The role of discourse in the promotion of the education of the girl child in Malawi

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Introduction

This paper is divided into four sections. The first section presents the background of girl child education in Malawi, reviews related literature and provides the theoretical background to which this study is based. The second section discusses the methodology on how sampling, data collection and data analysis were done. The third section presents and discusses the major findings in relation to the set objectives, related literature and the theoretical framework. The last section presents the conclusion and recommendation. The paper argues that classroom discourse symbolically positions boys and girls in the education setting and the society as a whole which in turn affects their educational achievements. This means that if classroom discourse is handled well it will have a positive effect on the pupils' achievement of educational goals. Particularly inclusive classroom discourse motivates girls to participate in the teaching and learning process which in turn leads to higher achievement by girls in education.

General background, literature review and theoretical framework

Gender Appropriate Curriculum (GAC) (n.d.) observes that African societies, including communities in Malawi, are predominantly patriarchal, in the home, workforce and the community. It has also been observed that when sending the children to school, most parents prefer boys to girls, because the former are believed to be "smarter, more competitive and give higher returns from their education" (GAC n.d.: 2). The boys are given priority as future bread winners, while the girls are kept at home to look after younger children, cook and clean and sometimes help the mother in farming or market trading (Leach 1998).

There have been a number of projects in Malawi with the aim to encourage parents to let their girls to go to school and the schools to retain the girls. The Malawi Institute of Education's Gender Appropriate Curriculum Unit (GAC) (1997) observes that enrolling girls in school is only the first step towards creating a population of educated women. Girls need to stay in school, complete

the primary cycle, have access to secondary school and higher education. However, the school system, the curriculum as well as teachers' attitudes may prevent the girls from staying in school. It has been observed that even when boys and girls sit in the same classrooms they are treated differently: the boys are called on more often, are allowed to speak out more and are given more praise and more constructive and useful criticism (Shapka & Keating 2003, GAC 1997, McCormick 1994), so receive different education.

Leach (1998), in support of the same, observes that teachers in school may show differentiated attitudes towards male and female students, they tend to be dismissive and discouraging towards girls and to give more classroom time to boys, who are usually more demanding. The school curriculum also, especially the textbooks, treat the boys and girls differently. Girls tend to be portrayed as passive, modest and shy, and boys as assertive, brave and ambitious (Leach 1998). By giving the boys more attention and portraying them as brave and ambitious, the teacher gives the student the picture that boys are more intelligent than girls, which then causes girls to develop low self-esteem which in turn leads to failure and dropout (GAC 1997). This means, therefore, that the failure of the girls to perform well in class, high rate of repetition and dropout in senior classes may not be completely attributed to 'natural talents'. It is also likely to be "a result of home/community and school factors that work against girls as they grow older" (Kamanga 2006:28).

These different attitudes or treatment of girls is in most cases portrayed through both verbal and non-verbal communication. According to Romaine (1999), words clearly have the power to influence our thinking and to direct our consciousness to certain areas of our experience. This, therefore, means that the words that are used in class can either help to keep girls in school or send them away. This study then aims to analyse the daily discourse for interaction in the classroom and find out if it has any implications for girl child education in Malawi. It specifically aims:

- to identify discourse strategies that textbooks use to transfer new information to students
- to analyse discourse strategies that teachers use in class to interact with students
- to evaluate the discourse strategies that students use for daily interaction in class

- to assess how the discourse strategies symbolically position boys and girls in the education setting and their everyday life.

Literature review and theoretical framework

This section reviews some of the literature on classroom discourse strategies as well as the use of gendered discourse in the classroom. The literature review forms the basis for understanding and focusing on pertinent issues in discourse analysis and education of the girl child. The review has also helped to assess and evaluate classroom discourse and how it symbolically positions the students in class, as well as the world as a whole. The section also discusses the theories that have guided this study. It discusses the classroom environment as a political arena in which emphasis is on the distribution of power. It also discusses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Symbolic Interactionism and Labelling theories as some of the theories that help in understanding how classroom discourse symbolically positions girls in the classroom and in the world at large. Finally, it discusses the classroom implications of these theories for educational achievements.

Literature review

Different scholars have defined discourse differently. *The Oxford Learners Dictionary* (2000) simply defines discourse as the use of language in speech and writing in order to produce meaning. Thomas and Wareing (1999), and the *Wikipedia Encyclopedia* view discourse as any piece of connected language that contains more than one sentence. In other words, it refers to conversations, arguments or speeches. According to Cook (1989:7), discourse can be "anything from a grunt or a single expletive, through short conversations and scribbled notes right up to a novel or a lengthy legal case. What matters is not its conformity to rules, but the fact that it communicates and is recognized by its receiver as coherent." McGregor (2003) defines discourse as simply expressing oneself using words. In short, discourse can be simply defined as the use of language to convey meaning.

Though different scholars have defined discourse differently, one thing is apparent, that is, the use of language for communication. Though grammar is important, as it governs the language the emphasis on it does not give insight into how people use language, to convey meaning. Furthermore, the ungrammaticality of language does not make communication impossible. As such, discourse analysis, which is the study of discourses of language used by

members of a speech community, should be concerned with that functional use of language and not the grammaticality of the utterance. This study, therefore, is not analysing the grammaticality of the language used in education but the use of language in education to convey different meanings.

