

# Counselor and Student at Talk: A Case Study

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*This paper explores ways in which expert and novice roles are constituted and maintained in an academic counseling encounter. By characterizing the counseling meeting as a socializing, problem-solving event and using both functional linguistics and discourse analysis as our methodological tools, we describe how the counselor<sup>1</sup> and the student mark stance through linguistic choices such as polarity, modality, superlatives, and reported speech. We also argue that the practice of withholding is an important means for both participants to create a zone of proximal development for whoever of them is the less expertized and that such a practice plays an important role in the power dynamics of the academic counseling encounter.*

## INTRODUCTION

The notion of asymmetry of power in an expert-novice relationship is crucial to the understanding of socialization, change, and development. This paper aims to examine how, in an academic counseling encounter, both expert and novice gain an important component of power--access to information and analytical inferential skills--through interaction. Using data from an academic counselor-student encounter recorded at a major American university, we examine linguistic constructions such as polarity, modality, and superlatives as well as strategies such as topic control, repair, reported speech, and the practice of withholding personal opinions and personal information, all of which serve to constitute varying degrees of expertise. We also look closely at how the counselor, trained by the university to withhold personal opinions and judgments, attempts to expertize the student in decision making, yet at the same time continually reifies his/her expert status through particular linguistic choices. Our discussion of expert-novice roles

and their constitution and relationship within the counseling encounter is informed by theoretical frameworks of cognitive development introduced by Vygotsky (1978) and developed by Leont'ev (1981), Ochs (1988), Ochs & Schieffelin (1984), Rogoff et al. (1989), and Lave & Wenger (1989). We shall demonstrate the role of language in producing, reproducing, and transforming notions of reality (Vygotsky, 1978, Giddens, 1984) and in constructing the sociocultural practices of a community (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990) by referring to transcribed excerpts from one conversation between a counselor and a student.

The Soviet sociohistorical school founded by Vygotsky and subsequently expanded by Leont'ev has argued persuasively for a situated conception of the learning process, one that integrates individual development within a social and cultural context. This model takes exception to the emphasis in Western learning theory on isolated individual development and instead privileges the role that society has in providing activities and skills which children eventually internalize or "appropriate" (Lave & Wenger, 1989) by participating in joint problem-solving with more skilled partners. It is these partners who bring the intellectual tools of society within the reach of children in a "zone of proximal development," the distance between a learner's actual developmental level and the level of potential development needed for independent problem-solving, by creating opportunities for problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Research in language acquisition and socialization (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Ochs, 1988; Schieffelin, 1990) has demonstrated the importance of social and cultural contexts for cognitive development as individuals are socialized to use language and are socialized through language. This conception of language socialization is compatible with Vygotsky's view that specific tasks are organized in socially structured ways, that mental and physical tools are provided to master the tasks, and that linguistic systems function as the most important tools for influencing the organization and development of thinking.

Both Rogoff et al. (1989) and Lave & Wenger (1989) have offered modifications to the Soviet theories, addressing cross-cultural issues and inherent conflicts in expert-novice relations. Rogoff et al.'s concept of guided participation extends the notion of the zone of proximal development to include the developmental goals and communication styles of cultures other than the Soviet model, which stressed literacy and academic forms of discourse (Rogoff et al., 1989, p. 212). Their comparative study of children

in a Mayan village and in Salt Lake City reveals that the mutual roles played by children and their caregivers rely not only on caregivers' interest in fostering mature roles and skills but also on children's own eagerness to participate in adult activities and to push forward their own development. This dynamic is similar to the counseling session in which the counselor purposefully fosters the mature role of decision-maker in the student. However our study differs from previous socialization studies in that the counseling encounter is not an apprenticeship situation. The counselor does not enable the student to become a competent counselor; instead, the counselor facilitates the process whereby the student becomes an informed and skilled decision maker/problem solver. Thus, when we speak of the expert-novice relationship in the academic counseling encounter, "expert" does not necessarily equate with the counselor, nor "novice" with the student. Both the counselor and the student can be experts, depending on the phase of the interaction and the topic at hand.

This complex distribution of expert-novice roles among the participants in the academic counseling encounter includes interaction dynamics of power and conflict. Lave & Wenger (1989) discuss possible conflicts between expert and novice or "newcomer" and "oldtimer." When participation spaces for experts are limited, for instance, novices' appropriation of expert skills can undermine the experts' security. As Lave & Wenger observe, the classical concept of a zone of proximal development neglects the potentially conflicting goals of the expert and the novice, for experts and novices have different motivations and interests, a situation which creates an asymmetrical power relationship. Such asymmetry of power and status is particularly salient in institutional contexts such as a university academic counseling setting. The structure of any institution is organized so as to allow those in authority the power to pursue defined goals. The university educational system gives academic counselors, for example, the power to interpret the university's rules and requirements and to influence a student's choice of courses and major. However, it is not the case that counselors have complete control over students or that they always act out institutionally predefined roles; nor is it the case that students are totally powerless. In this paper we will highlight the negotiated nature of counselor-student interaction and we will also display it as a sociopolitical, or, as Henley (1977) suggests, a "micropolitical" activity, in the sense that the counseling activity reflects, reproduces and thereby helps sustain power and status relationships.

