

**INSIGHTS FROM THE COFFEE TALK: A CORPUS-BASED
CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF POWER
MANIFESTATIONS AROUND THE WORD “STUDENTS” IN
THE DISCUSSIONS ON AJARN.COM**

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ABSTRACT

This study draws on the strengths of both corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis approaches to investigate the issues of power and ideology of teachers evident in their language use in the discussions on Ajarn.com. Data collection involved constructing a corpus from the discussions on the website, with the discussion threads dated from 2012 to 2022, in the “Thai students” tag. Altogether, the corpus, named Discussion corpus, covered over 80 articles with more than 160,000 words. Utilising Wmatrix software to generate semantic tags of the words in the corpus, an analysis of thematic categorisations revealed that issues related to education were central to the teachers’ discussions. In addition, an analysis of verb collocates of “students” using AntConc software confirmed that teachers expressed their dominance over the students in different ways. Interestingly, it was also found that teachers felt that they could become powerless in a specific context in a bureaucratic system. Overall, this study, acknowledging that power is a fundamental part of social relations, suggests that teachers should exercise their power in a healthy way that benefits students’ learning.

Key Words: power relations, corpus linguistics, collocation analysis

INTRODUCTION

When considering social issues in educational contexts, one basic consideration is power and ideology construction in classroom discourse. Regardless of the definitions given from various perspectives and by different scholars (e.g. Fairclough, 2015; Van Dijk, 2006), power is generally deemed to be asymmetrical, with some participants holding more of it than others (Sudar, 2013). In a classroom context, as in other contexts, power is hierarchal, and is inherently assigned to teachers (Lee & Kim, 2017) so that they can dominate and dictate what goes on in the classroom (Bahar et al., 2021). More importantly, it should be noted that it is the teachers' knowledge that empowers them to control and manage the classroom (Hosseini & Abdullah, 2011), which is technically referred to as expert power (Tananuraksakul, 2019). Given the nexus between knowledge and power, teachers therefore are often depicted as the participants representing the regime of truth (Foucault, 1980).

To date, extensive studies dealing with the issues of power in this context generally focus on classroom discourse that manifests teachers' dominancy over their students. The fact that classroom discourse is primarily concerned with spoken discourse (Chalak, 2021) means that research into power relations that considers other forms of discourse, such as written discourse, is clearly deficient. With societal discourse now expanding to cover the online discourse community (Kehus et al., 2010), in today's world, various forms of power and ideological representation are presently shifting to online discussions. The impacts of this shift are far-reaching with the possibility that the relevance of previous research into power relations in classroom contexts to the new societal practices is still unclear. With the need to consider the dynamics of discursive power as they constantly shift in society (Törnberg & Törnberg, 2016), this study aims to investigate the teachers' manifestation of ideologies and power in an online discussion platform on Ajarn.com. Given that the use of multiple research methods is aimed at reducing bias (Tarat et al., 2021), and more precisely at enhancing reliability and validity (Baker & Levon, 2015), this study employs corpus-based critical discourse analysis (Corpus-based CDA) as a methodological approach to explore the issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ideology and Power Relations

Ideology and power are two of the key concepts in studies that involve extensive investigation in CDA. First, in the discipline of CDA, ideology is defined as a form of beliefs in a discourse community and a social group (Van Dijk, 2006), which directs the group members to particular interpretations, perceptions, discourses, and social practices in specific social domains (Gkaintartzi & Tsokalidou, 2010). Second, scholars in the social research area argue that power relations are an indispensable part of social relations and social interactions. As power relations also exist in educational contexts, a thorough investigation of the issue is required.

While power is a multifaceted phenomenon, the exercise of power in educational settings is generally illustrated in teacher-student relationships in a classroom. In a classroom, as Walsh (2011) noted, the role of participants (which includes the teacher and students) is asymmetrical. Teachers are inherently assigned power over their students due to several attributions, one of which is being a knowledgeable participant who gains an authoritative role to control the class (Chalak, 2021), who holds “the power to pass their knowledge on as true” (Hosseini & Abdullah, 2011, p. 1). With such a belief, the association between power, knowledge, and truth is what dominates teachers’ discourse in interactions with students.

Although the discourses that teachers employ to assume their power and dominance can vary across different contexts of language use, there appear to be certain patterns in how they exert their power. For example, Lee and Kim (2017) revealed that to force students to show their participation in the classroom, the teacher participants in two classrooms similarly exercised their power as evaluators to direct the students to participate in the classroom discussions (e.g. by saying, “You! Answer me. If you do not answer, I’ll make you explain again and again until this class finishes”, as one teacher attempted to induce the student’s participation in the classroom). In EFL classrooms, in the study of Hosseini and Abdullah (2011), the authors also argued that there was a systematic exercise of power among the teachers, including, for example, using imperatives to control the students (for instance, the teacher reminded students to follow classroom etiquette by saying, “First raise your hand, then answer my question, ok?”). These examples clearly indicate that, regardless of different contexts,

teachers' use of power was altogether manifested in their classroom discourse.

