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Women managers in meetings
Ways of expressing power

Gabriela CHEFNEUX[1]

Power, a widely studied concept, constructs identities, behaviour, knowledge and discourse. Operating through language, hegemony is taken for granted and the discourses it creates become the norms in institutions. Power has been analysed in a variety of organisations – legal, educational, medical and economical. This paper uses the data transcribed from a meeting held in a medium-sized Romanian company that sells building materials, with the aim of identifying the ways in which the woman manager running the company expresses power.

Key-words*: power, directives, politeness, questions, interruptions, I, we.*

1. Definition of power

According to Foucault (1980: 131) power is a "productive network which runs through the whole social body", producing reality and discourse as well as identities, knowledge and behavioural norms. Mayr (2008) defines power as the successful acceptance of subordinate groups of moral, political and cultural values supported by dominant groups; power is not exercised coercively but routinely, is usually accepted by the subordinate groups and represents a site for continuous struggle, various groups fighting for hegemony.

Power has been studied in various types of organisations (legal, financial, educational), the analysis focussing on discourse types and strategies of expressing it. According to Fairclough (1996) "post-Fordist" workplacesposition workers in a more participatory relation with management, as institutional discourse has been democratized. Fairclough identifies two major shifts in relationships at work, namely the democratisation and conversationalisation of institutional discourse, which bridge the gap between those in higher and lower hierachical positions.

Institutional talk is characterised by orientation towards some main goal, task and identity, implying constraints on what is considered as an appropriate contribution and being based on inferential frameworks and procedures that are characteristic for each institutional context (Drew and Heritage 1992: 121). Critical

[1] Transilvania University of Braşov, gabriela.chefneux@unitbv.ro

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studies of organisations/institutions and their discourses see them as "of struggle where different groups compete to shape the social reality . . . in ways that serve their own interests" (Mumby and Clair, 1997: 182).Spencer-Oatey (1993: 12) identifies hierarchical power, or legitimate power, as granted by the individual's position in the institution, while Dwyer (1993:557) describes expertise power which derives its strength from a person's professional expertise. Fairclough (1989) characterises legitimate and expertise power as coercive, while Ng and Bradac (1993) comment on power"over", defined as the power of those people in management position who decide the way in which professional interactions are going to develop in terms of contents, what is said or done, and relations, the social relations of the people entering into in discourse.

2. Ways of expressing power

Meetings have been analysed by Holmes (2006) as sites for struggling for power, some of the items considered being talking time, interruptions, openings and closings, managing the agenda, summarizing, bringing the meeting to order. Some of the linguistic features characterising power are presented below:

2.1. Amount of talk

It can be defined as the contribution each participant makes to the interaction, with people of higher status talking more. However, the amount of talk a person contributes reflects not only his/her role or status, but also the nature of the task or purpose of the interaction (feedback, problem-solving, assigning tasks, clarifying, reporting, requesting action (Vine 2004: 177-178).

2.2. Topic choice

Topic control is defined by Fairclough (1989: 135) as a reflection of the way a more powerful participant puts "constraints on the contributions of less powerful participants".

2.3. Turn taking

Atkinson and Drew (1979) define turn-taking as a system of pre allocating turns and comment that the types of turns participants can take are predetermined by their institutional role. Holmes (2006) states in her analysis that holding the floor and overlapping speech may be collaborative in function.

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2.4. Interruptions

Fairclough (1989:43) equates the use of overlapping speech with the overt marking of power in face-to-face discourse and claims that one reason of interruptions is to control the participants'contribution. However, other linguists (Holmes 2006, Vine 2004) characterise overlaps as indicating support or agreement and demonstrate in their analyses that overlaps do not always tend to have a disruptive effect.

2.5. Evaluation

Defined as the speaker's opinion on the participants'contribution, evaluation can indicate closer or more distant relationships between participants. Holmes (2006) interprets the evaluation instances identified in the corpus she analyses as supportive and doing collegiality.

2.6. Politeness

According to Fairclough (1989:66) politeness is based upon the recognition of differences of power, degrees of social distance, etc., being oriented towards reproducing these differences without change. Speakers with less power are expected to be more polite (Brown & Levinson 1987: 80). Brown and Levison (1987: 76) refer to two types of individual wants –to be unimpeded (negative wants) and to be approved (positive ones). The former are related to face threatening acts – directives, requests, reprimands–their force depending on factors such as the social distance between the speakers and hearers, their relative power and the ranking of imposition.

