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## **'I'll DEAL with You ...': power and domination in discourse in a Ghanaian educational context**

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**ABSTRACT** In spite of the democratic arrangements that have been made to ensure students' participation in decision-making in the administration of Ghana's school system, it is not uncommon to hear of students' strikes and demonstrations which often result in the destruction of public property and closure of schools. Studies that observe the power dynamics between students and educators as they engage in decision-making and negotiation may contribute to our understanding of conflicts in schools, as well as the need to find solutions to these conflicts. This study applied Critical Discourse Analysis in analysing a 13-minute segment of a meeting between members of staff and student leaders in a Ghanaian senior high school. The study reveals discursive features through which social power and domination are reproduced and enacted in the discourse. Also, school authorities employ both positive self-representation and negative other-representation in cognitively controlling the minds of student leaders. The study has significant implications for power and domination in educational practice.

### **Introduction**

Power can be conceived of as the ability to influence or control the decisions, actions or behaviour of other people. The substantial cultural, social and structural variables which impinge on education as an institution inherently construct the interaction between educators and learners in terms of power relations. The curriculum objectives and the kind of personality that children are to become in the future are predetermined by the structure of the education system. In boarding schools, it is teachers and school administrators who even decide for students when to wake up and when to go to bed. This involvement of educators in the life of the child is held legitimate since the supposed effect is to positively affect the life of the child and/or contribute to the communal good of society. However, if the adult's involvement with the child becomes abusive, and thus is directed towards the satisfaction of the former's own interest, then the exercise of power becomes domination and illegitimate. One way of controlling the abuse of power in the regular interaction between educators and students is to distribute it and institutionalise consent such that the child is relatively involved in taking decisions and making choices that ultimately affect her or him.

In Ghana, the education system is structured such that both students and school authorities manage the enterprise of education in a democratic manner. There are structures instituted to ensure the relative balance of power among stakeholders of education just as there are opportunities for all to participate in decision-making. One key institution that ensures students' participation in decision-making is the Student Representative Council (SRC). The composition of the SRC varies at the different levels of the Ghanaian educational system, but the functions are very similar. At the senior high school (SHS) level, the SRC is made up of prefects who mediate between the school's administration and students; in this article, the term 'prefect' is used interchangeably with 'student leader'. The mode of selecting prefects varies from school to school, and, even in the same school, it varies from time to time. The commonest mode of selection is by election, where

students are given the opportunity to file nominations, and the nominees vetted by a committee made of teachers, and those eligible are presented to the student body for election. Another mode of selecting student leaders is by appointment. Here students are allowed to file nominations and the school administration constitutes a committee to vet the nominees and recommend some of them to the headmaster for appointment.

The SRC, thus constituted, plays a dual role of helping the administration to maintain discipline among students and ensuring that students' concerns are addressed by the administration. In spite of this democratic arrangement, it is not uncommon in Ghana to hear of students' unrest, which often results in confrontations with the administration and the destruction of public property. Such unhealthy occurrences question the effectiveness of the structures put in place to maintain peace and cooperation between students and school administration as key stakeholders of education. Studies that observe the power dynamics between students and educators as they engage in decision-making and negotiation may contribute to our understanding of conflicts in schools, as well as our quest to find solutions to these conflicts.

It is in light of the above that this study adopts a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach in analysing a segment of a meeting between members of staff and student leaders in a Ghanaian SHS, in order to illustrate how power and its abuse are discursively enacted. The study explores the discursive features that participants in the discourse employ to enact and reproduce social power relations. It also examines the techniques that the school authorities use to cognitively control the minds of the less powerful in the interaction.

Research in CDA has predominantly been about political discourse (e.g. Van Dijk, 2006; Rudyk, 2007) and media discourse (e.g. Fairclough, 1992, 1995a; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1998). Although Gee (1992, 1996), Rogers (2004), Young (2004) and Sarroub (2004) have directed their analysis at discourse in educational contexts, they do not focus on the enactment of power in teacher-student interaction. Rogers' study comes close to the present one, but her study analyses domination and ideology in school staff meeting with parents who are not as literate as the school board. The rest explore ideological issues relating to learning by either drawing on interview data or interaction between teachers and researchers. Some studies that examine power relations between students and educators include Owusu-Ansah (1992), Orellana (1996), Edu-Buandoh (2006), Masko (2009), and Mayes (2010).

Edu-Buandoh (2006) analyses interview data she co-constructed with three international English as a Second Language (ESL) students at the University of Iowa, as well as policy documents issued by the University to international students. Of significance to the present study is her finding that the University is projected as powerful, while the students are perceived to be powerless. Orellana (1996) explores two problem-posing classroom meetings in an urban bilingual elementary school in California, focusing on ways in which power was manifested, shaped, contested and negotiated by students and their teacher in a setting that was designed to transform traditional classroom relations. Looking at how power is played out among students in their own meeting, and how the presence of the teacher in another meeting changed the power dynamics, Orellana (1996) concludes that classroom meetings illustrate how power may merely be reconfigured, rather than equalised, despite efforts made to democratise classroom relations. The teacher enacted a powerful role in the discourse by asserting her own opinions, controlling space, monitoring students' contributions, and correcting misinterpretations of ideas.

