



## **DECONSTRUCTING PEDAGOGICAL AUTHORITY: A LINGUISTIC-PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF TEACHER- STUDENT INTERACTIONS IN BAD TEACHER**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the construction and deconstruction of pedagogical authority in teacher–student interactions through a linguistic-pragmatic analysis of the film *Bad Teacher* (2011). Employing a qualitative-descriptive approach, it applies Searle’s (1976) speech act theory and Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness framework to examine dialogues between the teacher character, Elizabeth Halsey, and her students. The findings reveal that Elizabeth frequently employs dominant and aggressive directive speech acts, sarcastic expressive acts, and manipulative representational strategies. Her communication style consistently violates principles of politeness, utilizing both on-record and off-record bald strategies that undermine normative expectations of educational interaction. Furthermore, pedagogical authority in the film is represented as pseudo-authority, constructed through verbal dominance, symbolic manipulation, and embodied coercion, marking a shift from educational authority to transactional power. These results highlight a crisis in the cultural representation of teachers and open avenues for critical discussion on professional ethics, power relations, and teacher identity in contemporary educational discourse.

**Keywords:** Pedagogical Authority, Speech Acts, Pragmatic Politeness.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the realm of education, teachers are seen not only as transmitters of knowledge, but also as authoritative figures who shape the character, values, and attitudes of students. Pedagogical authority, namely the power and legitimacy that teachers have in the learning process, is an essential aspect of successful teaching. This authority manifests through verbal and nonverbal interactions in the classroom, including how teachers direct, motivate, reprimand, and build relationships with students (Hinkel, 2011). However, the representation of teachers in the popular media often deviates from these professional norms. One extreme example can be seen in the film *Bad Teacher* (2011), which features the character of a teacher with apathetic, manipulative, and unprofessional behavior.

The film *Bad Teacher*, directed by Jake Kasdan and starring Cameron Diaz, highlights the character of Elizabeth Halsey, a teacher who teaches not by profession, but for personal gain. He exhibits pedagogically deviant behavior, including manipulation, verbal impropriety, and unethical use of power in the context of teaching. This character is in contrast to the ideal representation of teachers in the educational literature and TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), which emphasizes the importance of communication skills, professional ethics, and interpersonal relationships in language learning (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

This phenomenon becomes interesting to be studied linguistically-pragmatically, because the role of teachers as the main communicator in the classroom cannot be separated from the strategic and meaningful use of language. Through pragmatic approaches, particularly speech act analysis and politeness theory, we can explore how teacher authority is constructed, negotiated, or even destroyed

through verbal interaction (Brown et al., 1987; Thomas, 1995). In this film, there is a shift in the power relationship between teachers and students, where pedagogical authority is not built through academic authority, but through the dominance of sarcastic, aggressive, or manipulative language.

In the context of TESOL and language learning in general, the quality of teacher-student interaction is a key determinant in teaching success. These interactions are not only a forum for delivering material, but also a forum to form the social and professional identity of teachers (Walsh, 2011). By analyzing the dialogue between teachers and students in the film *Bad Teacher*, this study aims to deconstruct how pedagogical authority is interpreted and practiced through the use of language in fictional contexts. Although narrative and fictitious, this film reflects the public's perception of educational institutions and the actors in them, as well as opens up a space for critical reflection on the actual practice of education.

This research not only contributes to the study of linguistic-pragmatics and educational discourse, but also offers a broader understanding of teacher representation in popular media. In today's digital and global era, where the media has a major influence on the formation of public opinion, it is important to examine how teachers, as agents of Education, are represented, and what implications they have on people's perceptions of the pedagogical role in the context of language teaching and education in general.

Based on the background that has been described, this study is focused on the analysis of the interaction between teachers and students in the film *Bad Teacher* through a linguistic-pragmatic approach. This research is specifically designed to answer several key questions: First, how does the form of verbal interaction between teachers and students in the film *Bad Teacher* reflect or even negate pedagogical authority? Second, what are the types of speech acts and pragmatic strategies used by teacher figures in building or destroying power relations with students? Third, how does the representation of pedagogical authority in the film reflect the deviation from the norms of classroom interaction in the context of English education and teaching, especially in the realm of TESOL?