2.7. Directness/indirectness

Directness, also called explicitness (Vine 2004: 66), and indirectness depend on the forcefulness of the way in which messages, attitudes and judgments are expressed. For example, the use of modality can indicate a wide range of obligations (from strong – *must, should, ought to*– to weak – *could, maybe*) (Mayr 2008:20)

2.8. Control acts - directives, requests and advice

Vine (2004:36) defines control acts as speech acts by means of which the speaker attempts to get the hearer to do something. She analyses them in terms of speaker's status, hearer's right of refusal, beneficiary of the control act (speaker or hearer). Control acts are further subclassified as demaning immediate or delayed compliance, being elicited or spontaneous, specific or general, imposing conditions or not, attempting the speaker to do or not to do something.

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Directives are usually given by higher status speakers, the hearer having no right to refuse it; the beneficiary is usually the speaker, or rather the organisation. Requests and advice indicate a more equal status between speaker and hearer; in the case of requests the hearer has more right of refusal and the beneficiary is the speaker; in the case of advice, the beneficiary is the hearer. Advice may also indicate expert power. Although considered non-polite acts, control acts can nevertheless be expressed in a wide range of ways – imperatives, interrogatives, declaratives – and they can be mitigated by means of modality markers, negation, qualifiers (*just*), hedges (*a little bit, I think*), use of names(Vine 2004).

2.9. Questions

Heritage (2002: 314) states that "regardless of the specific aims of the question, the ways in which questions are designed unavoidably serve to index the relationship between questioner and respondent." Questions have been widely analysed as exercising a certain degree of influence of the behaviour of others, as positioning speakers and addressees, being devices which control discourse and serve a wide range of functions along "an information continuum" from information sought to information conveyed (Freed 1994: 626). Usually exercising some influence on the behaviour of others, they can facilitate interaction, elicit information, give directives, challenge, provoke thought. Vine (2004) emphasises that the pragmatic function of a question can be identified only in context. Holmes and Chiles (2010) state that questions are a way of enacting or claiming power, their use in meetings being a very subtle way of indicating power. Managers use questions to control progress through the agenda, the direction in which an argument develops, the range of solutions considered for a problem, the range of options considered for a process, etc. Fairclough (1996:46) comments on negative questions which can indicate criticism.

2.10. Use of we

The first person plural pronoun can be used persuasively in an inclusive or exclusive way. When inclusively used, it indicates shared responsibility and the speaker's commitment to the issue under discussion while, if exclusively used, it refers to the speaker or institution (Bastow, 2008: 143).

2.11. Use of so

Schiffrin (1987:217–218) analyses "so" as indicating a shift of responsibility to the hearer.

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2.12. Ways of mitigating power

Several analyses (Holmes 2006, Vine 2004, Dwyer 1993) also identify a variety of ways in which power is mitigated by managers, the more frequent ones being the use of grounding moves (explanations provided for managerial decisions), and of consultative power (managers encouraging participants to provide information, give advice and make plans).

3.Data analysis

3.1.Presentation of data

The data analysed in this paper are provided by a project funded by the National Council of Scientific Research in Tertiary Education. The name of the project is *Communication at the workplace - Corpus of verbal interaction in the professional environment* (Gheorghe, Măda, Săftoiu 2009) and the data were recorded in a company which sells construction materials; they are the transcription of a meeting which was divided into nine parts. The meeting brings together seven participants – Ina, the general manager of the company, her personal assistant, Irina, and six deputy managers – Carol, sales and marketing manager, Eni, logistics department manager, Dana, financial manager, Rareş, industry manager and Matei, technical manager. The agenda items are last year's financial results, plans for the next year, measures to be taken to meet the targets.

The analysis aims to identify ways in which the woman manager expresses power throughout the meeting.

3.2. Opening the meeting

Ina, the manager of the company, announces the agenda and also indicates the way in which the items should be discussed – briefly. To do that she uses *so* and inclusive *we*. Next she self-nominates herself as the speaker.

(1) Ina: Deci pe ordinea de zi azi avem# discutarea rezultatelor din 2005…. pentru alocarea noii sarcini şi aici nu vom intra foarte mult în detalii; chiar am să vă expun eu care e situația.

