

## Gender Positioning in the Development of EFL activities\*

DAVID CAMARGO PONGUTÁ\*\*  
davidcamargo2013@yahoo.es

Recepción: 20 de marzo de 2013  
Aprobación: 30 de abril de 2013

---

\* Scientific research article. Is the result of a research study carried out in a public institution in Boyacá. The study was also developed as a thesis work to graduate in the Master's in Language Teaching Program of the Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia.

\*\* M.A. in Language Teaching from the Pedagogical and Technological University of Colombia (Uptc). He works as a full-time teacher at the International Languages Institute Uptc, Colombia.

### **Abstract**

This article describes an experience related to gender positioning in a group of Fifth Grade students at a public institution of Boyacá. Due to the type of study and its objectives, the focus of the analysis and the interpretation of data applied was the Feminist Post-Structuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA). The results showed that students use different positioning mechanisms during the development of the activities proposed in class, and that girls have a privileged status in the group. It was also evident that the use of the dictionary is a way to exercise power over others. Social relations in this group have emerged and solidified over time. The results also demonstrated that the positioning of the students has a positive or negative impact on their language learning process. Finally, some conclusions and implications for teachers are suggested in order to improve teaching and social practices in the classroom.

**Key words:** discourse, gender, positioning, power, language learning.

### **Posicionamiento de género en el desarrollo de actividades de educación en lengua extranjera**

### **Resumen**

Este artículo describe una experiencia relacionada con el posicionamiento de género en un grupo de estudiantes de Grado 5° en una institución pública de Boyacá. Debido al tipo de estudio y los objetivos propuestos, el enfoque de análisis e interpretación de datos utilizados fue el Análisis del Discurso Feminista Pos-estructuralista (FPDA). Los resultados mostraron que los estudiantes utilizan diferentes mecanismos de posicionamiento durante el desarrollo de las actividades propuestas en clase y que las niñas tienen un estatus privilegiado en el grupo. También se evidenció que el uso del diccionario es una manera de ejercer poder sobre los demás y que las relaciones sociales en este grupo han surgido y se han solidificado a través del tiempo. Los resultados también ilustraron que el posicionamiento de los estudiantes tiene un impacto positivo o negativo en su proceso de aprendizaje del idioma. Finalmente, algunas conclusiones e implicaciones para los profesores son sugeridas con el fin de mejorar la enseñanza y las prácticas sociales en el salón de clase.

**Palabras clave:** discurso, género, posicionamiento, poder, aprendizaje del idioma.

## **Positionnement du genre dans le développement des activités d'EFL**

### **Résumé**

Cet article décrit une expérience liée au positionnement du genre dans un groupe d'élèves de la CM2 dans une institution du secteur publique de Boyacá. L'approche d'analyse et d'interprétation de données utilisées, a été l'Analyse du Discours Féministe Post-structuraliste (FPDA), dû au type d'études et aux objectifs proposés. Les résultats ont montré que les étudiants utilisent de différents mécanismes de positionnement pendant le développement des activités proposées en classe et que les filles ont un statut de privilège dans le groupe. On a aussi pu constater que l'utilisation du dictionnaire est une manière d'exercer le pouvoir sur les autres et que les rapports sociaux dans ce groupe-là ont surgi et se sont solidifiés à travers le temps. Les résultats ont aussi illustré que le positionnement des élèves a un impact positif ou négatif dans leur processus d'apprentissage d'une langue. Finalement, on suggère quelques conclusions et implications pour les professeurs, afin d'améliorer l'enseignement et les pratiques sociales dans la salle de classe.

**Mots clés:** Discours, genre, positionnement, pouvoir, apprentissage de la langue

## **O posicionamento de gênero no desenvolvimento de atividades do inglês como língua estrangeira**

### **Resumo**

O artigo descreve uma experiência relacionada com o conceito de gênero em um grupo de estudantes de quinta série de ensino fundamental de uma escola da rede pública de Boyacá. Pelo tipo de estudo e os objetivos propostos, o enfoque de análises e interpretação de dados utilizados foi a Análise de Discurso feminista Pós-estruturalista (FPDA). Os resultados determinaram que os alunos utilizam diversas posturas de posicionamento perante o desenvolvimento das atividades propostas na aula, e que as meninas tem uma posição privilegiada no grupo. Também se evidenciou que o uso do dicionário é uma forma de exercer poder sobre os outros e que as relações sociais no grupo tem surgido e se consolidam através do tempo. Os resultados também ilustraram que o posicionamento dos estudantes exerce um impacto positivo ou negativo em seu processo de aprendizagem do idioma. Finalmente, se fazem algumas recomendações aos professores para melhorar o ensino e as práticas sociais na sala de aula.

**Palabras Chave:** Discurso, gênero, posicionamento, poder, aprendizagem da língua.

## Introduction

Gender positioning and its relation to language learning is a topic narrowly explored in Colombian contexts especially in public institutions at primary level. Additionally to this, in Colombia it can be evidenced that diverse types of violence against women often take place. (EL TIEMPO, 2011). This situation may have an impact in children's behavior who, finally reflect these kinds of problems through their discourse in the classroom when interacting with their peers. Some studies are cited to explain the way students establish «gendered power relationships» and how this «... affect friendship and... the acquisition/ learning process of a second language» (Hruska in Castañeda, 2010).