## THE COUNSELING ENCOUNTER<sup>2</sup>

The academic counseling encounter that we are examining in this paper represents part of a range of academic advising services provided to undergraduate students at the university where the interaction took place. The largest proportion of academic counselors at this university are graduate students from various academic disciplines hired half-time (20 hours per week) who are trained by full-time academic counseling personnel to provide counseling primarily in the areas of "General Education" requirements, choice of major, and graduate and professional schools. Training focuses on university rules and regulations and the tenets of good counseling. Counselors attend training sessions of two to three hours, once per week for ten weeks, and continue to receive more specific training in special sessions held periodically throughout the summer and the academic year. Academic counseling encounters are one-to-one interactions between a counselor and a student. These meetings between counselor and student are held in the university academic counseling center, which is a large office divided by small cubicles. Although it is usually the student who takes the initiative in contacting the counselor by making an appointment, in cases of serious academic difficulty (such as a grade point average falling below 2.0 on a scale of 4.0), the university will notify the student that he or she is required to meet with an academic counselor. Counselors schedule their appointments at half-hour intervals.

Erickson & Shultz (1982) characterize the school counselor as an "institutional gatekeeper," for the counselor has the authority to make decisions and open or close the gates and channels of mobility not only within the school but within the larger society as well. In the university context which we studied, however, the counselor is not empowered to make decisions concerning an individual student's progress within the university. Instead, the counselors are instructed to listen carefully, to resist offering interpretations, attitudes, or personal feelings, to respond in ways which encourage the student to voice his/her difficulties, and then to focus on options and consequences. The counselors are also expected to elicit student goals, to ensure that information is correct, and to refer the student to other campus services when appropriate. Since the counselor is not supposed to make decisions for the student, the encounter must be conducted in such a way that all decisions are turned over to the student. "Telling the student what to

do" is thus explicitly excluded from the characteristic tenets of good counseling. The counselor's practice of withholding the expression of personal opinions and attitudes will be addressed later in this paper.

The typical counseling encounter exhibits the following overall structure: opening, establishing the agenda, clarifying the student's record and problem, supplying "official" information, offering advice, showing compliance or rejection, closure. During each of these phases, both parties display varying expertise on particular relevant issues and on the procedures for conducting the counseling encounter. By having come for academic counseling, the student initially takes on the role of the novice. However, students display expertise in matters concerning their problems. The counselor, on the other hand, initially assumes the role of the expert in addressing academic problems. Nevertheless, as we will show, expertise is constantly negotiated and reconstituted through the participants' talk as the counseling encounter proceeds.

With regard to the counseling encounter as a socializing, problem-solving event, it is observable that the counselor and the student are simultaneously engaged in the following activities: 1) socialization of knowledge regarding the rules and requirements of the university and strategies for maximizing both academic success and social mobility as a result of particular choices of major and future job opportunities; and 2) socialization of knowledge regarding the activity of academic counseling meeting: the counselor is accustomed to a set of conversational routines for characterizing the student in terms of progress and goals and consequently for determining appropriate information to give the student; the student, on the other hand, may or may not be familiar with these patterns of interaction.

## DATA AND TRANSCRIPTION

The segments of transcript discussed in this paper are taken from an audiorecording made by the first author of a counseling session held in October 1990. The academic counselor is a male doctoral candidate in mathematics, in his third year of working as a counselor. The student is a female undergraduate transfer student of junior standing, trying to decide on her major. The reason for the student's coming to talk to the counselor is her desire to know

which particular major will give her the best chance for acceptance to medical school. The entire meeting lasted 22 minutes.

The interaction was transcribed according to conventions developed by Gail Jefferson (Sacks et al., 1974, pp. 731-733). Important transcription symbols used in this study are:

WHA	capital letters indicate emphasis, signalled by pitch or volume
.	falling intonation
,	falling-rising intonation
[ ]	overlapping talk
-	cut-off
=	latching of talk
:	prolonged sound
◦ ◦	superscript degree signs indicate low volume, quiet speech
>	rapid speech
<	slow speech
<<	very rapid speech
(3.0)	numbers in parentheses indicate silences in tenths of seconds
(.)	micropause less than 0.2 of a second
( )	empty parentheses indicate uncertain or unidentifiable talk
-->	turn of analytical focus
(( ))	comments in double parentheses indicate analysts' comments
S:	capital and colon at the beginning of a stretch of talk identifies the speaker; in the following data S is for student, C for counselor

