**Analyzing Educational Dilemmas among Teachers from a**

**Discourse Analysis and Leadership Perspective**

**Abstract**

This study aims to shed light on how teachers handle the educational dilemmas they encounter in the field of education by using discourse analysis to examine their behavior as educators and leaders and their understanding of their roles and responsibilities in dilemmas. Discourse analysis was carried out on three educational dilemmas encountered by teachers during the Coronavirus pandemic. These dilemmas were, in turn, presented in a higher education course at a teacher training college and discussed among the students. Two of the three dilemmas in question were related to in-person education, while the third pertained to distance education. The researchers presented and analyzed each respective dilemma in the context of linguistics and educational leadership, analyzing the selected texts qualitatively.

As distance education (resulting from the Coronavirus pandemic) has highlighted the importance of the language of instruction as a central and effective tool in mental, emotional, and social communication in various educational contexts, the study aims to answer the following questions: how does linguistic discourse analysis help teachers understand their roles and responsibilities in dilemmas? How does linguistic discourse analysis help teachers examine their behavior as educators and leaders? How can teachers use discourse analysis to handle the educational dilemmas they encounter? The study found that teachers dealt with the educational dilemmas analyzed differently, depending on how they became aware of these dilemmas, how they understood their professional roles, and the linguistic choices they made. We recommend conducting additional studies combining linguistics and educational leadership about the different forms of communication between teachers and students.

1. **Introduction**

The complex and dynamic nature of teaching is responsible for the fact that teachers encounter many educational dilemmas in their work. Studies have touched on the importance of understanding and analyzing these dilemmas from several perspectives (including personal, psychological, social, professional, and legal aspects). But it is imperative that we also take the linguistic approach into consideration in analyzing these dilemmas, and this is exactly what the present work seeks to do. For the purposes of the present study, the educational dilemmas that teachers encounter can be viewed as a type of linguistic discourse that aids teachers in understanding, analyzing, and addressing these dilemmas.

Turning to modern linguistic studies we can see that previous approaches to discourse analysis have developed, particularly from an applied perspective, as early linguistic theory viewed sentences in discourse texts as the major linguistic unit for the study of language (Shaush, 2001). Textual analysis has, for a long time, been confined to analyzing the sentence as a fundamental unit with only limited relationships between its elements, and without pragmatic discourse implications. Developments in linguistics made it clear that these studies were confined to dealing with discourse analysis comprehensively, prompting many linguists to call for discourse analysis to be conducted beyond mere sentences, in order to uncover the entire textual implications, including those pertaining to education. This change in approach stems from the notion that language serves a social and educational function and must have a “communicative effect” which linguists consider the essence of the socio-educational process (Faraj, 2007; Buhairi 2004).

The first breakthrough to form this new linguistic approach was linguist Zellig Harris’ method of text analysis, that shifts from analyzing language at the sentence level to incorporating the contextualizing discourse in the analysis as well (Bin Arus, 2008). Textual studies further evolved and flourished thanks to linguist Van Dijk, commonly considered the founder of text analysis (Afifi, 2001). His book *Text and Context* sets forth a clear foundation for textual interpretation, stressing that all dimensions of discourse should be taken into consideration (i.e., structure, context, culture, society, and education). Van Dijk maintains that texts have both a superficial structure and a deep structure and must therefore be examined thoroughly (2001). Linguists interested in textual analysis have argued that communicative diversity—particularly differing contexts, attitudes, and styles—should be taken into account when analyzing texts in order to ensure an efficient process for textual interpretation. They further posit that the relationship between the addresser and addressee, as well as the forms of interaction between them and the aforementioned dimensions of communicative diversity should also be borne in mind (Buhairi, 2004). Moreover, this influences psychological states, social norms, and discourse (Hamad & Abu Ghazalah, 1999), as the structure of a text is based on the norms of the addresser and addressee alike (Heine, 1999).

These norms define the basic assumptions and values that characterize social values and individual attitudes. As the previous complexities constitute the system of values and basic assumptions defining social norms and individual attitudes, they also define human behavior (Schein, 1993). Drawing on this, linguistic performance in any text reflects social dimensions—educational-leadership behaviors that characterize both people in general as interlocutors and teachers in particular. These social, educational, and leadership dimensions influence the addressee, or student, in a variety of ways, creating a textual setting that connects the addressee and addresser (Brinker, 1985).

We would like to point out here that natural language is considered a reflection of the teacher, elucidating his behavior as a leader and educator—this directly reflects on the students themselves, as well as on the nature of the socio-professional communication between teachers and students, making the language of communication an important tool to measure leadership. In order to examine leadership we must examine behavior—either of the teachers or their students—as well as language. Furthermore, the teacher is not a neutral party, as he is part of a community with social circumstances, standards, societal knowledge, social norms, and professional ethics, all of which stem from linguistics (which itself stems from society).

1. **Background Framework**

The theoretical framework for the present work explores teachers’ educational leadership in the classroom by analyzing discourse within an educational context (with particular interest in the textual analysis of educational dilemmas) with the aim of understanding teachers’ roles and their awareness of, and how they handle, the dilemmas they encounter.

1. **Leadership**

(…)

1. **Leadership, Classroom Management, and Discourse**

(…)

1. **Sociolinguistics and Educational Environment**

We would like to point out here that sociolinguistics plays an important role in understanding the teachers’ educational environment when teaching in general and when they deal with dilemmas in particular. From this perspective, we appreciate the role sociolinguistics and its educational context play in effectively analyzing the discourse about the dilemmas teachers encounter and how they handle them. We seek to shed light on these dilemmas by drawing upon discourse analysis from a sociolinguistic perspective as the analytical and theoretical framework for this study.