In line with this question, this research has three main objectives. First, to analyze the forms of teacher-student interaction in the film *Bad Teacher* through a linguistic-pragmatic approach, focusing on how pedagogical authority is constructed or deconstructed. Second, to identify and classify the types of speech acts and politeness or rudeness strategies used by the teacher in their verbal interactions. Third, to reveal how the representation of teachers in popular media such as *Bad Teacher* can shape public discourse about professionalism, ethics, and power relations in the English education environment. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to pragmatic studies in the context of education and open up a space for critical discussion about the social representation of the teaching profession in popular culture.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative-descriptive approach with a pragmatic discourse analysis method to examine in depth the form of verbal interaction between teachers and students in the film *Bad Teacher*. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the social and linguistic meanings contained in the conversations of the figures, particularly in the context of the representation of pedagogical authority (Creswell, 2013). The main data source is in the form of dialogue transcripts in the film *Bad Teacher* (2011), which are then analyzed using a pragmatic theoretical framework, especially speech theory (Austin et al., 1975; Searle, 1976) and the theory of politeness from (Brown et al., 1987).

The analysis was carried out by selecting scenes that show direct interaction between the teacher (Elizabeth Halsey) and the students, then identifying the types of speech that appeared, such as directive, representative, expressive, commissive, and declarative (Searle, 1976). In addition, positive and negative politeness strategies were also identified to see how power and social relations are negotiated through language (Brown et al., 1987). Data collection techniques are carried out through documentation and transcription of dialogues, while data analysis techniques follow an interactive model of Miles et al. (2014) which includes the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the pragmatic study of education, the interaction between teachers and students is a key element in building or undermining pedagogical authority. Through the fictional representation in the film, we can see how power relations, professional ethics, and the role of teachers are constructed through explicit and

implicit linguistic strategies. The film *Bad Teacher* presents a teacher character that is the opposite of the normative image of the ideal educator. Through the analysis of the dialogue transcripts in this film, we can examine how Elizabeth Halsey as the main character uses language to manipulate situations, maintain control, or even show indifference to her pedagogical responsibilities.

*Bad Teacher* (2011) is an American comedy film directed by Jake Kasdan and starring Cameron Diaz as Elizabeth Halsey, a high school teacher who has no dedication to her profession. Instead of showing a commitment to the teaching-learning process, Elizabeth used her position to achieve materialistic personal goals, such as finding a rich husband and raising money for plastic surgery. Elizabeth's character is shown as a cynical, lazy, manipulative, and vulgar person, which is in contrast to the ideal image of an educator.

The main conflict in the film arises when Elizabeth competes with her fellow teacher, Amy Squirrel (played by Lucy Punch), who is precisely the representation of a perfectionist and passionate teacher. The interaction between Elizabeth and the students was largely one-way, dominated by rude commands, sarcasm, and verbal disrespect. When Elizabeth tries to get a bonus for the best teacher to finance her personal dreams, she begins to show a change in behavior, although she remains shrouded in unethical motives. On the other hand, his interactions with sports teacher Scott Delacorte (Justin Timberlake) and another sports teacher, Russell Gettis (Jason Segel), show interpersonal dynamics that reflect manipulation strategies and power relations in the school environment.

The film as a whole presents a social critique of educational institutions in a satirical and exaggerated way. Elizabeth's character becomes a symbol of the deconstruction of pedagogical authority, which in the context of this research is relevant to be analyzed through a linguistic-pragmatic perspective, particularly in understanding how language reflects power, social identity, and professional ethics in the fictional classroom.

The following are the results of the analysis and explanation;

#### 1. Identify the speech acts used by Elizabeth in the context of class interactions

In the context of learning, teachers' speech plays an important role in building educational relationships, structuring learning, and maintaining pedagogical authority. However, in the movie *Bad Teacher*, Elizabeth Halsey's character shows the use of speech acts that deviate from the normative function of an educator. Through pragmatic analysis, it was found that Elizabeth tended to use directive, negative expressive, and manipulative representational actions, which actually weakened the pedagogical structure in the classroom.