The first theory discussed in the theoretical framework is Discourse. Several authors are cited and their ideas are considered to define what discourse means and its relation with power and social relations. Gender is a key concept worth being explored and discussed in this study; in this study, gender is seen as an «evolving» and «living» concept which is shaped... by individuals and specific societies and contexts» (Wodak 1997 in Sunrise and Littoseliti, 2002 p. 4). In terms of positioning, I analyze the relation that exists between language and power and the way language is used as a tool to find privileged or dominant positions in school and academic activities.

In order to guide this study it was necessary to state the following research questions: *What happens in terms of gender positioning in a mixed-sex group of 5<sup>th</sup> grade students? And, how does this positioning affect students' language learning?* Since this study aimed at describing and analyzing the way gender positioning takes place in a group, the Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis was used as the approach of analysis due to it is the most suitable to «analyze the ways in which speakers negotiate their identities, relationships and positions» (Baxter, 2003, p. 1).

Three main categories describe the findings of this study: Girls Dominance in EFL activities, Gaining power through the use of a dictionary, and Constructive Power in Interactions. These categories explain the mechanisms used by students, especially girls, to gain leadership positions and the way this impacts positively or negatively students'

performance in the classroom. Finally, some conclusions and some implications for teachers and the institution are presented as well as further research for those teacher-researchers that would like to go deeper in this kind of studies or to start exploring gender issues in these kinds of contexts.

## **1. Theoretical considerations**

### **1.1. Discourse**

Baxter (2003), from a FPDA perspective, states that discourse refers to «stretches of text, spoken or written... which are open to the analysis of 'patterns (structure, organization) ...» (p. 7). She says that this concept is more likely to be thought as «language in use», in other words «any talk between people and groups of people, in everyday contexts...» (p. 7). Baxter also sees discourse as «a form of social/ideological practice» (p. 7). In this sense, it is important to say that discourse is something that takes place in every interaction of the human being. In other words, discourse involves aspects such as a person's thoughts, intentions, and words that can be expressed. The definition above situates discourse in a complete contextual and meaningful space of action through words; this can be similar to Van Dijk's (1993) and Fairclough's, in Park (2008) view of discourse as a phenomenon that occurs in a specific context with cultural and ideological characteristics. Through discourse, an individual can transform his/her environment into a «socially and culturally meaningful one» (Blommaert, 2005, p. 4). We can think that discourse is a powerful tool to give sense to situations around us and to mean using words, gestures, or written texts. Another important aspect of discourse is that by means of it individuals «may act upon the world and especially upon each other» (Fairclough (1992) in Frances (2005) p. 63). This idea lead us to think that it is through discourse that people can gain privileged positions in society, groups of work, and academic groups (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 255). An important insight that we can conclude is that there is no discourse without power and there is no power unless an individual use discourse; both situations are present in our daily interactions. It is very important to recognize that our learners are in a continuous struggling to gain a position in the group since it is the way they build themselves as language learners and as persons that belong to a society with specific cultural characteristics.

### **1.2. Gender And Discourse**

There is a close and why not inseparable relation between gender and discourse. Tischler (1996) in Durán (2006) states that gender pertains to the socially learned patterns of behavior and the psychological or emotional expressions or attitudes that distinguish males from females. According to this author gender is something we do as we talk, act, read and write in ways that constitute us as masculine or feminine within social structures.

Authors like Duran (2006) state that individuals express their gender identity through every aspect and characteristic of their verbal and nonverbal discourse these characteristics of gender can include the way we dress and body language. In our context, we have observed that boys tend to behave more roughly than girls. Some attitudes like being polite or respectful are not accepted in boys and being playful or naughty are not girls' behaviors. This is what Butler (1990); Humm (1989); and Weedon (1987) in Nikitina & Furuoka (2007) describe when they say that «gender differences are culturally shaped and defined by the individual's sense of oneself as «masculine» or «feminine», and that gender identity is not fixed and can be in a state of a constant flux» (p. 2). For the purposes of this study, gender is considered, rather than a fixed concept, an evolving one that changes through the time and is reshaped by individuals especially in the classroom where students have different roles and power positions; it is also important to highlight that discourse, both verbal and nonverbal, takes a remarkable part in shaping and showing what learners think about gender differences.

### **1.3. Positioning**

In one of his studies, Castañeda (2010) suggests that positioning is a moment in which a student can exert power over their peers. An important element that is tied to positioning is power which «involves *control*... such control may pertain to *action* or *cognition*: that is, a powerful group may limit the freedom of action of others, but also influence their minds» (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 254; Mahar, 2001). That is, when a person has more knowledge than their peers, this individual can exert more power or influence in the decisions to be made; likewise, we can interpret that power can be gain through the use of language or other sources like violence that may limit the freedom to act those whose knowledge or possibilities are not enough to success.

In academic environments it is possible to find that some students behave in a way that is not considered as correct by teachers or other peers; the natural reaction towards these people is rejection. On the other hand, when there is a calm student with polite manners the feeling of acceptance becomes an easier job. These situations are the ones that Castañeda, (2008) describe when saying that a powerful positioning may be encouraged (sometimes unconsciously) by teachers using discourses of «approval» for a reduced group of students making «their EFL experience in the classroom more positive and, for some of them, more comfortable» (Castañeda, 2008, p. 321).

### **1.4. Language Learning And Gender**

Many authors and studies suggest that primary students have marked differences in their performances in the classroom. Authors like Alloway and Gilbert (1997) in Skelton

(2003); Sunderland, 1998; and Powell and Batters, 1985, cited in Nikitina & Furuoka, 2007) suggest that girls are more successful in classes than boys. Additionally to this, Rowan *et al.* 2001 in Skelton (2003) consider that «communication and emotional expression is the domain of girls rather than boys» (p. 6) These concepts lead us to think that girls are better language learners than boys and that they are more likely to success in a language class. However, this conception sets aside the role that boys play in a classroom language; we may think that, as it was described above, girls have more opportunities to interact with the target language and thus they seem to be more successful.