## COUNSELOR AND STUDENT AT TALK

In the analysis, we will show how expert and novice roles are constituted through particular linguistic devices, specifically the use of polarity, modality, superlatives, adverbials of certainty/uncertainty, and discursal devices such as control of topic, repair, and reported speech. These grammatical and discursal structures contribute to the constitution of expert "stance" and novice "stance," which we define as a posture or attitude and which is closely tied to role. Both epistemic (pertaining to relative

knowledge) stance and affective (relating to emotions) stance are important in the constitution of asymmetrical power relationships, but, as was mentioned above, the counselor is under some constraint not to reveal affective stance. Polarity is the choice between positive and negative poles, as in "is"/"isn't" or "do"/"don't." Various kinds of indeterminacy falling in between these positive and negative poles are referred to as modality. Uncertainty can also be expressed through the use of adverbials, and instances of this device will be noted in the analysis. Use of superlative degree will also be examined, as will the use of reported speech, which we define as attribution, by direct quote or paraphrase, of third party speech.

### **Constituting Roles/Stance**

Although the student constitutes herself<sup>3</sup> as a novice by the very act of scheduling a counseling interview, the following segment shows how the counselor and student negotiate their respective roles linguistically in the first few minutes of their meeting. While the counselor controls the initial topic and then classifies the student within the institutional framework, the student does not accept the counselor's initial classification, though she marks her stance as novice by expressing uncertainty and by accepting the counselor's revised version of her identity:

#### **Extract [1]**

- 001 C: So:.  
002 S: All right um so,=  
003 C: =RIght now you are a math major.  
004 S: I AM a math I mean I TRANSferred as  
005 a math major.  
006 C: Ok.  
007 (.)  
008 C: Oh (.) Probably PRE-math.  
009 S: Premath (.) that's right.=  
010 C: =Ok,

As can be seen in extract [1], the counselor first opens the encounter by appearing to invite the student to initiate a topic ("So:.") though his choice of word, the stretched vowel, and falling intonation. Indeed the student interprets it as an invitation to start ("All right um so,"), but the counselor quickly steps in (note the

"latching" of his utterance onto the end of the student's) and begins the topic of the student's academic identity (lines 2-3). Though the student corrects the counselor's categorization of her as a math major, the counselor corrects the student (line 8) and assigns her an identity which conforms to an official university category ("PRE-math"), an identity which the student accepts. The counselor's institutional identity is not discussed, however, by the participants. Thus the counselor is directing the topic and defining roles.

The student, on her part, constitutes herself as a novice by indexing uncertainty in her own talk. Producing her initial correction of the counselor as a self-repair of her own utterance ("I AM a math I mean I TRANSferred as a math major."), the student appears to be correcting herself rather than the counselor (line 4), a strategy which helps to collaborate in the constitution of the counselor's role. Though the counselor mitigates his subsequent correction by using an adverb of uncertainty ("Probably") in "Probably PRE-math," this choice of modifier enhances his expertness by invoking a large body of experience from which he can generalize about a student's official academic identity. The counselor thus demonstrates his ability to make judgments as to the probability of facts which are not explicit, and the student acknowledges that his "educated guess" is correct (line 9). Before the first seven utterances of this encounter are completed, an asymmetrical relationship has already been constituted by the participants.

## Polarity

In extract [2], the counselor uses linguistic polarity to establish the wide range of his expertise:

### Extract [2]

((The student has raised the issue of whether math is a good major for going to medical school in the future.))

- 029 (.3)  
 030 -->C: Uh b't I would say that certainly (.)  
 031 medical school doesn't CARE  
 032 whatjur major IS.  
 033 (.8)  
 034 C: Y=  
 035 S: =Yeah that's what I heard.  
 036 -->C: What they do care is (.2) er did you

- 037 take the appropriate  
038 classes, do you have the: (.) the grades  
039 for appropriate  
040 classes, do you have the overall GPA do  
041 you have letters of recommendation  
042 and so on so on so on.  
043 (.5)  
044 -->C: B't so the the most important thing is  
045 you're going to medical school,  
046 you need to take the classes that're  
047 listed right-  
048 (oops ) talked about this already,  
049 S: Uhum,

The counselor's use of polarity in extract [2], lines 30-31 ("doesn't care") and line 36 ("do care"), serves to cover the widest range of declarative parameters, maximally extending his expertise. Later in the counseling meeting he discriminates between things that do matter and those that don't, as shown in extract [3]:

### Extract [3]

- 717 C: Yeah well, (.3) these're these're  
718 behind the times.  
719 (.2)  
720 C: The petitions=  
721 S: =How much behind?  
722 -->C: It doesn't [matter how much.  
723 S: [I did that I did that like-  
724 C: In SUMmer.  
725 (.)  
726 C: Yea:h.  
727 S: Right.  
728 -->C: It DOESn't matter how much behind the  
729 times. Because what (.2) what's in  
730 your file (.2) uh petition is in your  
731 file in mathematics department (.2)  
732 uh when it comes to graduating they  
733 don't look at this (.) they look at  
734 the files.  
735 (.)  
736 S: Ok, so it doesn't matter?=  
737 C: =So it shud (.) it should be showing

- 738 up in the future. B't (.) it  
 739 MIGHT take (.) a VERY long time,  
 740 S: hhh  
 741 C: B't once you've got the petition  
 742 approved in you file, (.2)  
 743 S: [Yeah,  
 744 C: [ss the problem is solved.

