

## ABSTRACT

“Who's got the power?”  
Gaining and granting dominance in conversation

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In many interactions, one speaker will have a tendency to dominate the conversation. In linguistic theory, this notion is called “conversational dominance,” and it describes one speaker’s tendency to control other speakers’ conversational actions during discourse. This thesis observes the conversations of two groups of university-aged friends in order to explore the reality of this conversational dominance, both how it comes into being in an interaction and how it plays out in conversation. Using the Conversation Analysis (CA) approach to linguistic research, this thesis will (1) describe the methodology involved in the CA approach, (2) discuss relevant literature and linguistic theories pertaining to the topics of conversational dominance, alignment, gender, and teasing, and (3) provide transcribed data of the recordings. This project observes existing research along with the recorded data to argue that conversational dominance is not only something that is claimed by a speaker, as prior research has defined it, but instead it is something that is dialogically constructed among participants in conversation.

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"WHO'S GOT THE POWER?"  
GAINING AND GRANTING DOMINANCE IN CONVERSATION

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

dom·i·nance [**dom**-uh-nuh ns] *noun*: the disposition of an individual to assert control in dealing with others

In every group of friends, there are leaders and there are followers. There are introverts and extroverts. There are those who speak often, and those who speak rarely. There are jokers, laughers, and listeners. And finally, there are those who dominate, and those who accommodate. These facets of a speaker's personality are not merely intrinsic, but they also tend to manifest in interactional settings through a speaker's particular words, actions, and general conversational choices. This final distinction, between those who dominate in conversation and those who accommodate to others in conversation, is the one of particular interest in this study.

In many interactions, one speaker will dominate the conversation. In linguistic theory, this notion is called "conversational dominance," and it describes one speaker's tendency to control other speakers' conversational actions during discourse (Itakura, 2001). It is because of this concept that phrases such as "I couldn't get a word in edgewise" have come into existence. This thesis observes the conversations of two groups of university-aged friends in order to explore the reality of this conversational dominance, both how it comes into being in an interaction and how it plays out in conversation.

The second chapter of the thesis introduces relevant research topics that will contribute to the reader's understanding of the analysis presented later in

the paper. This literature discusses general theories of dominance and describes how it has been understood to unfold generally, and specifically in the conversations of men and women. Dominance has been observed most often in mixed-gender groups, and research has created a dichotomy between the conversational styles of men and women. According to Coates (2004) and Tannen (1994), prior research has set up the distinction that men are generally dominant in conversations with women, and women are subsequently suppressed. Furthermore, most researchers have been interested in observing dominance in institutional or formal settings. This research aims to contribute to a greater and broader understanding of dominance by observing it occurring naturally among same-gendered groups of acquaintances and friends.

The third chapter explains the process by which the data in the thesis was collected and analyzed. It introduces a brief history of Conversation Analysis (CA) as well as thoroughly describes the procedure for properly conducting a study using this method. The chapter offers a few critiques to the method, ultimately defending it as a legitimate and empirical process. Finally, the chapter provides a brief description of the participants involved in the current study, involving biographical information necessary to understand their relationships and interactions.

The chapter entitled “Data Analysis” provides multiple transcriptions of the recorded data along with an analysis of each. Two sets of data were used for this analysis, one of four men playing poker (referred to in the paper as POKER) and one of four women playing a version of the board game “Clue” (referred to in the paper as CLUE). This chapter observes both *what* is said in the interactions and *how* it is said in order to draw conclusions about what is

happening among the participants. The analysis aims to observe how conversational dominance is both constructed and used as a resource among males and females, to compare these observations, and to compare them to the previous conclusions that existing research has drawn.

