What Are Course Syllabi Telling Students? Critical Discourse Analysis of Classroom Power Relationships

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Introduction

Nonnative English learners are often encouraged by their college instructors to become participants in the leaning process. However, Asian students are typically quiet and restrained in class. This tendency is likely conditioned by culture (Chuang, 2012; Guy, 1999; Marquardt, 1999) and the traditional top-down, teacher-centered pedagogies students have experienced (Jung, 2012; Liao, 2009, 2015; Liu, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2006; Tsou, 2012; Yeh, 2009). To promote active learning, instructors, especially those who teach the productive language skills (i.e., speaking and writing) have begun to assist students in overcoming the teacher–student boundary, seeing their teacher as a facilitator rather than an authoritative figure, freely expressing their opinions, and becoming decision makers in their learning. For example, Chen (2008) involved students in establishing the evaluation criteria for their classroom speaking assessments and learning to self-assess their oral performance in English. Lo (2010) alternated her role of the teacher between decision maker, mentor, and resource person to facilitate the development of learner autonomy. In Liao (2015), students were provided choices to determine the type and level of difficulty of speaking assessments based on their self-evaluation.

After the concept of learner centeredness was developed according to the theories of prominent psychologists and educators such as Piaget (1932), Rogers (1951), Dewey (1963), and Vygotsky (1978), interest in and the development of communicative language teaching (CLT) beginning in the 1970s has contributed to student-centered learning in second language acquisition (SLA; Hyland, 2007; Savignon, 1972). Many second-language (L2) pedagogies thus departed from the traditional audiolingual and grammar-translation methods of foreign language teaching and proposed the principle of learner centeredness, designing activities and curricula based on their relevance and meaningfulness to the learner.

Because of the development of the learner-centered approach and CLT in the past two decades, discourse analysis and its application in L1 and L2 language instruction and learning has received increasing attention (Fairclough, 1992a). Most studies on classroom discourse have focused on in-class discourse processes, including instructional discourse, recitation, and teacher-student interactions (e.g., Cazden, 1988; Greenleaf & Freedman, 1993; Lehere, 1994; Leander, 2002; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991a; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991b; Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, & Long, 2003). However, few studies have

investigated the teacher–student power relationship by using critical discourse analysis (CDA) of course materials. This study analyzed course materials, specifically course syllabi, in an English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) program. The objective of the study was to determine what the syllabi reveal about the curriculum and the power relationships between language teachers and learners. The present study contributes to the body of knowledge by examining the implicit messages embedded in the syllabi of core L2 listening and speaking courses held by the department of English of a university in Taiwan to raise EFL teachers' awareness of classroom power configurations.

Literature Review

This study is based on theories and research regarding the disciplines of CDA, learner centeredness, and L2 pedagogy.

Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA is different from earlier discourse analyses because it does not involve merely investigating the linguistic properties of a language, but focuses on the distribution of the social power represented by the language (Fairclough, 1992b, 2006; Van Dijk, 2009; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Fairclough (1989) asserted that the objective of CDA is to uncover the influence of language on the "production, maintenance, and change of social relations of power" and to "help increase consciousness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others" (p. 1). CDA not only reveals how sociolinguistic conventions produce unequal power distributions but also how they reinforce and reproduce social conditions. The purpose of CDA, therefore, is to identify the ideologies encoded in language that cause unequal distributions of social power to seem natural and to denaturalize these ideologies, thus enabling people to notice the unequal power distribution and, if they choose to, initiate change (Fairclough, 2004). CDA does not necessarily concern negative or severe social or political problems; instead, it investigates and challenges any social issue critically (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

CDA draws on an array of analytical approaches, including the systemic functional linguistics (SFL) approach proposed by Halliday (2004). Halliday applied a functionally and socially situated approach to linguistic analysis because he believed that language evolves in the process of human interactions in the social environment. SFL, therefore, is a framework of analytical techniques that CDA researchers can use to examine language and power relationships in society. Similarly, Fairclough (2004, 2006) asserted that the meanings of texts and discourses are socially constructed; all texts are parts of social events and discourses are means for representing aspects of society. Discourses not only reflect the relationships between linguistic and social structures but also perpetuate existing, stable sociolinguistic practices as well as ideologies and conventions based on the people who linguistically interact within a social institution. In addition, Fairclough contended that, through evaluation of individual word choices, writers' conscious or unconscious perceptions can be identified and their personal viewpoints or collective viewpoints can be determined.