The discourse in the classroom, as the context for discourse of education, has a sequential organization and a hierarchical structure marked by recurrent behavioural configuration. In view of this, Greenleaf and Freedman (1993) identify the following turn sequences – teacher Initiation (I), student Response (R) and teacher Evaluation (E) (I-R-E). This means that in every lesson the teacher will always have the floor first and then give turns to his/her students by nominating them to answer questions or give a comment. The teacher will then take his/her turn to evaluate students responses. There is no way the students will initiate the talk in the classroom without being asked to. This total control by the teacher of classroom discourse is enforced by the traditional classroom lay-out, where you have the teacher at the front and the students in neat rows. According to Edwards (1976), this lay-out symbolises a definition of learning as dependent on one teacher with many children. In other words, it reinforces the teacher as totally in charge. This means, therefore, that the teacher has control over classroom discourse; he/she is the source of orders, advice, judgement and instructions. This is also enhanced by the fact that he/she is the only one standing when everyone else is sitting down.

In view of the fact that teachers do most of the talking, selecting most of the topics for discussion, making decisions about who will participate through strategic use of turn-allocation procedures, and determining the relevance and correctness of student's responses to their inquiries (Simich-Dudgeon 1998), teachers need to know which strategies to use and how those may affect the students in their learning. For instance, one of the strategies that is mostly used by teachers as one way of interacting with the students is the use of questions. Teachers' questions are defined as instructional cues or stimuli that convey to students the content elements to be learned and directions for what they are to do and how they are to do it (Cotton 2001). The students then are expected to respond to the question and the teacher evaluates the responses.

The teacher then needs to know the strategies to use when responding to students' responses. The teacher needs to understand how these strategies may also affect the students' learning. It has been observed that some teachers have

problems in reacting to students' responses, especially incorrect responses. Orlich, Harder, Callaha, Kravas, Pendergras and Keogh (1985), observe that teachers' comments on incorrect responses such as "no", "you are way off" or "that's incorrect" act as a negative reinforcement and this may reduce the student's desire to participate in a verbal classroom interaction. It is not only the student responding to the question but also the other members of the class who may be negatively affected. The other strategy that teachers use as a way of reacting to students is repeating a student's response. According to Orlich et al. (1985:192), this strategy whereby the teacher repeats all of the students' verbal responses, causes the class to ignore their peers as sources of information and subtly conditions the class to wait until the word comes from the "fountain of all wisdom". If this happens then the students will not have positive self-image because the focus is not on the responding student but the teacher.

The classroom discourse is also affected by the issue of gender. Research on gender and language structure has demonstrated numerous ways that women are ignored, trivialised and deprecated by the words used to describe them (West, Lazar & Kramarae. 1997). It has been noted that women are denied autonomous existence through titles that distinguish them on the basis of their marital status. The career choices for women and men are segregated through distinctive occupational terms with modifying markers added for exceptions to the rule. Lee (1992:110) in support of the same observes that the process involving marginalisation and exclusion of women derives primarily from "the social disadvantage from which women have suffered in most human societiesin the course of human history". Romaine (1999) made a powerful observation in relation to this issue. She argued that gender is not just about biological and cultural differences; it is also about power. Much of this power and symbolic domination, according to Romaine, is achieved and validated through talk across a range of contexts, for example at home, in school and in the work place, just to mention a few. This simply means that, through talk in different contexts, there is domination of one sex over the other.

Coates (1993) explains that language is an important part of the socialisation process and children are socialised into culturally approved gender roles largely through language. Sheldon (1993:84) views language as "part of culture and an instrument for transmitting and perpetuating implicit, historically situated, and culture-bound principles of social order and systems of beliefs that define

and assign unequal social values to femininity and masculinity". This means, therefore, that use of sexist language (language that expresses unfair assumptions about gender differences) defines the different roles of men and women in the society. Thus the use of words that show that women are weak, for example, will direct the society to view them as such, in turn, giving them roles that will go well with their weakness.

Chimombo and Roseberry (1998:200) observe that "because education is one of the main channels for the maintenance and/or change of cultural values, it clearly has a major role to play, outside the immediate family in influencing people's reception of the world." Swan (1988) looks at the classroom, which is one arm of the school, as one place in which children learn social roles. She argues that socially appropriate behaviours (including gender appropriate behaviour) are learnt to some extent through classroom talk. In relation to this, Coates (1993) argues that the classroom mirrors the outside world: male dominance is acted out in the classroom, and this limits girls' opportunities. This male dominance is acted through the type of language used in class. This is in agreement with Wanahiu's (1997) observation that language is a powerful tool of socialisation. According to her, language whether written, oral or physical, helps us to interpret situations and find our niche in society. Unfortunately, for women and girls, this niche is, more often than not, subordinate and insecure, which is reflected in the way language is used. This means that the classroom talk, that is talk between teacher and students or students and students, has a role to play in defining the position of the students, not only in the class, but also the society. One's place in the society is not only defined through talk but also through exposure to different textbooks in the course of learning. Thus schoolbooks and other materials that the pupil may interact with may have sexist biases, which most of the times discourage girls from thinking of themselves as good learners. This in turn "lower their self-esteem, and their ambivalence about success, achievement and power" (McCormick 1994:44).