##### 1.1 Directive Speech (Order and Domination)

Directive speech is a type of speech that aims to make a speech partner do something. In the context of the classroom, teachers generally use directives to direct students. However, Elizabeth used this form roughly and not didactically.

Sample data;

"Anyone seen *Stand and Deliver*? Show hands... You and you, grab the TV and roll it up front."

In this excerpt, Elizabeth begins class with a direct command to students to prepare for a movie screening instead of a teaching activity. This shows a form of imperative speech action, but without a pedagogical explanation or educational introduction. The order was delivered without politeness, without negotiation of meaning, and without relevant learning context. This indicates that directive speech is used to assert power, not to facilitate learning.

In theory Searle (1976), such speech is included in directives with high illocutional power, but in Elizabeth's context, she uses it not in order to build educational authority, but in the form of evasion of teaching duties.

##### 1.2 Expressive Speech (Sarcasm and Disrespect)

Expressive speech is speech that expresses the speaker's attitude or feelings towards a situation. Elizabeth uses this type a lot in the form of sarcasm, rudeness, and social irony that are incompatible with the ethics of communication in the classroom.

Sample data;

"Goodbye, bitches!"

This remark was made when Elizabeth said goodbye from school, which was supposed to be a reflective and professional moment. However, the expressions used are very inappropriate in an educational environment. It reflects negative expressiveness, which shows the indirect release of emotions, cynicism,

and contempt to its audience, including students and colleagues. In normative classroom practice, teachers should use expressive to show empathy or motivation, not to show superiority or bring down others.

### 1.3 Representative Speech (Manipulation and Lies)

The act of representative speech expresses something that is considered true by the speaker. In this film, Elizabeth often uses representations in the form of lies and verbal manipulation, which are used to influence other people's perceptions of her.

Example data:

"The school hired me because I'm amazing at what I do... I use a variety of other multimedia techniques."

This statement was made to the parents of the students at the meeting. However, moviegoers know that Elizabeth has no commitment to teaching methods and tends to rely on movie screenings as a tool to avoid teaching assignments. It is a representation that is used to deceive or cover up true intentions, not to convey information honestly.

In a pragmatic framework, this is included in the strategy of verbal impressions, where representations are used to falsify professional identities in order to achieve personal goals (Searle, 1976). This speech blurs the line between educative performative and social performative, which ultimately damages the image of teachers as role models.

Based on the dialogue fragments from the film *Bad Teacher*, it can be concluded that Elizabeth Halsey consistently uses speech that deviates from the norms of educational communication. The dominant directive speech act is used not to build learning, but to avoid responsibility. Meanwhile, expressive is used cynically and aggressively, and representative functions more as a tool of manipulation than the delivery of information. These findings show how the pedagogical power in the film is not built through moral authority and educational discourse, but through distorted, sarcastic, and falsehood language.

## 2. Politeness strategy based on Brown & Levinson's theory

In the theory of politeness Brown et al. (1987), communication strategies are classified into several categories that aim to manage Face (Source: Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, Bald on-record and Off-record. However, in Elizabeth Halsey's communication practice as a teacher, politeness strategies are often ignored or deliberately rejected, and replaced by forms of communication that are explicitly disrespectful, manipulative, and undermine social and professional norms in the classroom.

### 2.1 Bald On-Record Strategy (No Politeness, Dominance and Direct Rudeness)

This strategy involves a direct form of communication and does not take into account the face of the interlocutor. Elizabeth often used on-record bald to express her power or impatience with students and colleagues.

Example data:

"Are we gonna have a problem, me and you?"

This statement was addressed to Amy Squirrel, a fellow teacher, in an intimidating tone. This sentence is a direct form of statement that indicates a symbolic threat, and there is no attempt to mitigate the threat to Amy's negative face (the need not to be forced or suppressed). In the context of education, this kind of bald on-record style is not only unethical, but also disrupts the collaborative ethos between teaching staff.