Various methods of textual analysis offer insight into the elements present in a text; however, Fairclough (1995) stressed that scrutinizing the elements that are absent from a text (i.e., analysis of significant absences) is critical from the standpoint of sociocultural studies. Analyzing significant absences facilitates discovering voices or discourses that have been excluded from the text but are as crucial as those explicitly stated (2004). One method for visualizing absences is to deconstruct nominalizations. Nominalizations create

an impersonal style and make actions agentless. Through the deconstruction of nominalizations, semantic roles (i.e., agent or patient) of the parties involved emerge (1995). In addition, analysis of the force of utterances (Fairclough, 1992b) at both the lexical and grammatical levels entails a pragmatic aspect of language use and facilitates illustrating power relationships in texts.

Van Dijk (2001) included semiotic structure as a dimension in CDA and described discourse as "a communication event, including conversational interaction, written text, as well as associated gestures, face work, typographical layout, images, and other 'semiotic' or multimedia dimension of significance" (p. 98). Van Dijk's emphasis on semiotics was supported by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) and Wodak and Meyer (2009), who believed that the nonverbal aspects of texts are as communicative as linguistic devices even though nonverbal information conveys value systems implicitly.

Learner Centeredness and L2 Pedagogy

Traditionally, teachers serve as the center of knowledge and direct students' learning process while students play a receptive role in education. In teacher-centered approaches, learning objectives are prescribed by teachers based on their experiences and prior practices; and assessments are mostly summative. In the twentieth century, theories of prominent psychologists and educators such as Piaget, Dewey, and Vygotsky have contributed to the shift from traditional teacher-centered to student-centered approaches, which place students at the center of the learning process. Piaget (1932) condemned traditional schools, which offer teacher-centered whole-class instruction. He criticized that the procedure "seems to be contrary to the most obvious requirements of intellectual and moral development" (p. 412). Similarly, Dewey reprehended traditional instruction for failing to "secure the active cooperation of the pupil in construction of the purposes involved in his studying" (1963, p. 67). For Dewey, simply waiting passively for the instructor to hand-feed knowledge does not constitute learning; learners must gain experience through activities in which they actively participate. Vygotsky, one of the most prominent social-cognitive theorists, deemed social context critical to cognitive development and regarded socialization as the foundation of cognitive development (1978). The internalization of knowledge, according to Vygotsky, is a progression that begins with an interpersonal process before it proceeds into an intrapersonal process; a learner's development first occurs on the social level (between people) before it occurs on the individual level (within a person).

Rogers' (1951) person-centered approach further facilitated the development of student-centered learning. According to Rogers' theory of personality, one person is unable to teach another person directly. Instead, he or she can merely facilitate another person's learning. The learning effect is maximized only when the learner perceives relevance. Thus, student roles vary considerably between student-centered and teacher-centered learning. In student-centered approaches, learners are no longer deemed empty vessels; rather, they are individual entities that have distinct perceptual frameworks based on their life experiences. Learners learn in various ways (Kolb, 1984; Myers, 1995) and construct their distinct meanings through active learning (Meyers & Jones, 1993). Therefore, teachers should guide and facilitate students' learning based on the experiences and needs of the students instead of those of the teachers (Entwistle, 2003; Ericksen, 1984).