The concerns of Mayes' (2010) study are quite similar to those of Orellana's (1996) in examining an English composition programme that was designed to implement critical pedagogy in a university in the United States of America. Her analysis of the curriculum objectives against the institutional context, and interviews she had with students and teachers, as well as interactions among students and teachers, reveal contradictions between the goals of the critical pedagogy project and its implementation. She notes that the assumption that traditional classroom power can be transferred directly from the powerful (teachers) to the powerless (learners) underestimates the complexity of power relations, and that the designers of critical pedagogy projects ought to be critical of such theoretical assumptions. Mayes (2010) recommends that the objectives of critical pedagogy projects need to be driven bottom-up; that is, from the ordinary students and teachers. Both Orellana's (1996) and Mayes' (2010) studies draw attention to the difficulties involved in transforming traditional power relations. While the present study acknowledges that the structural and sociocultural elements underpinning the education of children tend to construct educational

situations in terms of power relations (Levering et al, 2009), it argues against the abuse of power in educational contexts.

Masko's (2009) study of literacy lessons in several kindergarten classrooms in the Central Region of Ghana is important to the current study. She probes the authoritative positions teachers assume during lessons and concludes that such an approach to the child's upbringing is not the best for Ghana's developing democracy. It is interesting to question whether there is a correlation between how students are taught at the early ages and how they accept or resist dominance in higher levels of education. This question is not answered in this study, but Owusu-Ansah (1992) shows that student leaders in the University of Cape Coast employ modality to enact power in their interaction with the University's administration. Owusu-Ansah analyses written minutes of meetings and resolution documents by student leaders and observes that while students employ modality in the minutes of meetings to show politeness and construct a powerless 'subject position' (Fairclough, 2001), in the resolution documents they display a high degree of power in their demands. Owusu-Ansah concludes that this difference is due to the variation in context and the nature of interaction.

The studies summarised above demonstrate that previous research on power relations in educational settings has focused on several dimensions, including students' role in policy formulation, curriculum design, and teaching and learning approaches, students' interaction with educators in text and talk, and the evaluation of critical pedagogy programmes from the perspective of CDA. The studies together illustrate that the relationship between educators and learners can usefully be conceived of in terms of power relations (Levering et al, 2009). Masko, in particular, criticises the authoritative position Ghanaian basic school teachers assume in classroom interaction. The current article contributes to the growing exploration on power relations and domination in educational settings by investigating how power is enacted at a meeting involving members of staff and student leaders in a Ghanaian SHS. The purpose is to draw attention to the discursive features and strategies used in enacting power and to argue against domination or manipulation in Ghanaian institutional discourse.

### **The Concepts of Power and Manipulation**

Fairclough's (1995b, 2001) concepts of 'power' and 'ideology' and Van Dijk's (2006) concept of 'manipulation' provide a theoretical basis for the analysis of the meeting recorded for the study. According to Fairclough (1995b), power is conceptualised in terms of asymmetries between participants in discourse events and also in terms of unequal capacity to control how texts are produced, distributed and consumed in particular sociocultural contexts. Power ideologically exists in social structure and is reproduced in discourse, and Fairclough (2001) defines 'ideologies' as the implicit assumptions that participants bring into discourse to naturalise power and legitimise domination. In the context of the school, power and ideologies exist not only with the authorities, but also with the students who are equal stakeholders in the social process of education.

Van Dijk's (2006) concept of 'manipulation' is 'a communicative and interactional practice, in which a manipulator exercises control over other people, usually against their will or against their best interests' (p. 360). Manipulation involves domination or abuse of power, and is thus illegitimate. Manipulative discourse typically occurs when the victims are unable to understand the real intentions or to see the full consequences of the beliefs or actions advocated by the manipulator. This may be the case, especially, when the recipients lack the specific knowledge that might be used to resist manipulation. Van Dijk (2006) conceptualises 'manipulation as a form of social power abuse, cognitive mind control and discursive interaction' (p. 359). These domains of manipulation are in a triangulated framework and are dialectically related.

Most manipulators employ strategies that include positive 'self-presentation' and negative 'other-presentation'. By employing notions of the 'self' and the 'other', speakers and writers construct biased accounts of identities in favour of themselves or the group they stand for, 'blaming negative situations and events on opponents' (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 377). These strategies, as Van Dijk (2006) notes, implement the usual polarisation that is often found in ideological discourse. Specific techniques of positive self-presentation include asserting moral or intellectual superiority over one's opponents, appealing to relevant ideologies, attitudes and emotions, and emphasising one's

position, power and authority, as well as their related ideological sources. On the other hand, some techniques of negative other-presentation are accusation, emphasising the negative acts of the opponent, as well as emphasising his or her inferior position and deficiency in knowledge. Van Dijk's (2006) theoretical position on domination outlined here is integrated with Fairclough's (1995b, 2001) concepts of ideology and power in studying how social power and its abuse are reproduced in institutional discourse.