Conversational dominance is not a new topic of discussion, but it has often been viewed in light of the speaker's actions only. Previous research on the subject suggests that dominance is something that is claimed by one speaker through the choices he or she makes in the conversation, such as talking for a long time or interrupting others frequently. These choices can be quantified, counted, and measured. This thesis argues that the dominant speaker's choices only tell half of the story, and that previous research has neglected to take the other participants into account. Through careful observation of the data recordings, it becomes clear that dominance is a dialogically constructed part of conversation, involving the choices of not only the dominant speaker, but of every speaker present for the interaction.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

The current study attempts to describe the construction of conversational dominance within same-gender groups of college students. Many studies have looked at the idea of dominance in both institutional settings and in everyday interaction (Agar, 1985; Adelsward et al., 1987; Zimmerman & West, 1975). This chapter will first explain the general understanding of conversational dominance and how it has been explored in previous research. This chapter will also review the topics of teasing, alignment, gender, and communities of practice as they pertain to the analysis of the data.

The traditional notion of dominance in conversation relies on the idea that conversation is asymmetrical, and that asymmetries in conversation may be caused by “social inequalities” between speakers, such as differences in gender, social status, or different roles such as expert and non-expert, or narrative-teller and listener (Itakura, 2001, p. 1860). Dominance only exists in conversations because it is impossible for a conversation to be entirely symmetrical, according to Itakura (2001).

In most early studies on dominance in every day interactions, dominance is measured by the distribution of various interactional features among speakers. Each of these features is strictly quantifiable, meaning that each can be counted, measured, and compared. These features include overall number of turns taken, frequency of interruptions and overlaps, and amount of topic control (West & Garcia, 1988; West & Zimmerman, 1983). Some studies observe

dominance as a combination of these features, and others look at one in isolation. The majority of studies, however, conclude that the speaker who displays the most quantifiable features of dominance is the dominant speaker, often neglecting other factors that may play into a particular interaction.

Itakura's (2001) study addresses the issue of the relative importance of these various features. He describes conversational dominance as a multi-dimensional construct consisting of sequential, participatory, and quantitative dimensions, all of which must be analyzed in order to determine who is the dominant participant in a particular interaction. Sequential dominance is described as one speaker's tendency to control another speaker(s) actions with respect to the direction of the interaction, similar to topic control. If a speaker initiates a new topic and receives positive responses, he or she is said to have successfully controlled or dominated that particular interaction. Participatory dominance refers to one speaker's ability to restrict the speaking rights of others, mainly through overlap or interruption. For example, a speaker who interrupts another, whether or not he or she is making an attempt to dominate the conversation, violates the "...interrupted speaker's right to maintain and complete the turn" (Itakura, 2001, p. 1868). Quantitative dominance refers to the level of contribution by any given speaker in terms of the number of words spoken by each participant and the length of each participant's turns. For instance, the speaker who produces the most words is said to dominate the conversation in that he or she is restricting the amount of talk another participant can produce and is constraining other participants to play a listener role for a larger amount of time. Aside from mere number of words, length of turn is also a quantitative means of determining dominance. As long as one

speaker is holding the floor, with a personal narrative, for example, other speakers remain limited in speech. According to Itakura, one speaker may or may not dominate in all three dimensions. In varying situations, the three facets may occur dependently or independently of one another. He ultimately concludes that the sequential dimension is the most significant of the three, because "...it is topic that characterizes conversation as a meaningful interaction" (Itakura, 2001, p. 1874). Therefore, he concludes that sequential dominance best quantifies a speaker's contribution to an interaction as a whole.

Itakura (2001) also suggests that the prior ways of determining dominance may be misleading. A speaker who interrupts, for example, may be showing involvement in the other speaker's talk and may not be attempting to control the conversation at all. Therefore, analyzing speech quantitatively must be done in light of the speaker's conversational style, goals, and strategies. This is an important idea that previous researchers often neglected to take into account, focusing solely on what they could quantify.

The problem with Itakura's (2001) study, as well as the hundreds of studies on dominance which preceded it, is that they present dominance as something that is gained by one participant through the conversational choices he or she makes, but often neglect to analyze or take into account what the other participants are doing. The present study attempts to refocus the attention of dominance on not only the dominant speaker, but also on the other participants who are dominated, presenting a theory of dialogically constructed dominance. This theory suggests that dominance is not only *gained* in conversation by one participant, but is also *granted* and even *sustained* by others who are present. Ultimately, dominance relies on both the primary dominant

speaker *and* the other speakers in the conversation to function properly in an interaction.