In SLA, learner-centered discourse is commonly believed to facilitate learning more effectively than teacher-led discourse because it provides more opportunities for negotiated interaction and greater autonomy to learners (Lee, 2000; Pica, 1987; Van Lier, 1996). By

contrast, in teacher-led discourse, disfluent exchanges between teachers and students have been observed (Donato & Brooks, 2004; Hall, 2004; Leemann-Guthrie, 1984). Another approach that is similar to learner centeredness is CLT, which emerged in SLA in the 1970s (Hyland, 2007; Savignon, 1972). CLT emphasizes meaning and communicative competency instead of form and that language must be meaningful to the learner to facilitate L2 learning. Therefore, in CLT, the curriculum and learning activities are designed based on their meaningfulness and authenticity to the learner, rather than only the course objectives and materials pre-determined by the teacher (Johnson, 1982; Littlewood, 1981; Savignon, 1972, 2001).

The aforementioned development has caused "task" to become a crucial concept in L2 pedagogy and course and materials design (Nunan, 1991). Because task-based instruction has become more common in L2 classrooms, researchers have begun to examine practical applications and the effectiveness of the pedagogy. In examining task-based instruction, Breen (1989) distinguished "task-in-process" and "task-as-workplan" (pp. 24−25). Based on this distinction, Seedhouse (2004) argued that L2 teaching research should focus on what actually occurs in the classroom (i.e., task-in-process) instead of the teacher's pre-determined goals (i.e., task-as-workplan). Drawing on sociocultural theory, which is based on the premise that learners co-construct the learning activities in which they participate based on their personal backgrounds and individual goals, Ellis (2000) emphasized that language teachers must view tasks as dynamic processes (i.e., task-in-process). In these tasks, language use and learning do not follow predetermined patterns but are actively shaped through the engagement of both teachers and learners.

Similar to Breen's (1989) distinction between task-in-process and task-as-workplan, Van Lier (1991, 1996) proposed two fundamental dimensions of language teaching: planning and improvising. Van Lier recommended that teachers balance planning and improvising by developing a dual vision, which involves a long-term sense of direction while improvising in response to given situations.

The aforementioned learning theories and L2 pedagogies are based on student centeredness. However, the implicit messages conveyed in English curricula and whether EFL students are treated as participants or recipients in the L2 acquisition process remain undetermined. According to Pinar and Reynolds (1992), every text is embedded with "purposes and crosspurposes, motives and countermotives—what is stated and what is not" (p. 224). Many aspects of curricula, such as course materials, class lectures, and class organization, can be examined to identify the roles that students play and are allowed to play in classrooms. The aspects include, but are not limited to, course materials, class lectures, and class organization.

Studies on Classroom Discourse

In the past two decades, discourse analysis has been increasingly applied in language instruction and learning (Fairclough, 1992a). For example, Greenleaf and Freedman (1993) used conversation analysis to study the teaching-learning interactions in a ninth grade English class. Nystrand and Gamoran (1991a) analyzed the instructional discourse of an eighth-grade English classroom and identified features of substantively engaging teaching, including authentic questions and integration of prior responses into successive questions or discussion. Graff (2009) examined why the relationship between a language arts teacher and a specific seventh-grade student was particularly strained. Graff applied conversation analysis, classroom discourse analysis, and Goffman's participation frameworks (1981) to analyze the teacher-student interaction in class. Furthermore,

Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, and Long (2003) conducted an event-history analysis of questions raised by teachers and students in eighth- and ninth-grade English and social studies classrooms to explore the structure of classroom discourse and the dynamics of its unfolding. Leander (2002) studied silencing in peer interaction in a high school history classroom and determined that participants used silencing to produce, divide, and relate social spaces in which they were positioned as more or less silenced or privileged.

In addition, discourse analysis has been applied in examining L2 classroom interaction. For example, Goldenberg and Patthey-Chavez (1995) examined discourse features of instructional conversations and their possible effects on the conceptual and language development of L2 learners. Mortensen (2009) investigated how learners in L2 college class settings assumed speakership and established recipiency in whole-class interaction. Lerner (1995) examined the speaker turn design in L2 reading and writing classes. She focused on the uses of incomplete turn-constructional units by teachers in providing opportunities for subsequent student participation.