### **The Ghanaian Context: struggles for better education**

Since independence, Ghana's secondary education system has undergone several policy shifts. The 1987 reforms replaced the British-styled seven-year secondary school system with a three-year system modelled on an American-Japanese style education (Quist, 1999, 2003). Recent reforms, beginning in 2006, brought into being a four-year SHS system (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2004). The new reform programme was meant to deal with a number of weaknesses in the education system and make it more responsive to the challenges and demands of the country in the twenty-first century (Government of Ghana, 2002). The 2006 policy, nonetheless, brought in its wake new implications and challenges to education, both at national and institutional level. One major institutional problem was the tenure of office of student leaders. Heads of schools and their administrative machinery tried to find local solutions to this problem.

In most senior high schools in Ghana, student leadership is drawn from the final year group either by election or by appointment. In the school from which data was collected for this study, the issue of student leadership had been a bone of contention between the school's administration and the student leaders. It is a privately owned SHS, which has a population of 1400 students, and, like most Ghanaian SHSs, is a day and boarding school with students coming from different parts of the country. The student leaders had been appointed prior to their promotion to form three (average age 17 years). By the time of data collection, these leaders had served their one-year term of office, but still had one academic year to stay in the school because they were the first batch of students to take the four-year programme. The administration's position, influenced by their impression of the performance of the prefects for the previous year, was that most of the prefects had not been effective and committed to maintaining discipline in the school. Indiscipline behaviours in the school included staying away from school functions and gatherings, lateness to class, poor participation in prep (i.e. evening studies), breaking of boundaries, excessive noise-making during school hours, and disregard for the school timetable. Some prefects did not only condone these behaviours, but joined students in them. Thus, the administration initially decided to dissolve the student leadership and replace it with another set of final year students. Nominations were thus opened for interested students to file their nominations, but nobody turned up.[1]

It was in the period of these uncertainties that the Senior Housemaster II was elevated to the status of Assistant Headmaster (Operations) (hereafter referred to as Assistant Headmaster), a new office created by the proprietor to help restore discipline. In the first two weeks in office, the Assistant Headmaster put a number of strategies in place to ensure discipline. One key strategy was the use of the cane. In Ghana, caning has been one of the oldest modes of punishing a child both at home and in school. The Ghana Education Service's policy on corporal punishment strictly reserves its administration to heads of schools, and demands that records on corporal punishment are kept and signed and reasons for administering it given. However, this policy is very often contravened in many schools, and many heads often delegate the authority and discretion to administer corporal punishment to teachers. In the school from which data was drawn for this study, the authority to administer corporal punishment was limited to the Headmaster and his assistants, the Senior Housemasters and Senior Housemistress, and sometimes Housemasters and Housemistresses. At the time this study was conducted, it was the Assistant Headmaster and one of the Housemasters whom he had chosen to assist him who were using the cane to compel the students to comply with the school's rules and regulations.

In addition to maintaining a conducive atmosphere for academic work, the Assistant Headmaster had also wanted to deal with the issue of the student leaders since he was going to depend on them to sustain the discipline he would create. After consultation with a few prefects

and some of his colleagues, he decided that the prefects would be allowed to extend their term to the end of the first term in the following academic year. Those who felt they were tired of the work and could not continue should resign. Informal interviews with students reveal that most of the prefects felt that the pressure they experienced working with the Assistant Headmaster during the two weeks he had been in office was too much for them and wished their tenure of office to be declared to have come to an end, as is mandatory, so they could officially handover their positions. It is within this societal and institutional context that the data of this study will be described, interpreted and explained. The local or interactional context, which is the meeting, will be described later in the article.

### **Data and Method**

The study was conducted from March to June 2010. We employed ethnographic strategies in collecting the data. Several meetings that addressed the tenure of office of the school's prefectorial board, as well as other issues related to student leadership, were observed. Finally, this particular meeting was chosen for analysis because it marked the climax and the deciding moment for many of the issues that had been discussed previously, both by the school's administration and the prefectorial board. The meeting was in two sessions which were audio-taped and the first session selected for the study because it was the most intense and involving. The actual data for the study was a transcript of the first 13 minutes, 5 seconds of the recording.

The second author, who had taught in the school for almost two years, sat in the meeting as a participant observer. Because he was familiar to the other participants as a teacher and a colleague, his presence was not intimidating. This familiarity was very important to manage the observer's paradox (Labov, 1972). This paradox can be summarised in Labov's assertion that 'the aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed; yet we can only obtain these data by systematic observation' (p. 209). It was assumed that since the observer was familiar to the participants and with the sociocultural practices of the school, his presence would not prevent the participants from interacting naturally. Prior to the meeting, permission was obtained from the Assistant Headmaster (Operations) and other teachers present to record the proceedings for research purposes. At the end of the meeting and after the teachers had retired, however, the student participants were informed that the meeting had been recorded and permission was obtained from them before transcribing the recording for analysis. The reason why the students were not informed of the recording at the opening of the meeting was to make sure that they would participate in the meeting actively and naturally as possible.

