study is a private university of Pakistan, which is basically a business institute. The MS program of Education is designed to equip the participants with essential knowledge and skills to lead organizational change and development. After successful completion of the course work, students are required to carry out research study for the thesis under the guidance of a research supervisor selected by the students and approved by the institute

Literature Review

The literature is selected to review the notions of hegemony and power in supervision, language ideologies and the affects of these factors on the voice of the research supervisees. The section also discusses literature related to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the analytical framework.

Research supervision in higher education is still an under explored area of study. Studies in the field explore students' and supervisors' misunderstandings and beliefs about the nature of feedback, issues of relationships between research students and supervisors and identities of both the partners (Tuck, 2010). Major researchers in the field are Cope and Kalanzis (2000). Another relevant research theme is the building of students' relationship with the supervisors on the nature and content of feedback.

Voice generally means one's own views and making oneself understandable. According to Northedge (2003), "Voice requires a sense of one's identity within the discourse community ... [and thus] support in establishing voice is a vital component of courses for students from diverse backgrounds" (p. 25). This study takes Blommaert's definition of voice as follows:

Voice stands for the way in which people manage to make themselves understood or fail to do so. In doing so, they have to draw upon and deploy discursive means which they have at their disposal, and they have to use them in contexts that are specified as to conditions of use. Consequently, if these conditions are not met, people 'don't make sense'- they fail to make themselves understood... (2005, p. 5).

Voice becomes an important parameter when students have to argue, or take stand or a position. According to Brooman and Darwent (2015), student voices can bring very important aspects into the higher education curriculum development.

Language ideology refers to a shared body of common beliefs, views and perceptions about language, which includes cultural assumptions about language, nature and purpose of communication, and patterns of communicative behavior as an enactment of a collective order (Woolard, 1992). According to Tollefson (1999), language ideology tries to capture the implicit, usually unconscious assumptions about reality that fundamentally determine how human beings interpret events. Research shows that hierarchies are built in language classrooms on the basis of language ideologies, within languages (De Costa, 2010; Carreira, 2011) and between languages (Flores & Murillo, 2001; Mori, 2014; Luykx et. al., 2008; Volk & Angelova, 2007).

CDA contributes in understanding the power behind discourses-things which are not said or the veiled meanings of discourses (Fairclough, 1989). Texts cannot be viewed in isolation but in their contexts. This is what Fairclough refers to as "intertextuality" of discourses (1989). It positions certain people in more power, calls for a particular order of discourse, which is appropriate in a particular setting. CDA's critical stance on literacy brought invaluable insights in terms of theory and approach to this study by analyzing the discourses of power and hegemony in research consultation meetings. It could make visible the structures of dominance and control by the powerful counterparts, and suggested ways to eliminate power and hegemony in supervision.

Research Methodology

The study was a qualitative case study in ethnography per se. Within qualitative research, this study is situated in the paradigm of critical research. It focused on critiquing the present status quo and challenging the existing state of affairs in research supervision. To study the notion of power and hegemony in research supervision the study selected two case studies of two research supervisees with their supervisors: Case I was a female supervisee with a female supervisor; case 2 was a male supervisee with a male supervisor. These cases were selected as purposive sampling to get two MS students of Education who were at the stage of thesis writing, so that the study could examine their discourses related to thesis development. For this, unstructured interviews and research consultation meetings between two MS (Education) students and their supervisors were selected within their contexts (a private university).

These two case studies tried to bring insider's perspective in the field of language ideologies. The uniqueness of this study is the depth of specific understanding of supervision processes and practices in this specific context. There was no attempt at generalization for larger audience and organizational studies.

For its methodological framework, the study used Fairclough's triad structure of CDA explained below.

Data Analysis

The study followed Fairclough's triad structure of data analysis which includes: (1) The analysis of the linguistic structure, forms, and meanings of the text, that is, micro-analysis using the texts of students' research theses, (2) Discursive practices around the discourses of the participants in research consultations, that is the discursive practice of the participants in the context of the institutional context and (3) the sociocultural context in which these literacy processes occurred and within which resulting discourses circulated. As a method of analysis, Fairclough's CDA approach well-suited the purpose of this study to address and transform the social wrong of power and hegemony in supervision practices and processes, and a systematic manner of suppressing student voices.

The acronym S is used for the supervisor and A is used for the supervisee.

Participants' Voices

In case 1 there was a significant absence of supervisee's input because of her being silent. On many turns of the talk, the contribution was in 'hmm' sound or 'ok'. The supervisee's obvious silence could be because of lack of equality or inclusion rendered to the supervisee. According to Blommaert (2005), "... issues of voice would be identified as crucial in explaining inequality... the capacity to accomplish desired functions through language. More accurately, it is the capacity to create favorable conditions for a desired uptake...." (p. 68). Voice may be associated with the most prestigious variety such as English and it may be denied to those ranking poor or existing at basic levels.