FIGURE

Big circle: Sociolinguistics

Medium circle: Discourse Analysis

Small circle: Educational Context of the Dilemma

**6. Educational Dilemma**

(…)

This study aims to draw upon discourse analysis to uncover the processes through which teachers deal with the educational dilemmas they encounter at work. In order to deal with socio-educational contexts and dilemmas there is a pressing need to view discourse analysis and the educational and social sciences as an integrated and interdisciplinary cognitive system, since they contribute to human relationships and communication between individuals in general and between individuals in the education sector specifically (i.e., teachers and students).

**7. Method**

In this study, we will use discourse analysis to examine three different educational dilemmas that arise during student-teacher interaction in educational environments, as discourse texts cannot be separated from leadership and education. We agree with the principle that people are a product of their environment—it is impossible to separate the pedagogical educational process from social language. In this sense, discourse texts convey socio-cultural components and contexts (Ibn Khaldun, 2006; Pinkrad, 2015) and are a reflection of society at various levels.

In this study, we will analyze three educational dilemmas encountered by students enrolled in the course “Analyses of Educational Cases” taught by the authors of this study at a teachers’ training college. We selected three dilemmas from a group of 27 faced by an equal number of teachers. We selected these dilemmas because the class showed the most interest in them, eagerly discussing their social, educational, and leadership aspects in the course’s online forums. It is worth noting that most students expressed that they themselves had faced dilemmas similar to the three in question. We analyzed the leadership, educational, and social aspects of these three dilemmas linguistically, examining the teachers’ linguistic choices used in handling them. We then discussed and analyzed the dilemmas’ common themes in line with Wall, Stahl, and Salam (2015).

Discourse Analysis

**8. Findings and Analysis**

Below, the three dilemmas are described and analyzed. Following this, the linguistic and educational theories connecting them are discussed, with the aim of uncovering how teachers’ perceptions of their roles and responsibilities influence the way they handle the educational dilemmas they face at work. To this end, we will examine the teachers’ educational-leadership behavior, analyzing the transcriptions of the dilemmas.

**9. The First Dilemma**

**9.1 The Description of the Dilemma**

Salma is a full-time Arabic teacher at a primary school with ample teaching experience. She faced a dilemma with Adam, a 5th grade student in a co-ed class at a public school. Adam is the eldest son in a family of five. His family is afflicted by socio-economic hardship, and lives below the poverty line. He does not speak much and occasionally exhibits violent behavior. He sits by himself and is very shy during verbal tasks. He does not participate in class discussions but excels in other educational tasks. His grades range from “good” to “very good”, and he demonstrates a potential for excellence. However, his lack of motivation and low self-esteem stemming from his social situation are hindering him.

A few minutes after Salma entered the classroom, she noticed that Adam was acting differently—he seemed to be exceptionally anxious and held his hand against his cheek for the duration of the entire lesson. She waited for the bell to ring, and then asked him to accompany her to a private meeting room. There, she examined him closely and noticed blue bruises on his face that seemed to be the result of violence. Salma felt anxious and scared. She asked Adam to sit, and the following conversation took place:

*Salma:* *How are you? Hopefully you’re well and everything’s fine?*

*Adam: Good, thanks.*

*Salma:* *Do you need anything? Do you feel like there’s anything you’d like to tell me?*

*Adam: No.*

*Salma: Why have you had your hand on your cheek all day?*

*Adam: Nothing, teacher. I have a toothache.*

*Salma:* *Get well soon, dear. Did you go to the dentist?*

*Adam: No.*

*Salma: Do you want any help from me?*

*Adam: No, thanks.*

*Salma: Ok, Adam, get back to class.*

**9.2 Discourse Analysis of the First Dilemma**

The teacher clearly took responsibility for Adam and respected his privacy—she was willing to devote time to meet with him personally in a separate room, to find out whether her suspicions of abuse were true. Her use of three different expressions in one linguistic exchange to ask Adam how he was doing—“how are you?,” “hopefully you’re well,” and “everything’s fine?”—reveal her anxiety. Adam’s laconic answer—“good, thanks”—is short and vague. He is not yet ready to divulge his feelings about what had transpired. Perhaps because he had indeed experienced violence and was afraid of what the consequences of admitting that might be.

Adam’s language suggests that he was affected mentally. Additionally, the curtness of his reply, and his attempt to avoid discussing what happened to him, indicates the continuous mental impact of the incident. Adam’s quick but vague response indicates his desire to avoid any additional communication, and to keep his teacher from discovering what had actually transpired. More precisely, “good” is a generic answer in Arab culture, and is appropriate in all contexts, positive or negative, and thus provides no elucidation.

The syntax of the dialogue demonstrates the extent of the teacher’s interest in the student’s well-being, namely “Do you need anything? Do you feel like there’s anything you’d like to tell me?”, inquiring about his general situation by asking the same question in different ways, hoping to clear up her suspicions. The sentence in question contains three questions that convey a sort of psychological reassurance to the student, and we can infer that the teacher was reassuring the student out of ethical motivations. Furthermore, we can deduce that there is a containment relationship between the student and teacher (hence she is interested in inquiring about such emotional aspects). Moreover, there are several possible explanations for the teacher’s anxiety. Perhaps she cared about the student. Or maybe she was unable to deal with instances of violence towards students by informing the appropriate authorities. The teacher tried to question Adam more than once, because she sensed that he was in some sort of distress which she wanted to help him overcome. We can clearly see all her attempts to uncover the source of Adam’s distress caused her stress and anxiety.