The recordings were transcribed using French's (1992) level II transcription method, which is an orthographic representation with basic information about speaker identity, turn-taking and non-verbal elements. A copy of the transcript and a CD containing the recording was given to the Assistant Headmaster to verify the authenticity of the transcription. Students whose voices were identified on the recording were again contacted for permission to proceed with the study. Informal interviews and discussions were also held with students, the Assistant Headmaster and other teachers in order to get a panoramic picture of the context. The data were coded for linguistic patterns that marked power differentials and discursive strategies of manipulation. Recurring patterns and strategies were organised under themes for analysis and discussion. Quantitative techniques used include the frequency counts of recurring linguistic patterns and frequency and percentage distribution of clause types. In subsequent sections of the article, we will situate the meeting that served as the data source and analyse the data in relation to Fairclough (1995b, 2001) and Van Dijk's (2006) theories of power and manipulation.

### **The Student-School Authorities Meeting**

The meeting was organised by the Assistant Headmaster to review his strategies for maintaining discipline and to discuss ways of sustaining the discipline he had helped to establish. It took place in the Staff Common Room on Sunday 30 May 2010, between 6:45pm and 8:00pm. Present were the Assistant Headmaster, a Housemistress, two Housemasters, a teacher and 30 prefects. Participants

sat in a round table format. Although the meeting was primarily conducted in English, participants occasionally code-mixed English with Akan, the major indigenous Ghanaian language.[2]

At the beginning of the first session, the Assistant Headmaster asked the prefects to give their impressions on the tone of the school for the past two weeks. Four prefects spoke; two of whom expressed strong approval of the use of the cane as a key strategy for ensuring discipline, while the other two felt that its use should be minimised, emphasising the negative repercussions of its use. The Assistant Headmaster expressed shock that his efforts to help the prefects maintain discipline had not been appreciated. He dominated the discussion that followed, with the Housemistress often coming in to clarify issues and control turns. Only 10 out of the 30 prefects spoke, with only 5 actively involved. In this first session, there was a long argument between the Assistant Headmaster and the prefects on the mandatory duration of their term of office and whether it was appropriate to say that those who did not wish to continue with the post were to ‘resign’ rather than ‘handover’. The session ended to allow the prefects to make a resolution as to whether they were handing over their posts or whether they would extend their term.

### Enacting Power in Interaction

In the discourse, six linguistic resources were identified as units used to enact power. These were clause types, pronouns and transitivity patterning, modality, vocabulary choice, speech exchange patterns, and prosodic features. For discussion in this article, we isolated clause types and their pragmatic functions, and the interaction between pronouns and transitivity patterning, because they are the two most prominent features used.

#### Clause Types

Halliday and Matthiessen’s (2004) ‘clause complexes’ informed the analysis of the structural patterns of the utterances. In this article, ‘clause’ is defined as any structure that is analysable into one or more clausal elements (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1973), and ‘clause complex’ as a structure that is made up of several clauses that are embedded in it. In our analysis, we counted the matrix clauses and clauses that are embedded in them as separate clauses. Table I presents a distribution of the clause types per participants.

Clause Type	Assistant Headmaster		Housemistress		Student Prefects	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Declarative	87	70.1	8	53.3	15	93.8
Imperative	26	21.0	6	40.0	0	0
Interrogative	11	8.9	1	6.7	1	6.2
Total	124	100.0	15	100.0	16	100.0

Table I. Distribution of clause types per participant.

The table shows that the Assistant Headmaster dominates in the use of all the clause types. His role in the discourse is very powerful. Goffman (1981) identified three roles of the speaker in discourse: animator, author and principal. In discussing these roles, Davies and Harré (1990) describe the ‘animator’ as the one who speaks, the ‘author’ as the person responsible for the text, and the ‘principal’ as the one whose position is established by what is said. At the meeting, the Assistant Headmaster assumes all three roles, which corroborates Goffman’s (1981) observation that sometimes speakers combine the three roles into one. In the case of the Assistant Headmaster, bringing the three roles together is to portray his authority. He introduces and shifts topics while the other participants only speak to the issues he raises; it is his authority and power that drive the direction of the discussion. His roles in the discourse come out more clearly in the pragmatic functions of the clause types. He uses declarative sentences not only to state facts and opinions, but also to regulate, command, or warn the prefects, and to invite them to take a turn in the

interaction. Fairclough (1995b) observes that it is the powerful in discourse who control turn-taking, an activity that is constantly shown and is clearly marked in the data.

The Assistant Headmaster also accounts for 26 (81.2%) of the 32 imperative clauses. Imperatives contain force markers that place requirements on the addressee (Portner, 2004). The Assistant Headmaster employs this clause type to regulate, command, caution and warn the students. The extract below illustrates the use of the imperative clause type (see key to the transcription at the end of the article) [3]:

*Extract 1*

002 Assistant Headmaster: ... you wake up at the right time / you make sure they finish / but you have to finish first / you make sure they get out / you lock it(.).