Online Discourse Community

Generally, a discourse community is described as a speech community where the members share common communicative goals and with certain mechanisms for communication (e.g. Kehus et al., 2010; Swales, 1990). With technology that continues to mature in this digital era, it is widely acknowledged that societal discourses, as fluid and dynamic entities (Berkenkotter, 1993), have continually developed to cover new forms of discourse communities, the most recent of which is online discourse communities. Given the growing popularity of social media and online discussion platforms, online discourse has been the focus of many studies in the discipline of discourse analysis in recent years. Among a variety of issues, the negotiation of ideology, identity, and power in online discourse is the issue most often discussed in the literature (Matsuda, 2002).

To date, much of the evidence suggests that the shift in the production of societal discourses has resulted in new ways in which discursive power is represented and exercised. That is, unlike interactions in offline contexts, online discussions encourage certain discourse that is usually not moderated and does not have explicit communicative patterns or rules (Smith & Bressler, 2013). Another dominant feature of online interactions is anonymity, which allows members to express themselves freely and without the stress that could be ascribed from face-to-face conflicts (Witschge, 2004). Thus, it is clear that the growth of the new discourse community in online discussions will carry new dynamics of the exercise of power. The investigation into such new social practices is particularly important and has the potential to become even more common in the future (Törnberg & Törnberg, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

The present study is theoretically underpinned by the corpus-based CDA approach, the two somewhat opposite instruments in the field of discourse analysis (Kim, 2014). While corpus analysis is not limited to quantitative analysis, it is important to note that the corpus-based approach is largely concerned with quantitative analysis of texts to produce statistical findings elicited from an entire corpus. The

corpus-based approach is also generally employed to examine collocational patterns of words to identify meaningful relationships of certain lexical items with other texts, while providing “an effective means of accessing the evaluative and discourse prosodies surrounding mentions of particular social groups” (Brookes & Chafupnik, 2022, p. 220).

On the other hand, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is extensively deemed to be a qualitative research paradigm in discourse analytic research (e.g. Armayanti, 2019). Developed in the late 1980s, CDA is both a theoretical framework and a research method that aims to study how power can be exercised through language. As a problem-oriented form of social research (Brookes & Chafupnik, 2022), CDA particularly aims to uncover “the opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, domination, power, and control as manifested in language” (Wodak, 2001, p.2). So, in a nutshell, CDA underlines the meanings and assumptions behind the discourses produced by people (Martinez-Roldan & Malave, 2004), with extensive focus on identifying how power relations can ideologically shape the assumptions. Despite some slight differences in the methodological approaches to conduct CDA initiated by a number of scholars (e.g. Fairclough, 1989; Van Dijk, 2001), the most common framework used in existing studies is that of Fairclough (2015). Fairclough’s (2015) CDA framework argues that CDA consists of a three-dimensional approach that ties language use in a context to social and cultural structures. The three dimensions include text level (i.e. patterns of language use), discursive practice (how discourses are shaped by societal practices), and social practice (how discourse reflects and shapes ideologies and wider societal attitudes).

In educational contexts, CDA is helpful for describing, interpreting, and explaining the associations between language and educational issues (Rogers, 2004). Realising the need to use CDA in educational contexts, for example, Chanzanagh et al. (2011) utilised CDA to analyse textbooks in a school curriculum to identify issues relevant to democratic citizenship values. More recently, Leung (2015) used CDA to reveal the hidden stories behind the national curriculum in Hong Kong. Based on the CDA-informed approach, the author discovered the power-related stories behind the policy texts and the contexts where the curriculum was used.

Despite the effectiveness of CDA, given that it is a qualitative approach in nature (Gu, 2018), there are some worrying issues that need to be addressed. Among the minor concerns, scholars cautioned that researchers could present small amounts of data and information that support pre-conceived ideologies (Widdowson, 2004). As such,

there have been some advocates for an approach that combines corpus linguistics with CDA. In an attempt to reduce the limitations of both methodologies, much evidence suggested that corpus linguistics and CDA in combination have the potential to enrich each other (Brookes & Baker, 2021; Brookes & Chałupnik, 2022). This means, with the assistance of corpus-based analysis, CDA will be able deal with extensive datasets, while reducing subjectivity in the analysis of data.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

In order to uncover the issues from a corpus-based CDA perspective, constructing a corpus of the texts becomes technically compulsory. To this end, the teachers' discussions in the online discussion forum on Ajarn.com were used to create the corpus, hereafter called the "Discussion" corpus. Named after the Thai word for "teacher," Ajarn.com describes itself as the most popular TEFL website in Thailand. Founded in 1999, Ajarn.com has more than 30 frequent forum contributors and typically receives more than 10 new contributions each month. With its popularity, contributors on Ajarn.com include both Thai teachers and an increasing number of foreign teachers who may be engaged in discussing Thai education and comparing their experiences with Thai students with those with students in other countries. As such, while the amount of data on other websites for teachers in the Thai context is rather limited, the discussions on Ajarn.com tend to be more insightful and instructive, providing rich data for in-depth and comprehensive analyses of power relations in this study.