As we have seen in the theory so far, there is an inseparable relation between language learning and gendered discourses. There is a continuous struggling in which participants in academic spaces want to gain a privileged position and sometimes want to reject and set aside their peers due to the urgency to construct themselves as language learners.

## **2. Research Methodology**

In this study, the Feminist Post-structuralist Discourse Analysis was used to analyze and interpret students' interactions. Baxter (2003) explains that the FPDA is «a feminist approach to analyzing the ways in which speakers negotiate their identities, relationships and positions in the world according to the ways they are located by interwoven discourses» (p.1). FPDA considers «plurality» and «diversity» which implies that individuals, both female and male, are multiply positioned... at times as powerful and at other times as powerless» in different contexts (Baxter, 2003, p. 183; Weedon, 1998 in DeShong 2011). FPDA is also a flexible approach that allows the researcher to explore males and females positioning at the same level.

### **2.1. Context And Participants**

This research took place at a public co-educational public school of Boyacá, Colombia. The school offers Technical instruction with especial emphasis on technology and computers. This institution offers from primary to high school education. Most students that attend classes come from the countryside and belong to middle and low social classes. Students from this school take classes from 7:30 a. m. to 2:00 p. m.

The participants selected in order to develop this project were 10 students (5 males, 5 females) of 5<sup>th</sup> grade aged between 10 and 14 years. They come from different social backgrounds. Some of them are children of teachers who live in town; some others do not live with their parents and live in rural areas. The hours of class (3 hours per week) are devoted to learn vocabulary and other introductory activities that help students become familiar with the foreign language. It was necessary to get the permission from the principal of the school and the students' parents by using a consent form. Unfortunately, only a few

parents were presents in the meeting when the project was presented. This is the reason why only 10 students were part of this study.

## **2.2. Data Gathering Instruments**

The first instrument used for data gathering was Voice Recording. This instrument was very important because it allowed the researcher to record «much interaction» of every class (Wallace, 1998). Characteristics of the discourse of the students were collected through this instrument.

The second instrument was Direct Observation. As Bell (1999) explains, this technique allows observing what actually happens in the classroom. This information provided the researcher with specific features about the participants' characteristics. After observing what happened in the classroom it was necessary to register what was observed in order to keep every detail of the events occurred using t-researcher field notes.

The third instrument used was a Semi-Structured Interview. Through this, it was possible to explore students' ideas, feelings, and perceptions about their own experience in the classroom and the relations they constructed in the class with each other. A protocol prepared by the researcher was used. Students were asked about some aspects that were observed and recorded during the classes. Three students were interviewed at the same time. The interviews were video and voiced recorded.

## **2.3. EFL Learning At This Public Institution**

According to the Common European Framework which was adopted by The Ministry of Education, 5<sup>th</sup> graders should have a basic level A2 (Serie: Guías No. 22. p. 6). This implies that they should be able to communicate and use the language in a basic form. However, these learners took 1 hour of instruction in English from first to fourth grade with teachers who were not language teachers. It is worth mentioning that the communicative approach must be considered to lead the syllabus and classes according to the standards and the curriculum of the school (Serie Guías No. 22, 2006).

## **2.4. Research Process And Findings**

The collection of data occurred while students were developing EFL activities. Some of the activities they developed were puzzles, unscramble words activities, matching pictures to words, describing pictures, among others. The instructions were given in Spanish and were mainly simple directions explaining what learners had to do in the activity. After the instructions, students were ready and free to organize their groups and start developing their assignments.

Once they started to work I placed the voice recorder in one of the groups. Their interactions were recorded for 30 minutes or more. This happened during 8 sessions of class. After this, all conversations were transcribed and common situations that could be relevant for the study were identified. These situations were given a specific name in order to identify this category or group of patterns. Then, the categories were analyzed under Conversation Analysis (CA) principles which help determine the «recurring patterns across many cases without appeal to intuitive judgments of what speakers «think» or «mean» (Lazaraton, 2002, p. 37). After the CA, a latter analysis was developed under the FPDA principles. In this part of the analysis, interactions of students were interpreted and contextualized. A reflection about the conditions of students and their behavior was developed paying special attention to the ways students use discourse to negotiate their identity, positions, and the way the gain or give away power in their interactions as language learners (Baxter, 2003).

### 3. Findings

The results in this section describe the way gender positioning in a group of 5<sup>th</sup> graders takes place and the way this positioning affects students' language learning. Thus, in the next paragraphs the reader will find the categories that were found in the analysis stage of this study.

The following conventions appear in the other conversations during the analysis section. Actual names were changed to respect students' identities.

- (???) = it is not clear what the speaker is saying
- (- - - -) = interruptions (other students speaking loudly or making different noises)
- ... = brief pause when speaking
- ⇒ = change of situation: students talk about things different from the task.  
There's no specific interaction.
- (sss) = Students speaking at the same time. What they say is not clear.
- (SS) = students say the sentence or word at the same time.
- (kpr) = kids playing with the recorder
- (xxx) = a word that is not clear to identify
- = Moments in which students do not speak (They are writing, looking up in the dictionary, etc.).
- (msp) = word mispronounced in English  
Capital letter: they say this yelling

### Girls Dominance In EFL Activities

In this part of the analysis we will see how girls and boys struggle to gain a position during the development of academic activities. In this section, Oswald, Mary, Oliva, Jessica, and Dave are developing a group activity in which they have to relate some adjectives to their opposites. Due to the lack of vocabulary, students' main tool to work is the dictionary. It is worth mentioning that students organized their groups freely and that the teacher goes around the classroom giving feedback and answering students' questions.