This is not to say that a dominant speaker's actions in a conversation are irrelevant. On the contrary, a dominant speaker usually emerges in the first place because of certain conversational choices he or she makes. One way that conversational dominance plays out in conversation is through teasing, and both the male and female participants in the current study make use of teasing throughout their interactions. Keltner et al. (2001) define a tease as "...an intentional provocation accompanied by playful off-record markers that together comment on something relevant to the target" (p. 234). This definition takes into account many ambiguities in previous definitions and confines a tease within certain boundaries, namely that it must be intentional, playful, and directed at a specific target. The authors describe that the provocation is almost always either something about the target, the relationship between the teaser and the target, or something of interest to the target. As opposed to joking, teasing requires that the joke be directed at someone present (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997). According to Brenman (1952), "teasing seems to stand somewhere between aggression and love" (p. 265).

Research shows that the three factors to have strong effects on teasing in conversation are social distance, gender, and social power. Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997) observe varying levels of "bite" in teases among groups of varying familiarity. These researchers conclude that higher risk teasing will typically take place among participants who are "intimates," such as close friends or family (p. 280). Lampert and Ervin-Tripp (2006) affirm this claim by explaining that the familiarity of interactants, informality of the setting, and

general disposition of speakers all contribute to an individual's interpretation of a tease as friendly as opposed to aggressive. The effect of gender on teasing has also been widely explored in research. The consensus of many studies is that men's conversational humor tends to manifest in competitive joking, while women's humor is often constructed more collaboratively (Boxer & Cortes Conde, 1997; Hay, 2000). According to Keltner et al. (2001), men, more so than women, assess being teased in a positive light and believe that it signals affiliation to the teaser and to the group as a whole. Keltner et al. (2001) comment on the relationship between social power and teasing. They argue that high-power participants are less dependent on others and are less concerned about how their actions are perceived, and are therefore more likely to tease aggressively. This comes into play in the present study, as the transcribed data show the dominant speakers of each group to tease with greater frequency and to be much more direct with their teases than other participants.

Research has suggested that the successfulness of a tease relies not only on what the speaker says, but also on how it is received by the target and the rest of the group. Voss (1997) says:

I define teasing as humorous taunts. For teasing to be successful, the target must respond in a playful manner...If the target responds in a hostile, impatient, or angry fashion, teasing may escalate to ridicule (pp. 241-242).

For Voss, a tease's successfulness relies entirely on the way the target responds to it, and in order for a tease to be successful, the target must acknowledge the playfulness of the tease. Teasing, if received well, can also contribute to a closer bond between the teaser and the teased. In an interaction between North

American women, Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997) found that a tease which one woman used against another served an ultimate purpose of bonding them closer together. In this interaction, one participant teased another about not drinking hot drinks due to her religious beliefs. While this tease is an outright one that is directed at a quality of the target, it shows that the teaser has “insider knowledge” about the teased, and this knowledge of a past history creates solidarity and a sense of closeness and intimacy between them (p. 285). Furthermore, it is widely accepted among sociolinguistic research that “...shared laughter nurtures group solidarity” (Coates, 2007, p. 29). Teasing is one way to achieve shared laughter, so although one participant may be at the biting end of a tease, group solidarity may still ultimately be achieved through teasing, provided that laughter ensues. This is where dominance relies not only on the actions of the dominant speaker, but also on the rest of the group. By laughing at the dominant speaker’s tease, or by a refusal to laugh, other participants may either affirm or deny the speaker the social power that he or she has attempted to gain.