The interrogative structure itself—“Do you need anything? Do you feel like there’s anything you’d like to tell me?”—indicates that the teacher is embarking on to a new stage of questioning; she changed the nature of her question, moving from a general, neutral question—“How are you? Hopefully you’re well and everything’s fine?”—to a direct question containing a specific “code.” This code indicates that the teacher is adopting an influence tactic so that the student feels safe to confide in her.

Moreover, the repetition of the word “anything” indicates that the teacher is directing the conversation to find out what Adam is hiding—manipulating the syntax and her questioning tactics (as opposed to relying on her authority as a teacher). This lends linguistic emotion to her attempts to extract information from him. She utilized her power as an authority figure, and adult who cares about his well-being, to make him feel comfortable and to trust her to intervene (coalition). The diversity of linguistic styles can be viewed as a tactic to persuade and get closer to the individual, as language is a useful interdisciplinary tool to achieve specific goals.

The student answered with a firm “no,” a fast and curt answer that indicated not only his desire to end the conversation but also demonstrated his worry and fear, as if he were saying “There’s nothing I want to tell anyone. I don’t want to talk. I don’t want to express my feelings. I’m afraid to have that conversation. I don’t want to remember and relive those memories.” From this “no” we can see the fear that permeates him to his very core and makes him reluctant to divulge any details.

The teacher’s question—“Why have you had your hand on your cheek all day?”—is another indicator that she knows the student is scared and in distress. However, she shied away from directly questioning him after she noticed the fear embedded in his “no.” Despite this, she did not give up, because she felt an educational and ethical responsibility to help the student. From this question, we notice that she possibly wants to indirectly tell the student that she knows he is lying out of fear (as she was able to deduce from the fact that he had had his hand on his cheek since the morning). She was attempting to convince him that what happened to him was not okay. In addition to the spoken discourse, the student was exhibiting facial expressions that the teacher understood implicitly but did not disclose. Alternatively, it is also possible that she was letting the student know that she knew he had his hand over his cheek to hide signs of physical abuse, perhaps out of shame, or for fear of the possible repercussions.

Adam was still reluctant to divulge his situation to his teacher and was in a denial, as is clearly evidenced by the sentence “Nothing, teacher. I have a toothache.” Moreover, we can see that the teacher changed her way of speaking to Adam to gain his trust, saying “Get well soon, dear. Did you go to the dentist?” in order to obtain proof of the abuse, since she knew his response was illogical. Thus, she employed a light-hearted tone to show she believed him, although she did not. By saying “Get well soon, dear” she assumed the role of a caregiver and not just that of a teacher. Furthermore, her question “Did you go to the dentist?” demonstrates her continued attempts to contain the situation, despite knowing he did not need to go to the dentist, proving to him once more her interest in his well-being, attempting to convince him that she was dependable and trustworthy.

The student’s persistent refusal to divulge any information by saying “no” indicates his refusal to accept any form of help from others at this stage—refusal can be a sign of fear, stress, worry, or anxiety. In addition to the student’s insistence to withhold information, we see the teacher’s persistence in trying to help by her repeated question “Do you want any help from me?” Through this question, she is clarifying that although he is still reluctant to divulge what happened, she cares about him and is willing to help him now and in the future.

Furthermore, in our view, Adam’s refusal to cooperate and his employment of “No, thanks” indicate that he wants the conversation to end immediately, as if he is saying to his teacher “Leave me alone. I’m fine.” The teacher tried all possible ways to influence the student and ended the conversation by saying “Ok, Adam, get back to class,” as she had realized that he was not yet ready to divulge what had happened.

**9.3 Linguistic and Educational Aspects of the First Dilemma**

In the dilemma above, we notice that the teacher tried to determine the pragmatic implications of the student’s comments and incomplete responses. It is undoubtedly a complex situation and the student was reluctant to share his experience with the teacher, using his words to foil her attempts to extract more information. Despite this, the teacher was able to read between the lines. In this regard, previous studies comparing the use of single letters with the use of full words have shown that treating a letter in the context of a word facilitates the identification of the given language component. This is known as Tagmemics Theory, and is achieved through continuous dialogue between the teacher and student. According to Pike, dialogue in this respect constitutes a unit of social interaction consisting of one person speaking and the other person reacting (1981).

From an educational perspective, we can note that, according to Oser and Althof (1993), the teacher, Salma, was trying to signal here that she wanted to have a professional discussion on the matter, that is, on a dilemma that had taken place in connection with school and the educational sphere. While handling the dilemma, the teacher responded as a professional and not as a private individual. The dilemma was liable to influence the teacher’s equilibrium, affecting her choice of behaviors to solve social-educational dilemmas. In addition, the teacher showed she had a caring, compassionate, and responsible character. According to Oser and Althof, a teacher’s professional decision-making process involves searching for an equilibrium between the parties to a dilemma. For this reason, they preferred realistic discourse over ethical discourse as a means to solve teachers’ social and moral dilemmas. Despite the teacher’s stress and anxiety regarding Adam, she handled the dilemma with confidence, and, according to Gunawan, her anxiety did not prevent her from upholding her professional values and educational beliefs (2017).