Except for Leander (2002), who explored silencing and student-student social relationships in a high school history class, the aforementioned studies did not investigate power relationships. In the past two decades, most studies on classroom discourse in L1 and L2 settings have focused on in-class discourse processes, particularly instructional discourse and teacher–student interaction during class time. Power relationships evident in course materials have yet to be explored. The current study addressed this gap in the literature, examining the teacher–student power relationship by conducting a CDA of course syllabi.

Methods

To explore how teacher–student relationships are textually represented in higher education, this study critically examined language functions in the syllabi of the core listening and speaking courses required for a bachelor's degree held by the department of English of a Taiwanese university. The educational mission of the English program was to enhance the language competencies of learners and prepare them for a career in English language teaching or business. To complete the degree program, students were required to complete 50 credit hours of core English courses and 30 credit hours of elective courses in language or professional (i.e., English language teaching or business) skills. The required language courses could be divided into four disciplines: listening and speaking, reading and writing, linguistics, and translation and interpretation. The core courses in the listening and speaking discipline were English Listening and Speaking (freshman, 4), Fundamental English Oral Communication (sophomore, 2), Intermediate English Oral Communication (sophomore, 2), English Business Communication (junior, 4), and Business Meetings and Presentations (senior, 4). The information in parentheses denotes the academic standing and credit hours of the courses. The total number of credit hours was 16, accounting for 32% of the 50 required credit hours of language courses.

A CDA of the syllabi of the core listening and speaking courses was conducted to elucidate unequal power distributions at an institution of higher education and explore the syllabus writers' identities and roles as teachers. The syllabi are denoted as Syllabi 1 to 5 according to the order in which they were used in the curriculum. The theories and analytical techniques on which this study was based were Van Dijk's discourse semiotics and ideology (1995); Fairclough's emphasis on word choice (1989), significant absences (1995, 2004; see also Van Leeuwen, 1993), and analysis of the force of utterances (1992b,

1995); and Halliday's functional analysis of discourse (i.e., SFL), particularly his analysis of lexical connotation (2004). Specifically, the research involved analyzing word choices, lexical connotations, semiotic structures, modality, quantifying adjectives, nominalizations, and semantic roles.

Because no studies have explored the teacher–student power relationship by examining course syllabi, the categorization guidelines for this study were developed during the initial phase of the research. In addition to the author of this study, two trained raters assessed the syllabi and five categories were determined in the initial analysis. In the second phase of the analysis, three raters re-examined the texts by considering all five categories.

Results of Text Analysis

A critical analysis of the syllabi revealed indications of classroom power relationships. The intra-rater reliabilities of the three raters were .94, .94, and .92, which are considered high; and the inter-rater reliability was .87, which is considered satisfactory. The elements that indicated classroom power relationships were categorized into the following: instructor information, course policies, course empahsis, section headings, and grading.

Instructor Information

The study first examined how the faculty members presented themselves in the syllabi. Out of five instructors, three added the academic title "Dr." or "Ph.D." before or after their names. Although such practice seems natural in academia, deconstructing how text is read, defamiliarizing taken-for-granted perceptions, and making the familiar strange (Kaomea, 2003) revealed that this practice conveys that qualification, expertise, and authority are crucial in these courses and, thus, signifies the instructors as authoritative figures. This practice implies that the status difference between students and instructors creates a hierarchical structure in which the students are subjects of rather than participants in the teaching program. It is likely that by adding the title "Dr." or "Ph.D." to their names, the instructors sought appreciation of their expertise and respect for their authority by the students, intending to establish a relationship that is conducive for knowledge transmission.

Course Policy

In three of the syllabi, the most salient element was course policy. Syllabi 1, 3, and 4 listed 19, 20, and 11 class policies, which constituted more than 35%, 30%, and 25% of the entire syllabus, respectively. Collectively, the semiotic structures of these three syllabi indicated that rules are an indispensable component of language courses.

Course Emphasis

In Syllabus 3, the course description stated that the course was designed to facilitate inquiry into the learning process. As foreign language majors, students are often reminded during their language courses that the learning process is more vital than the product. In this syllabus, however, the learning process seemed to be less vital than the product, as indicated by the Goals section of the syllabus; instead of "In the **process** of this course, the learner will learn X, Y, and Z", the instructor wrote, "As a **result** of this course, the learner will. . ." (emphasis added by the author).