Stanley (2001) observes that English as a Second Language (ESL)/English as a Foreign Language (EFL) materials are guilty of sexist language in different categories, which include omission, fitness and occupations. She noted that in most books males appear more frequently than females, as if females are less important than males. It was also noted that when a male and female are mentioned, the male is almost always put first. She sees no reason to say '*John*

and Mary' when '*Mary and John'* would convey the same message. When an occupation is mentioned, it is more often assigned a male character name, for example, "John is a doctor". It should be noted that young learners are always sensitive to everything happening around them, so the models they are presented with in texts limit their imaginations. Girls who read about only male pilots are much less interested in flying than girls who read about male and female pilots.

It is very important to understand that a lot happens in class as the teacher interacts with the students and students interact with each other as well as the environment and the textbook. The teacher needs to use different strategies in order to achieve his/her goal which is to make the students learn. The teacher has to use these strategies to convey meaningful messages to the students. Gender stereotypes which may have an effect on the students' achievements in education are transmitted through these strategies.

Theoretical framework

The class as a political arena
Bush (1995) observes that organisations are political arenas whose members engage in political activity in pursuit of their interests. In this theory of education management the organisation is seen as a political arena, with emphasis on the distribution of power and influences in organisation and on the bargaining and negotiation between interest groups. According to Bush, an organisation has different interest groups who are constantly fighting to pursue their interest. The success of the interest group depends on the power they have over the other interest groups. Power is defined as the ability to determine the behaviour of others or to decide the outcome of the conflict (Bush 1995:79). The power may be in the form of: the position one holds, expertise, personality, the control one has over rewards, coercive power as well as control over resources.

White, Martin, Simson & Hodge (1993) consider schools as organisations. This is because they consist of a network of relationships among the individuals who regard themselves as belonging to that organisation. The school as an organisation is also a political arena with the head or principal as a key participant in the process of bargaining and negotiation. The heads and principals possess authority arising from their positions as the formal leaders of their institutions. They also hold power in the form of key rewards such as promotion and references.

These concepts of politics in educational management may also be applied at a micro-level to the classroom. The teacher is the key participant in the process of negotiation and bargaining in the classroom. The teacher has power or influence arising from the position he/she holds, the expertise and the control of rewards such as grades. The teacher, the students (boys, on one hand, and girls, on the other) are seen as interest groups in the class who are constantly fighting to be heard or recognised. The success in this pursuit depends on who has power over the other.

McGregor (2003) has noted that discourses are used in every day contexts for building power and knowledge, for regulation and normalisation, for the development of new knowledge and power relations and hegemony. Hegemony, according to Fairclough (1992:76), is "the power over society as a whole of one of the fundamental economically defined classes in alliance with other social forces" or simply the excess influence or authority of one sect of a society over the other (McGregor 2003). The *Wikipedia* views hegemony as the dominance of one group over other groups, with or without the threat of force … more broadly, cultural perspectives become skewed to favour the dominant group. In short, discourse helps to build power and knowledge which in turn leads to hegemony.

In view of the foregoing discussion, it can be said that through interaction in which discourse is used, teachers and students are constantly engaged in politics, as each one is fighting for power or recognition in the classroom. In turn those who 'win' and get power control knowledge which in turn leads to hegemony, with that group that holds power having control over the others.

The theory of critical Discourse analysis
The theory of Critical Discourse Analysis as advanced by Norman Fairclough and Teun van Dijk is founded on the idea that there is unequal access to linguistic and social resources, resources that are controlled institutionally (*Wikipedia* 2006). Thus the theory is based on the issues of power and dominance. van Dijk (1993:2), defines dominance as "the exercise of social power by elites, institutions or groups, that results in social inequality, including political, cultural, class, ethnic, racial and gender inequality."

Power involves control. This typically involve the control of the actions of the other group and its members, in the sense that the others are not (or less) free to do what they want, but may be brought to act in accordance with the wishes or

the interests of the more powerful group and against their own best interests (and usually against their will) (van Dijk 1998). Van Dijk (1993) explains that this power and dominance is interpreted in terms of privileged access to discourse and communication. This means that language users or communicators have more or less freedom in the use of special discourse genres or styles, or in participation in specific communicative events. Thus only parliamentarians have access to parliamentary debates and teachers to proceedings in the classroom. It has been observed that there is parallelism between social power and discourse access. The more "discourse genre, contexts, participants, audience, scope and characteristics they actively control or influence, the more powerful social groups or institutions are" (van Dijk 1993:256). In the same way lack of power is measured by its lack of active or controlled access to discourse. Those who have access to discourse have control over those who have little or no access to discourse. Put differently, those who have access to discourse have power.

In a classroom situation, the teacher, by virtue of his/her authority, has access to this scarce resource and has power, and because s/he has power s/he can influence decisions made in the class. The teacher can decide who, between boys and girls gets a larger share of the discourse or can decide to give the two groups equal access to discourse. If one group gets a larger share of classroom discourse then it might have power over the other group.