The counselor suggests in extract [3] that what does matter is that the student has the petition in her file and what doesn't matter is that it is not yet posted to her record. That the counselor's knowledge can override the student's printed transcript/record indexes him as expert indeed, since students are accustomed to using transcripts and written records as *prima facie* evidence of completed requirements. The student's follow-up question (line 736) seems to be a request for a second verification of the counselor's information, to which the counselor eventually replies with finality ("the problem is solved") in line 744.

### **Adverbials of Certainty and Use of Superlative Degree**

Returning to extract [2], the counselor's use of an adverbial of certainty ("certainly" in line 30) and superlative degree ("the most important thing is" in line 44) conveys absoluteness and "truth" with authority. Equally notable is that while projecting himself as the expert and the authority, the counselor is also cautious to limit the interpretation of his statements with a modal "would" in "I would say" (line 30), a practice which we will discuss in greater detail shortly in reference to modality.

The student's speech is characterized by significantly fewer instances of such usage, however. She exhibits a hesitancy to use superlatives. For example, when the counselor encourages her to use a superlative in identifying what she would "most likely" major in and what she is "most" interested in, as in extract [4], she does not respond (line 142, line 144). Later in the encounter, when the counselor restates a question about the student's degree of preference and asks the student to say which major she likes "best," she responds "I like both" (extract [5]). After the counselor presses her further, asking why she likes them, she responds that it is because she does well in them. Judging by these responses that the student is unable to determine her own preferences, the counselor advises her to postpone making a decision:

### Extract [4]

138 C: Ummm, (.5) So (.3) what I'd say is  
139 (.2) if (.4) suppose you forget  
140 about medical school completely (.2)  
141--> what would you most likely to major.  
142 (.4)  
143 -->C: What do you find most interesting.  
144 --> (.3)

### Extract [5]

426 (.)  
427 C: Right.  
428 -->S: I like both,  
429 C: =Why-  
430 S: =I do WELL in both.  
431 -->C: Another thing is that you DOn't  
432 have to decide right this minute.  
433 (.3)

In extract [5], the student uses an emphatic "well," but it is applied equally to majors the counselor has asked her to distinguish between.

In addition to an absence of superlatives, the student frequently uses constructions of uncertainty, such as "I am not sure" and "I don't know." Below are a few instances:

024 -->S: Yeah I am NOT sure if that is the  
025 (.2) the RIght thing or no:t.

053 -->S: Y' know, [but I I don't know  
054 C: [Why why is that.

075 -->S: B't I don't know how tou:gh (.)  
076 upper division math classes are  
077 going to get.  
078 -->C: No (hhh) you really don't. An'  
079 you know what, I cannot tell you.  
080 (.2)  
081 C: .hh [Ha ha!  
082 S: [uh ha!  
083 C: Becu:se (.) er: what are (do) you

084           you probably in 32 now?  
 085    S:    I am taking 32A, right.  
 086    C:    Yeah.  
 087           (.)  
 088    C:    Lemme- The way I went through  
 089           a degree in mathematics is  
 090           every (.) ye:ar I did  
 091           I read > descriptions of what I  
 092           was going to be learning the next  
 093           year. I couldn't even understand  
 094           it.< This is- < I don't know what  
 095           his IS!! I mean (I didn't  
 096           understand). hhh An:d (.8) ho:w  
 097           (.4) if y if you're doing well  
 098           in calculus, that's usually a sign  
 099           that you (.) can be doing well  
 100           later. But (.5) as to what your  
 101           interest in what's going  
 102 -->   to be later it's it's really hard  
 103           to tell. If you if you have  
 104           always liked math, you will  
 105           probably like upper division math.  
 106           If you have always done well in  
 107           math, you will probably do well  
 108           in upper division math. But (1.0)  
 109           it's hard for me to tell what  
 110           it's going to be like.

When in lines 78-79, the counselor also displays uncertainty, the result is laughter. His laughter may indicate his discomfort at not being able to provide an answer to the student's indirect question (lines 75-77), or it may indicate that the student's indirect question is really unanswerable, that is, unreasonable. If the latter, this would mean not only that the student cannot distinguish between questions that are unanswerable and those that are but also that the student may thus be acting inappropriately. Perhaps to account for why he cannot supply the information that the student has expressed uncertainty about, the counselor relates a personal story about how he succeeded when he was a student despite not understanding some of the complex descriptions of math courses in the catalogue. The anecdote both reindexes him as more expert (since he obviously has already successfully completed his math degree), while at the same time he suspends speaking in the voice of the institution. In some

sense, however, the anecdote which begins with "I cannot tell you" is an answer to the student's problem: there is no hard and fast conclusion to be drawn from a course description in the catalogue, but students who have done well in lower division math typically do well in upper division courses.