Serving as a social entity that connects its members through mutual interests in an online discussion platform, Ajarn.com features job advertisement space, articles, and blogs. More importantly, Ajarn.com, using only English in all sections of the website, attracts English language teachers in Thai schools at different levels, most commonly the high school level. On the "Ajarn Street" page, there are discussion platforms where users are encouraged to create posts and to interact with each other, with several topic-specific threads differentiated through tags (e.g. "classroom management," "teaching methodology," and "school problems"). So, teachers can find the

posts that most closely match their interests by scrolling through the existing tags.

Among those tags on the discussion forum, “Thai students” is frequently used by the teachers, representing a series of wide-ranging and extensive discussions about “Thai students.” The fact that “Thai students” co-exists with other classroom-related tags (e.g. “Classroom management,” “Teacher opinions,” and “Teacher stories”) clearly justifies the representation and the extensive coverage of the teachers’ discussions on Thai student-related topics on the forum, which therefore became the search tag of the present study. So, to examine how the discussions on “Thai students” contained opaque power and ideology manifested in the teachers’ language use, this study collected the posts and comments about “Thai students” from 2012 to 2022. Adhering to ethical issues, prior to the collection of data, this research was submitted to, and approved by, the ethics committee of the institution where the author works. Consent from the website owner to collect the data was also obtained before collecting the data. All unnecessary words (e.g. user names, contribution dates, and other irrelevant texts in the posts and comments) were removed from the text prior to the analyses of the data. This is because they are not part of a meaningful pattern and so should not be included in the corpus. In all, the Discussion corpus included more than 80 articles with over 400 comments consisting of 161,532 words.

Data Analysis

Analysis

The analyses of data involved two major stages. First, Wmatrix, a software tool for corpus analysis, was utilised to provide the empirical evidence helpful for the thematic categorisations. The Wmatrix application offers basic functions for corpus analysis, including, for example, concordances, collocations, and keywords. Besides the qualitative data analysis, Wmatrix can produce results which are quantifiable, ranging from lexical to grammatical and semantic modes. For lexical analysis, the software can generate frequency lists of a text. At the grammatical level, the software uses the CLAWS (the Constituent Likelihood Automatic Word-tagging System) corpus annotation tool to perform part-of-speech tagging of words. And, at the semantic level, Wmatrix draws on the USAS (UCREL Semantic Analysis System) framework for the multitier automatic semantic

grouping of running texts. USAS consists of 21 semantic fields, annotated into the English alphabet. USAS can efficiently provide empirical data to conduct thematic analysis through its semantic tagging system, underlying the thematic categorisations in this study.

The first step of the thematic analysis involved creating a corpus of the posts and comments in the “Thai students” tag. As this stage of analysis did not require any preliminary data processing, the Discussion corpus with all collected texts saved as a .txt file, was uploaded into the Wmatrix software. The software then assigned semantic tags to every lexical item in the text (or the Discussion corpus file), which contains roughly 160,000 words. Once all words in the text were successfully tagged, the software began to generate a key semantic domains list. Each identified key semantic domain in the list was ranked by log-likelihood (LL) value, and the keyness statistics were automatically calculated by the software by comparing the Discussion corpus against the BNC corpus, the primary corpus built into Wmatrix. In the following step, the generated semantic groups together with the statistical results were observed and analysed to determine the key themes that emerged in the Discussion corpus. The LL value, a statistical measure to determine the salience of data, was used to determine the salient themes in the discussions on Ajarn.com. Since a higher LL value indicates a more salient theme in the corpus, the cut-off value was set at 100.00 in order to more accurately identify the salient themes with stronger statistical significance (Balossi, 2014). Then, from the categorisations, the identified themes and the lexical items that fall into each theme were analysed, explained, and interpreted.