In addition to dominance and teasing, the present study relies on an understanding of alignment and alliances within group interaction. According to Kangasjarju (1996), a characteristic of multiparty conversation is that participants can “...treat themselves as part of a subgroup within the larger group of conversationalists” (p. 291). These subgroups can become what she describes as an alliance, a group that essentially bands together for a short period of time for a purpose, and then dissolves once its purpose is served. Kangasharju (2002) states that alliances are usually formed after matter-of-fact statements, stance-takings, or proposals that anticipate or allow disagreement.

Kangasharju's research and other research on alignment generally revolve around alignment in disagreement. Alliances are understood to form, for example, between Speakers B, C, and D in an interaction against Speaker A, in which Speakers C and D endorse Speaker B's counterargument to Speaker A's claim. Her research also introduces the idea that these alliances may form based on some sort of understanding of status among the participants. For example, in her 1996 research, she describes that the use of the pronouns "we" and "us" act to create separation between those who work in the Health Center, one alliance, and those who do not. While there is research that discusses alliances in terms of status, there is little research that connects alignment to dominance. One of the aims of this thesis is to show the relationship between dominance and alignment in conversation, arguing that dominance relies on alliances to function properly in a group interaction.

Many studies have observed dominance as a product of issues relating to gender. The relationship between gender and language has been broadly examined and studied, drawing upon evidence from anthropology, psychology, dialectology, discourse analysis, and other similar fields. Because this study observes one male and one female group of participants, it is necessary to review general theories of gender discourse, specifically in relation to the construction of dominance. According to Cheshire and Trudgill (1998), women and men show preferences for differing conversational styles. No research is needed to observe this, as it can be seen in everyday interactions that men and women talk differently. Research shows that women prefer a collaborative speech style in which they support one another's ideas and attempt to emphasize solidarity, and they are more likely to attempt to achieve

these goals with their utterances. Men, on the other hand, prefer a competitive style that stresses their individuality and emphasizes their hierarchal relationships. According to Crawford (2003), gender is a social construct that serves as a way of making sense of certain speakers' interactional choices.

Research in more recent decades has focused increasingly on discourse strategies in same-gender talk, whereas previous research mainly analyzed cross-gender conversations. Mixed-gender research resulted in a generalization that feminine discourse operates under a framework of "oppression" and masculine discourse under a framework of "dominance" (Coates, 2004, p. 125). In other words, research stereotyped men as being dominant in conversation and women as being submissive when observed in mixed-gender interactions. In fact, Lakoff (1975) even termed "women's language" as a speech style that is hesitant, weak, and generally humorless, a very broad generalization that more recent research has disproven time and time again. Although many researchers have made attempts to expose this generalization, there still remains a lack of research on the topic of dominance within same-gender groups, specifically in everyday conversational environments. This lack of research is one source of motivation for the current study.

Beattie (1981) looks at interruptions in a university tutorial setting and found that gender played no role in the differences in interruptions. Instead, status had a significant effect. The higher status individuals tended to interrupt more, while men and women showed no preference for interruptions. This study presents a case against the many others that claim interruption in conversation is a feature guided partially by constructs of gender. Beattie instead introduces the idea that not all discursive actions are performed due to



the gender(s) of the participants. On the contrary, it is important to consider all potential factors when drawing a conclusion, including other qualities of the participants such as their relative status to one another.

Gender is not the only lens under which dominance can be observed. Mills (2003) explains, "...the context and community of practice within which speech takes place is crucial in determining the way that speech will be judged" (p. 194). While gender stereotypes allow certain assumptions to be made about different speakers' utterances, it cannot be assumed that gender is the only contributing factor to why certain things are happening in an interaction. Eckert (2006) draws on the earlier research of Lave and Wenger (1991) to define a community of practice. While Lave and Wenger define it as a basis of a social theory, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) brought it into the sociolinguistic realm. Adjusting the term for linguistic purposes, they determined that a community of practice is not merely a group with shared characteristics, but a group that develops ways of thinking, values, and ways of talking as a group. Their linguistic practices articulate a group identity. According to Eckert, a community of practice can be defined as a collection of people who engage on an ongoing basis in a common endeavor (a book club, a friendship group, a football team, etc.). Communities of practice are important to this research because they suggest that there may be other factors influencing the participants' speech choices other than gender, specifically for these two groups which both exist as communities of practice in the form of college Greek organizations.