### **Reported Speech**

In this counseling encounter, the student uses reported speech, whereas the counselor speaks for the institution without attribution to specific persons. For example, in the following segment (line 20), the student tells the counselor that Linda, another counselor, has told her that medical schools accept a higher percentage of math majors:

018 S: Ok, (.8) anda when I (.2) when I  
019 was in the orientation, (.)  
020 --> Linda told me that (.2) it's a  
021 LOT better if I am a MATH major,  
022 (.) cu:s er medical schools they  
023 prefer math major people.

Later in the encounter, in line 206, the student again voices what "Linda said" regarding a petition to have a transfer class accepted for credit:

206 -->S: That Linda said we can jus=  
207 C: =should should should accept that.  
208 S: =Right.

In contrast, at line 233, the counselor challenges information provided by the student that is unattributed ("Who told you this?"). Such questions are never asked by the student:

230 (.2)  
231 S: So I have to take (.) 11C (.)  
232 11B 11C and 11CL.  
233 -->C: Ok, so who is this information  
234 (from) who told you this?  
235 S: Chemistry department,  
236 C: Ok, great.  
237 (.)

Unlike the student's use of reported speech, the counselor freely assumes the voice of the institution, whether of the university:

495 (.)  
 496 -->C: .hhh So: we say well fine we  
 497 accept you as say: (.) math major  
 498 we're going to let you graduate  
 499 as a math major. B't don't  
 500 change your major.  
 501 (.2)

or of a hypothetical medical school:

034 S: =Yeah that's what I heard.  
 035 -->C: What they do care is (.2) er did  
 036 you take the appropriate classes,  
 037 Do you have the: (.) the grades for  
 038 appropriate classes, Do you have  
 039 the overall GPA do you have letters  
 040 of recommendation and so on so on  
 041 so on.  
 042 (.5)

## Modality

Various kinds of indeterminacy falling between positive and negative poles are called modality. According to Halliday (1985), the clause, organized as an interactive event involving the speaker and the hearer, relates the proposition to its context in the speech event in two ways. One is by "primary tense" and the other is by "modality." Primary tense refers to time relative to the moment of speaking. A proposition may become arguable by having its relevance to the speech event specified in these temporal terms. Modality indicates the speaker's judgment of the probabilities or obligations in what he/she says; it marks the speaker's stance. A proposition may become arguable by being presented in terms of its probability, frequency, obligation, and inclination. Halliday's temporal and modal operators are listed in Table 1:

TABLE 1  
Temporal and Modal Operators

Temporal Operators		
past	present	future
did, was had, used to	does, is has	will, shall would, should
Modal Operators		
low	median	high
can, may could, might	will, would should, is/was to	must, ought to has/had to, need

(Halliday, 1985, p.75)

An important resource which speakers can use to index expert/novice status, modality can express various degrees of stance which fall on a continuum ranging from low to high values:

probability (possible -> probable -> certain)  
 frequency (sometimes -> usually -> always)  
 obligation (allowed -> supposed -> required)  
 inclination (willing -> eager -> determined)

In extract [6], we will show how both the counselor and the student employ these grammatical constructs in constituting their roles by analyzing the temporal and modal elements in a particular stretch of talk:

**Extract [6]**

288 (.2)  
 289 C: Now y' need I think you need 18  
 290 upper division right?  
 291 (.)  
 292 C: Everybody needs 18 upper division.  
 293 (.)

- 294 C: [The math major  
 295 S: [( )  
 296 C: The math major is 14.  
 297 (1.2)  
 298 C: B't that includes (.2) 7 (.4)  
 299 biology.  
 300 (.5)  
 301 C: So that'll finish your biology  
 302 requirement.  
 303 S: Uhuh.  
 304 C: An' then you need three upper  
 305 division chemistry the organic  
 306 chemistry series.  
 307 S: Ok,  
 308 C: An:d er that's it. I think.  
 309 (.)  
 310 C: So you need plus one-  
 311 <<OH OOH OH!: and you need- how  
 312 much English have you got.  
 313 S: Oh I got=  
 314 C: =English 3 and 4, (.4) Don't  
 315 you need maybe one more?  
 316 (.2)  
 317 S: They didn't say anything?,  
 318 C: Uh UCLA doesn't want it (.) b't  
 319 (.) er medical school wants a  
 320 year English.  
 321 S: Well, isn't that a year English?=  
 322 C: =Oh that's a year becus it's a  
 323 semester school. Ok fine so (.5)  
 324 in (either) case it doesn't  
 325 matter. So then you need  
 326 one upper division elective  
 327 to make it up to (.4) 18.  
 328 (.2)  
 329 S: Ok,  
 330 C: Ok.  
 331 (.3)  
 332 C: So biochem major, °a second°  
 333 S: Also I HAVe to take 18 upper  
 334 division classes anyway=  
 335 C: =NO matter what to graduate (.)  
 336 yeah (.) no matter

337 what.  
338 S: Ummmm.