Symbolic interactionism theory
Symbolic interactionism as advanced by Herbert Blumer stipulates that the meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing. Thus individuals constantly have a view or sense of themselves that is defined and affected by the actions and reactions of others towards them (Teevan 1986:69). For example, if individuals come to define themselves as intelligent, it is because they perceive other people to regard them as such.

In other words, the theory of symbolic interactionism is based on the fact that the view of the self develops out of interaction with others. It emerges from our social experiences in groups such as family and friendship networks (i.e. principle of meaning and language). Not only this, but we also acquire a sense of self through the process of interpretation. That is, we always infer or imagine how we appear to other people (i.e. the principle of thought) (Teevan 1986). For example, a child may be frequently told by parents and siblings that s/he is

stupid. If the family is the sole source of the information that s/he has about him/her, s/he is likely to eventually perceive him/herself as stupid. This will affect him/her in his/her actions.

Labelling theory

Labelling theory maintains that the society creates deviance through its reaction to the people who break its rules. The theory was derived from the theory of symbolic interactionism. In this theory it is not an individual's actions but audience reaction that places individuals in the status of deviance. Thus the audience/society's reaction to deviance may actually increase rather than stop their deviance and may even lead to more serious forms of deviance (Teevan 1986). For example, parents who label a child a "troublemaker'" for breaking a house rule promote deviance in the child.

What is critical in labelling theory is not the action but the reaction of those in authority, those who have the power to define and label behaviour as acceptable or deviant and their relationship with those subject to them (Slattery 2003). What the theory is stipulating is that there is nothing inherently deviant in any human act; something is deviant only because some people have been successful in labelling it so. Taylor et al. (1996) look at a label as a major identifying characteristic. If, for example, a pupil is labeled as "bright" others will respond to her and interpret her actions in terms of this label and this in turn makes the individual to perform well in class. On the other hand, if teachers are convinced that certain children are less able, they put less effort into helping them and find that they were right all along because the children do not do as well in tests (Moore 2001). Hargreaves (1975), cited in Taylor et al. (1996), stipulates that whether or not a label is accepted by the pupil depends on a number of factors; that is, how often the pupil is labelled, whether the students sees a teacher as someone whose opinion counts, the extent to which others support the label and the context in which the labelling takes place.

Classroom implications

As already noted the classroom is seen as a political arena, as its members are involved in conflict on who gets the share of the classroom discourse. Those who get access to the classroom discourse (in this case the teacher) have power and dominate those who have little or no access. If the observations that teachers tend to give more attention to boys than girls are anything to go by then the boys have power over girls as they have more access of the classroom

discourse than the girls. Since people get the sense of themselves through the eyes of the significant others (the powerful groups), then it implies that the use of discourse by the dominant groups in the classroom (teacher and boys) that marginalizes the less powerful group (girls) tend to influence the less powerful groups' understanding of the self and their position in the society. Thus the labels that these powerful groups will give to the less powerful group through the use of the classroom discourse may influence the symbolic position of the students in education as well as in their lives.

Methodology

Approach
The study is basically qualitative. The qualitative approach was chosen because it was considered the best approach, the study of discourse that is used for in daily interaction in the classroom. Therefore analysing the words and actions of teachers and students in class and not simply number of times something is done or said is important.

Research techniques

Sampling
Data was collected from four secondary schools in Zomba from 12th to 20th March 2006. The schools are one All Girls Secondary School (AG), one All Boys Secondary School (AB) and two Government Co-education institutions (GC 1 and GC 2). Thirteen lessons were observed to collect the data: Four lessons from GC 2 and three lessons at each of the remaining schools. Two sampling techniques were used, convenience and random sampling. Of the thirteen lessons, five were handled by female teachers and the rest by male teachers. The lessons were recorded and transcribed.

Data was also collected from the textbooks that the teacher used in preparation as well as during the lessons that were observed. The following books were analysed:

1. McAdam, B. (1967). *Foundation Secondary English: An English Course for the Junior Secondary School in Africa*. Longman

2. Malawi College of Distance Education. (1995). *English Composition Writing Skills Set 1 – 3*

3. *New Secondary English Book 1* (2001). Blantyre: Longman

4. Kalibwanji, O. (2001) *Chanco Senior Secondary Biology*. Chancellor College Publications

5. Howse-Chisale, C., Chauma, A., & Kishindo, P. (2000). *Bukhu la Chinyanja la Ophunzira 1*. Blantyre: Longman.

6. Mshanga, J., Kampira, L. & Mwanza A. (2002). *Strides in Physical Science Book 1*. Blantyre: Longman

7. Kayala, B., & Kapelemera, N. (2002). *Strides in Agriculture book 3*. Blantyre: Longman.

8. Chikwakwa, R., Kaphesi, E., & Suffolk, J. (2002) *Senior Secondary Mathematics Book 4*. Blantyre: Macmillan

Data collection

The study used three techniques to collect the data: observation, textbook analysis and interviews. The role of the observer was that of a non-participant observer and the observation was structured. The researcher was basically looking at the type of discourse strategies used by both the teacher and the students in class. In analysing the texts the researcher was looking for the discourse strategies that the textbooks are using to impart new information to the students and how they are used. Interviews were conducted where clarifications were needed on something that was observed in the class. Basically the teachers are the ones that were interviewed as they were in control of the lessons.