It can be seen from the extract above that the Assistant Headmaster instructs the prefects on what they should do. The prefects have the mandate to make sure that students generally keep the rules of the school. There is no need for the Assistant Headmaster to prescribe how the prefects are to exercise the mandate; especially when this cohort of prefects is in the process of leaving office. It can also be seen from the excerpt that the commands he gives the prefects are confrontational and likely to bring strife; but since he is the powerful one in the discourse, he instructs the prefects what to do. As Foucault (1979) maintains, institutions are eager to get inmates or students to conform through hierarchical observation, normalising judgement and examination. In the excerpt above, the goal of the Assistant Headmaster is to get the prefects to force the larger student body to conform so that they can be seen to be conforming to the rules of the school. The utterance is also a clause complex. The parallel structures in the clause complex serve to rhetorically enforce the authority and dominance the Assistant Headmaster wants to exercise.

The Assistant Headmaster also uses interrogatives (8.9%) to probe students' suggestions and question their reasoning, as is demonstrated by the following extract:

*Extract 2*

154 Assistant Headmaster: this this we have gone beyond this discussion ... a long time ago ... you didn't see the notices around? If you are telling me that this is the first time you are hearing of erm the fact that your replacement will be from threes I will be so surprised (...).

The above extract is a reaction to an observation made by the Girls' Prefect that she is not aware that they (the prefects) would be handing over to their own mates after their tenure. She is apparently expressing dissatisfaction about that decision made by the administration. Although the Assistant Headmaster has already talked about it, she feels there was the need to raise the issue again. As can be seen in the extract, the Assistant Headmaster establishes that the issue has already been discussed and questions her apparent lack of knowledge. The interrogative in Extract 2 situates the Girls' Prefect as ignorant and not having a grasp of what she is commenting on. By establishing that the prefect is ignorant, the Assistant Headmaster constructs a subjective position for the student. His mention of the fact that the issue has already been discussed so there is no need for further discussion shows that he is the authority that determines what is relevant to be discussed and even when to discuss a particular issue.

Further, Table I showed the Housemistress as an active participant who also asserts a considerable degree of power in the discourse, at least, in relation to the students. She takes turns occasionally to correct misinterpretations or clarify other people's contributions, but mainly to control and regulate turn-taking, especially during intense moments when there is overlapping. She employs all four clause types in performing these functions. Extract 3 illustrates such a situation.

*Extract 3*

093 Housemistress: wait ... wait till one person finish ... (other people still anxious to speak) *mawonnwei (let them finish)*.

095 Assistant Headmaster: (...) let me get [this (...)].

096 Housemistress: [Have you finished Gatuso?].

097 Sports Prefect: No.

098 Housemistress: eh so go on.

In this extract, the Housemistress controls the turns and overlapping as the Sports Prefect is still asking for clarification on the issue of whether they (the prefects) have to handover or resign if they do not want to extend their term. She also restrains the Assistant Headmaster from seizing the floor from the Sports Prefect. Nonetheless, she does not compete with the Assistant Headmaster for power; rather she asserts her authority as a teacher to sometimes mitigate the effect of the power of the Assistant Headmaster on the prefects. Ironically, in the process, the students often also become victims of her power.

The students are the powerless in the discourse, only taking a turn at the permission of the Assistant Headmaster. As Table I illustrates, no student uses an imperative construction. The dominant speech acts they perform are asking for clarification and making suggestions. They mark politeness, either by using modal predicates such as 'think' and 'suggest' to hedge, or by employing indirectness in their utterances. Also, the questions they ask are often realised by declarative constructions. The excerpts in Extract 4 illustrate these linguistic choices by the students:

*Extract 4*

099 Sports Prefect: I don't know whether if you resign you're going to get certificate or.

139 Girls' Prefect: Sir (...) I think our term of office is over ... .

140 Assistant Headmaster: Good.

141 Girls' Prefect: and so what we are suggesting is that we handover to the form twos (...).

As illustrated in the extract above, the Sports Prefect uses a declarative in making an enquiry from the Assistant Headmaster. The Girls' Prefect also hedges her two utterances by using the modals 'think' and 'suggesting'. Her use of the address term 'Sir' also enacts an asymmetrical relationship between her and the Assistant Headmaster. Also worthy of note is that the italics imply that the utterances of the prefects are in a low tone, which suggests their deference to the powers shown by the Assistant Headmaster and the Housemistress. Within the 13-minute segment under discussion, only 4 students speak, while the rest sit waiting for the authorities to decide on their term of office.

It could be deduced from the discussion so far that the three clause types presented in Table I are used to perform different pragmatic functions by different participants in the interaction, and that these functions reproduce the asymmetrical relationship that exists between the students and the school authorities. A second linguistic resource employed in reproducing social power relations in the discourse is the use of pronouns and the transitivity patterns in which they occur.