Even though collocations can be generated through Wmatrix, users should note that the software is still in development (Vathanalaotha & Jeeradhanawin, 2015). For that reason, in the second stage, it became necessary to look for an alternative. AntConc was thus employed to perform the collocation analysis of the search word in the Discussion corpus. Collocation analysis looks at how frequently a search item statistically co-occurs with other tokens in the corpus. It is, moreover, important to note that the overall methodology of this data analysis stage involved both corpus-driven and corpus-based approaches. While the former approach relies on the corpus data itself to delineate the frequency or salience in the data without prior assumptions, the latter involves the analysis of the predetermined forms and theory to carry out the investigation (Biber, 2009; Tognini-Bonelli, 2001). In this study, the corpus-driven approach was first implemented to identify meaningful patterns in the corpus. In order to determine the search terms for collocation analysis, the words from

the generated word list that could be associated with ideology and power relations in classroom contexts, including “teachers” and “students,” were thoroughly inspected. Eventually, the preliminary analysis suggested that “teachers” was used significantly less frequently than the other word (“students”) in the Discussion corpus, and that it did not adequately reflect how teachers’ ideology and power are manifested in their language use. This, as such, means that the actual collocation analysis should focus on the word “students,” which on the other hand is the content word most frequently used in the Discussion corpus, and is thus the most relevant word for performing an in-depth analysis. From observation, it appeared that, among the many collocative tokens, verb collocates of “students” yielded considerable representations of power relations issues in the teachers’ discussions on Ajarn.com. As with the analysis in the previous stage, without any cut-off frequency applied before the computation of the collocation, the identified collocations of the word “students” were thematised. Word span was set within the range of five words to the left and right position of the search term (5R – 5L), meaning that the returned results would be collocates in a range of five words to the left and five words to the right of “students.” And, to gauge the verb collocation strength of the word “students” in the Discussion corpus, the cut-off value, using LL, was set at 5.00.

While combining the strength of quantitative and qualitative research methods is reasonably fruitful in taking the CDA approach (Baker et al., 2008), it should be pointed out that the present study does not attempt to replicate the standard analysis of CDA. Rather, this study draws on the underlying principles of corpus linguistics, with the analytical approaches compatible with the CDA framework, to analyse social issues, including opaque power and ideology, manifested in the language use in the online discussion threads. In particular, this study was broadly informed by Fairclough’s (1989) elements of textual discourse analysis. These elements primarily include description (of the texts), interpretation (of the discursive relationships between the texts), and explanation (of the relationships between the discursive processes and the social processes).

Research Questions

The present study, driven by a corpus-based CDA approach, aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the salient themes according to the key semantic fields in the discussions on Ajarn.com?
2. What does a collocational analysis of the word “students” tell readers about the opaque power and ideology in the teachers’ language use in the forum?

RESULTS

In response to the research questions, the results will be divided into two sections. To explicate key semantic categorisations, as a linguistic approach to identify salient themes in the Discussion corpus, the first part will report the results obtained from the Wmatrix software. The second part will be the results elicited from a collocational analysis performed by AntConc software. In both sections, the generated concordances will be used to illustrate each identified theme. As previously discussed, combining corpus linguistics and CDA reduces subjectivity in data analysis (Brookes & Baker, 2021; Brookes & Chaupnik, 2022). Consequently, employing a corpus-informed CDA to analyse the data in the following sections ensures that the concordances were not cherry-picked or purposefully selected to prove a preconceived point (Baker & Levon, 2015; Widdowson, 2004).

Thematic Categorisation

USAS Tagging, a semantic tagging function available in the Wmatrix tool, was employed to classify themes. Table 1 demonstrates the top semantic issues that emerged in the discussion forum (with the cut-off value at 100.00). The identified key themes in Table 1, coupled with the concordances, provided the basis for the discussions and interpretations of the teachers’ implicit attitudes toward their students as presented in the following section.

Table 1*Key semantic fields of the discussion threads*

Key issues	Log-likelihood value
Education in general (e.g. <i>classrooms, education, schools</i>)	11337.94
Geographical names (e.g. <i>Bangkok, Thai, Thailand</i>)	3163.33
Language, speech and grammar (e.g. <i>language, pronunciation, words</i>)	2642.11
Learning (e.g. <i>learn, learning, learnt</i>)	1314.33
Cause and effect/Connection (e.g. <i>because of, hence, why</i>)	711.55
Quantities: many/much (<i>majority, most</i>)	376.33
Degree (<i>as, relatively</i>)	279.33
Able/intelligent (e.g. <i>ability, proficient, skills</i>)	258.39
People (e.g. <i>children, kids, people</i>)	227.77
Speech acts (e.g. <i>admit, demand, dictate</i>)	226.71
Mental object: Conceptual object (e.g. <i>concept, issues, topic</i>)	210.81
Work and employment: Generally (e.g. <i>job, work, workload</i>)	205.48
Degree: Non-specific (e.g. <i>degree, by any means, even</i>)	186.14
Alive (e.g. <i>life, lives</i>)	166.68
Interested/excited/energetic (e.g. <i>enthusiasm, interest, self-motivated</i>)	153.24
Evaluation: True (e.g. <i>evidence, prove, true</i>)	144.87
Personal names (e.g. <i>James, Mark, Mr. Biggs</i>)	142.29
Attentive (e.g. <i>attention, focus, paying attention</i>)	141.22
Grammatical bin (e.g. <i>are, on, or</i>)	140.41
Failure (e.g. <i>fail, losing, waste of time</i>)	131.30
Expected (e.g. <i>expected, hopefully, foresee</i>)	128.11
Government (e.g. <i>country, government, official</i>)	120.78
Uninterested/bored/energetic (e.g. <i>boring, passive, laziness</i>)	115.37
Important (e.g. <i>emphasis, important, primary</i>)	105.99
Quantities: many/much (e.g. <i>extra, more, supplement</i>)	100.82