Research tools

Three tools were used for data collection: observation checklist was used when observing the lessons, textbook analysis checklist was used when analysing the texts and audio-tape recorder was used to record the lessons.

Data analysis

The data collected was quantitatively and qualitatively analysed. The quantitative analysis involves presenting data in an efficient and meaningful summary form through frequency distribution. The data collected from the classrooms and books was read through to make sense of the themes, ideas, relationships and categories that emerge from the data. By listing all the themes, ideas and

concepts, coding categories was developed. The data was coded and sorted out in the coding categories, from which conclusions were made. The lessons were also transcribed to have a clear picture of what was actually happening in class

Discussion

Discourse in the text

The study sought to find out the strategies the textbooks use to transfer new information to students. One of the strategies the textbooks used is illustration. The study has revealed that in most of the textbooks the males are featured more than the females. This observation agrees with Stanley's (2001) observation that in most textbooks males appear more frequently than females, as if females are less important than males. The use of more male pictures than females may hinder the learning process of the girls as it sends the message that females are not as important as males. However, the authors of the textbooks should be commended for making an effort to balance the theme of gender in the textbook, except for *Foundation Secondary English*. For this particular textbook it may be because it is an old publication published in 1967, but since it is used in today's classes the teacher should be conscious of the kind of textbooks they bring to class.

Chimombo and Mandalasi (2000) observe that pictures are "worth a thousand words". According to them, pictures help in memory retention and are useful in arousing interest; this may be the reason the textbooks have a lot of pictures. Mtunda and Safuli (1986) add that pictures help the students to build new experiences and also correct their misconceptions. This means that the pictures, apart from helping in the teaching and learning process, also help the students to develop new perceptions of the world. For example, the pictures in Chapter 3 of *Strides in Physical Science Book 1* that show a man cooking or washing dishes or a picture in *Buku la Chinyanja Buku 1* that shows a boy washing dishes, apart from helping the students to understand and learn new concepts, also puts them in a position to change their perception towards these chores. The students will understand that men can do what is perceived to be women's work or women can do what men can.

The authors also use the explaining strategy to give more detailed information on new concepts in the books. In almost all the books that were analysed the authors are directly addressing the students. This is clearly seen through the

use of second person plural or singular "you" and the use of the prefix "mu" (you) in Chichewa, for example "*you* need energy to cook *your* food" and "naka kanthano kena koti *mu*ngatolepo phunziro" (here is another educative story). In other cases, the authors use the first person plural "we" for example, "*we* say at Christmas when *we* are referring to the period of Christmas", the use of "we" shows that the authors view the students as part of the teaching and learning process. The students are seen as active participants.

In other cases the language that is used is distant, that is the authors are not directly addressing the students but rather just giving information without really involving them. In this case instead of using "you" or "we" the content words become the subjects of the statements for example, "soil depth", "physical property of soil is…" This strategy is essentially used when new information is being given. The use of "you" and "we" in explaining or asking questions breaks the gender boundary. Every student male or female feels part of the learning process; no one is left out because of the discourse used.

Romaine (1999) observes that the use of masculine forms such as "he", "man", and compounds like "mankind" in a generic sense to include women, is evidence that English is sexist. The data from *Foundation Secondary English* and *English Composition Writing Skills* where we have professions like *salesman, foreman, landlord, chairman, policeman and headmaster*, and where all the definitions refer to males only, also reflect this observation. The use of these generic terms also sends the message that women are inferior to men and that they do not have the power to ascend to such positions. Kandaswamy (2004) in support of the same argues that if students read such textbooks the girls learn that they are worthless and boys learn that women never contributed anything to develop the society, conditioning them from an early stage that women are inferior. This is because the reader being an active receiver of discourse s/he has the chance to question the use of the generic term instead of using a more balanced term.

Teacher discourse strategies
The study set out to analyse the discourse strategies that teachers use in class to interact with student. One of the strategies the teachers use in class is turn allocation. It was observed that the teacher is the only person who has control over classroom discourse. She/he is the only one who has the privilege to allocate turns in class. There is no way the student will initiate talk in class without being asked to do so. The teacher talks first before giving the students the floor to talk.

As soon as the teacher finishes talking, she/he creates an opportunity for the students to talk, and in most cases the teacher will be looking for a response from the students to whatever s/he has said. The student has to give a response that is relevant to what the teacher has asked or talked about. The teacher then evaluates whether the response is correct or incorrect. If it is incorrect, the teacher gives the floor to another student and, if it is correct again the teacher may move on to give new information. This process is repeated throughout the lesson.

Since the teacher is in control she/he is expected to consider balancing the turn allocations in mixed classes. In order to achieve this, it was observed that teachers used the Question-Pause-Nominate strategy. This is where the teacher asks a question, then pauses and then nominates a student, to answer. This strategy gives the students an equal chance to answer questions as the questions are addressed to the class not to individuals, thereby giving those who know the answer the chance to volunteer.

Giving the girls an equal chance to answer questions or nominating them without them volunteering is a discourse strategy that may help the girls to develop their self-esteem as they know that the teacher believes in them too. It sends a message to them that they have the ability to perform like the boys. This is the non-verbal strategy of discourse which conveys meaning to the girls without actually saying the words. However, it was noted that boys and girls were treated differently when they were in single sex classrooms. The boys were given more time to talk than the girls were. The data reflects the assertion by Shapka and the assertion by Keating (2003), GAC (1997), and McCormick (1994) that boys are called on more often and are given more praise and more constructive and useful criticism.