#### Segment 1

24. Oswald: ¿qué toca hacer?  
*Six turns omitted*
25. Mary: OIGA NO SE COPIE. Parece tonto copiando las oraciones.
26. Oswald: ¿no es en grupo? Perdón.
27. Mary: ¿y entonces por qué nos dieron tres hojas?  
*32 turns omitted*
56. Oliva: yo hago todo con ayuda, pero Mary me había quitado la hoja. (???)
57. Mary: haga una lista de los adjetivos y escribir al frente el opuesto. (???)
58. Oswald: pero, ¿nosotros si lo hacemos en... grupo?
59. Oliva: no
60. Oswald: lo de las palabras... ¿lo de palabras lo hacemos en grupo?  
*13 turns omitted*
73. Jessica: profe, ¿o sea que entre todos, o cada uno?  
*4 turns omitted*
77. Teacher: entre todo el grupo hacen el ejercicio y cada quien anota en su cuaderno.
78. Oswald: ah, SI VIO. ¡COMO NO HACEN CASO! ¡COMO NO HACEN CASO!
79. Jessica: a la vuelta me toca escoger mejor... eh... mejores compañeros para que no ...
80. Oswald: (overlaps Jessica) ¿QUÉ? ¿QUÉ? ¿QUÉ JESSICA? (???)  
*25 turns omitted*
105. Oswald: espere que ahorita después de Laureen yo comienzo a buscar

#### Segment 1

24. Oswald: What do we have to do?  
*Six turns omitted*
25. Mary: HEY, DON'T CHEAT. You're like a fool copying my sentences.
26. Oswald: Isn't it in a team? Sorry.
27. Mary: so, why were we given three worksheets?  
*32 turns omitted*
56. Oliva: I develop everything with help but Mary had taken my worksheet. (???)
57. Mary: make a list of adjectives and write their opposites (???)
58. Oswald: but, Do we have to do it in group?
59. Oliva: no
60. Oswald: the workshop about those words... the workshop about those words, is that in group?  
*13 turns omitted*
73. Jessica: teacher, is this in group or individually?  
*4 turns omitted*
77. Teacher: you develop the exercise in group and each person takes his own notes.
81. Oswald: ah, YOU SEE! BUT YOU DIDN'T TAKE ANY NOTICE FROM ME! YOU DIDN'T TAKE ANY NOTICE FROM ME!
82. Jessica: next time I'll choose better ... eh... better team partners so I don't ...
83. Oswald: (overlaps Jessica) WHAT? WHAT? WHAT JESSICA? (???)  
*25 turns omitted*
105. Oswald: just hold a minute, once Laureen finishes I'll start lookink up.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 106. Dave: no, yo. (???)  | 106. Dave: no, I'ts my turn. (???)   |
| 107. Dave: esas van quedando mal  | 107. Dave: those are not correct   |
| 108. Nicol: No porque es así. ¿Jessica?   | 108. Nicol: No, they're right like this. Jessica?  |
| 109. Jessica: no señor, pero yo ya gané. (???)<br><i>7 turns ommitted</i>                         | 109. Jessica: no, but I already won. (???)<br><i>7 turns ommitted</i>  |
| 110. Oswald: Es mi diccionario y yo hago lo que quiera con mi diccionario                         | 110. Oswald: It's my dictionary and I do whatever I want with my dictionary  |
| 111. Jessica: bueno usted hace lo que quiera con su diccionario.                                  | 111. Jessica: OK, you do whatever you want with your dictionary.   |
| 112. Oswald: veloz, ¿con V o con B?   | 112. Oswald: veloz, is it spelled with V or B?   |
| 113. Mary: con V  | 113. Mary: It's spelled with V   |
| 114. Jessica: ¡CÁLESE! YA NO SEA CANSÓN.  | 114. Jessica: SHUT UP! STOP BEING NAUGHTY.   |
| 115. Oswald: era con V, era con V, y con Z! (he says this with the purpose of offending the girl) | 115. Oswald: it was spelled with V, it was with V, and with Z! (he says this with the purpose of offending the girl) |
| 116. Jessica: !AAAY, SILENCIO! SHH (she feels offended and frown).                                | 116. Jessica: AH, BE QUIET! SHH (she feels offended and frown)   |
| 117. Teacher talking to the whole group. (???) (Oswald is distracted doing other things)          | 117. Teacher talking to the whole group. (???) (Oswald is distracted doing other things)                             |
| 118. Jessica: y después pregunte . . . y después pregunte qué hacemos (she's complaining)         | 118. Jessica: you see and then you're asking . . . and then you're asking what to do? (she's complaining)            |
| 119. Oswald: ¿quién?  | 119. Oswald: who?  |
| 120. Jessica: usted (addressing to Oswald)  | 120. Jessica: You (addressing to Oswald)   |
| 121. Oswald: ¿Yo?   | 121. Oswald: Me?   |
| 122. Jessica: sí, mire. No dejan escuchar. (???)<br><i>Two turn ommitted</i>                      | 122. Jessica: Yes, look. You're not letting me listen to the class. (???)<br><i>Two turn ommitted</i>                |
| 123. Oswald: Laureen ¿Qué toca copiar estas palabras?   | 123. Oswald: Laureen What, do you have to write down these words?  |
| 124. Nicol: ¡QUE NO MOLESTE! QUE ESTAMOS COPIANDO   | 124. Nicol: DON'T BOTHER! WE'RE JUST WRITING!  |