Table 1 presents an overview of the salient themes from the statistical methods generated from USAS Tagging. With the highest LL-value, it is apparent that the issues relevant to education in general are the gist of the textual content in the Discussion corpus. It must be, as such, pointed out that the main theme generally represents the key characteristic of the website, with most discussions centred around issues in education. Further investigation into the concordances revealed that most tokens falling into this category primarily connote negative meanings, many of which manifested the teachers' discontent in the Thai educational system. The following excerpts exemplify this category:

It's about time Thailand starts kicking out all the uneducated, unqualified backpacker TEFL teachers and starts focusing on qualified *teachers*, while also tripling the salary given, Thai students might actually stand a chance.

The Thai *educational* system is made for students to memorize things. What do you usually do when you have to memorize? You memorize it for the test and after the test, it goes bye-bye.

You are more likely to get out on the street and end up speaking to someone in English rather than writing them a full English sentence or an essay. Thai *schools* place too high an emphasis on written English (think grammar, verb tenses, preposition, punctuation, those fill in the blank with the correct words type questions, etc., etc.)

One intriguing aspect of these excerpts is the discursive process evident in the teachers' discussions. From these, it is clear that the teachers' freedom to express their opinions was discursively construed through their lexical choices (such as "kicking out" and "bye-bye"), the words which connote informality, and perhaps, intimacy. Ajarn.com, not intended for deliberative discussions, clearly encourages real-world discourse, or discourse which is not dictated by norms or strict rules of interaction. This, consequently, promotes the discursive construction of comfort and informality in the teachers' discourse on the website.

The first theme was actually foregrounded by that with the second-highest value (geographical terms), indicating that teachers' discussions on the educational system focused on that in Thai contexts.

The third- and fourth-highest values in the table, including “Language, speech and grammar” and “learning,” respectively, were intimately connected to the previous themes. That is, both of them reinforced that the key issues in the discussion threads focused on education in the Thai context relevant to (foreign) language learning.

The highlight of the key semantic categorisations refers to the “work and employment” theme, the twelfth item on the key domain list. Surprisingly, while the theme merely consists of issues associated with teachers’ workload (e.g. “It’s a serious time for teachers, when their *workload* increases a thousand-fold trying to catalogue all of the late homework assignments”), many discussions focused on what is primarily involved in a teaching position, which ideologically dictates how teachers dominated the power. Three concordances below illustrate what is attributed to the thematic categorisation of “work and employment.”

C1: excel in the job. As a teacher our *job* is more akin to a manager and to manage

C2: English language, while the *role* of the student is to study hard. However, as must

C3: control of the class at all times with the *role* as being more of a facilitator or coach.

From the example concordances, it appears that the tokens in this category were often used to differentiate teachers’ agency from that of the students, while reflecting the hierarchical societal roles of the education ecology. In the given contexts, teachers were the agents that had the authority to control their students, while the students’ agency involves putting effort into studying. This ideological perspective, in fact, could be rooted in the social hierarchy of Thailand. In the Thai context where teachers inherently possess a respected authority (Pattapong, 2011), teachers play a superordinate role, while students are placed in a subordinate position (Young, 2011). Given the differences in the position on the hierarchical ladder, teachers generally dominate with their position as classroom manager to control students. Moreover, it should be noted that the most distinct discursive feature in one concordance is the use of “our” (as in “our *job*”) to convey collectivism. The existence of this possessive pronoun in the first concordance appears to indicate the inclusiveness and the

ideology of belonging to a community, suggesting an equal power and an attempt to minimise the distance between the contributors and the readers in the teachers' discourse on Ajarn.com.

Another theme that reflects the ideological position is that of the 18th highest value, which refers to the "Attentive" category. A thorough examination of the concordances in the theme demonstrated that, as teachers held the authoritative power to pass knowledge onto students, they deserved the students' attention in their lessons.

Capturing the *attention* of a large class of kids and teaching them is a complicated psychological game.