Research has characterized conversational dominance as something that can be measured by quantifiable means alone. It places a large emphasis on the

conversational choices of the dominant speaker and generally neglects to observe how the less assertive speakers in the group may be contributing to a dominant speaker's continued control in conversation. Furthermore, dominance has often been observed within cross-gender groups, resulting in the generalization that men are dominant, women are oppressed, and that interruptions, overlap, teasing, and other discourse strategies can be explained by gender. However, this generalization is likely not to fit in interactions among same-gender groups. This thesis aims to contribute to the field of linguistics by providing research on dominance in same-gender groups of college-aged men and women to observe how dominance is constructed, independent of the influence of a cross-gender scenario.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

#### *Introduction to Conversation Analysis*

At its core, conversation analysis is the study of talk. More specifically, it is the study of talk-in-interaction, or "...the talk produced in everyday situations of human interaction" (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008, p. 11). According to Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008), at the time when Conversation Analysis (CA) came on the scene, language was mainly studied for its formal properties such as phonology and syntax, with researchers paying little attention to how it was actually used in real situations. Before conversation gained serious attention of scientific study, it was merely considered mundane. ten Have (1999) recalls that "...the general impression was that ordinary conversation is chaotic and disorderly" (p. 3).

Harold Garfinkel is responsible for a type of research called *ethnomethodology*, which at its foundation represents the idea that "...everyday interaction constitutes a legitimate domain of sociological study" (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008, p. 26). Garfinkel believed that members of society are fully capable of understanding and rationalizing their actions in society. However, Garfinkel encountered a problem with ethnomethodological study: in attempting to take note of what is "seen but unnoticed," researchers were unable to find a method with which they could analytically observe these processes taking place (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008, p. 28). These ideas resonated with Harvey Sacks, a graduate student in Sociology at the University of

Berkeley, who ultimately conceived of a method that would allow for the natural use of language to be observed and analyzed.

Sacks' approach to the analysis of talk-in-interaction came to fruition during the time in which he gained access to recordings of conversations from a Suicide Prevention Center. He listened to employees at the center conversing with anonymous participants on the other end of a phone line. He discovered that callers had subtle ways of avoiding giving their names, such as pretending that they did not hear or repeating what the Prevention Center worker had first said. Through the use of these recordings, Sacks began to capture more details concerning the specific ways the words were produced, especially in relation to the other speakers in the conversation. These details ultimately brought about a system of transcription that allowed for sequential analysis, which studies the ways in which an utterance can be practically analyzed according to its sequential position in the conversation. This sequential analysis lays the initial framework for conversation analysis. In a lecture given by Sacks in 1964, he demonstrates CA's basic analytic strategy: "take what people are doing, that is saying, not-saying, saying something in a particular manner...and try to figure out the kind of problem for which this doing might be a solution" (ten Have, 1999, p. 15). Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008) put it this way: "Principally, [the purpose of Conversation Analysis] is to discover how participants understand and respond to one another in their turns at talk" (p. 12).

Some have deemed CA an unnecessary part of the field, arguing that analyzing "chit-chat" is not nearly as important as analyzing, say, interactions between doctors and patients (ten Have, 1999, p. 28). However, talk in general is one of the most universal aspects of sociality, proving that all interaction

offers some information about societies and cultures. CA brings up and explores socially significant issues, opening up a wide range of topics within sociology and other disciplines. Furthermore, ten Have (1999) defines the purpose of a CA transcription as “to make *what* was said and *how* it was said available for analytic consideration, at first for the analyst who does the transcribing, and later for others, colleagues, and audiences” (p. 33). In other words, the conclusions drawn in studies by CA researchers do not exist for the benefit of the researchers alone, but can be applied to the interactions of many audiences who may come across the findings.

CA is part of a bigger realm of research called Discourse Analysis (DA).