*Pronouns and Transitivity Patterning*

The personal pronouns 'we', 'I' and 'you' are used predominantly by the Assistant Headmaster. He uses 'we' to refer to the school administration and himself and 'you' to refer collectively to the prefects. Of interest are the verbal processes in the transitivity patterns of the clauses in which these pronouns are participants. When the referent of 'we' and 'I' is the administration or the Assistant Headmaster, these pronouns are frequently the 'Sayer' in verbal clauses (e.g. 'We said'), the 'Sensor' in mental clauses (e.g. 'we decided', 'we didn't agree', etc.), and the 'Actor' in material action-oriented and often goal-directed clauses (e.g. 'we will get', 'we will appoint', 'we give', 'I'm ready to give', 'I'll DEAL with', 'I've dealt with', etc.). These transitivity patterns present the Assistant Headmaster and/or his administration as being in total control of both the institutional (the school) and the local (the meeting) contexts of the discourse. It is he (or they) that take(s) decisions, declare(s) them, and implement(s) them.

Further, the intervention of the Housemistress in Extract 5 is a clue that the pronoun 'we' used by the Assistant Headmaster does not have a general reference to the administration. It is a royal 'we' that he employs to assert his authority over both the students and the members of staff.

*Extract 5*

077 Housemistress: (.) I think what he said was (.) I wasn't there but from what he is saying (.) some of your members (.) met him and said that instead of having election (.) your time is going to extended to December (.) so that there wouldn't be any election that will bring in (.) I mean your end of [backchannel noise] the next election we're going to have is electing the form twos



to take over (.) but it look as if some of you also do not want to wait for December (.) so then he is saying that if you are in that soup like you don't want to wait till December (...) you can (.) I think that is all I don't know if ... .

In the extract, the Housemistress rewords the Assistant Headmaster's utterances, distances herself from propositions already made by him by hedging ('I think', 'I mean', and 'I don't know') and also categorically attributes verbal processes to him ('he said', 'he is saying').

The preponderant use of 'I' by the Assistant Headmaster in Extract 6 below gives a further clue to the fact that he is the referent of the pronoun 'we' in many of the instances in which he uses it.

*Extract 6*

174 Assistant Headmaster: let me remind you ... we DON'T and I will speak for myself for now because I'm in the chair (.) and I'm in charge of the situation and I will STEER the affairs of this {condition -} this institution until I have a better condition ... I have the mandate to do so ... I don't have any problem changing ALL OF YOU (.) today (.) I don't have any problem at all (.) I will get people who will be equally strong to take over (.) [increases tempo] and let you bear in mind (.) like I told the head boy (.) that if I put people in place (.) to work (.) and you don't know [banging on the table] (.) any of you (.) I'm not warning you (.) doesn't know (.) and he sabotage my prefects (.) I'll DEAL with you ... .

It is interesting to note that the Assistant Headmaster consciously replaces the pronoun 'we' in the first line of Extract 6 with 'I' to unambiguously emphasise his authority in relation to the students in particular, and the school in general. This authority is further elaborated by the occurrence of the following identified processes:

- Circumstantial relational processes – 'I'm in the chair', 'I'm in charge'.
- Possessive relational processes – 'I have a better condition', 'I have the mandate', etc.
- Material processes – 'I will get people', 'If I put people in place', etc.

He frequently casts himself in these processes to further elaborate his authority as the Assistant Headmaster. The semantic implication for casting oneself in these processes is that it creates the impression that the speaker has utmost power to do whatever he wants. In such a situation, where the power differential is glaringly portrayed, one can clearly see who has power in the communicative event, and who does not.

As has been mentioned earlier, the pronoun 'you' is used mostly by the school authorities and always in reference to the prefects. This pronoun is often the subject of imperative clauses:

002 Assistant Headmaster: ... you wake up at the right time you make sure they finish but you have to finish first you make sure they get out you lock it (.) Once you lock it they will not loiter about they will surely come ... .

Such usage is grammatically acceptable as the marked usage of the imperative since the implied subject 'you' is often not realized under normal circumstances. The use of 'you' in the object position, on the other hand, marks the pronoun as the recipient or the beneficiary of favours, warnings, punishment, and other related speech acts as these examples drawn from Extract 6 demonstrate: 'I'm not warning you'; '... we give you'; 'we get you'; 'let me remind you'; 'changing all of you'; '...let you bear in mind...'; 'I'll DEAL with you ...'; 'I'm cautioning you'; '... giving you some strokes on your back...'.

Using pronouns this way positions the prefects as powerless recipients who could be pushed anywhere by the school authorities, represented here by the Assistant Headmaster.

### **Techniques of Manipulation**

In addition to the linguistic items discussed, the Assistant Headmaster employs several discursive techniques to control the minds of the prefects. These techniques can broadly be classified in Van Dijk's (2006) terms as positive *self*-presentation and negative *other*-representation. In what follows, particular extracts are selected from the transcript and analysed in order to identify the delicate choice of manipulation techniques in the discourse.

Extract 7

012 Assistant Headmaster: ... when [banging the table] prefects are playing their roles well ... we'll we will not come in ... so the most unfortunate part of our discussion as we have just started is that the same people who were supposed to have ensured that the job got done (.) now the same people are complaining ... is like complaining **er erm** not doing your job and saying that erm I'm happy I didn't do my job ... so all that have been happening (.) you should have been supportive ... **Deɛ w'antumi anyɛ no** (.) **ɛno na{mereba a bɛ} mereyɛ adi aboa wo** ... [I'm doing what you could not do to help you].