**10. The Second Dilemma**

**10.1 The Description of the Dilemma**

Sara is a 3rd grade student. She has three younger brothers, all of whom were raised by different foster families after their parents abandoned them. They did not have a stable home, and moved between different families for three years, while studying at schools in the city center. During the most recent summer break, their mother contacted their father’s family through the local Social Affairs and Welfare Office and asked them to take care of the children. Although she did not want them to continue shifting from foster family to foster family, she had no desire to assume responsibility for them herself. Sara and her brothers moved in with their paternal aunt (a mother of eight) who agreed to care for them. The Social Affairs and Welfare Office was in regular contact with the aunt to check on Sara’s well-being, as any neglect would prompt them to search for a new foster family for her. Sara’s teacher, Dalia, was familiar with Sara’s social situation in detail. In addition to being Sara’s teacher, Dalia is from the same city as Sara, and the entire community is aware of Sara’s family’s situation. One day, Dalia encountered a confusing situation with Sara. Sara, as usual, arrived in class 10 minutes late. She took her seat, placing her palm on her elbow, and rolling up the sleeve of her sweater. Then the following conversation ensued:

*Dalia:* *What’s wrong with you, Sara?*

*Sara: My hand hurts, teacher.*

*Dalia:* *Come here. Let me see. What’s wrong with your hand?*

*Sara: Yesterday my cousin was carrying boiling water and spilled it on me. It wasn’t on purpose. She didn’t see me.*

*\*While Sara is standing in front of the teacher and talking, Sara’s aunt passes by the class and notices her talking with Dalia. She enters the classroom.\**

*Sara’s aunt: What did she tell you? She’s only good at complaining!*

*Dalia:* *It’s nothing. She told me that water spilled on her and that it was an accident.*

*Sara’s aunt: \*loudly\* Don’t tell me she’s accusing me of burning her and you’ll report me to the police.*

*\*a short silence\**

*Sara’s aunt: She didn’t tell you to file a police complaint?*

*\*Dalia looks at Sara who is standing in silence and averting her gaze.\**

*Dalia:* *No, she didn’t tell me anything. She’s just in pain, and I asked her what’s wrong.*

*\*Sara’s aunt exits the classroom, muttering angrily.\**

Two days after this conversation, Sara arrived in class two-hours late, and Dalia called Sara’s aunt to inform her. The following conversation took place:

*Dalia:* *Hello. I wanted to tell you that Sara just got to class now. I just wanted to check if she left the house late or she was on her way to school this whole time.*

*Sara’s aunt: No, she just left. We had a meeting.*

Dalia spoke with Sara in private after class. Here is the transcript of their conversation:

*Dalia: Why were you late?*

*Sara:* *We had a meeting at home. A foster family came. They came to see us so they can take us, and our caseworker and the consultant were there.*

*Dalia: And what happened?*

*Sara: I told them I don’t want to go with them. I told the caseworker I want to stay with my aunt.*

*Dalia: You’d like to stay with your aunt?*

*Sara: Yes.*

*Dalia: Why?*

*Sara: I get to see grandma every day and play with my cousins.*

*Dalia: So, the family wants to take just you or your brothers too?*

*Sara: \*in a faint and scared voice\* Just me. But I want to stay with my brothers!*

**10.2 Discourse Analysis of the Second Dilemma**

Since the teacher noticed something was wrong, she opened the conversation by saying “What’s wrong with you, Sara,”, to which Sara responded, “My hand hurts, teacher.” By using this curt response Sara tried to avoid divulging too much information, just like Adam did in the first dilemma, but with one slight difference— Sara’s reluctance was less severe. This might indicate that Sara would be willing to open up later. The teacher tried to find out more details about Sara’s hand, addressing Sara in an authoritarian manner, “Come here. Let me see”— she did not ask for permission, acting as though she is supposed to interfere in such a situation. Likewise, “What’s wrong with your hand?” indicates she was not satisfied with Sara’s answer. However, based on Sara’s reaction (i.e., looking at the teacher with fear and anxiety), we can deduce that she was still hesitant and withholding information.

Here, the student began to divulge to what had happened, “Yesterday my cousin was carrying boiling water and accidentally spilled it on me. She didn’t see me.” There are two possible interpretations of this sentence: that she told the truth, or that she fabricated a story to protect her aunt. We believe that the latter is more likely, as it is supported by the discourse—Sara tried to defend her cousin by saying “It wasn’t on purpose,” strengthening this with “She didn’t see me.” Thus, the student was aware that what was done to her was unacceptable and dangerous and should be kept hidden from strangers (in this case the teacher). Additionally, the student’s tone of voice indicates hesitation and fear, lending greater credence to our belief that the story was fabricated.

Sara’s aunt noticed Sara and the teacher talking. She entered the classroom saying “What did she tell you? She’s only good at complaining!” With this statement, the aunt defended herself by accusing the student of constantly complaining. By saying “It’s nothing. She told me that water spilled on her and that it was an accident,” the teacher was trying to avoid admitting what Sara had told her, so she would not have to submit a judicial report to the authorities. According to our analysis, the teacher was careful not to enter into a confrontation with the aunt for several possible reasons. For instance, perhaps the teacher did not possess the necessary professional resources to deal with such a conversation, or maybe she did not believe it was her job to resolve the problem (the so-called “role-perception”). The teacher clearly took a step back and began to diffuse the situation by subduing the discourse. In contrast to the teacher in the first dilemma, who assumed responsibility for the student and took matters into her own hands, the teacher in the second dilemma surprisingly took a step back and completely removed herself from the situation.

The aunt continued defending herself saying “Don’t tell me she’s accusing me of burning her and you’ll report me to the police,” and adding “She didn’t tell you to file a police complaint?” This reiteration demonstrates the aunt’s concern over possible legal troubles related to her niece’s injuries. We notice here that the aunt was abrasive when trying to deny involvement, preemptively defending herself and placing the blame on Sara who apparently “always complains.” The student seems clearly aware that no one has the right to touch or harm her, and that were someone to do so, she has the right to file a legal complaint. However, the fact that Sara did not disclose that her aunt was the one who burnt her indicates that she was scared.