Section Headings

Although analysis of the other four syllabi indicated no such emphasis on the product, the instructor's power over the students was evident in the syllabus headings, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Section Headings Indicating Instructors' Power Over Students

	Course Title	Goals	Activities	Grade	Course Policy
1	English Listening and Speaking	x	Required Activities	Grading Procedure	Class Rules
2	Fundamental English Oral Communication	x	x	x	x
3	Intermediate English Oral Communication	Instructor's Goals	Course Requirements	Evaluation & Grading	Course Policy
4	English Business Communication	x	Assignments	Grading	Class Rules
5	Business Meetings and Presentations	x	Requirements	x	x

The five syllabi contained seven main types of heading. The four types shown in Table 1 indicate that the instructors held power over their students whereas the following three do not: "Course Description," "Course Schedule," and "Textbooks."

In Syllabus 3, the course objectives were presented as the "**Instructor's** Goals for the Course" (emphasis added by the author). The presence of the instructor's voice and the absence of the students' opinions and options suggested that the instructor possessed the power; the instructor set the goals, not the students, even though the students are often strongly encouraged to exhibit creativity and responsibility in the learning process.

The headings "Course Requirement" and "Evaluation and Grading" of this and the other syllabi revealed the same pattern. Although the nominalization of "requirement," "assignment," "evaluation," and "grading" renders both the "agent" ("doer" or "actor") and the "patient" ("doee" or "recipient") absent, a more careful examination of the headings identified the instructor as the agent and the students as the patients. The instructor's power over the students is clearly demonstrated once the nominalizations are transformed into complete sentences directed from the agent to the patient:

Requirement → The instructor requires the students to perform specific tasks.
Assignment → The instructor assigns tasks to the students.
Evaluation → The instructor will evaluate the students.
Grading → The instructor will grade the students according to the rubrics.

Once nominalizations are transformed into complete sentences, they can be transformed into passive sentences:

Requirement → The students are required to perform specific tasks.
Assignment → The students are assigned tasks.
Evaluation → The students are evaluated by the instructor.
Grading →The students are graded by the instructor according to the rubrics.

The instructor's authority and power are evident in these passive sentences. The students were the subjects of the teaching program rather than active participants of the process. No encouragement of the student's creativity is observed in these sentences.

Grading

Syllabus 3 included strict rules on evaluation; the frequency and due dates of assignments were clearly defined and a rubric explicitly precluded flexibility. The use of the subjective modal verb "must" in "For a grade of A, a student must participate in all aspects of the course including written work, discussions, productions, and presentations of high quality" expresses the instructor's authority and defines him or her as someone with power over the students instead of someone who shares the power. In addition, the use of the quantifying adjective "all" designates the instructor as the decision maker regarding the curriculum; it implies that the instructor, not the learners, knows the elements that are crucial for the students' learning. The quantying adjective and a rubric with a fixed grading percentage seemed to deny the student any power in the decision-making process.

However, the power relationships identified in the other syllabi differed. Although Syllabus 1 listed specific grade percentages with "each requirement," it granted more power to the students than Syllabus 3 by stating the following: "[The] approximate [weight] for each requirement is as follows. This may be altered during individual conferences as each student sets personal goals for the semester." Although the instructor still held the power by "requiring" the students to perform certain tasks, he or she provided flexibility, enabling the students to exert power as well. The instructors in the other three syllabi also seemed to allow space for students' creativity and decision making, as stated in Syllabus 4,

> I believe that you, as a participant in a language course, are the person [best suited] to assess the degree to which you [succeed or do not succeed] in getting the most out of this learning experience. While I will provide you with ongoing guidance, support, and feedback, I will ask you to judge what grade you deserve for the progress you have made in meeting the course expectations.