In this interaction we can see the way girls construct their identity and position themselves in a privileged status in the EFL activities. I would like to refer to what happened to Oswald in this group activity. In several opportunities he struggled a lot to belong to the group. There are two types of interests in this boy's attempts to be part of the activity. First, he knows that taking an active part in the activity gives him power to decide and helps him construct his identity as language learner. Oswald could never gain a good position in the group by himself. Only once he could have a privileged position but it was thanks to the teacher's intervention and just for a few minutes. Despite the teacher's instruction to work in groups, girls never gave Oswald the membership and participation he wanted to have.

One explanation to this situation is that maybe girls consider this boy as a playful and absent-minded learner. Jessica's comment evidences this situation when she says to him: «*y después pregunte ... y después pregunte qué hacemos*» (*and then you're asking, and then you're asking what to do.*). To some extent, Oswald's distractions and lack of concentration could explain the reason why his attempts to be included in the group never succeed. Jessica also showed her thinking about Oswald as a language learner when she said «*a la vuelta me toca escoger mejor... eh... mejores compañeros para que no ...*» (next time I'll choose better...eh...better group partners) When she was about to give more details about her thinking, she was overlapped by Oswald. To some extent, Jessica thinks Oswald is not a competent classmate to work with her. Moreover, we can see that Jessica was not the only one in exerting power over Oswald. At the end of the segment, Oswald is asking about the exercise and Nicol, through shouts, asks him not to bother.

Other aspects observed through this segment is that verbal aggression is one mechanism used by both girls and boys to demonstrate power. This takes two forms, one related to the offensive words and shouts students used to address each other; and the other related to the tone they use to express their aggression. Expressions girls used to refer to boys are as follow: «parece tonto» (you're like a fool), «¡CÁLESE! YA NO SEA CANSÓN!» (SHUT UP! DON'T BE NAUGHTY), and some expressions that students expressed through shouts, for example «CÁLESE USTED LA BOCA», (SHUT UP) «¡AAAAH, NO YO BUSCO!» (OOHH, NO IT'S MY TURN) «¿QUÉ? ¿QUÉ? ¿QUÉ JESSICA?» (WHAT? WHAT? WHAT, JESSICA?) «QUE NO MOLESTE! QUE ESTAMOS COPIANDO» (DON'T BOTHER! WE'RE JUST WRITING). These two mechanisms of positioning are often used and seem to have a good result especially when girls used them.

Overlapping is used to show power and in some sense to impose ideas and persuade the other to do one's will. Tannen (1994) suggests that interruptions or «overlapping»... may be a sign of solidarity in the conversation or it may be a real sign of power in the conversation. In our study this is a sign of power and dominion.

Another issue that could affect boys' positioning and that maybe the reason for girls' success is that girls seem to have a clear understanding of the activity and what they have to do. The students who know what to do are the ones who can have access to discourse and so, lead some activities during group work. Van Dijk (1993) says that knowledge is a way to exert power over the others. Jessica's knowledge of the activities gives her power to lead a group and reject or exert dominion over others. Oswald's lack of knowledge constituted a disadvantage for him at the time of interacting, learning and gaining a position in the group.

Through the interviews it was possible to see that students, for many years, students have been creating cliques that have strengthen as they have shared together for a long time have built an early friendship. The following exert of an interview shows that students have built strong emotional links since Kindergarten:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Teacher: casi siempre, y ¿Por qué casi siempre se hacen la mismas personas?  | 1. Teacher: usually, and, why do you usually work with the same people?  |
| 2. Rita: pues porque por ejemplo a mí me gusta hacerme harto con Ashly y con Angie porque... son mis mejores amigas por que estuvimos con ellas... yo estuve con ellas desde el jardín entonces por eso mantengo con ellas. | 2. Rita: well, because for example, I like to work with Ashly and Angie a lot because... they're my best friends because we were together ... I was with them since kindergarten so that's why I stay with them. |

We can say that those cliques formed by students include a small group of classmates who preferable have spent a long time together and do not want other people to join their group.

### **Gaining Power Through The Use Of A Dictionary**

This second category emerges from several interactions that students had in which the access and use of the dictionary constituted a tool to gain a privileged position. It was already explained that most learners lacked materials due to their economic situation. Thus, groups of work depended on one dictionary that belonged to a student from the group. It is understandable that due to these conditions students were eager to participate in the activities and wanted to have access to the target language by using the dictionary. Likewise, the classroom becomes the only space in which many students could have the opportunity to use a dictionary and demonstrate they are assertive learners and may be they could have approval language as English learners.