The teacher glanced at Sara who was standing in silence and averting her gaze, saying “No, she didn’t tell me anything. She’s just in pain, and I asked her what’s wrong.” This sentence further confirms that the teacher tried to avoid any confrontation with the aunt (and perhaps the family as a whole) and did not want to get involved in matters that do not concern her as a teacher. This situation also reflects the influence of the culture of the local community on the teacher, as demonstrated clearly both in the manner in which the teacher handled the conversation, and in her linguistic choices. These two factors indicate that she is evading responsibility and has no intention of intervening between the student and her family. Furthermore, the aunt exited the classroom while muttering angrily.

Reflects on

Perception of the situation

Reaction

Led to

Professional perception

Abandoning the main situation/using professional authority and managing the incident

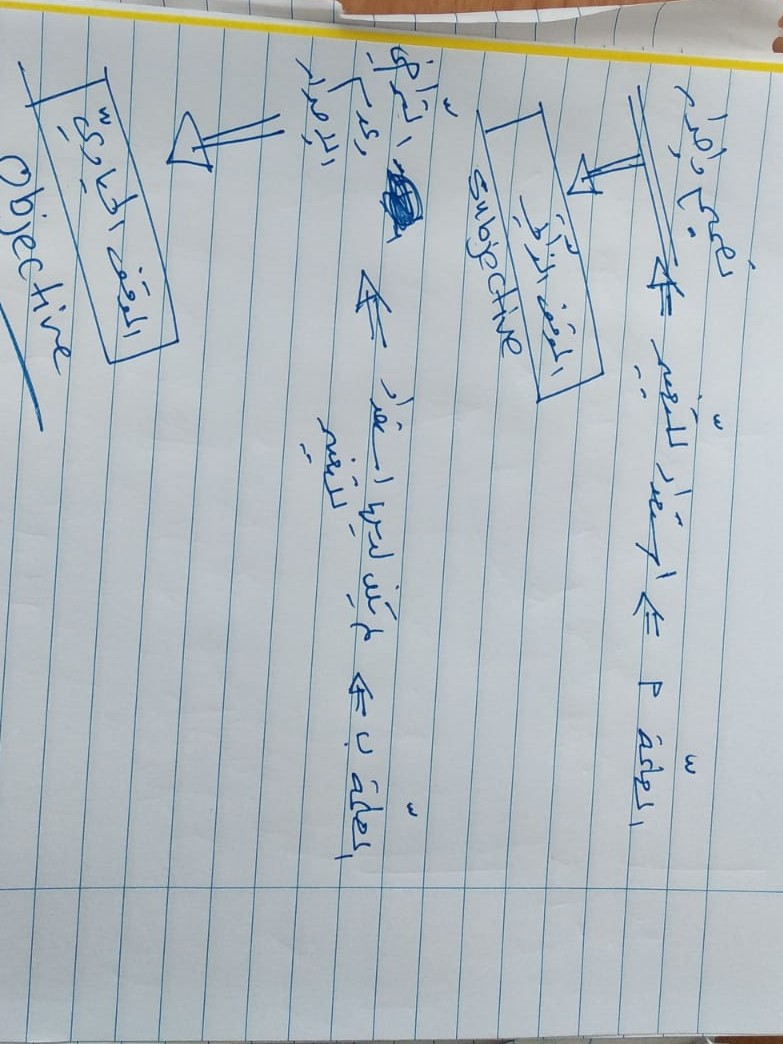
In this conversation the teacher adopted a more technical role (as opposed to a leadership one), maintaining a specific distance between herself and the incident. When inquiring about Sara’s injury, she first attempted to broach the subject indirectly and neutrally, as she was aware of Sara’s family’s situation and did not feel that it was her place to interfere in such familial matters. This may be because she did not want to, despite the fact that Sara was open with her and directly divulged what had happened, or because she did not feel professionally equipped to intervene.

A few days after the initial conversation, Sara arrived in class late (at 9:30am), and the teacher called Sara’s aunt to inform her of Sara’s tardiness. The teacher initiated the conversation by saying “Hello. I wanted to tell you that Sara just got to class now. I just wanted to check if she left the house late or she was on her way to school this whole time.” The teacher did not question the student about her tardiness, but was quick to contact the student’s aunt, as though she wanted to prove a sort of loyalty to the her (and is perhaps indicative of the teacher’s fear of the aunt and her family).

The teacher did not follow-up the aunt’s vague, short reply “No, she just left. We had a meeting” with questions, as if to tell the aunt “Your family meetings are none of my business, and it’s not my place to interfere.” At the same time, the teacher wanted to discover more details, so she questioned the student after class, asking her “Why were you late?” The fact that the teacher approached the student privately indicates that she thought someone might be watching them and was afraid that Sara’s family, and especially Sara’s aunt, could learn of her repeated attempts to unearth information. This caused the teacher to be cautious around Sara, removing herself from the situation. She refrained from providing Sara with emotional or social support and did not try to solve the problem, seemingly contenting herself with adopting a passive approach. In other words, the teacher’s desire to prove herself to the student’s family caused her not to provide the student with moral support, despite knowing she was caught in the midst of a difficult situation. Sara told the teacher “We had a meeting at home. A foster family came. They came to see us so they can take us, and our caseworker and the consultant were there.” The teacher continued asking Sara more technical questions with the sole aim of bringing more information to light. She attempted to remain neutral by not broaching the topic of Sara’s psychological or social situation. After asking “And what happened?” the teacher continued asking Yes/No question to extract more information from Sara, such as: “You’d like to stay with your aunt?” Yet she did so without showing any empathy for the student’s feelings which she had firmly expressed in both her verbal and non-verbal responses.