Let me start by saying that I've encountered no experience more deflating and frustrating than realizing as you look out over 25 to 35 students to whom you're talking that not a single student is paying *attention* to a word you are saying. This has happened to me on many occasions.

Another problem I noticed is that many of the students are either not paying *attention*, being unruly, or doing other work. Many of them are just plain lazy!

The above excerpts conceptualise what constructs the societal functions of the two agents. While the teacher agent is concerned with gaining the authority to capture the attention of the students, the student agent on the other hand involves paying attention to the class, and behaving appropriately in the classroom. One possible explanation for the dissatisfaction among the teachers is that teachers' position, given their superior knowledge, is highly valued in the Thai context (Chan & Chan, 2005). So, the absence of the students' attention in classroom is perceived as disrespect for teachers who are of a higher status (Young, 2021).

Overall, the key themes identified from the semantic tagging approach revealed the salient issues that emerged in the discussion threads on Ajarn.com. With the highest rank from the LL-value, the analysis indicated that the "education in general" theme represented the highest lexical richness, which, in turn, suggests that this is the topic most prominent in the Discussion corpus regarding Thai students. Moreover, it is equally important to note that some thematic categorisations also somehow implied the relationships between

teachers' ideology and power, as well as how such power was exercised.

Verb Collocates of “Students”

While the thematic analysis provides a broad overview on the key semantic fields of the discussion topics about Thai students on Ajarn.com, it is possible that the inspection of the issues could be complemented by a corpus-based analysis approach that examines a smaller number of frequent collocates. Scrutinising less frequent collocates not only allows the issues to be considered from a different perspective, it also has the potential to tell a different story (Baker, 2004). Given the focus of this study is to examine power relations in an educational context, it would be particularly intriguing to investigate how the teachers exercised their power on students through their word choices. As such, AntConc was utilised to examine verb collocates of the word “students,” a content word ranked highest in the Discussion corpus with a frequency value of 1448, and to generate concordances to contextualise the search item. To start with, AntConc software enabled the search for collocates of the search term, with the returned results sequenced by a statistical measure between the search term and the collocate. For a robust and systematic analysis of the collocations, the researcher employed a statistical measure (using the LL-value calculated by the corpus software) to identify the collocates that are statistically salient in the Discussion corpus. The generated collocates, in a total of 14,480 tokens, were observed to determine the verb collocates to be used for the categorisation. Eventually, to elicit as many relevant topics as possible, the LL value of 5.00 of the verbs collocates of “students” was set as the cut-off point.

Table 2

Categories of Verb Collocates of “Students”

Categories	Examples of verb collocates
Dominance	
Authority	<i>control, demand, empowering, managed,</i>
Giving permission	<i>order</i>
Giving help	<i>letting, let, permit</i>
Handling difficulties	<i>encouraged, helped, helps, served, support</i>
Possession	<i>avoid, confronted, disciplined, exerted, handle</i>
	<i>granted, keep, retained, take, taken</i>

Dominance

Table 2 offers a look into the lexical tokens that co-existed with the search word. Overall, the collocation analysis revealed that “students” collocates largely with the words that denote teachers’ dominance. The sheer use of words connoting exertion of power clearly suggests that the topics as to power relations are lexically rich. This topic can be treated under three key issues, including authority, giving permission, and giving help.

Authority

The collocates in this subcategory concern the authoritative discourse of the teachers, irrespective of whether it is illustrated by describing past events in classroom settings or from the teachers’ self-portrayal of their powerful position. It is also worth noting that very few lexical items in this subcategory appear in neutral contexts (e.g. “empowering”, as in “. . . *empowering* students to talk about their lives”). Consequently, it should be emphasised that the verb collocates of “students” in this category are predominantly used to discuss the teachers’ exercise of power in the discussions relevant to negative topics; specifically, they were used to convey the teachers’ dominance over the students. For example, in the discussion thread titled, “Think about what students you want to teach!”, the teachers appeared to expect students to obey them. The excerpt below clearly demonstrates how the teachers’ dominance is manifested in the discussions:

Once students hit secondary level, you are dealing with the onset of the dreaded puberty. Students often become difficult to *control*, rude, lazy and easily distracted. Biological changes can bring out a rebellious streak and as a teacher, you're standing right in the firing line!

This excerpt, besides manifesting the teacher's authoritative discourse, consists of various lexical choices (e.g. "dreaded," "rude" and "lazy") that denote negative, and possibly personal, judgements on students, discourse that would rarely be found in face-to-face communication. Just as anonymity can generally help people overcome pressure and fear of interpersonal conflicts in offline discourse (Witschge, 2004), the anonymity of online discourse on Ajarn.com obviously allows the teachers to have a certain degree of freedom in expressing themselves among those who share mutual interests and are of an equal societal status.