This extract forms part of the Assistant Headmaster's initial response to the prefects' criticism of the use of caning in the school. He accuses prefects of inefficiency, which has necessitated that he comes in with the cane to ensure sanity, and in essence to do the duty they have refused to do. He emphasises this by banging on the table to draw attention. Van Dijk (2006) notes the use of emphasis as a manipulation technique to get information into the victims' short term memory. Those who criticise him are accused of sheer apathy and sabotage; they are happy they did not do their job and are refusing to support him when he is doing it. To despise such a favour on the part of the prefects is sheer ingratitude. In this way, he is also asserting a moral superiority over the prefects. Extract 8 demonstrates other manipulative techniques employed by the Assistant Headmaster in the interaction:

Extract 8

109 Assistant Headmaster: er now I want I want to remind you of something before we even go any further erm if this whole thing is about the (.) certificate then you have to be (.) [backchannel noise] you have to be a little more cautious because I can tell you for a fact that due to a number of issues your seniors who who just completed (.) (...) and co have you asked them ... if they've even received their certificates? Have have you asked them? And and [a prefect signals that they haven't received their certificates] yes thank you very much and I'm cautioning you for those of you who (.) have become over confident to the extent that erm everything in the system doesn't APPEAL to your eyes (.) you have to be very very careful (.) simply because we can just allow the system to run (...) finish (.) is a year now not even one has got the certificate (.) the reasons are very close to our chest ... it may not be FAIR (.) but one way or the other it has happened (.) and I I I'm the same person who have been battling for them since then ... now if its all about the certificate (.) eh we can say that OK fine (.) you've completed your (kingship) (.) you did not resign (.) everything was fine (.) you will get your certificate (.) let us get new people to go on (.) if that is what you want we can get that done (.) and then at the right time you come for your certificate ... so don't worry so much about your certificate (.) don't think that certificate is my RIGHT my RIGHT I will get it (.) no (.) it's even subject to the appraisal or if you like erm a good analysis of the the person you worked for (.) you're supposed to represent the students with the administration (.) I mean erm representing them at this level (.) if the students you represented think you did well but the people you worked with who will give you the certificate think you didn't do anything erm appealing you wouldn't get ANYTHING ... so don't think that once you've **w'atena mu saa** [you just stay in the system] it's a big bus **yɛn nyinaa te mu** [we are all in it] certificate **no ba a yɛn nyinaa te mu** (.) **ɛno koraa no** (...) [when the certificate comes, we are all in it. Even that ...] [laughing] it is subject to a good analysis (.) of your performance (.) let your confidence level be moderate ... moderate it.

In this extract, the Assistant Headmaster appeals to 'the relevant ideologies, attitudes and emotions' of the prefects (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 374). He cautions or rather reminds them that they are powerless before the school's administration, and for that matter before him. The administration decides whom to award certificates to and when to do so and it does so based on a 'good analysis' of whether one conformed to its rules and dictates. This observation is clear when he ironically says that 'if the students you represented think you did well but the people you worked with who will give you the certificate think you didn't do anything erm appealing you wouldn't get ANYTHING ...'. He gives the instance of their predecessors in a manner that emphasises the prefects' lack of knowledge of how the system runs. The phonological emphasis on the words 'appeal', 'fair', 'right', and 'anything' adds prominence to his threats. The 'everything' in the utterance 'everything in the system doesn't APPEAL to your eyes' includes caning, which the prefects have to approve in order

to avoid 'unfairness', enjoy their 'right', and get 'something'. The negative meanings attached to 'caning' and 'unfairness' are contextually neutralised. Instead, they are wrapped with positive meanings. These contextualised meanings are what Gee (2004) calls 'situated meaning'. The metaphor of the 'big bus', which the Assistant Headmaster expresses by code-mixing Akan and English, cautions the prefects to reconsider their attitude in the face of the administration. In short, in this extract, the Assistant Headmaster emphasises his position, power, authority, and their related ideological sources, while in contrast projecting the prefects' inferior and powerless position and lack of knowledge.

Extract 9 further illustrates the use of manipulative techniques in the discourse:

*Extract 9*

185 Assistant Headmaster: ... do you realize that it will then create more peeve in the system (.) because you will not you will find it very difficult to get a form two boy to tell you to do the right thing (.) so in order that we won't (...) we said that Ok fine (.) why don't we then give you the opportunity because it will be difficult for you I mean to walk around or move what if (.) I have the floor please ... please [snaps fingers for attention] if you're you hand over as a prefect to a form two boy (.) I'm not sure you'll go back to the prefects' room (...) another form three boy (.) (...) the prefects room for example ... you will be reduced to almost nothing (.) in the school ... and **mehu no** [I see it ...] that is like (.) like a slap in the face of leadership (.) I've also been a leader before ... I have been a prefect at (...) president at Atlantic Hall (.) that level ... I've dealt with student leadership in a very high level (.) or at a very high level (.) I understand what it feels (.) if you handover and you are still in the system and you are being treated like an ordinary person I know what it feels like (.) so when the discussion went on (.) and I gave them what the repercussions were (.) they then suggested that (.) OK (.) erm why cannot why can't they have the needed to push the motivation to work for that time where they are legally handing over to the next generation ... THAT'S WHAT WE SAID ... so if that is the problem we can simply all agree that's what I (...) to do ... this meeting is crucial ... it's a (...) a great meeting (.) we have it and that's the end (.) because I want to see action (.) from tomorrow.