The teacher’s question “So, the family wants to take just you or your brothers too?” continues her attempts to extract information without addressing the student’s feelings. These sentiments were clearly expressed in the student’s statement “Just me. But I want to stay with my brothers!” The teacher did not comment on the painful situation that the student expressed, nor did she assert her leadership in an attempt to change the situation. Instead, she just repeated what Sara had said, without trying to solve the issue or show solidarity, as if to indicate that it was not within her power to change the situation, despite Sara’s depressing confession in the last sentence that she did not want to be separated from her brothers.

When comparing the events in the two dilemmas, we can see that Salma, the teacher in the first dilemma, was very positive and willing to do what she could to help, even if she did not have the necessary resources to do so. On the other hand, Dalia, the teacher in the second dilemma, did not have the motivation, or perhaps the courage, to get involved in the situation despite its gravity, as evidenced by the lack of confidence that characterized her approach and the fact that she did not express solidarity with Sara.



**10.3 Linguistic and Educational Aspects of the Second Dilemma**

When we examine the text closely, we can clearly see that the teacher’s intonation indicates her neutrality and represents her confusion regarding how to tackle the situation. In other words, intonation here is used as a linguistic tool bearing syntactic significance to clarify the pragmatic implications of the sentences, or what linguists call “phonetic symbolism” (Hassan, 2009); according to Hassan, intonation often provides significant elucidatory context for the other party (in this case, the student and her aunt). The teacher’s intonation here plays a functional role in differentiating between different syntactic structures, as well as between reporting and interrogating. It further denotes the end of a sentence, and expresses surprise, satisfaction, anger, amazement, pain, denial, interrogation, and more (Baalbaki, 2005; Crystal, 2010; Hanna 2012).

The above dilemma allows us to make some suggestions sharpening the concept of Professional Aptitude, a term that is particularly useful in educational research and studying the role of the teacher in the classroom (Evans & Tribble, 1996; Housego, 1992). Accordingly, we should note that the teachers’ aptitude is based on their roles, and particularly their role-perception – as opposed to the official definition of their job. We can also note that, in the second dilemma Dalia, the teacher, seems to perceive her role as purely educational, limiting herself to classroom material, and not stepping up as an educational figure with an overarching responsibility for the education and social welfare of her students. In this case, Dalia did not assume a responsible role in her school. By avoiding conflict with the aunt she expresses personal or professional incompetence, and fails to give Sara a feeling of personal safety. According to Bandura, a teacher’s role, both in the classroom and as part of a school, includes expressive, informal aspects that derive from the relationship between teachers and the people who make up their working environment, (Bandura, 1997).

In addition, the Arab family is usually considered in light of traditional collective norms and values. These accord a place of primacy to respecting one’s elders, and preferring the greater good—be it the family’s or the collective—over one’s personal good (Aziza, Levenstein & Brodesky, 2001). Indeed, it seems as though this description adequately explains the teacher’s response to her student’s aunt, which came at expense of her student’s welfare and even her personal safety.

**11.0 The Third Dilemma**

**11.1 The Description of the Dilemma**

After the transition to distance education during the Coronavirus pandemic, Arabic teacher Ramy noticed that his student, Huda, was not attending class, so he sent Huda’s mother an email asking why. The mother replied that there was a problem with their home internet, making it difficult for her daughter to participate. She promised Ramy that she would do her best to remedy this. At the time, it did not occur to Ramy that this might not be the real problem. More than two weeks later, several teachers expressed concern that Huda had not been attending online lessons, especially as she was known to be very studious. As a result, Ramy scheduled a Zoom meeting with Huda’s mother, during which the following conversation took place:

*Ramy: May peace be upon you, Um Huda. Hello Huda. How are you both? We’ve missed you, Huda.*

*Huda’s mother: Fine thanks. How are you, sir?*

*Ramy: Fine, thanks, but I’ve noticed that Huda has been absent for two weeks. She hasn’t been attending classes or completing her assignments. The strange thing is that we’re used to her eagerly participating and being very studious. I hope everything is fine?*

*\*Huda nods and tries to get out of view\**

*Huda’s mother:* *Thank you very much for your concern. To be honest, I expected the school administration would be in touch to ask why Huda hasn’t been attending her online classes.*

*\*Huda’s mother asks Huda to leave the room for a few minutes so that she can speak with Ramy in private.\**

*Huda’s mother: I don’t want to divulge all of the reasons for Huda’s absence, because it’s a sensitive topic. God knows how worried I am about how her mental state has been since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic. I don’t want anyone other than you to know, because people in our community wouldn’t believe it.*

*Ramy: Oh my God… you’re really scaring me. What’s going on?*

*Huda’s mother: Huda has been terrified since the start of the pandemic, because her older brothers scared her by talking about the Coronavirus in front of her, especially since she had the common cold, so they started teasing her telling her she had Corona. I’m afraid that if I tell anyone about her mental state, they’ll think she’s crazy and has a mental illness. You know very well what that means in our communities, especially for girls. I was hesitant to tell you these private details, because her father doesn’t want me to tell anyone, but I can see it’s important that you know. Please keep what I told you between you and me and don’t let anyone find out.*

*Ramy: What can I do to help you? Can I call every day to talk to her and reassure her?*

*Huda’s mother:* *Yes, thank you. I appreciate your understanding… but I don’t want Huda to know I informed you of her situation… I mean you can talk to her but pretend you don’t know anything about her problem, and we don’t want any interference from a caseworker or the school, because we don’t want word to get out.*