The other strategy that the teacher uses in class is group discussion. Chamdimba (2003) observes that boys and girls have different working styles. Boys like working as individuals and girls like working as a group. She observed boys and girls working in groups and realised that boys worked through a given activity as quickly as possible by avoiding discussion while girls seemed to be moving together, less concerned about working quickly and finishing the task than with involving everyone in the group in doing a given task. It might be argued that this is the reason why we have more group questions in the AG classes than in AB classes. The teacher's knowledge on the different working

styles between boys and girls might have influenced the teacher's choice of the discourse strategies to be used in class. However, it is possible for the teacher to use discourse strategies that may help the boys to work together and the girls to develop self-reliance, in this case, more group work and more individual questions for boys and girls respectively.

It was further observed that at GC 1 Mathematics, the teacher treated the boys differently from the girls. Though they were in different classes, the teacher that handled the lessons was the same. In the all-boys' class he gave the boys time to discover and explain certain mathematical concepts. The class was used to evaluate answers given by individuals. On the other hand, in the all-girls' lesson the girls were not give much time to discover things for themselves; it was always the teacher telling and the questions asked were closed and simple, that is why they were mostly answered in chorus form. This was also observed at AG English class where the girls were asked chorus questions throughout the lesson.

When the teacher at GC1 was interviewed as to why they separated the boys from the girls, he said the school wanted to see if the girls can improve their performance if they learn on their own. Shapka & Keating (2003) observe that all female classes may alleviate the exposure to gender biased messages; this may in turn lead to girls performing highly in the teaching and learning process. But if the girls are treated the way the teachers in the all-girls' classes treated them, they may not develop self-confidence as they are not given the chance to explore or discover things on their own. The teacher is sending a message that they cannot handle these subjects without the teacher's help or that of others. This will lead to low achievement in these subjects, which will also extend to the other lessons. This is to say, if the girls are continuously given special treatment by the teachers ,the purpose of having all-girls' institutions may not be achieved as this may not help them develop self-confidence which is needed for educational achievement.

The other discourse strategy the teachers use in class is evaluation of students' responses. Greenleaf and Freedman (1993) observe that being in the classroom requires a student to respond (R) to a teacher's initiation (I) not only with the correct content but also with the correct interactional turn-taking and communicative conventions, otherwise the students may be ignored, discounted or not heard. Though the teacher has the right to evaluate students' responses, s/

he must be careful as to how s/he evaluates students' responses as the evaluation may have a negative effect on the students. Orlich et al. (1985) stipulate that repeating students' (correct) answers causes the students to ignore their peers as sources of information and subtly conditions the class to wait for information from the teacher. The repetition of answers by the teacher was the most commonly used strategy in the classrooms that were observed.

A further strategy that the teacher used to evaluate pupils answers was silence. The teacher does not say anything but moves on to solicit another response from another student. Though this might be a good strategy as it does not waste time and it may also help the teacher to avoid saying the wrong things, it seems not to acknowledge students' efforts. Students expect to be rewarded for their efforts either through verbal or material rewards. An answer which goes unrewarded will be viewed as not so important or not so impressive. In this case the student that has given that answer may get discouraged as his/her effort is seen as unappreciated by the teacher. Of course, some of the teachers acknowledged the answers with a smile but not all did this. A lot of teachers showed indifference to the students' right answers.

The teachers also used a lot of strategies when reacting to students' incorrect answers. Apart from repetition of the answer in question form, the teachers also helped the struggling students through the answer and some evaluated the answers using the whole class. Orlich et al. (1985) observe that teachers' comments on incorrect responses such as "no," "you are way off" act as negative reinforcement, which may reduce the student's desire to participate in a verbal interaction. It may not only affect the student responding but also the other members of the class. It was observed in this study that there were very few cases that the teacher actually said 'no' to a student's answer.

Yet another strategy that the teachers use was the use of the whole class to evaluate students' incorrect answers. For example in one of the classes, the teacher begun to analyse a student's answer with a laugh and the other members of the class joined in. This kind of reaction makes the student responsible feel embarrassed and this may lower his self-esteem. The teacher should not be the first one to laugh at students' mistakes, but s/he should encourage them. The teacher's duty is to help the students, not to embarrass them. It does not matter whether it is a single sex class or a mixed class, individuals constantly have the view or sense of themselves that is defined and affected by the actions and

reactions of others towards them (Teevan, 1986). This sense of self that will be developed in class will also affect the way they view themselves in their daily lives.

Basically the boys and girls received the same comments from the teachers. Responding to a student's incorrect answer is crucial in the teaching and learning process, because the teacher may either encourage or discourage the students by the way s/he reacts to the answer. It was observed that the teachers tried to use strategies that may not completely put off the student. The most important thing is that both boys and girls received the same comments, which means both were treated equally. Neither gender was given special treatment. This kind of treatment helps the students to develop a sense of belonging, which in turn may help them to achieve highly in the teaching and learning process. It was noted that the same comments were also used in the single sex classes which means there is no difference in the way this discourse strategy is used in the classrooms.