Students were always struggling to use the dictionary in class as they understand that the one who uses can have access to knowledge and this would give them real advantages over the others. It was observed that the students that use the dictionary can decide what to do, how to do it, and even more, to know the answers to the questions or exercises they are doing. Thus, a dictionary becomes a tool to access knowledge and to make important decisions in the group. It also becomes the only chance for many learners to have access to the target language and have a nice learning experience. In the following segment of a conversation we can observe something interesting related to this issue.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 82. Steve: Palma se dice palm, mire, P-A-L-M, palm. Ahora toca buscar por la L, león. | 82. Steve: Palma, you say palm, look, P-A-L-M, palm. Now, we'll look up león (lion) with L. |
| 83. Aldo: no, espere, <i>new</i> , new.   | 87. Aldo: no, hang on, <i>new</i> , new.  |
| 84. Steve: espere, espere, busquemos león.  | 88. Steve: hang on, hang on, let's look up león (lion).                                     |
| 85. Aldo: pero... eso es Lion hombre!   | 89. Aldo: but... that's Lion, man!  |
| 86. Steve: lion, lion, es lion.<br>(???) <input type="checkbox"/> →                   | 90. Steve: lion, lion, is lion.<br>(???) <input type="checkbox"/> →                         |
| 87. Aldo: esper, toca... busque new. ¡ÉSTA PALABRA, OLE!                              | 83. Aldo: wait, we've got to... look up the word <i>new</i> . THIS WORD, HEY!               |
| 88. Steve: espere, espere, espere.  | 84. Steve: hang on, hang on, hang on.   |
| 89. Aldo: déjeme buscar esta palabra.   | 85. Aldo: let me look up this word.   |
| 90. Steve: espere, yo la busco. L-i-o-n   | 86. Steve: hang on, I'll do it. L-i-o-n   |

When Steve is looking up the word «Lion» Aldo knows the meaning and tells it to Steve. Despite Aldo's knowledge, that is totally right, Steve considers it for a while by repeating the word lion three times, but at the end he continues looking up. This situation makes Aldo feel desperate and shouts saying: ESTA PALABRA, ¡OLE! (THIS WORD, HEY!) Aldo uses this mechanism to try to call Steve's attention but again Steve ignores Aldo's suggestion and decides that he is going to look up in the dictionary. This short segment shows that having the dictionary is more powerful than having knowledge. The student who is using the dictionary has more probabilities to lead the group and make decisions; it does not matter if the other members of the group have the right answer.

Another important issue that can be highlighted in this section is that in a group it does not matter who the owner of the dictionary is. This is the case for segment 1 in which Oswald has been trying to access to use his own dictionary but girls did not allow it for several minutes; data shows that the girls had dominion over the group and that Oswald had never had the opportunity to taste a little power unless he had not been the owner of the dictionary. It was through the dictionary that he could exert some power over the members of the group it does not matter if his leadership lasted just a few minutes, the dictionary gave him the opportunity and he took it. After this episode, Oswald lost his power because of his lack of attention and concentration in the class.

### Constructive Power In Interactions

This category described the way students exert power over the others and behave as leaders. The mechanisms learners used in order show their leadership were: being organizers, giving feedback to peers, correcting misbehavior, and encouraging partners to work. The following segment of a conversation takes place with 3 female students who are developing a workshop in which they have to write the name of some pictures of animals or objects and then to match them to some adjectives depending on their characteristics.

237. Natalia: dígame a (*not audible*) que le escriba porque su letra no le entiendo nada. ... ¿cuál es la que sigue?
238. Nicol: sigue... emm... palmera
239. Oliva: tall
240. Nicol: hagámoslas en desorden.
241. Natalia: no importa  
*10 turns omitted*
242. Nicol: a ver, es T-H- E... eh... plancha... iron (laughs) vamos bien. A ver ayuden a desarrollar una frase con tortuga. Usted ayude a idear una frase con palmera y usted con... elefante.
243. Oliva: la palmera tiene muchos cocos. Cocos, ¿cómo se dice?
244. Nicol: tiene muchos... es muy alta, toca con esta.
245. Oliva: ah, sí. La palmera es muy alta.
246. Nicol: Y pregúntele al profesor cómo se dice (xxx)
247. Natalia: ¡profe! ¡profe!
248. Nicol: Venga venga Oliva, (???)  
*5 turns omitted*
253. Natalia: palmera, la palmera es... tall
254. Nicol: a ver, ahora le toca a usted con.. le toca a usted con...
255. Oliva: elefante es ... grande. Grande es .... O la elefanta, ¿Y que tal sea una elefanta?
256. Natalia: el elefante está aquí.
257. Nicol: el elefante está... o es... es o grande ¿sí?
258. Nicol: ahora toca...
259. Natalia: la tortuga.
260. Nicol: y (xxx) con tortuga y usted con león. Y yo con carro.
261. Other person: ¿me presta su diccionario?
262. Oliva: lo necesitamos. Espere Natalia porque nos toca buscar palabras
237. Natalia: tell (not audible) to write because I can't understand your handwriting... which one is next?
238. Nicol: it's... emm... palmera (palm)
239. Oliva: tall
240. Nicol: let's do it in disorder.
241. Natalia: it doesn't matter  
*10 turns omitted*
242. Nicol: let's see, this is T-H- E... umm... plancha... iron (laughs) we're right. Ok, you will help write a sentence with the word turtle. You will help to construct a sentence with the word palm and you with ... elephant.
243. Oliva: the palm has many coconuts. Coconuts, how do you say?
244. Nicol: it has many... it's very tall; you have to use this word.
245. Oliva: oh, yeah. The palm is very tall.
246. Nicol: and ask the teacher the way you say (xxx)
247. Natalia: teacher! teacher!
248. Nicol: Hey, you Oliva, (???)  
*6 turns omitted*
253. Natalia: palm, the palm is... tall
254. Nicol: let's see, now you'll do it with...
255. Oliva: elephant is ... big. Big is .... Or the she elephant. What is it is a she elephant?
256. Natalia: the elephant is here.
257. Nicol: the elephant is... or is... is or big? Isn't it?
258. Nicol: now you'll...
259. Natalia: the turtle.
260. Nicol: and (xxx) with turtle and you'll write one with lion. And I'll do it with the word car
261. Other person: Can you lend me your dictionary?
262. Oliva: we need it. Hang on, Natalia we need to look up some words.