*Ramy: I respect that, but may I speak to Huda now?*

*Huda’s mother: Of course. \*She calls Huda and tells her to sit in front of the webcam.\**

*Ramy: How are you, Huda?*

*Huda: Fine, thanks.*

*Ramy: I was expecting you to participate in the Zoom meetings like your classmates.*

*Huda: Daddy lost his job because of the pandemic and our internet got cut off.*

*Ramy: Ok, Huda. I’m going to speak to you every day on the phone to check in on you and fill you in on what your classmates are learning. Try to do the classwork so you understand the subjects and we return to normal.*

*Huda: Ok, sir. Thanks.*

*Ramy: I’ll send you the worksheets with Manal since she lives the closest to you. She will drop off the daily assignments for you. Be sure to wear the mask when you open the door for her. Please let me know if you have any problems.*

*Huda: \*hesitates\* I can’t get close to anyone. I’ll have mother open the door for her.*

*Ramy: Don’t worry, I know you’re an excellent student, Huda, and I’m sure you will overcome this and we’ll see you in class again.*

**11.2 Discourse Analysis of the Third Dilemma**

The teacher greeted both Huda and her mother to create a relaxed atmosphere and open a good channel of socio-emotional communication from the beginning, saying “May peace be upon you, Um Huda. Hello Huda. How are you both? We’ve missed you, Huda.” Here, the teacher was trying to show interest in their well-being. By saying “We’ve missed you, Huda,” he was indicating that Huda normally has fantastic attendance (and thus several of her teacher’s noticed her absence). The mother replied to the teacher’s greeting with the generic “Fine thanks. How are you, sir?” and the teacher, when asked how he was doing, replied with a curt “fine, thanks,” immediately shifting the topic to the student’s absence (which was the focus of the conversation).

The teacher’s assertion “but I’ve noticed that Huda has been absent for two weeks. She hasn’t been attending classes or completing her assignments” presents facts and real data. It also shows he is keeping track of his students’ attendance and follows up when they are absent (giving himself legitimacy to inquire about Huda’s absence).

By saying “The strange thing is that we’re used to her eagerly participating and being very studious” the teacher is indicating that he is showing special interest in Huda since she is an active and diligent student, stressing that several of her teachers were surprised and wanted to check in on her. “I hope everything is fine?” indicates that the teacher feels there is something preventing Huda from continuing her online education and that he wants to find out the root of the problem and utilize the tools at his disposal to try and solve it.

The mother replied “Thank you very much for your concern. To be honest, I expected that the school administration would be in touch to ask why Huda hasn’t been attending her online classes.” Here we can see that the mother has a pre-conceived notion about the teacher’s leadership role and that she expected more than just a phone call from the teacher— she expected a representative from the school administration to check in on her daughter (indicating the mother’s awareness of the importance of Huda’s presence in the classroom and at school). Thus, we can understand that the main purpose of the phone call was to get the student to resume her studies so that she can maintain her self-awareness and motivation to learn.

Huda’s mother asked Huda to leave the room for a few minutes so that she can speak with Ramy in private, before saying “I don’t want to divulge all of the reasons for Huda’s absence, because it’s a sensitive topic. God knows how worried I am about how her mental state has been since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic. I don’t want anyone other than you to know, because people in our community wouldn’t believe it.” Thus, it is clear to us that the mother was already willing to confide in the teacher about her daughter’s sensitive situation, although she wanted to feel safe and trust him first.

The teacher took control by directing the conversation, “Oh my God… you’re really scaring me. What’s going on?” indicating leadership and initiative—his last sentence makes the mother feel safe and trust him. His utterance “You’re really scaring me” indicates genuine concern, prompting the mother to open up and provide details about her daughter’s and family’s situation: “Huda has been terrified since the start of the pandemic, because her older brothers scared her by talking about the Coronavirus in front of her, especially since she had the common cold, so they started teasing her telling her she had Corona. I’m afraid that if I tell anyone about her mental state, they’ll think she’s crazy and has a mental illness. You know very well what that means in our communities, especially for girls. I was hesitant to tell you these private details, because her father doesn’t want me to tell anyone, but I can see it’s important that you know. Please keep what I told you between you and me and don’t let anyone find out.” On the one hand, this statement re-asserts the teacher’s position as an educator and the mother’s conviction that she can trust him. On the other hand, it demonstrates that the mother has high expectations the teacher will help Huda, as he is the only person she informed about the situation, increasing his responsibility.

By asking “What can I do to help you?” the teacher is switching from the theoretical conversation stage to the practical implementation stage. Here he indicates his willingness to be flexible regarding how he can help and proposes his first of several suggestions. This question also demonstrates actual educational authority and asserts his self-confidence and professional competencies that enable him to provide various forms of assistance and support. Furthermore, he was evidently prepared to deal with the situation at hand. His willingness to call Huda every day to check in on her, “What can I do to help you? Can I call every day to talk to her and reassure her?” indicates that the teacher is very caring and sympathetic towards her.

The mother’s response, “Yes, thank you. I appreciate your understanding… but I don’t want Huda to know I informed you of her situation… I mean you can talk to her but pretend you don’t know anything about her problem, and we don’t want any interference from a caseworker or the school, because we don’t want word to get out” reiterated her high degree of trust that she could depend on him to not involve anyone else. The statement “We don’t want word to get out” indicates that the teacher can draw upon his social awareness to fill the role of both the caseworker and the school administration, and can transition from theoretical discourse to implementation (shifting from the backseat and taking the initiative to find and implement a solution).