Table 2 displays the temporal and modal elements used by the participants in extract [6]. Also indicated are the line numbers, speaker, and grammatical subjects of the clauses in which these elements are located:

TABLE 2  
Temporal and Modal Usage

Ln	Sp	Subj	Temporal	Modal
289	C	y' (student)		need
292	C	everybody		needs
294	C	the math major	is	
298	C	that	includes	
301	C	that		will
304	C	you		need
308	C	that	is	
310	C	you		need
311	C	you		need
312	C	you	have	
313	S	I	got	
315	C	you		(don't) need
317	S	they	didn't (say)	
318	C	UCLA	doesn't (want)	
319	C	med school	wants	
321	S	that	is(n't)	
322a	C	that	's	
322b	C	it	's	
324	C	it	doesn't (matter)	
325	C	you		need
333	S	I		have to

Ln = line number

a,b = clauses in the same line

Sp = speaker

Subj. = grammatical subject

C = counselor

S = student

In terms of the counselor's speech, from Table 2 we can see that primary tense is used by the counselor to assess courses already

completed (lines 312, 322) and to clarify the facts concerning the major or the requirement (lines 296, 298, 318-19, 322). (Left unanalyzed are lines 308 and 324-5: "that's it" and "it doesn't matter" are set phrases that carry low semantic values.) Modality is used to both explain requirements that need to be fulfilled (lines 289, 292, 304, 310, 315, and 325) and to explain application of course work toward the requirements (line 301).

On the other hand, the student takes on the role of the listener in this segment. In the few instances when she does provide comments or questions, she uses primary tense in three instances (lines 313, 317, 321) and modality in one instance (line 333). Similar to the counselor's usage, the student uses primary tense to clarify facts concerning the requirements (what she has completed, in lines 313 and 321, and the fact that nobody has reminded her of her deficiency, if any, in line 317) as well as modality to indicate requirements that need to be fulfilled ("I HAVE to take 18 upper division"). What differs between the student's and counselor's usage, however, is that when the student uses modality, the grammatical subject is "I" (line 333); the stance implicated by the modal element is oriented toward the speaker herself, whereas when the counselor uses modals, he is orienting toward the student (lines 289, 304, 310, 315, 325), toward students (line 292), or toward requirements (line 301) in general.

Extract [7] provides more examples of modality employed for other purposes:

### Extract [7]

- 241 (.8)  
 242 -->C: Uhhhh now you need (1.) uh  
 243 3 (.2) your physics. So 8A  
 244 B C.  
 245 (.3)  
 246 S: Mmm.  
 247 -->C: But it COULD mean 3ABC or 6ABC,  
 248 (.2)  
 249 S: Ye:ah. It could have been-  
 250 I was trying to (.) get to 6A,  
 251 b't they clo- the class was  
 252 closed. [So  
 253 C: [Right.  
 254 S: Signed up for 8.

255 -->C: Ok. [you can swi- you can switch.  
256 S: [and I figured it's a lot  
257 harder.  
258 -->S: I can?=  
259 -->C: =Y'know you can take 8A 6B 6C  
260 if you want. That's fine.  
261 [No problem.  
262 S: [Ok. Yeah.  
263 (.)  
264 -->S: I'll probably do that.  
265 C: Though for the math major, (.2)  
266 [talk to Lin-  
267 S: [it's better to ( )  
268 -->C: Becus for many math majors you  
269 need 8A (.) and 8C.  
270 (.5)

In addition to using the modal operator "need" (line 242 and line 268) to explain requirements to be fulfilled, a practice we noted in extract [6], in lines 247, 255, and 259, the counselor provides suggestions/options for the student as to how to satisfy the physics requirement (either by taking Physics 8ABC or 3ABC or 6ABC or by switching between these series). In these three instances, the modal operator "can/could" is employed. Similarly, in lines 258 and 264, the student uses modals ("can" and "I'll") to verify with the counselor what she herself can do to satisfy the requirement and to indicate what she herself will do to satisfy the requirement.

We observe, then, the following general trends in the distribution of temporal versus modal operators in the extracts we have presented:

Primary tense is used by the counselor

- (a) to discuss what course requirements the student has already fulfilled; and
- (b) to present to the student facts regarding the courses.

Modality, on the other hand, is used by the counselor

- (a) to explain applications of already completed courses toward the requirements;
- (b) to tell the student what requirements remain to be completed; and
- (c) to make suggestions on how to satisfy the remaining requirements.

Through the use of primary tense, the counselor presents himself as being neutral and objective when discussing general issues of majors, requirements, and courses the student has already completed. His stance becomes more marked (through the use of modality), however, when he explains to the student what requirements remain to be completed, how the courses apply towards the requirements, and when he makes suggestions as to how the student can satisfy these requirements.