This segment presents Nicol with leadership attitudes. She reflects this in her capacity to organize her classmates, assign points and correct them without resistance. With regard to this, Van Dijk (1993) states that «*some members of dominant groups or organizations have a special role in planning, decision-making and control over the relations and processes of the enactment*» (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 255).

In this case students are supposed to be in the «same position» in terms of power. However, as the interaction and conversation occur, the positioning struggling starts and it is Nicol who starts showing her knowledge and ability to ask questions and interact with the teacher. The teacher tries to correct her pronunciation of the word *iron*. Her answer: *sí, pero ¿cómo escribe está?* Can be interpreted as «I know it, but what I need is to know how to write *está* in English». This was a way to parry the teacher's correction and focus her attention on the question she had. This is interesting because she repeats the same question a couple of times and very fast. The teacher finally answers her question and does not try to correct Nicol's pronunciation again. In this case we could say that the teacher could not exert power on Nicol as she uses her own question as a mechanism of resistance to avoid the teacher's correction.

The following segment takes place at end of one of the activities developed in class. Students have been working on a picture of the Human body in which they were to locate and write the parts of the body. Three girls and one boy were the members of this group.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 245. Teacher: nose? Pero ¿cómo se escribe nose?  | 260. Teacher: nose? But how do you write nose?   |
| 246. Mary: mire, uy, Rita.   | 261. Mary: look, oh, Rita.   |
| 247. Rita: Ay, el mío quedó bien   | 262. Rita: oh, mine is right   |
| 248. Teacher: I have one (xxx)... I have five... Only five toes?   | 263. Teacher: I have one (xxx)... I have five... Only five toes?   |
| 249. Nicol: Ay, esa es mío. No!  | 264. Nicol: Ay, esa es mío. No!  |
| 250. Teacher: I have two eyes. I have two ears. I have one stomach. I have teeth. I have two elbows. I have two arms. I have two hands. I have two legs. ... I have two (xxx). | 265. Teacher: I have two eyes. I have two ears. I have one stomach. I have teeth. I have two elbows. I have two arms. I have two hands. I have two legs. ... I have two (xxx). |
| 251. Nicol: ¿Corregimos, profe, o lo dejamos así? Profe? ¿Lo corregimos o lo dejamos así?  | 266. Nicol: Shall we correct it or leave it like this? teacher? Shall we correct it or leave it like this?   |
| 252. Teacher: (xxx)  | 267. Teacher: (xxx)  |
| 253. Nicol: corregimos rápido, rápido, rápido  | 268. Nicol: let's correct, hurry, hurry, hurry   |
| 254. Mary: corrija ese (xxx). Pero yo no sé  | 269. Mary: correct that one (xxx). But I don't know  |
| 255. Rita: por que yo soy una niña pequeña que no sabría cómo escribir algo tan simple   | 270. Rita: because I'm a little girl who would not know how to write that simple thing   |
| 256. Nicol: pues escriba aquí TEN... escriba aquí TEN  | 271. Nicol: so write down here TEN... write down here TEN  |
| 257. Rita: ¡CORRIJA!   | 272. Rita: CORRECT IT!   |
| 258. Mary: pero es que este quedó mal. Era lo contrario  | 273. Mary: but this is not right. It was the other way around  |
| 259. Nicol: apure que ya terminaron ellos. Apuren!   | 274. Nicol: hurry, those boys are done! Hurry!   |

In this segment Nicol led the correction of the activity by saying the imperative sentence: «corregimos, rápido, rápido, rápido» (let's correct, hurry, hurry, hurry!). From the beginning of the correction part she expressed enthusiasm and eagerness for working and finishing the activity as fast as possible. Mary and Rita expressed they do not know how to correct the sentences. Nicol explained them how to do it and then asked her peers to hurry. After the explanation, Nicol said something that makes us think she was interested in something else than finishing the task quickly. Her final words: «*apure que ya terminaron ellos. ¡Apuren!*» (*hurry, those boys are done! Hurry!*) shows that in some sense, she was comparing her assertiveness as language learner with another group composed by boys. Her enthusiasm to work fast and finish the task is implicit in a race she was having with boys. Castañeda (2008) says that races in the SLL classroom take place because the teacher organizes them; or second, when the students organize which becomes a «'private race' because it was 'secretly' established alongside the activities proposed by the language teacher (Castañeda: 2008, p. 118). Thus, it is possible to infer that Nicol is measuring her assertiveness and rapidness in working and finishing an EFL task considering the boys that are near her.

Authors like Smircich and Morgan (1982) and Gordon (2002) cited in Collinson (2005) agree that power is important in leadership. In their studies they reveal «how leaders exercise control by «managing meaning» and defining situations in ways that suit their purposes». The examples of leadership in the classroom show how students, under an ideology of «being the first» or «finishing first» faster than their other classmates, encourage the group to work and be more efficient and skillful.