The teacher started his conversation with a general question, creating a relaxed channel of communication between them by asking her “How are you, Huda?.” He did not directly ask about her absence at this point. Huda replied with the generic “Fine, thanks,” maintaining her privacy.

The teacher replied with a response that was at once polite and intelligent, “I was expecting you to participate in the Zoom meetings like your classmates.” His choice of words lends him an air of politeness; instead of asking Huda directly what had happened, he focused on his high expectations of her, thereby sparing her any possible embarrassment and avoiding making her uncomfortable or causing her undue emotional distress. The discourse tool the teacher employed here is known as “softening speech.” The manner in which the teacher posed the question indicates his awareness that language can positively influence how the addressee interacts with the addresser (as we will see later in Huda’s interactions with him). Huda replied “Daddy lost his job because of the pandemic and our internet got cut off,” implying that the family’s economic situation was so difficult that they could not pay the internet bill. On the one hand, she was interacting in the conversation, but on the other hand, she did not confess the real reason she was not attending her online classes, indicating that she did not wish to talk about her mental health situation at that time.

The teacher continued his socio-emotional communication, trying to help her indirectly, saying: “Ok, Huda. I’m going to speak to you every day on the phone to check in on you and fill you in on what your classmates are learning. Try to do the classwork so you understand the subjects and we return to normal.” Since she did not admit the real reason for her absence, and because the teacher stressed his interest in her education, Huda feels reassured and motivated to continue learning. The teacher added “I’ll send you the worksheets with Manal since she lives the closest to you. She will drop off the daily assignments for you. Be sure to wear the mask when you open the door for her. Please let me know if you have any problems.” As we have already noted above, the teacher is practical, implementing steps to solve the problem with Huda’s best interests in mind.

**11.3 Linguistic and Educational Aspects of the Third Dilemma**

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According to Brousseau’s theory, the student’s preconceived notions resulted from mutual and continuous interaction between the teacher and her. This is known as “didactic contract,” a commitment that binds the teacher and the student and stimulates the educational process. In our view, didactic linguistic activity spans many areas, going beyond the typical student-teacher situation in the academic environment and extending to deeper and more vital aspects. The didactic contract seeks to uncover how a group of interactive relationships between the teacher and the student create common denominators that extend beyond the norm. An effective deployment of discourse stemming from such a didactic contract can be seen in the case of the teacher in the third dilemma, Ramy. Here the teacher employed a multifaceted discourse, including intonation, behavior, and word-choice to assert himself as a leader and handle an atypical emergency situation; according to Brousseau and Biaget, the didactic contract has the power to search out innovative solutions (Brousseau, 1995; Biaget, 1975).

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**12. Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study sought to shed light on how teachers handle the educational dilemmas they encounter at work, using discourse analysis to examine their behavior as educators and leaders. It also analyzed their understanding of their roles and the responsibility they took, or failed to take, in responding to moral dilemmas. The dialogues in all three dilemmas analyzed indicated the teachers’ interest in their students’ well-being, as expressed by their linguistic choices. In the first and third texts, the teachers asked about their students’ well-being several times, formulating the same question several times in different ways. These linguistic choices indicate a high degree of professional responsibility for the dilemma, and demonstrate the teachers’ awareness that solving these dilemmas was part of their job as educators. The teacher in the second dilemma, on the other hand, was more reserved and less inquisitive about her student’s personal situation, indicating that she did not feel a professional responsibility to deal with the dilemma.

Furthermore, we noticed a difference in the educational-leadership role played by the three teachers. For instance, the teacher in the first dilemma took control of the situation and assumed responsibility, taking the initiative, and asking questions that investigated what had happened to the student. The teacher in the second dilemma, on the other hand, asserted a lesser degree of leadership and did not take responsibility for solving the dilemma, choosing instead to be a passive observer. On the other hand, the teacher in the third dilemma was the most distinguished in his role as an educator and leader in that he took the most responsibility and initiative, utilizing the student’s family in a plan meant to solve the dilemma. By cooperating with them, he earned the family’s trust and together they were able to help the student. This contrasts with the teacher in the first dilemma, who, although she took the lead, was unable to suggest and implement a practical solution. On the basis of these examples we can posit a relationship between the effective employment of linguistic culture, teachers’ self-perception of their educational-leadership role, and the teachers’ behavior when faced with moral dilemmas and crisis situations. The Coronavirus pandemic, and the challenges of distance learning, have furnished real tests of language and educational leadership in crisis.

Based on the above discussion, we can see that teachers’ perceptions of their educational-leadership roles influences their relationship with their students. Social and professional developments may influence these perceptions and the link between educational environment and educational perceptions consciously and subconsciously influence teacher-student interaction. Thus, a teacher who is also a leader is one who is interested in their students’ expected behavior (that is to say he knows a given student’s typical behavior based on his previous interactions with that student). Thus, as studies have shown, teachers’ expectations and their desire for their students to succeed contribute to student success—such teachers are leaders who help their students overcome obstacles, motivating them to succeed, and providing them with practical solutions to their dilemmas (Brousseau, 1995).

In our opinion, there is a pressing need for additional studies that merge linguistic fields with elements of educational leadership, particularly as regards communication between teachers and students and different educational modes and processes. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) may be applied in many educational stages to ensure well-being and has recently become of interest to education policy makers, especially in light of how rapidly the pandemic has changed educational processes (i.e., face-to-face vs. distance education). Distance education has highlighted the importance of language for mental, emotional, and social communication in an array of educational contexts, as language is perhaps the only effective tool in this form of education.

**Bibliography**

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