Example data:

"Goodbye, bitches!"

This remark was expressed when Elizabeth left the school, in a contemptuous and vulgar tone. This is a form of on-record bald with the intention of openly damaging social relations, which reflects a rejection of institutional norms of manners in the educational environment.

### 2.2 Rejection of the Positive Politeness Strategy (Neglect of Social Solidarity)

Positive politeness serves to build closeness and social solidarity through praise, similarity, or cooperation. However, Elizabeth often rejected this form of politeness, even when colleagues were trying to establish good social relations.

Example data:

Amy: "Who are you again?" Elizabeth: "Amy Squirrel." Elizabeth: "Squirrel?"

Elizabeth's response uses repetition mocking, which weakens the value of the interlocutor's identity

and rejects forms of social bonding. He responded to the introduction with a cynical tone, which showed a reluctance to build collegial relationships and instead embarrassed the interlocutor in a social space that was supposed to be cooperative.

### 2.3 Off-Record Strategy: Sarcasm and Veiled Ambiguity

Off-record strategies are used to avoid direct responsibility for statements, usually in the form of sarcasm, indirect hints, or ambiguous humor. Elizabeth often used this strategy to convey insults or manipulations implicitly.

Example data:

"I'm like an 8, 8 and a half... but if I got a new pair of tits, right?"

In this context, Elizabeth expressed her dissatisfaction with her appearance sarcastically and with indirect strategies. This statement is manipulative, as it indirectly encourages social acceptance of plastic surgery, while attracting the sympathy of the interlocutor. This shows off-record strategies with manipulative motives, not a subtle form of communication ethics.

### 2.4 Negative Face Violation (Degrading Student Identity)

Elizabeth also took actions that explicitly ignored the negative face of students, namely the desire of students to be appreciated and not humiliated.

Example data:

"I was that hot girl, hotter even, and I would never've gone out with you."

This greeting is aimed at students who are sharing feelings about their attraction to classmates. Elizabeth openly stated that the student had no socially attractive grades. This is a serious violation of teacher ethics, where face-threatening acts not only occur, but are part of the teacher's communicative style. Strategies like these have the potential to cause psychological trauma for students and reflect extreme impropriety in classroom communication.

An analysis of the (not) politeness strategy in Elizabeth Halsey's verbal interaction shows that the communication built is not based on pedagogical ethics, but on domination, sarcasm, and social humiliation. Instead of building authority through politeness and positive relationships, Elizabeth used rudeness as a form of symbolic power. This is in line with the concept of face-threatening acts from Brown et al. (1987), where Elizabeth consistently ignores the positive and negative faces of speech partners, both students and colleagues. This confirms that the pedagogical authority built by Elizabeth is a form of deviant authority, that is, a power that is not rooted in moral legitimacy or expertise, but rather in aggressive and unethical verbal tactics

## 3. Power relations and the representation of pedagogical authority in its discursive practice

In educational institutions, pedagogical authority should be built through competence, professional ethics, and a respectful relationship between teachers and students. However, in the movie *Bad Teacher*, the authority possessed by the character Elizabeth Halsey is represented subversively and full of distortions. Through her discursive practices, Elizabeth displayed power as a means of control, not as a means of education; He prioritizes manipulative strategies, exploitation of social positions, and the use of institutional relationships for personal gain. The power shown does not reflect legitimate professional authority, but rather is pseudo and performative.

### 3.1 Symbolic Power without Academic Legitimacy

Elizabeth Halsey took advantage of her formal status as a teacher to access the classroom, but did not perform the educational function as it should. This symbolic power is seen in the form of discursive dominance that positions itself as a "class leader", without a valid didactic process.

Example data:

"We're watching a movie on the first day?" "I think it's awesome." "You rock!"

The response from these students shows passive acceptance of Elizabeth's authoritarian style, even though the substance of the teaching is empty. Elizabeth's power was not built on a critical educational process, but rather on the students' reluctance to oppose the formal authority she possessed. Here, authority does not come from epistemic knowledge, but from exploitative hierarchical structures.