Wood and Kroger (2000) describe discourse analysis this way:

Language is taken to be not simply a tool for description and a medium of communication...but as a social practice, as a way of doing things. It is a central and constitutive feature of social life. The major assumption of discourse analysis is that the phenomena of interest in social and psychological research are constituted in and through discourse (p. 4).

This thesis uses CA in the larger setting of DA. The CA method used with the data is important in understanding the organizational structures of the interactions. However, this thesis also discusses the wider application of these structures to their social implications, which coincides with the goals of more general discourse analysis.

### *Data Collection*

Any CA study begins with talk-in-interaction that can be studied, and it can, and has been observed in a variety of places, from doctor’s offices to business meetings, and from school playgrounds to family dinner tables. The general outline for CA research consists of four distinct phases: “getting or

making recordings of natural interaction, transcribing the tapes (in whole or in part), analyzing selected episodes, and reporting the research” (ten Have, 1999, p. 68). In order to collect video or audio-recorded data, the participants involved must grant the researcher permission.

One crucial aspect of making recordings is that the interactions recorded must be as natural as possible. They should not be provoked or planned, but should occur naturally in everyday life. Obviously, this characteristic of CA limits the types of data that can be recorded. For instance, it may be difficult to record and observe interactions between a store clerk and various shoppers throughout an afternoon, as it would be nearly impossible to gain permission from each speaker while also keeping interaction as natural as possible.

ten Have (1999) notes that CA prefers naturally occurring data to experimental data. This way it is less artificial and can truly be considered talk-in-interaction as opposed to “a product of personal intentions” (p. 9). An important concept in CA research is the idea of “unmotivated looking.” It seems that all looking is motivated, making this concept a difficult one to grasp; all research must be motivated by some desire for knowledge or understanding of a particular type of interaction. This term refers to the necessity that the investigator is open to finding any sort of recurring phenomena, as opposed to having a preconceived notion of what is going to be found and only searching for specific instances of it in the data. ten Have (1999) sums this idea up in saying that “...the generally preferred strategy is to *start* from the data at hand, and not from any preconceived ideas about what the data ‘are’ or ‘represent’” (p. 121). In regards to gathering data, ten Have (1999) quotes Davey and

Andersen (1996), who compare a Conversation Analysis practitioner to a photographer:

It is of paramount importance that the analyst goes about his everyday life like a photographer. Just as the photographer looks at the world through an imaginary camera lens assessing potential shots, so the analyst must look for potential data sources in the world around him (p. 78).

ten Have also points out that in order to study CA, one must have an interest in social behavior and the ability to switch back and forth between a "...level of concrete understanding and one of abstract reasoning" (ten Have, 1999, p. 10).

At the start of a project, a researcher can use any data that can be obtained; as the project becomes more specific, it is acceptable to narrow down either the phenomena being recorded, or the settings in which data is being recorded (ten Have, 1999). In any event, if one particular setting is being analyzed, catching variation in a different setting is useful in order to make comparisons and draw conclusions. That is, in the realm of CA, it is not enough to observe a phenomena occurring once and assume that it is true for all people at all times. The present study takes this limitation into consideration by observing the interactions of not one, but two different groups of friends of different genders.

Analyzing talk-in-interaction is not simply about writing down what is said, but also how it is said. Although this process may seem simple, transcribing data can easily be complicated by factors such as people talking at the same time, laughing, or not articulating well. There is not one specific method for transcription used uniformly by all CA practitioners, but Gail Jefferson is seen to be an authority on the matter, and she developed the conventions that are widely recognized and used (Atkinson, 2006). A list of