In case 2, the voice of the supervisee was given attention. One stress that he was relieved of was the use of English in conversations. He spoke in Urdu throughout the meetings and interview which was instrumental in giving voice to the supervisee. Voice is a social issue; it is a matter of functions, which is affected by the social values. According to Blommaert (2005), such values are found in orders of indexicality, which are unevenly distributed in society, with unequal access to these values. What may be appropriate or highly valued in one society may not be valued in another community.

Voice Association with Subject Positions

Subject positions are the positions speakers take up in their discourses. In case 1, in taking up their subject positions in discourses, the supervisor and supervisee showed the discursual rights and obligations in their roles. It decided what they could say and what they could not say within this particular discourse type. According to Fairclough (1989), discourse determines and reproduces social structure in the most creative ways through orders of discourse. Fairclough talks about two elements of reproduction of social structure: One is conservative, in which power structure remains relatively stable; and transformatory in which there is a shift in power relations through social struggle. In this consultation, the power relations were generally conservative in which their roles as supervisor and supervisee were stable; however, they were transformatory also when the supervisee was seen taking subject position and provided information on ICT (Information & Communication Technology). This was also a source of bringing about a social change, in the form of changing the status quo between the participants, no matter how meek it could be. The supervisor had to adjust or renew in a constantly changing world-here it was the

technological advancement of ICT. In order to adjust to the transformation in the order of discourse, it was necessary to hold on to her position as an English language teacher.

In case two, the supervisor acted like a mentor to the supervisee. The tone showed his patronizing style. The supervisee sought advice in non-academic matters also. This style was instrumental in gaining supervisee's respect for his supervisor, and admiration for the supervisor's insight and command of the subject. The mutuality of ideas and freedom granted to the supervisee gave him the confidence and he viewed himself empowered.

Voice of the Less Powerful Participant

In case 1 the voice of the supervisee was in accordance with the supervisor's assertions. As a centering authority, the supervisor laid down the norms of supervision style and structure, and the supervisee was in complete agreement with the supervisor's authority.

A: Experience is going good, because when I had made this proposal, so my supervisor took a lot of interest in the topic, and this is something of a lot of satisfaction for me, that she understands this topic, otherwise if, without interest, if any topic is taken by the supervisor also, so both cannot enjoy in the coordination ... and I am also learning that how to write that in proper academic way.

The supervisee realized the overarching role of the supervisor.

A: To keep focus that what we were doing, converting that into academic English writing in the correct way, that it looks correct and is also being understood... It's a challenge for me

In the above exchanges with the researcher, the supervisee used 'challenging' for writing and in order to overcome that difficulty she revised her writing many times before showing to the supervisor. These accounts narrate her hard work and difficulties in meeting the challenges of writing. The supervisee's voice complied with the supervision style, and she submitted to the educational system and the institutional practices of supervision. According to Blommaert (2005), voice is crucial in explaining inequality. The issue of voice is a social issue, concerned with function, which is affected by the social 'values'. Every difference in language can be turned into difference in social values, in difference and inequality. According to Gumperz (1982), "Language differences play an important, positive role in signaling information as well as in creating and maintaining the subtle boundaries of power,

status, role and occupational specialization...". (p. 6-7). According to Blommaert (2005), part of this linguistic and thus social linguistic inequality depends upon the inability of the speakers to carry out certain discourse functions based on the resources available to them.

In case 2, the supervisee found the supervisor's consultation as engaging. There were many philosophical debates on Al-Ghazali's philosophy of education and he was quite confident that the discussions made him get a firm grasp on his topic. However, the supervisee was very clear about the use of language:

A: In thesis for example ubh, it is said that use this type of language and use these words, but in using this structured language, the meanings changed from inside and originality finished.

In the fashion of his supervisor, the supervisee expressed his displeasure with the structured norms of writing:

A: Meaning that what I am wanting to write, that what I am wanting to say the words that I am wanting to use in place of that I am changing the words then meanings are not what I want to say and that difficult English has to be brought.

His concern regarding the prescriptive writing was that the originality of the work got lost when writing was structured in a regimented way. He uses metalanguage to express concerns like these:

A: Content of literature review should be this much. In that write in this way, link this paragraph with that paragraph plus "APA" style, that is one pain.