Ina: *So on the agenda today we have the discussion of the 2005 results…to allot the new task and here we will not go into too much detail- I will present the situation myself.*

Ina also indicates the topics and the sequence in which they are to be approached:

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(2) Ina: Hai să deschidem prima dată şi să ne concentrăm pe această coloană !

Ina: *Let's open first and concentrate on this column!*

The directive she uses is expressed as an imperative form with *let's* and the pronoun *we* which has an inclusive function.

3.3. Interruptions

In most cases during this meeting it is Ina who interrupts the participants; however she sometimes accepts being interrupted, particularly when she feels that the interruption is related to the topic under discussion. The example below illustrates a situation when Ina interrupts Dana, as she feels that Dana rushes:

(3) 1 Ina: Păi trebuie să scadă şi a scăzut# şi în procente# e# uite CE frumos e#
2 Dana: E frumos cu menţiunea că.#
3 Ina: Las' c-ajungem şi acolo↓ că nu-i aşa frumos↓ ai răbdare.

1 *Ina* *well it was supposed to decrease and it decreased in percentages look HOW nice it is*
2 Dana *Dana: it's nice but it should be mentioned*
3 Ina *Never mind, we'll talk about it as it is not that nice – be patient*.

Dana interrupts Ina using Ina's own word – *nice* (line 2) to which she has something to add but Ina does not accept the interruption, stating that the topic is to be discussed later (line 3) and tells Dana not to hurry by using a strong imperative form – b*e patient*, mitigated by grounding (line 3).

3.4. Use of I

It is worth noticing that throughout the financial presentation Ina discusses the budget repeatedly using *I:* the use of the first person pronoun can be explained either as the result of her having made the budget and consequently feeling responsible for it, or as her openly acknowledging her high status in the company:

(4) Ina: A fost calculată greşit în forcastul din mai↓ … mi-a dat bugetu' de cheltuieli peste cap cu patru miliarde… şi mi-au crescut vânzarile# în forcast,…

Ina: They were miscalculated in the May forecast—my expense budget was turned over by four billion and my sales increased in the forecast.

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The example below illustrates the same situation:

(5) Ina: Deci vreau un raport# în douăşnouă douăşopt februarie de la [prenume] a situației la zi în /expreso/ da↑

Ina: *So I want a report on the twenty-nine twenty-eight of February from [first name] of the updated situation in /expresso/, yes*

This directive indicates Ina as the beneficiary of the action she requests and it is expressed by the use of so, I and the verb want.

3.5. Corrections

Ina corrects the participants in a rather straightforward manner. The example below illustrates one such instance. Ina has been talking about an increase of costs which she is about to evaluate; at this stage Irina interrupts Ina and characterizes this increase as *superb*, an evaluation which Ina rejects in a rather direct way:

(6) 1 Ina: Această creştere de costuri este

2 Irina: = Superbă ##
3 Ina: <@>nu mă obligați să fac anumite remarci că înregistrăm

1 Ina: This increase in costs is
2 Irina: Superb
3 Ina: Do not make me express certain remarks as we are recording.

Ina mitigates her correction by smiling and by grounding her words (line 3), uttered in a joking manner.

Ina also corrects the participants when she considers the issue important, as the example below illustrates. The manager has stated that the official papers of the company should be standardized and decides that the department heads are responsible for this. Matei tries to joke, but Ina does not accept the joke and rejects it by returning to her idea and using Matei's words, which she implies are wrong:

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(7) 1 Ina: Şi toţi şefii de departamente răspund
2 Matei: Cu capu'#
3 Ina: Cu nişte bani# nu cu capu'# ă: de oamenii din subordine să respecte regulile şi să nu îi mai văd cu contracte de tot felul de sigle colorate

1 Ina: And all the department head will be held responsible
2 Matei: With their lives
3 Ina: With some money, not their lives the subordinates should observe the rules and I won't have them with contracts with all sorts of coloured logos.

Ina expresses her position in a direct way– she indicates herself as the person who wants the papers standardized and talks about the subordinate people who are expected to follow the rules (line 3). To express these ideas Ina starts with *and* (line 1) suggesting that this is her final decision.