To sum up, leadership roles some students take in the development of EFL activities is a positive attitude. It allows students to challenge themselves and to be more demanding in terms of their work. Students develop skills in the target language when they give feedback and try to lead an activity and this represents a responsibility as the leaders not only are thinking of themselves but of the whole group.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Fifth grade students have demonstrated to use different mechanisms for gender positioning and construction of their identity as language learners. Girls' dominance in group activities is a salient fact that characterizes their interactions along with the use of tools, more specifically a dictionary, is directly related to positioning and the exertion of power over individuals. This power has a negative impact on learner's identity as the ones who are at the top position (most of the time are girls) in the group tend to exclude their peers (boys) from learning experiences.

Students have formed very strong relations since their early childhood in kindergarten and they reflect their preferences in the classroom. Data also shows a selective attitude in terms of social networks which constitutes cliques that affect negatively the learning processes in the EFL classroom. The lack of solidarity in students' relations becomes an institutional issue; it is suggested to foster more solid living-together skills and values.

In the analysis it was possible to see that when learners gained privileged positions their access to the target language and participation was higher than when they were set aside and rejected. This could have serious implications in terms of self-confidence and self-esteem which can have a direct impact on students' learning process and development of their skills (Hruska, 2004).

The lack of resources in the classroom and school does not give equal opportunities to access the target language. This causes unrest that is materialized through insults, shouts, negative competence, and lack of solidarity. For these students and the teacher, having enough resources could imply a change in the methodologies and type of activities developed in the classroom.

Finally, positive attitudes in students' performance can be more affiliated to teacher's behavior; Castañeda (2010) calls these students «student teachers» as their leadership allowed them not only to show their positioning and construction of their identity but also to encourage their partners to work fast, have appropriate behaviors in the classroom, organizing turns and activities at their groups and have their partners following their instructions during long periods of time. Under this view we can conclude that not everything is negative, there are positive leaders in the group and it is necessary to continue developing more citizenship competences especially the ones related to respect, coming to agreements, collaborative and cooperative work.

## References

- Baxter, J. (2003). Positioning Gender in discourse: a feminist research methodology. 1-Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 1-215.
- Bell, J. (1999). Doing your Research Project: a guide for first-time researchers in education and social science, 3. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Blommaert, J. (2005). *Discourse: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 1-299.

- Castañeda-Peña, H. (2010). The next teacher is going to be... Tereza Rico: Exploring gender positioning in an all-girl preschool classroom. En: *Revista Internacional de Investigación en Educación*. N° 3 (5), pp. 107-124.
- Castañeda-Peña, H. (2008). «Positioning Masculinity and Feminity in Preschool EFL Education». En: *Signo y Pensamiento*, vol. XXVII, No. 53, pp. 314-326.
- Castañeda-Peña, H. (2008). 'I said it!' 'I'm first!': Gender and language-learner identities. En: *Colombian Applied Linguistics Journal*, No. 10. pp. 112-125.
- Collinson, D. (2005). Dialectics of leadership: *Human Relations*; 58, 11; ProQuest. pp. 1419.
- DeShong, H. (2011). Gender, Sexuality and Sexual Violence: A Feminist Analysis of Vincentian Women's Experiences in Violent Heterosexual Relationships. En: *Journal of Eastern Caribbean Studies*. Vol. 36, No. 2, pp. 63-96.
- Durán, N. C. (2006) Exploring gender differences in the EFL classroom, in Colombian *Applied Linguistics Journal*, No. 8. pp. 123-136.
- Frances, C. (2005). *Classroom Discourse Analysis: A Functional Perspective*. London, GBR: Continuum International Publishing, 2005. E-brary, p. 19.
- Hruska, B. L. (2004). Constructing Gender in an English Dominant Kindergarten: Implications for Second Language Learners. En: *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 3, Gender and Language Education (Autumn, 2004), pp. 459-485.
- Lazaraton, A. (2002). Quantitative And Qualitative Approaches To Discourse Analysis. En: *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* No. 22, pp. 32-51.
- Mahar, D. (2001). Positioning in a middle school culture: Gender, race, social class, and power. En: *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* No. 3, pp. 200-209.
- Nikitina, L. & Furuoka, F. (2007). Language Classroom: A «Girls' Domain»? Female And Male Students' Perspectives On Language Learning. Online Submission, Paper presented at the Malaysia International Conference on Languages, Literatures and Cultures (MICOLLAC) (5<sup>th</sup>, Subang, Selangor, Malaysia, May 22-24) Recuperado de: <http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED508640>
- Skelton, C. (2003). *Boys and Girls in the Primary Classroom*. Berkshire, GBR: McGraw-Hill Education. E-brary, p. 17.
- «Otra Violencia». *Www.eltiempo.com*. EL TIEMPO Casa Editorial, 6 Dec. (2011). Web. 10 Jan. 2012. Recuperado de <<http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-5011760>>.
- Park, H. (2008). «You are confusing!»: Tensions between Teacher's and Students' Discourses in the Classroom. En: *The Journal of Classroom Interaction*. No. 43, 1; ProQuest Education Journals. p. 4.

- Ministerio de Educación Nacional. *Formar en Lenguas Extranjeras. Inglés: ¡el Reto!* Bogota: MEN, 2006. Print. Ser. p. 22.
- Tannen, D. (1994). *Gender and Discourse*. Cary, NC, USA: Oxford University Press. Ebrary, p. 47.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1993). *Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis*. Recuperado de: <http://das.sagepu.com> at UNI Arizona Library.
- «Vergonzosas estadísticas de maltrato familiar en Boyacá. Recuperado de: *Www.eltiempo.com*. N. p., 22 Oct. 2010. Web. 06 Jan. 2012.
- Wallace, M. (1998). *Action Research for Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.