The counselor employs different types of modality to perform different institutional tasks. Modal operators of high value ("need / need to" and one instance of "must") are used to explain what requirements the student has yet to complete. Modals of median value ("will") are used to clarify for the student how her course work applies towards the university requirements. And finally, modals of low value ("can" / "could" and one instance of "might") are used to provide suggestions and options as how to satisfy the requirements. In other words, the counselor marks his stance by alternately ranging from what is certain to what is possible to indicate to the student what is required, what is supposed, and what is allowed in her academic career at the university.

### **The Practice of Withholding**

We have discussed how counselor and novice roles are constituted through specific grammatical choices, as evidenced in the language of the counseling session. But another practice is also at work here. In order to foster the development of the novice's skills in navigating through the university and making decisions about which majors and courses to choose, the counselor has been trained to withhold certain information the student is looking for--personal opinions or expert judgments which the student might appropriate as her decision. This policy of withholding exists because the university has determined that what the novice should appropriate from the counseling encounter is tools for decision making.

In extract [8], the student wants to know what job prospects she has with a math degree:

#### **Extract [8]**

519                    (.2)  
 520    S:    .hhh There's another thing  
 521                    I want to know. What can I  
 522                    DO (.) with a math (.) degree.

- 523 (.)  
524 C: You go to medical school,  
525 ((smiling voice))  
526 S: ((laughter)) I know, (.2)  
527 well (.) suppo:se  
528 [we decide not ( )  
529 C: [suppo:se you decide you're  
530 not going to medical school.  
531 (.2)  
532 C: Uh (.2) >(when students) ask  
533 me the question (.) I usually  
534 give the MOre or less the  
535 same answer.< Eh: (.) what  
536 can you do with ANYthing  
537 (°is my first answer°).  
538 hhha En the second answer  
539 is (.2) y you can sell  
540 yourself y- if y' if if no  
541 graduate school is what  
542 you're interested in, (.)  
543 if you're mainly interested  
544 in say I'm going to TAKE my  
545 math degree and going to  
546 run and LOOK for job.  
547 (.3)

((The counselor then explains that there is no one-to-one correspondence between a major and a career option.))

In extract [8], the counselor first delays his response with a joke (line 524) by repeating what the student stated earlier in the interaction (see extract [7]) and then reframes the question to address it on a less personal level (lines 532-535). By designing his response for a set of students (through the use of "usually" in line 533 and of "more or less the same answer" in lines 534-35) rather than for the specific individual student, the counselor withholds a direct and personal reply to the question and thus socializes the student into the knowledge that majors are not job training and that a career path is larger than an undergraduate degree. By withholding an answer specifically tailored to the student's question about what she can do with a math degree, the counselor avoids addressing the contradiction between institutional goals and individual aspirations. The university, as a social institution, aims to provide a liberal arts

education and, the counselor implies, leaves the students solely responsible for fitting their undergraduate degrees to the demands of the job market (lines 539-40). We see in this interaction, perhaps, a clash between the liberal arts philosophy of the university and the prevalent view in American society that higher education is matched clearly with particular job opportunities.

Sometimes the counselor withholds his personal judgment to reject the whole basis for the student's question. In extract [9], the student is debating the merits of majoring in math as opposed to majoring in microbiology. One of the factors she considers is how difficult upper division math classes are:

### Extract [9]

073 (.6)  
 074 S: B't I don't know how tou:gh (.)  
 075 upper division math classes are  
 076 going to get.  
 077 C: No (hhh) you really don't.  
 078 --> An' you know what, I cannot  
 079 tell you.  
 080 (.2)  
 081 C: [((laughter))  
 082 S: [((laughter))  
 083 C: Becu:se (.) er: what are (do) you  
 084 you probably in 32 now?  
 085 S: I am taking 32A, right.  
 086 C: Yeah.  
 087 (.)  
 088 C: Lemme- The way I went through  
 089 a degree in mathematics is  
 090 every (.) ye:ar I did  
 091 I read > descriptions of what I  
 092 was going to be learning the next  
 093 year. I couldn't even understand  
 094 it.< This is- < I don't know what  
 095 this IS!! I mean (I didn't  
 096 understand). hhh An:d (.8) ho:w  
 097 (.4) if y if you're doing well  
 098 in calculus, that's usually a sign  
 099 that you (.) can be doing well  
 100 later. But (.5) as to what your  
 101 interest in what's going

- 102 --> to be later it's it's really hard  
103 to tell. If you if you have  
104 always liked math, you will  
105 probably like upper division math.  
106 If you have always done well in  
107 math, you will probably do well  
108 in upper division math. But (1.)  
109 it's hard for me to tell what  
110 it's going to be like.  
111 (.5)  
112 S: Uh yeah. Cus I DOn't wanna do  
113 something that I'm gonna be  
114 STUCK with. Y' know,  
115 C: Yeah.