3.6. Directives

Ina expresses directives in a variety of forms, from imperative constructions to declarative sentences, depending on the importance of the topic and on the stage of the discussion.

The example below illustrates the way in which Ina announces Carol that she expects him to inform the employees of a new development;

(8) Ina: Dar: la şedinţa de vânzări am să te las să le spui acest lucru↓

Ina: At the sales meeting I'll let you tell them this.

This way in which this directive is expressed indicates again Ina's power of making decision – she is the one allowing Carol to communicate her decisions to the employees.

The manager also resorts to the future tense and inclusive *we* to express directives:

(9) Ina: Aşa vom reface calculele

Ina: *So we'll redo the calculations*

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The next example illustrates a higher level of directness– Ina asks the financial manager to provide a thorough explanation for the figures representing stock decreases. She both mitigates her request by justifying it (*you cannot lose four point six billion*) and using the personal pronoun *you* with an impersonal value, but she also intensifies it by the use of *so* – indicating finality, *I*, emphasising that Dana reports to her, repetition (*I want them* and *you cannot*) and the intensifier *up to the last penny*.

(10) Ina: Deci aceste patru virgulă şase miliarde le vreau! le vreau defalcate şi justificate până la ultimul ban. ### nu se poate să pierzi patru virgulă şase miliarde# nu se poate

Ina: *So these four point six billion I want them broken down and explained up to the last penny. You cannot lose four point six billion, you cannot.*

Another instance of directness in requests is illustrated in the example below. The topic of the discussion is the translation of the technical forms sent by the company to the clients. Ina starts by identifying the problem (line 2); then, after the participants have discussed it for a while, she describes the stages in which the issue is to be solved (line 4) and gives some directives which, towards the end of the discussion, become stronger and are repeated (lines 4, 6, 8, 10). Ina clearly establishes deadlines (line 2), indicates the end of the discussion by means of *there* and then explicitly says that the issue has been settled (line 10).

(11)
1 Irina: Hai să zicem că poate o dată
2 Ina: La prima livrare… deci în primul rând tre' lămurită problema
3 Irina: Trebuie să le dau la tradus↓ le traducem noi?
4 Ina: Nu↓ nu↓ le dai la tradus# ↓ deci le cauți şi le dai la tradus
5 Irina: Mai am de tradus declarațiile de conformitate…
6 Ina: Le dai la tradus
7 Irina: Şi ălea trebuie
8 Ina: Le dai la tradus
9 Irina: Toate produsele care vin de la (xxx)
10 Ina: Da↓ da le dați la tradus aşa↓ s-a rezolvat.

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1 Irina: Let's say that a possible date
2 Ina: The first delivery ... so firstly the issue has to be clarified
3 Irina: Need I have them translated or shall we translate them ourselves?
4 Ina: No you have them translated so you find them and have them translated
5 Irina: I also have to translate the compliance certificates
6 Ina: You have them translated
7 Irina: Those too need
8 Ina: You have them translated
9 Irina: All the products coming from (xxx)
10 Ina: Yes, yes you have them translated – there – it's solved.

The strongest form of directive and also criticism expressed by Ina is presented in the example below. The discussion is between Ina and Irina, her assistant and it illustrates the way in which Ina expresses discontent caused by her personal assistant who did not carry out her responsibilities.

(12) 1 Ina: Te rog să-mi spui# ă:#cât reprezintă marfa expirată …
2 Irina: Vreți exact cifra?
3 Ina: Cifra↓ păi CIFRA
4 Irina: Nu ştiu exact:
5 Ina: PĂI dar ieri trebuia să:
6 Irina: Da↓ dar eu (am trimis ălea) şi când am primit era târziu# deja
7 Ina: Ai primit şi trebuia să faci…
8 Irina: Păi↓ dar ieri nu am ştiut↓ eu acum aud:
9 Ina: Păi ți-am spus să te duci să-l întrebi pe [prenume] # n-am vorbit aşa?
10 Irina: (tace) #
11 Ina: Păi ↓ măi↓ obişnuiți-vă↓ măi să lucrați la nivelul vostru măi↓ păi EU să vă spun?
12 Irina: Şi eu ce să fac acum?
13 Ina: Tu nu ştii?
14 Irina: Eu nu am primit eu am o situație a mea cu numărul bonurilor↓
15 Ina: Dar nu vreau să ştiu↓ eu vreau cifrele finale # este foarte↓ este extrem de relevantă această sumă## şi te rog frumos atuncea să discutăm …