Giving Permission

This subcategory consists of the verb tokens that refer to teachers' act of giving permission or consent to students. On the one hand, from a glimpse of the collocates belonging to this category, it is presumable that students were generally described as getting the freedom to do things and are perhaps dependable. On the other hand, a further investigation into the concordances revealed that this category is fairly connected to the previous category, as it represents the teachers' tendency of giving permission as a measure to take control of the classroom and the students. The results returned from the AntConc software highlighted that students obtained the permission to follow the teachers' instructions.

I let my students read the story by groups. One served as the reader, others helped to hold and flip the book. Two groups presented, and the whole student body chose the winner.

Giving Help

The co-occurrences of "students" in this category refer to the practices of giving help. The collocate tokens in this category

apparently accentuated the teacher-student relationship, specifically indexing the presentation of teachers as help givers and students as help receivers. As with the notion that social power takes place in classroom management so as to help students recognise teachers as problem solvers (Alderman & Green, 2011), this typology of power strategies was particularly employed to express the teachers' higher societal status. The excerpt below substantiated the claim:

My next step is to set measurable outcomes along the journey. All I need to do then is to find (or make) resources that will *support* the students in achieving the set outcomes. That's the part I really enjoy, for it enables me to be creative.

Handling Difficulties

It is necessary to point out that this categorisation relied partially on the surrounding discourses combined with the concordance lines of the collocates. With their reliance upon the contexts beyond their dictionary definition, some tokens may not immediately seem to make sense in the subcategory. For instance, the word “discipline” may not instantly appear to be associated with the actions of handling difficulties in classrooms. But when the relevant context is considered (i.e. “. . . to *discipline* students”), it becomes clear that the token carries out a coping or a managing function.

What subsequently emerged from the examinations of the tokens in this category is that the words commonly co-existed with discourses that served as examples of coping with the difficulties that took place in the classroom. A closer inspection of the concordances revealed that the approaches the teachers used to handle difficulties ranged from trying to *avoid* using power in the situations, to *confronting* the situations. The fact that the word “*confronted*,” which typically connotes a negative expression, consistently first appears in positive contexts but is typically followed by discourses that demonstrate the exercise of power, is also particularly intriguing. For example:

Therefore, whenever *confronted* with students who speak Thai in class, I considered it an opportune moment for teaching them the right structures. So, these are now the ways how I handle them. When students say “Kin num.” I insist that students say, “May I

drink, Teacher.” The student can’t go unless he/she can say the right sentence in English.

Given that the teacher viewed this as an opportunity to teach the students, it is clear from this excerpt that the word “*confronted*” initially existed in a positive discourse. However, the following discourses (such as “*insist*”) imply that the teacher found it intolerable when students spoke Thai in English class. These discourses also show the power dynamics in play, as it was made clear that the student would not be permitted to leave the classroom unless they met the teacher’s expectation about the appropriate language use.

Possession

The collocates belonging to this category are fairly different from those of the previous ones. While the prior categorisations encapsulate the social power exercise emerging in the discourse in the online discussion forum, with a thorough investigation into the concordance lines, it appears that the lexical items that denote the possession function indicate that the teachers were also, probably politically, dominated. While their possession of power can potentially enable their control of the classrooms, in a different context such as that which is highly bureaucratic, teachers can become somewhat powerless. The following excerpt exemplifies the discourse of the teachers that manifests the dominance over teachers in the Thai educational context.

They wanted to know how well I engage the students and how well I *keep* them under control.

The above concordance exemplifies a clear hierarchy of power in the education context. From the example, it is apparent that the teacher, albeit possessing a higher power in a teacher-student relationship, was directly subordinate to a superior system in this context. In the Thai context, the hierarchy of power is determined by age, education, occupation, and professional position (Young, 2021). As such, while it is unclear whether this perhaps contributes to the marginalisation issues as it is still unclear if other groups of teachers, especially groups of Thai teachers, have faced the same issues, as a hierarchically

structured society (Ma et al., 2019), there is certainly an unequal status relationship in the Thai educational context.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Guided by the corpus-based CDA approach, the main goal of this paper has focused on a wide-range analysis of power relationships manifested in an online discourse community. Through the thematic categorisations, empirically informed by the automated semantic tagging system, the overall theme of the discussions on Ajarn.com were revealed, demonstrating that the issues related to education were central to the discussions on the online forum. With reference to the exercise of power, from the key themes, there was a tendency among the teachers to exercise power over their students. Among the prominent thematic ideas, the “Attentive” category encapsulates how teachers exercise the power to dominate classrooms to regain students’ attention. This finding substantiated that in the study of Lee and Kim (2017), as discussed previously, that one common way teachers expressed their dominance in the classroom is by assuming their roles as evaluators to force their students to pay attention to classroom activities. More specifically, some support for this finding is empirically provided by Young’s (2021) study which argued that Thailand’s social hierarchy involves the appropriate behaviours which involve obedience and following orders. As such, the mismatch between the students’ behaviours in the classroom and the Thai hierarchical structure clearly led to the teachers’ dissatisfaction as expressed in the discussion forum.