He regarded research writing as a matter of cutting and pasting contents in different sections. The democratic style of supervision was appreciated in his expressed freedom in his research work and his supervisor encouraged him to think critically through the problems. He mentioned about a reviewer who told him to give the research presentation in English, which frustrated him:

A: Now this mentality is against the educational framework. That absolutely destroys and finishes educational development. That mentality I can see over here. We are the ones to promote experiential learning and research but actually we are not being able to break through the structure and come out and a structure also of the west has been adopted. Why? There is no answer to this....there is so much attention given to English but is it adding any value to my work?

The voice of the supervisee was distinct, indexing his identity as a Pakistani Muslim scholar. His identity was framed with his overall disposition, appearance and dressing. He was clad in shalwar kameez (Pakistan's national dress, which is also emblematic of informality and casualty), and carried a beard (the mark of Muslim identity). When he deliberated on matters related to eastern values and Islamic philosophy, his appearance and reality matched very aptly, creating an overall aura of a Muslim scholar. Camps and Ivanic (2001) defined voice as "self-representation" in all human activity. Silva and Matsuda (2001) pointed out that "voice is not necessarily tied to the ideology of individualism" (p. 36) and also stressed the inevitability of voice as a result of intentional or unintentional uses of "socially available yet ever-changing repertoires (p.40). This concerns not only the individual, but the surrounding social relations (Bakhtin, 1981; Fairclough, 1992; Ivanic, 1998). His voice was distinct and self-assuring when he discussed that English was imposed on the people of this country, and was responsible for a certain mentality. Though he meant the mentality of the examiners, it was equally applicable to the social practices at the national level, which he thought was not adding any value to academics. According to him, there was an undue attention given to English, which was useless and futile.

A commonality was seen between him and the supervisor. He was in many ways echoing what his supervisor had expressed in matters related to English language and western values.

Power in discourse means the powerful participant controls and constrains the input from non-powerful participants. Fairclough (1989) distinguishes between three constraints: Contents, on what is said or done; relations, the social relations people enter into in discourse; subjects, or the 'subject positions' people can occupy. In case 1, the supervisor mostly composed the contents of discourses. The supervisee either answered in brief disjointed utterances or answered in 'hmm' sound which showed agreement and acceptance of the supervisor's assertions. Back-channels are also a form of feedback, where interruptions are allowed by the listener to support the speaker. Common expressions of back-channels include "mm" and "uhh hu" "ok" "ohh," and laughter by which listeners signal to the speaker that they are paying attention and the speaker can continue speaking. Ibrahim and Rafik-Galea (2006: 116), on the other hand, explain that back-channeling is the vocalization produced by conversational interlocutors who are in a listening role at the moment

of utterance that will not disrupt the primary speaker's speakership or turn. The social relation was that of consultation between them and both of them occupied subject positions in their roles. These constraints were imposed on the participants to behave in a particular manner linguistically. However, there was no direct control on the supervisee. The constraints were rather derived from the customary tradition of the discourse type of teaching which it drew upon. However, the supervisor exerted power in an indirect manner by selecting the discourse type. Powerful participants, in this way, can constrain contributions of the supervisee indirectly by indirectly constraining them (Fairclough, 1989).

S: *Have you seen our published theses?*

A: *Yes ma'am, ma'am I have seen Ms Leenab's thesis, first I saw Ms Sobaila's then Ms Leenab's*

S: *Haven't got Leenab's so far, there are more changes are coming but yes have you seen Sobaila's*

A: *Yes you had said to check other people's that's latest check that out. Sobaila's old*

S: *But in that*

A: *In Leenab's also there was no methodology but you told me to write for the understanding*

In this excerpt, the supervisee re-exerted herself, as compared to earlier exchanges. She regarded Sohaila's thesis as old, upon which the supervisor tried to give some explanation but was pre-empted by the supervisee that in Leenab's thesis there was no methodology. It came as a complaint that the supervisee was made to write for clarity but the others were not given this task. In these sets of exchanges, the supervisor was obviously in a commanding position demanding explanation. This explains the accessibility of holding educational discourses in academia. Although the dialogs revolved around the supervisee's work, it seemed that the supervisee did not have the access to these academic debates. This is also emblematic of power and authority in academia. The obviousness of unequal power relations between the participants discloses the aspect of discourse of power-who has the access to the discourse of power in academia. The supervisee by virtue of her modest educational background, and being lesser informed in academic matters, could not hold the dialog with control and confidence. The supervisor demanded an answer.

S: *There will be thousands of such models but your model is different from the others*

A: *Hmm*

S: *Is it or its not?*

A: *Yeab of course*

The explanation was demanded as if in interrogation. Such assertions were used frequently in the consultation and these left the supervisee further disempowered.