Students' discourse strategies
The study sought to evaluate discourse strategies that students use for daily interaction in class. It was revealed that students initiate talk through asking questions. They are either prompted by the teacher or by their own need to know. McCarthy (1991) observes that it is only the classroom conversation that has systematic turn-taking under the control of the teacher. This is reflected in how the students are given the floor to speak. Even though in some cases the students asked questions without being asked if they have any question, they could not ask the question without being told to do so. If they have something to say, they are required to raise their hands. This indicates to the teacher that they want to say something; if the teacher does not respond to that they cannot say anything. Even after the teacher has asked them if they have any questions they still have to wait for the teacher to tell them to do so. This also reflects Sacks et al.'s (1974) observation, cited in McCarthy (1991) that people take turns when they are selected by the current speaker, or if no one is selected they may speak on their own accord, but the latter does not happen in the classroom situation; they have to be selected all the time. However, the teacher's reaction to the student's questions may act as a discouragement or encouragement to the students.

In most cases the learners were indifferent to their classmates' answers. Students' indifference to their classmate's answers may have both negative and positive effects on the students involved. On the one hand, this attitude towards incorrect answers may help the student involved feel encouraged to try again next time as there is no observable negative reaction to the incorrect answer from fellow students. On the other hand, this attitude to a right answer will discourage the concerned student as there is no observable appreciation of the answer from fellow students.

How these discourse strategies symbolically position boys and girls in the education setting and their everyday life

The study also assessed how the discourse strategies identified, analysed and evaluated above symbolically position boys and girls in the education setting and their everyday life. It was observed in our earlier discussions that discourse is a resource that can be used in the maintenance of power and dominance in a society or group and, according to van Dijk (1993), this power and dominance is interpreted in terms of privileged access to discourse and communication. This study has revealed that the teacher has more access to classroom discourse and communication than the students, so he/she has control over the students. The teacher, by virtue of his/her position, is seen as a source of knowledge, information, beliefs and values, so has excess influence and authority over students. Van Dijk (1993) also observes that the exercise of power through control of discourse by the dominant group presupposes mind control involving the influence of knowledge, beliefs, understanding, plans, attitude, norms and values. That is to say, those in control have the ability to influence people's knowledge, beliefs and values through discourse.

There are four ways, according to van Dijk (2003), in which power and dominance are involved in mind control. Firstly, the recipients tend to accept beliefs, knowledge and opinions through discourse from what they see as authoritative, trustworthy or credible sources such as scholars, experts, professionals or reliable media. In this study, the teacher is an expert, a professional and trustworthy in the classroom, so he/she can easily influence the students' beliefs.

In view of the labelling theory which stipulates that people tend to live up to their labels, if, for example, the teacher labels the students as worthy or able through teachers reaction to student's answers, the students will live up to that

label. This means they will try their best to perform well in class. By saying "zikomo" (thank you), "that's good" or "zoona" (that's true), what the teachers were actually saying is "Your answer is worthy. Do the same next time." The student responsible will believe this and next time she/he will have the courage to answer questions in class.

On the other hand, if the teacher reacts negatively to students' answers or questions the student looks at himself/herself as worthless. For example, it was observed earlier on that the teacher was the one that started laughing at students have responses. This sends the message, "you are dull; how can you give such an answer." It also gives the message to the rest of the class that this student is not to be taken seriously. Such a reaction makes the student feel small and worthless, and it will not be surprising if this student refrains from answering questions. In view of symbolic interactionism all these interpretations come in because the meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the way in which other persons act towards them. Thus individuals constantly have a view or sense of themselves that is defined and affected by the actions and reactions of others towards them (Teevan 1986). These labels stick because the students have been labelled by someone they trust, someone who is an expert and has control.

The textbooks that are used in class are also sources of knowledge and beliefs. The books were written by experts and professionals, as such, they also have the ability to influence a student's beliefs and values. For example, the books that were analysed in this study symbolically position women as less important than men or that men and women are equal. The discourses that are used in class by the teacher are often supported by the books that the students read. It has been observed from the previous discussion that the teachers in the mixed classes tried as much as possible to balance their nomination of students to answer questions as well as distribution of comments. But the fact that there are more boys than girls in class sends the message that girls do not need as much education as boys. The books they use in class supports this by providing comprehension passages with few or no female characters or few or no pictures featuring women. For example, *Foundation Secondary English, New Secondary English Book 1 and English Composition Writing skill Set 1-3*, have a total of 250 males featured in the examples and pictures of these books against 142 females representing 63.8% and 36.2% respectively.

On the other hand, books like *Strides in Physical Science Book 1* and *Buku la*

Chinyanja Buku 1 seem to provide an alternative belief or message that women can do what men do. Even though they are few in class they can attain the same achievements as boys. Whether the classes are mixed or not the message is the same: "women can also do it." In this case the boys in all-boys' classes will not look down upon women in the society and in mixed classes.