The examination then moved on to focusing on the representations of power and ideology around the word “students,” the most frequently used content word in the Discussion corpus. To this end, collocational analysis was performed to identify recurrent patterns associated with the lexical item (“students”) across the entire corpus. The analysis of verb collocations of the search word highlighted the dominance and power exercise in the teachers’ discourses, while also helping to broaden the understanding of their ideological stance on the hierarchical power relationships in the Thai educational context, where a huge hierarchical and centralised bureaucracy exists (Fry, 2018). This became apparent through the detailed observation of the “Possession” category which indicated that teachers can be excluded from positions of power in such bureaucratic domains. This result may

be justified by the Sudar's (2013) notion of institutional power, suggesting that social hierarchies in the context of education should be viewed from a wider perspective. This means, based on the institutional conventions, power is dynamic and so consistently shifts depending on the surrounding context where power relations are shaped by other factors such as wider social norms and intrinsic rules of proper conduct (Fairclough, 1989). Beyond the classroom, the value of social hierarchy pervades all aspects of Thai society, including Thai education. Thus, as with a teacher-student relationship, teachers may wield unequal power in the bureaucratic system.

Despite the primary focus on ideology and power manifestation on Ajarn.com, one somewhat unanticipated finding of this study is the discursive features associated with the online discussion community. Overall, it appears that the teachers' discourses that illustrate their comfort to express themselves freely were widely observed in the discussions on Ajarn.com. Along with the opportunity to make anonymous contributions, this could be due to the affordance of online conversation in that it allows authentic discourse in a real-world context, or more precisely, unmoderated discourse (Smith & Bressler, 2013).

In addition, as with the general notion of a speech community where members share a similar communicative repertoire (Wilson & Peterson, 2002), the teachers on Ajarn.com appeared to have similar communicative practices when they interacted on the online discussion forum. These include, for example, the lexical choices to describe the teachers' experiences with "Thai students" or those in the Thai educational context which indicate informality and intimacy among the teachers. In effect, this study strongly reinforces the arguments in previous studies (e.g. Matsuda, 2002), pointing out that there is movement in the production of societal discourses toward online discourse. As a result, this study argues that the examination of discursive practices in online discourse communities is becoming increasingly important.

Regardless of the proven usefulness of the corpus-based CDA approach in expanding the understanding of social issues, especially those related to power abuse and social injustices conveyed in public texts and talk (Baker et al., 2013), there are some minor issues that need to be discussed. First, while the data collected can provide an insight into certain discursive practices that would not be recognisable in offline communication, the anonymity in the online discussion forum may raise a worrying issue. As the website allows for anonymous contributions, it is impossible to confirm the identity of contributors. The anonymity of Ajarn.com, therefore, challenges the

possibility of eliciting representative samples (which are the text from posts and comments) from the website. Second, due to the fact that the word was not used with significant frequency in the Discussion corpus in this study, and that it did not clearly illustrate the issues as to ideology and power, it was impossible to carry out a collocational analysis from a CDA-informed approach of the word that reflects the opposite identity, or “teachers,” a minor issue which could account for a shortcoming of this study. This means, presumably, an examination of other lexical items, relevant to power relations in the educational context would reveal a different, and perhaps equally interesting, picture. Even more, it appears that the ideology issues were only subtly addressed in this study, regardless of their prominence in the CDA discipline. This could be due to the fact that the data (the discussions on the discussion platform) were gathered from a single tag, rather than multiple tags in the related issues. All of these clearly suggest that there is abundant room for future research into examinations of power relationships and dominance in educational contexts.

Regardless of the minor issues, the findings from this study provide an important pedagogical implication which raises the teachers’ awareness of exercising their power. Although the authoritative role of teachers is common in a teacher-student relationship, the results from this study, substantiating those of previous studies, established that most of the power exercised was intended to control and manage the classroom. However, given the association between students’ increased motivation in their language learning and teachers’ use of power (e.g. Goh & Burns, 2012; Pawlak et al., 2016; Tananuraksakul, 2019), teachers should be aware of the extent to which they use the power and how they dominate the classroom. As Bahar et al. (2021) noted, the most effective power is that which is properly used for the sake of a smooth learning process. As such, this study advocates that the power teachers use should encourage students to participate in the class (e.g. taking an authoritative role to direct students to classroom discussions or lessons), rather than that which prevents them from sharing their ideas (e.g. judging the students’ mistakes).

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