Unequal Contributions

In the research consultation practices, English language ideologies related to language ideologies were the force behind discourses, which showed the effect of power in the discourses. English has penetrated into the nation's life to that level where English is synonymous to good writing skills or research. In case 1, the constraints on the supervisee were to speak in English and follow the high formality index. English was the preferred language in consultations, but both the partners switched codes very frequently. From the supervisor's perspective, the underlying cause could be to make the supervisee relaxed, could understand her and engage her in the discourse. However, this yielded much lesser contribution from the supervisee. The subject position of the supervisee was also restricted as she did not get the space to present her viewpoint. The supervisor mainly initiated the topics. This was a highly routinized activity and was carried out in a professional manner by the supervisor. In the sense of thesis structure and appearance, a lot of ground was covered. Given the dynamics of access to linguistic forms and contextual spaces controlled by the centering actor, there is inequality, which occurs due to gaps in producing normative function, which are called pretextualities. People enter communication based on the resources and capabilities of the pretextualities which allow them to behave at a certain level or below that level. According to Blommaert (2005), misunderstandings or big communication slips between people may occur when their communicative functions do not match their resources. Blommaert (2005) talks of invisible contexts, which influence language long before they are produced in utterances and explain why certain utterances were produced or failed to be produced.

Silence

In case one, it was an important ideological work where silence was used as a defense by the supervisee. She knew that there was some problem in explaining the meanings but could not spell it out and remained silent on the matter and resorted to short responses. “Silence is another weapon for the less powerful participant, particularly as a way of being noncommittal about what more powerful participants say; but the latter may again be able to force participants out of silence and into a response by asking...” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 113). The supervisor’s elicitation of information was a strong ideological work, and the more powerful partner sustained power due to this ambiguity.

Conversely in case 2, the supervisee spoke with ease and freely expressed his ideas in Urdu.

Findings

The study analyzed the data through CDA, and posits that language plays a pivotal role in establishing power and hegemony in research consultations. As voice is central in explaining inequality, it is a social issue and is a source of hegemony and power.

In case1, silence from the supervisee suggests a concern of using English language in consultations. Language ideologies are the major force in using a language. In this context, English is viewed as an artifact that could be possessed and attain power. English is seen as a commodity which sells high in the language market. Those who do not possess this language feel threatened by the academic English. As in the case of the supervisee, English language constraint creates a feeling of disenfranchisement and disempowerment. The subject position that the participants take, show their discursal rights in their roles. Subject position was largely taken by the supervisor and it was only when discussing ICT that the supervisee took her subject position. This aspect is a source of bringing social change (Fairclough, 1989). The analysis of the data showed that the discourses were largely initiated by the supervisor. The turn-taking in conversation revealed that the larger and longer turns were taken by the supervisor. Largely, the supervisor imposed the contents of the talk. Back-channels were used by the supervisee as she preferred not to interrupt the flow of supervisor’s discourses. The discursal constraint on the supervisee was instrumental in making the supervisee behave in a submissive manner, linguistically.

Contrastingly, lack of language concern led to stress-free consultation, and resulted in an increased focus on the philosophical debates of the thesis. Supervisee took subject position and reasoned out his assertions. The democratic style of supervision led to more participation of the supervisee.

Conclusion

The paper concludes with the proposition that the voice of the research supervisee was not heard in case 1, while in case 2 the participant was given encouragement through the encouragement given by the supervisor. This affected their level of participation during the consultations. In case 1, language was a major concern in the consultation meetings, which became a source of establishing asymmetrical power relations between the participants.

Language ideologies have a dominant role to play in this context. Class struggle in social relations affected the discourses. The non-egalitarian layer of power manifested itself through language ideologies, as language became a source of creating classes among the people. The powerful agent [the supervisor] controlled the discourse types topically and the social order through the orders of discourse. Language ideologies played a very important role in sustaining the dominant position of the powerful agent. The study's submission is that language played a vital role in constraining the contributions of the less powerful participant, and was a source of creating inequality and incapacity to achieve desired goals.

The case 2 was in a sharp contrast to case 1 in approach and style of supervision. The structure of supervision was very flexible and there was no constraint on language.

The findings reveal an analytical approach toward the philosophical debates on a Muslim scholar. The ideological index was high as the supervisee's preferred language of communication remained Urdu, and he was given this autonomy and freedom by the supervisor.

Based on the research findings and discussion of the themes, the study presents the recommendations for bringing about a change in research supervision. The study recommends that the supervisors should not consider English language as a criterion for communication in research consultation meetings.

As most of the students are not proficient in English language skills, they tend to shy away in the meetings. Development at the conceptual level would bring

depth and profundity in research, which is getting compromised in most of the research supervisions. The supervisees should be encouraged to get involved in philosophical debates and discussions at the conceptual levels of the research, rather than being limited by the choice of a language. A pluralistic approach should be adopted where not one language but bilingualism or national language should also be encouraged.

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