### 3.2 Power Through Symbolic Discrimination and Harassment

Elizabeth routinely practiced verbal power through forms of symbolic harassment and discriminatory actions against students and other teachers. This reflects the practice of domination that goes beyond the

boundaries of educational discourse and enters the territory of verbal abuse.

Example data:

"I was that hot girl, hotter even, and I would never've gone out with you."

This speech is an explicit form of face-threatening power and shows an asymmetrical relationship between teachers and students. In this context, Elizabeth asserts her position through personal insults, not educational arguments. Power in this practice is exclusionary, marginalizing students' identities based on social stereotypes such as appearance, economic status, or dress style.

### 3.3 Deconstruction of Pedagogical Authority (From Professional to Performative)

Ideal pedagogical authority is based on instructional competence and moral integrity. But in this film, Elizabeth reduces the role of the teacher to a social performance, a character who manipulates the system for personal gain. He deconstructed the figure of the teacher from a moral agent to a transactional agent.

Example data:

"As your personal tutor, I guarantee personally that she will get an A. Or your money back."

This statement shows how Elizabeth used the position of educator as an economic tool. It trades academic value for money, eliminating academic legitimacy as the basis of pedagogical authority. This practice proves that the power he has is transactional, not transformational. This is in line with the concept of marketized discourse in education (Fairclough, 1995), where the value of education is reduced to a product of buying and selling.

### 3.4 Power Relations as Gender and Image Strategies

In addition to using language as a tool of domination, Elizabeth also negotiated power through body representation and hyperrealistic femininity strategies. He sought to build authority not through academic substance, but through a self-image designed to attract the attention of wealthy men.

Example data:

"I'm like an 8, 8 and a half... but if I got a new pair of tits... right?"

This statement describes Elizabeth's strategy in utilizing body aesthetics as a tool for social negotiation. The power that emerges here is both visual and gender-based, showing how the teacher's authority is obscured by the performance of the commodified body. It is a form of power that rejects the values of professionalism, and instead promotes capitalistic and patriarchal logic in educational institutions.

From all the discursive practices analyzed, it is clear that the representation of pedagogical authority in Elizabeth Halsey is subversive, manipulative, and deviant. He does not build power based on academic competence or ethical relationships with students, but through strategies of verbal dominance, systemic manipulation, and body image that are used as a tool of social bargaining. The power displayed is power that is forced, not obtained through recognition or trust (legitimate authority). This is an implicit criticism of the modern education system that is vulnerable to the commodification of the role of teachers and the degradation of educational values. In this context, Elizabeth's discursive practice also shows how a teacher's professional identity can be shaped by popular cultural influences and structural pressures within an educational system that are trapped in performative logic and imagery (Mockler, 2022). Thus, *Bad Teacher* becomes a critical reflection on the crisis of pedagogical authority in popular culture and contemporary educational institutions.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that the representation of pedagogical authority in the film *Bad Teacher* undergoes a significant shift from the values of professionalism and educational ethics that should be the basis of teacher-student interaction. Through a linguistic-pragmatic approach, it was found that Elizabeth Halsey's character built power relations not through academic competence or learning strategies, but through the use of dominant, sarcastic expressive, and manipulative representational speech. In addition, the (not) politeness strategy used by Elizabeth reflects a rejection of social solidarity and professional ethics; He more often practices Bald's on-record and off-record communication styles with a tendency to demean speech partners, including students and colleagues. Elizabeth's discursive practice also highlights symbolic power that is performative and illegitimate, in which the role of teachers is reduced to an instrument for the achievement of personal goals through the exploitation of the education system. In this context, pedagogical authority is no longer represented as the result of healthy didactic relations, but as a form of power that is displayed through

aggressive, manipulative, and image-based language. These findings not only reveal the crisis of teachers' professional identity in popular culture, but also invite readers to re-reflect on how teachers should be represented, both in real educational practice and in the media. Thus, this research contributes to the pragmatic study of education, critical discourse, and representation studies, as well as the basis for broader discussions on communication ethics, power relations, and identity construction in the classroom and media culture.

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