Although the instructor reserved the right to overturn the grade, substantial power was granted to the students through this approach. The students remained subjects of the teaching program, but they also became agents, and, therefore, participants in assessing their own level of success, attaining valuable skills and knowledge through the learning experience, evaluating their own grades, and achieving progress. "We live, Daignault says, in a flattened world in which our insistence on accuracy destroys fantasy and pleasure" (Pinar & Reynolds, 1992, p. 11). The analysis of the grading policies of the five syllabi produced encouraging results, showing only one syllabus with a strict rubric that inflicts a "flattened world" upon the students.

Discussion

This study explored the power relationship between instructors and language learners manifested in course syllabi. The analyses revealed two opposing findings. (1) The writers of the syllabi, except for the writer of Syllabus 3, shared power with their students by affording them flexibility in determining the learning goals and assessment methods. (2) Many of the linguistic elements of the syllabi, including nominalization, modality, quantifying adjective use, subject positions and agentivity, and semiotic structures, strongly indicated the authority that the instructors held over their students. These contradictory

findings prompt investigation regarding why language learners are urged to think critically, set goals, and make decisions and, simultaneously, are subjected to the authority of teaching staff.

One possible reason for the contradiction between written text and the intended meaning is people's orientations toward writing in certain genres (Kress, 1989; Swales, 1990). Hoey (2001) compared writing with dancing. Although dancers can be creative, any variation must be based on certain existing patterns. Likewise, writers and readers who are embedded in a particular context are subject to certain schemata and write or understand text with specific structures in mind. An example is that of writing letters. People begin a letter with the word "dear" regardless of whether the recipient is a friend or a stranger. Because of the formality of a certain genre, people often give little thought to the information that is communicated through a text. The principle might apply to syllabus construction. When instructors were students, they received traditional syllabi from their professors; instructors' colleagues construct syllabi in a certain fashion; and instructors receive a prescribed format for syllabus writing from the university at which they teach. Therefore, they develop syllabi based on given conventions, unaware of the type of message that might be conveyed. Consequently, they are unaware that some of the text in the syllabi contradicts their intentions for the students. Fairclough contended that people apply their knowledge of language and conventions not only to interpret the meanings of text but also to construct new text. Through frequently reoccurring conventions, the existing social and power relationships are validated, reinforced, and perpetuated, and the possibility of change undermined (2006). Genre conventions thus become a key factor in the perpetuation of institutional structures in modern society (2004).

In addition, within the syllabi genre, the interaction between participants (i.e., the teacher and students) is unidirectional, or as Thompson described it, "mediated quasi-interaction" (1995, p. 84). The producers of texts "exercise power over consumers in that they have the sole producing rights and therefore determine what is included and excluded, how events are represented, and . . . even the subject positions of their audience" (Fairclough, 2006, p. 50). As Fairclough indicated, the unidirectional nature of mediated quasi-interaction not only causes texts to seem authoritative (2004) but also causes the power relationships between the participants to be unequal (2006).

The subject positions of teachers should be determined not only according to their role as knowledge providers but also according to their other roles and identities as mentors, facilitators, and members of their institution (i.e., the school). However, in the syllabi examined in this study, the "course manager" identities of teachers were overwhelmingly more evident than any of their other identities. Through language, the syllabi not only created subject positions but also generalized representations of the teachers.

In addition to being implicit in the language, the "course manager" identities of teachers were evident in the semiotic structures of course policies and rules. Although course policies and rules are crucial to convey to students the expectations of a course, the semiotic structures overstressed the rules. This overemphasis on semiotic structure was also evident in a study by Crowley (1989), who indicated that reading was overemphasized and that people spend most of the time throughout their school lives reading; students read the books and articles assigned by the teacher to learn what he or she wants them to learn, and read the syllabus carefully to ensure that they do only what is allowed. Many Asian students, instead of being independent thinkers who are aware of the rationale behind their behaviors, tend to be obedient and wait for the teacher's instructions (Scollon, 1999). The

semiotic structures of the syllabi examined in this study are consistent with Crowley's implication that independent thinking is not adequately encouraged and fostered in existing curricula.