The second way that power and dominance are involved in mind control, according to van Dijk (2003), is that participants are obliged to be recipients of discourse, they are obliged to listen. In this case our students, by virtue of being so, have to attend classes and listen to their teachers who are sources of information. They also have to read the books that are prescribed. This means that if the teacher uses discourse that discriminates one group from the other, and students read books that also use the same discourse, they tend to believe this is true which in turn may affect their achievements in education. They may believe this because in the classroom and the school in general the teacher and the textbooks are the experts and the authority.

Thirdly, van Dijk (2003) argues that there is no public discourse or media that may provide information from which alternative beliefs may be derived. This means that when the students go out into the society they do not find new information that will give them alternative beliefs to what they have acquired in the classroom setting. However, there are a number of public discourses that are trying to encourage people to send the girl child to school and giving the girl child models. These include a number of articles in newspapers, for example, the *Female* supplement in the *Malawi News*, and radio programmes like *Tisankhenji* and *Mayi wamakono*. This means, therefore, that if the discourse in the classroom portrays women as inferior, the articles provide an opposing view on issues of equity between women and men.

Lastly, power and dominance are also involved in mind control in that the recipient may not have the knowledge and beliefs needed to challenge the discourse or information. This provides an answer to the critics of labelling theory who say that it is possible for the social actor to resist labels and fight back against them. As was noted earlier, Malawi is predominantly patriarchal and women are seen as weak in both body and mind whilst men are smart, more competitive and give higher returns from their education (GAC, n.d.), hence more boys go to school than girls. In this case, the knowledge that the girls have is that education is for boys and not for them. This means that if the books,

teachers, and the education system label them as worthless by not giving them models, by not giving them attention or not enrolling equal numbers of boys and girls, they will have no ability to fight back; because the knowledge they have is that girls should stay at home and look after the family.

In view of all these, the use of textbooks that are not gender biased like *Strides in Physical Science Textbook 1, Buku la Chinyanja Buku 1, Chanco Senior Biology, Strides in Agriculture Textbook 3* and some extent *New Secondary English Book 1* put boys and girls at the same level in class and this may also be extended to their daily lives.

On the other hand, using textbooks like *Foundation Secondary English* in class where there are no female characters in the book elevates boys to the position of superiority to girls, because the girls have no characters to associate themselves with. It has been observed that in this particular textbook the female characters are the mothers, sending the message that they belong at home as mothers, taking care of children, husband and the home and not going to school and becoming a teacher or policeman. Since boys are portrayed as adventurous and brave, they will tend to associate themselves with these characters, hence taking control over the girls.

Conclusion

The study aimed at identifying teachers' textbook and students' discourse strategies that are used for daily interaction in the classroom and find out the implications they have for the education of the girl child in Malawi. A few selected secondary schools in Zomba were visited and teachers were observed. The books that the students and teachers were using for the particular lesson that was observed were analysed. Students as participants of classroom discourse were also observed and their discourse strategies analysed.

It was observed that there is not much variation in the discourse strategies that the teachers use in class. Even though mixed classes had more boys than girls, it was observed that the teachers made sure that both boys and girls are equally involved in the class discussions, and the teacher discourse strategies were the same.

Further observation shows that the authors of the books that the students and

teachers use in class are actually trying their best to balance the gender issues in the education system. This is the case especially in the recent published books that tend to look at girls as on a par with boys. The older publications tend to focus more on the male character with the female character being given the secondary role. This may give the girls the impression that in the class as well as the society at large they are secondary to males, hence having a negative impact on the promotion of the education of the girl child. Conversely, it may give boys a picture that they are superior to females which may lead to them dominating the classes as well as the society at large.

For students' discourse, it was observed that there is no hostility in the classroom. That is to say neither gender is hostile to the other, nor are they unfriendly to students of the same sex. The students seem to support each other. In some cases the students were seen to be indifferent to what their classmates are doing or saying in class. Thus most of the times the students seemed not to notice the correct or incorrect answers that their colleagues have given so did not show any reaction to the answers. This attitude towards incorrect answers helps the students to feel part of the classroom activities and have a sense of belonging. In this case, the girls also have that chance to achieve what their counterparts achieve at the end of the day as they will not feel belittled. However, it was noted that this attitude towards correct answers will have a negative effect on the students concerned, as they might feel their answer is not appreciated.

Therefore the different discourse strategies that textbooks, teachers and students use in class have that influence of symbolically positioning boys and girls in the classroom as well as in the society at large. These positions affect achievements of the girls in education negatively as well as positively. The following then are the implications of this study:

- Teachers should be discouraged from using textbooks like *Foundation English* and *English Composition Writing Set 1 – 3* which give females secondary roles or no roles at all as the books might influence their attitude towards the students. However, bearing in mind the scarcity of textbooks which lead to teachers using old publications, it may be helpful to teach the girl child to challenge the negative representation of females in class and the textbooks. Therefore, there is need to introduce more programmes in schools that will aim at helping girl children to develop a fighting spirit.

- Textbooks like *Strides in Physical Science Book 1, Chanco Senior Biology, Strides in Agriculture Book 3, Buku la Chinyanja Buku 1, Senior Secondary Mathematics* and *New Secondary English Book 1* should continue to be used and more textbooks which are balanced should be published. As these will help the girls achieve highly in the educational goals.
- Teachers should be encouraged to continue the use of balanced discourse in mixed classes in order to incorporate both sexes in the teaching and learning process.

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