In extract [9], the counselor explicitly tells the student (lines 78-79) that he cannot answer the question she implied in lines 74-76, although, being a much more advanced math major himself and having 2-3 years experience as a counselor, he ought to have (and most likely does have) a feeling for how difficult upper division courses are for the average student. In asking how difficult the courses will be, the student sees level of difficulty as an attribute of a course, while the counselor apparently understands that the difficulty of a course depends on the student's ability in the subject and her prior experience (lines 102-109). By withholding the kind of answer that the student anticipates, the counselor channels her to think along a different line and to adopt a different perspective.

Withholding personal opinion as a strategy is not the exclusive province of the counselor; it is also employed by the student. The student's expertise in the interaction comes from ownership of the personal knowledge of events relevant to the issues being addressed. In extract [10], the student withholds the personal information that she wishes to be a microbiology major until she is reassured by the counselor that any major is acceptable for medical school. Withholding gives her time to be empowered with new information (and perhaps analytical skills) before giving away whatever information she already has:

### **Extract [10]**

- 040 C: B't so the the most important  
041 thing is you're going to medical  
042 school, you need to take the classes

- 043           that're listed right- (oops    )  
 044           talked about this already,  
 045    S:       Uhum,  
 046    C:       Y' know, a year of English,  
 047           ((cough)) a pile of biology,  
 048           a pile of chemistry,  
 049    S:       That's right.  
 050    C:       Yeah all that stuff.  
 051    S:       So ( [    ] )  
 052    C:               [Now THat can fit in any major.  
 053 --> S:    I thought if I (.3) if I become a  
 054           microbiology major that's going to  
 055           be a lot easier for me to get better  
 056           GRA:des.  
 057    C:       Uhuh,  
 058    S:       Y' know, [but I I don't know  
 059    C:               [Why why is that.  
 060    C:       Because y you are better at  
 061           microbiology? Or=  
 062    S:       =Well I am GOOD in biology.  
 063    C:       Uhuh,  
 064    S:       I really li:ke biology.  
 065           [Reading and all that.  
 066    C:       [Great. (.) Great.

It is not until the counselor displays his expertise that the student proffers her own plan. By waiting, she enhances her expertise about formulating reasonable plans. She knows that what she is about to say will not be contradicted by the counselor and will not pre-empt the information he has to offer. Here we see a paradoxical situation in which the student secures her position of expertise with respect to knowledge regarding her own questions and concerns by withholding instead of displaying information. In contrast, the counselor withholds his expert knowledge in judgment and decision-making so as to provide a zone of proximal development and thereby develop expertise in the student and to minimize his responsibility as well as the risk of being challenged in his expertise.

It was noted earlier that in the academic counseling encounter the counselor and the student potentially have conflicting goals and motivations. The counselor's objective, by training, is to listen to students' problems, present and explain university requirements, and provide options. The student, on the other hand, expects

definite answers to questions and solutions to problems. Hence, there is an inherent clash of expectations from the very beginning in any encounter. By withholding personal opinions and judgments (as in extracts [8] and [9]), the counselor, in addition to minimizing personal liability for what he says, is also socializing a different way of thinking. In other words, by not telling the student exactly what she wants to hear, the counselor is providing a zone of proximal development for the student to make decisions and judgments on her own, to be "expertized" and therefore empowered. Reciprocally, by empowering the student, the counselor re-enacts his own position of power and expertise.

## CONCLUSION

We have described the negotiated nature of expert and novice roles in the academic counseling encounter and illustrated how these are continually reproduced in linguistic terms. We have also shown the asymmetry of power inherent in such roles, since the very linguistic means used to index expertise can also index power. The linguistic devices of polarity, modality, and reported speech all serve to constitute an expertise or lack of expertise that reaches beyond the level of the sentence to control the shape of an interaction. The counseling encounter thus reflects, reproduces, and thereby helps sustain power and status relationships. We have also noted the institution's role in constituting the asymmetry of power in the expert-novice relations of the counseling encounter. The university instructs the counselor to withhold from the arena certain elements of his own expertise so that the student can gain expertise in decision-making skills. The flow of information from expert to novice in the academic counseling encounter is thus institutionally constrained, though not in the competitive way described by Lave & Wenger (1989). In this discussion we have focused more on the role of the counselor than on that of the student. As the roles of the counselor and the student are mutually constitutive, it remains to be investigated how the student's role is defined through the reciprocity of linguistic choices.

### Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Elinor Ochs and two *JAL* readers for their careful reading and insightful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Any remaining problems are ours alone.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The academic counselors, themselves graduate students, whom we discuss in this study are called "counseling assistants" in the university where they work, and they are differentiated from full-time counselors whose duties include implementing university rules such as acting upon students' petitions and dismissing students. For the sake of convenience, we have used the title "counselor" to refer to counseling assistants.

<sup>2</sup> The ethnographic descriptions of the counseling setting and counselor training are drawn from the first author's two-year experience as an academic counseling assistant.

<sup>3</sup> In this paper, we use "he/she" in discussions pertaining to counseling encounters in general. We use "he" to refer to the counselor and "she" to refer to the student in the particular counseling session under scrutiny because the actual data are an encounter between a male counselor and a female student.

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