This is not surprising because unequal power relationships arise regularly and have become too natural to be challenged. Because people become accustomed to unequal power relationships during their school and professional lives, they experience difficulty in initiating change. A suitable method for initiating change is to deconstruct text by making the familiar strange and the strange familiar (Derrida, 1976; Gee, 1990) as achieved in this study. According to Kaomea (2003), familiar text and dominant appearances often must be scrutinized to reveal a broader spectrum of perspectives. Exploring and disturbing mundane traditions provides useful insight.

Although this study provides awareness regarding the representation of authority in language programs, it does not propose that authority can completely disappear. Auerbach (2000) provided valuable insight into teacher and student centeredness. She asserted that all classrooms are teacher centered because it is essentially teachers who hold the power and their beliefs shape the nature and process of a learning community. Scholars agree that teachers have distinct perceptions of effective L2 pedagogies. Delpit (1988) contended that the power of the teacher over the student is enacted in classrooms: "[T]o act as if power does not exist is to ensure that the power status quo remains the same" (p. 292), but "[t]hose with power are frequently least aware of—or least willing to acknowledge—its existence" (p. 282). This paper was not intended to serve as a critique of the content or construction of syllabi or to advocate the total elimination of power. Conversely, the purpose was to demonstrate that examining familiar texts "with a very high level of awareness" (Kaomea, 2003, p. 21) reveals the power structures conveyed in syllabi and curricula designs and facilitates implementing remedial actions.

Auerbach (1995, 2000) stated that teachers are pivotal in fostering a participatory learning community. Regardless of whether they are aware of this, the dynamics of power are integral to daily classroom activities. Even when teachers try to enhance the degree of learner participation by using dialogues and negotiations, they remain "first among equals" (Doll, 1993, p. 166), and their attitudes critically influence their classroom decisions. Thus, it is meaningful and important for teachers to become aware of their standpoints. If language instructors were to acknowledge the power structures embedded in text and reflect on their own syllabi to determine the teaching philosophy underlying the formal, traditional syllabus writing and their choice of words, then they may be able to provide their students with more power, enable them to become participants in their own learning process, and foster their critical thinking and creativity.

Conclusion and Limitation

How teachers speak in class affects how students perceive their academic world and their place in it. In addition, textual representations of students' social conditions and interactions in school influence their perceptions of their roles and identities. Because teachers can construct multiple copies of textual representations, they hold the power to influence students' self-perceptions and the understanding of their relationship with the social world and events therein. The present study examined the underlying messages of course syllabi and discovered an unequal teacher–student power relationship textually represented in the discourse of syllabi within schools. As one of the writers of the syllabi analyzed in this study reported, the author's analysis and deconstruction of her syllabus

made her realize that she was not as liberal and open-minded as she thought she was. However, the process of deconstructing the syllabi enabled her to examine text more closely. The results of this study suggested that, by becoming willing to examine the overlooked aspects of their curricula and writing, instructors can improve their curricula and experience personal growth.

Certain limitations in this study must be acknowledged. First, the study examined the syllabi of the core listening and speaking courses of only one language program and, thus, was essentially a case study. Therefore, future studies are encouraged to conduct further analysis of more written texts. They are also encouraged to compare and contrast written discourses with the more overt statements made by teachers in both interviews and classroom talks. Moreover, cultural and social practices and preferences shape communication and writing (Connor, 2011). Because teachers are the products of their cultures (Ellis, 1985), a complexity of cultures exists in the classroom (Connor, 2011; Holliday, 1999). Differences in philosophical assumptions pertaining to communication, teaching, and learning cause variations in the way in which teachers and students in Chinese and Western cultures mutually negotiate roles (Scollon, 1999). Therefore, a curriculum can be seen as a mirror that reflects cultural beliefs (Bruner, 1996; Pinar, 2004). Traditional whole-class teacher-centered EFL classrooms emphasizing receptive over productive learning are common in Taiwan (Liao & Oescher, 2009; Liu, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2006; Yeh, 2009). The author of this paper acknowledges that Chinese culture and its impact on teachers' beliefs might have influenced the results of this study. This consideration warrants further investigation.

Notes

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Submitted: August, 10th, 2014

Approved: June, 5th, 2015