

Student Response 2

The extract itself is a clear example of dominance and there is no doubt that the teacher is in control of the exchange. He overlaps the student on numerous occasions and does not allow him or her to reply at the end. The student is made to appear far less confident and uses a lot of non-fluency features. Lakoff says this is what women do so, if she is right, then this must be a female student. The teacher is likely to be male, showing that the Dominance Theory is correct. That suggests that men dominate women and don't allow them to talk, interrupting them a lot (Zimmerman and West). This is true here. The teacher is clearly impatient throughout with lots of commands and evidence of sarcasm. He simply doesn't give his student a chance to speak which is very bad. When he says "off you go", he sounds like he does not care very much and when, near the end, he says "good", it doesn't really sound like he means it.

There are lots of ways in which teachers try to show that they are the boss. They set the topic at the start of the lesson and then they ask questions. Since they set up the adjacency pairs, they run the whole lesson and decide who is going to speak. Often they talk for much longer than the students, as students can only just make brief comments rather than going on and on. Sometimes, teachers are more open and encourage students to ask more questions in class. This is good and makes lessons much more enjoyable.

Interviewers also set an agenda when they ask questions on television. This can vary a lot, depending on the interviewer. Graham Norton is very successful, partly because he does not want to be dominant. He makes it all seem like he and the guests are friends. The fact that they all come on together and sit near each other makes the whole thing seem much more equal. The use of the set in this way is a paralinguistic feature and makes the speakers more equal so that Graham is not seeking to be dominant.

The way in which some other people conduct interviews is different, especially if they are doing a political interview for BBC2 or Radio 4. When John Humphrys interviewed Harriet Harman once he was very cross with her. You could tell this from the way in which he laughed at her at one point. This is a paralinguistic feature. He also raised his voice which is a prosodic feature. He also interrupted her. This is a definite way in which people try to gain control by not allowing them to speak. This is called unco-operative overlapping. Tannen says that men are more likely to do that when women but this may no longer be true because she wrote in the 1990s.

Another way in which people try to have control is just to give commands, like a sergeant major speaking to soldiers. "Don't do that" is an imperative while "Would you mind not doing that?" has the same effect but is less forceful. It makes it seem less aggressive and as if the speaker wants to be nice, not dominating the other person. This is sometimes called a mitigated directive (Searle).

Politeness is another important element in speech. This can be divided into Positive and Negative Politeness (Brown and Levinson). Positive politeness is about saying good things ("you look good today") while negative politeness is about not imposing on the other person such as saying "excuse me" before you ask someone for directions. This is also important for control and dominance in that it is the opposite – you are not wanting to be dominant at all. You respect the other person through your language which is also called face work. The opposite is a face threatening act which people do to be dominant.

In conclusion, there are a lot of ways in which different people try to be dominant. Men dominate women by interrupting (Dominance Theory) and some interviewers on political programmes try to stop politicians being too dominant and saying what they want by raising their voices and not allowing them to finish. Other interviewers on chat shows use more politeness and try to make the guests feel at home. In these cases the guests speak much more (higher MLU) and are able to do so because they are the guests and sometimes famous. Telling people what to do by using imperatives is also a way of making yourself more powerful in a conversation.