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1 *Ina:* *Please tell how much is the expired merchandise*
2 *Irina:* *You want the exact figure*
3 *Ina:* *The figure, well THE FIGURE*
4 *Irina:* *I don't know exactly*
5 *Ina:* *Well but yesterday you were supposed to*
6 *Irina:* *Yes but I sent those and when I received it was already late*
7 *Ina:* *You got the task you had to do it …*
8 *Irina:* *Eh, but yesterday I did not now, I hear only now*
9 *Ina:* *Well I told you to go and ask [first name] didn't we talk so?*
10 *Irina:* *Keeps silent*
11 *Ina:* *Well, you, got used to working to our standards well am I the one to tell you*
12 *Irina:* *And what should I do now?*
13 *Ina:* *Don't you know?*
14 *Irina:* *I don't I received, I have my own situation with the bills*
15 *Ina:* *But I don't want to know I want the final figures it is it is extremely relevant this amount and I nicely ask you to talk…*

The exchange starts with Ina asking Irina for accurate information (line 1) which she expresses with *please*; Irina has not fulfilled the task and tries to avoid admitting it (line 2). At first Ina is confused, as she does not understand that the assistant did not do her job. Once she realizes it, she becomes more and more direct in her orders. She uses *you had to* (line 7) and does not take into account Irina's explanations, stating that Irina was given the job and had to do it (line 70). At this stage Ina resorts to constructions with *you* (*you got the task*), which places the emphasis on the assistant. Ina repeats the idea that Irina was supposed to do this task by reminding her what she had asked her to do, for which she uses a negative interrogative, slightly mitigated by the use of *we* (line 9). Next Ina uses an imperative form which includes *you* and continues expressing her dissatisfaction by means of another interrogative, a rhetorical question functioning as a criticism (line 11). Irina reacts by asking Ina what she should do next (line 12), a question which further irritates Ina, who answers it by another negative question, an indirect way of telling Irina that she should know her responsibilities (line 13). Irina excuses herself by providing an explanation (line 14) but Ina interrupts her, repeatedly using *I want,* which indicates that Irina has not carried out her duty (line 15). The exchange ends with Ina mitigating her instructions - the sum is very relevant (line 15).

Ina changes her way of making requests when she asks her personal assistant for favours – actions that are not strictly parts of Irina's responsibilities. For example the manager asks her assistant to bring her the memory stick which she forgot in another room and she phrases the request with *please*, use of *I*(*I'm asking you*), justification for the request (*I forgot it*) and use of the assistant's first name:

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(13) Ina: Aşa deci [prenume] # te rog io adu-mi /sticul/ că l-am lăsat pe
Ina: So, thus [first name] I am asking you to bring me the stick as I forgot it on…

Ina's relation with her personal assistant is very nuanced, as the following example also illustrates. Towards the end of the meeting Ina invites the participants to bring up issues that were not covered during the meeting. Irina says she has something she would like to bring up, and Ina encourages her to do it by repeating Irina's words (some stuff*):*

(14) 1 Irina: Eu aş avea nişte:# nişte treburi
2 Ina: Hai zi nişte treburi.

1 Irina: *I would have some stuff*
2 Ina: *Well, say some stuff.*

4. Conclusions

Ina indicates her legitimate power during the meeting in a variety of ways.

She chairs the meeting and announces the agenda, the sequence of the topics and the manner in which these topics should be discussed. Sometimes she allows interruptions when she considers them in line with the topic discussed, sometimes she brings the meeting back on track and corrects the participants. In terms of directives, the manager expresses them in a variety of ways – from more to less direct. When the topic under discussion is important (financial errors and unfulfilled duties), Ina phrases her requests with strong modal verbs, strong imperatives, repetitions, negative interrogatives, sentences starting with so. However, these directives are usually mitigated by grounding, use of we, by placing herself as the beneficiary, and by resorting to impersonal forms.

Appendix

Transcribing Conventions
Intonation:
↓ falling intonation
↑ rising intonation
pause
<@> laughter simultaneous with speaking
<z> smile simultaneous with speaking
<r> fast speech rate

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