In this extract, the Assistant Headmaster continues to appeal to relevant emotions of the prefects and accepted ideologies in the school. He threatens them that, should they decide to hand over or resign, they will be stripped of their privileges as prefects and they will be 'reduced to almost nothing in the school', which will be 'a slap in the face of leadership'. Here again, he imposes his social and intellectual superiority over the prefects. He has dealt with student leadership 'at a very high level' and thus knows the repercussions of the prefects' decision better than they do. He ends by exciting their emotions by emphasising the crucial nature of the meeting; it is the platform for the prefects to decide their fate for the future which begins 'tomorrow'.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

This study applied the CDA approach in analysing a segment of a meeting between members of staff and student leaders in a SHS in the Cape Coast Metropolis of Ghana. A two-pronged theoretical framework, comprising Fairclough's (2001) concepts of power and ideology and Van Dijk's (2006) concept of manipulation, was employed in the analysis. The analysis of the clausal patterns and their pragmatic functions, as well as the use of pronouns, has demonstrated that the teachers [4], especially the Assistant Headmaster, assume very powerful positions in the discourse. It is the power and authority of the Assistant Headmaster that drives the decision-making process in the discourse, leaving the prefects in a state of powerlessness. Secondly, the study reveals that the Assistant Headmaster employs several techniques of manipulation in cognitively controlling the minds of the prefects. These techniques include accusing the prefects, neutralising his (or the administration's) negative acts, emphasising his superiority, power and authority, and appealing to the emotions and attitudes of the prefects through threats and sarcasm, and finally by appealing to established ideologies of the school's social structure. These techniques correspond with those identified by other researchers, such as Van Dijk (2006) and Rudyk (2007), and can be categorised under Van Dijk's (2006) 'positive self-representation' and 'negative other-representation'.

The study has significant implications. First, it has implications for educational practice. Heads of institutions, educators, and teachers, especially in Ghana and other African countries, should employ pragmatic and liberal ways of engaging students in talk and interaction in educational contexts, rather than assuming the traditional authoritative position that disables students from contributing to decisions that ultimately affect them. As noted by Masko (2009), upbringing influences the kind of citizenry that is produced for Ghana's young democracy. Checking the domineering position that educators assume in talk and interaction with students will also provide an enabling situation for students and teachers to negotiate their differences, which could control the frequent riots and strikes that destroy educational development in Ghana and other West African countries.

Second, the study has implications for critical linguistic theory since it demonstrates that language is ideological and that social domination and power abuse are reproduced and enacted in discourse. Although an ideal power-free discourse situation may not be attainable (Wang, 2006), particularly in educational contexts, attempts should be made to avoid domination or the abuse of power in talk and text and interaction.

Finally, further research is needed to provide comparative analysis of the techniques other speakers employ in similar contexts and to find strategies for resisting domination and manipulation. With regard to this, it is quite doubtful that speakers and writers are always conscious of what they do when they manipulate people, or of the negative implications of their use of language. Further research should be more interactive, involving discourse participants (including manipulators) in the research process, in order to marshal a concerted challenge to the problem of discursive power abuse.

### **Key to Transcription**

- (.) A micro pause of about a second
- ... An unfilled pause of about 3 seconds
- (...) Inaudible utterance
- {-} Self-corrected error
- [ ] Overlapping
- // End of an utterance due to interruption
- ^ Rise-fall intonation
- Er A filled pause marking hesitation
- Erm A filled pause marking hesitation
- Uhm A filled pause marking hesitation
- Eh A conciliatory backchannel cue
- Hmm/hm A conciliatory backchannel cue
- Italics - uttered in low tone
- Upper Case - Emphatic stress
- Bold type - Akan expression
- Inscriptions in round brackets - status of transcribed item doubtful

### **Notes**

- [1] The usual mode of selecting prefects in the school was by election. However, the incumbent prefects during this study were appointed.
- [2] Since English is the only official language in Ghana, and the medium of academic communication from basic school level four (average age nine years) onwards, SHS students are relatively proficient in it and are comfortable using it in both written and oral communication. At the meeting it was the Assistant Headmaster and the Housemistress who mainly code-mixed English with Akan.
- [3] The numbers attached to the extracts are the codes assigned to those extracts in the transcript. Each utterance or conversational turn is assigned a number in the transcript in the order in which it appears. Apart from helping the authors in the analysis in terms of ease of reference, these numbers show readers the order in which these utterances appear in the transcript, e.g. in extract four, we can

tell that between '099' and '139' there are many intervening utterances (though not necessarily in logical sequence).

- [4] The other three teachers who were at the meeting with the Assistant Headmaster and the Housemistress did not speak in the first session. At the end of the second session, however, they were invited by the Assistant Headmaster to comment on issues addressed at the meeting.

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