transcription notation used in this thesis is listed in the Appendix. To make note of *how* things are said, CA researchers may note vocal inflection, volume, duration of pauses, or overlap of speech in the transcriptions. Generally, anything that displays how the utterance was delivered can be marked in a transcription, especially when it contributes to a greater understanding of the utterance in its context. Transcriptions can be tedious, but they are a crucial part of CA. ten Have (1999) says, "...transcripts are not the 'data' of CA, but rather a convenient way to capture and present the phenomena of interest in written form" (p. 95). The recordings themselves are the data, and the transcripts are a way to display what is interesting in the data to an audience. Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008) say that the transcript is a "representation" of the data, while the recording itself is a "reproduction of a determinate social event" (p. 70). Most conversation analysts create their own transcriptions from the data, as sometimes the transcription process can aid in revealing interesting things about the data at hand. For instance, it may be difficult to notice overlap or volume change when watching a recorded video, but interesting and specifically recurring phenomena become very apparent once they are repeatedly identified.

### *Criticisms of CA*

Because CA is a qualitative research method, it is sometimes accused of being irrelevant in the "real world," that is, the world outside of its social science sphere (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008, p. 182). This criticism can immediately be dismissed in viewing the method's numerous applications. CA is the method used in research that has enhanced understanding of political



rhetoric, human-computer interaction, and language use among children, among countless other varying interactional settings. It can be argued that conversation analysis, when applied, is an extremely effective way to study the “real world” and its everyday, natural happenings.

Another criticism that CA receives is that CA researchers neglect other sources of data aside from the audio and video recordings. ten Have (1986) recalls a time in which he presented his findings on medical consultations to a non-CA audience and was approached with questions as to why he did not use interviews with the participants, case studies, or any other type of data to support his analysis. A CA researcher’s response to this would remind the question-asker of the purpose of CA: to observe that which is happening as talk is occurring between participants. ten Have (1986) explains that in an interview setting or something of the like, a participant may be very tempted to “...present rather partial accounts, putting their actions in a favorable light” (p. 37). CA as a method allows researchers to observe the meanings that are produced and intended at the time of the interaction. Therefore, there is a particular importance of using live recordings for raw data in CA, as opposed to other sources that might skew the original interaction.

### *The Present Study*

The data for this study were taken from two recordings of university-age students. For each conversation, a video camera was set up to be able to see the entirety of the table where the participants are interacting. The camera was set to record and then left to run for an hour as the participants were left to their conversations. All speakers were aware that they were being recorded, of

course, but it seems that after the first few minutes, they become less aware of the recording and conversation becomes quite natural. Both recordings involve four students, and all names have been changed to pseudonyms in order to respect the privacy of those participating. The recordings were transcribed using Gail Jefferson's notation system (Appendix). In my study of each recording, I personally transcribed each individual dialogue analyzed in this paper against the original video to ensure that each transcription is an accurate representation of the original recording.

The first recording that will be looked at in this study will be referred to as the POKER recording. The POKER data involves four male friends named Bert, Stan, Fred, and Mike and was recorded in 2004. These men meet on a weekly basis to play a friendly game of poker. One of these meetings was recorded by another acquaintance of the friend group. The men are all a part of the same band fraternity on campus, and their relationships to one another range in closeness and familiarity. Notably, Stan is the youngest member of the group, which will be significant in the data.

The second recording, referred to as the CLUE data in this study, was recorded in 2013. The CLUE data involves four females, Maddie, Anne, Claire, and Jess. All four women are members of the same Greek sorority on campus and like the men involved in the POKER data, their relationships range in closeness. Two of the women are roommates, and the other two are "big" and "little" in the sorority, meaning that they are in the same sorority "family" and share an especially close relationship. Claire and Jess are meeting for the first time when the recording takes place. In my analysis, I stray slightly from the original methodology of CA, which avoids using background contextual data

unless necessary (ten Have, 1986). For this study, I found an understanding of the basic relationships between the participants to be crucial in interpreting the interactions that take place among them. For example, in one of the dialogues analyzed, the fact that Jess is from another state is used as a subject of a joke. It is important to know this important piece of biographical information in order to fully grasp what the participants are doing with their words. For both recordings, it is relevant to understand which participants at the table are familiar with one another and which participants are new to the group.

I first observed the CLUE data and noticed a recurring phenomenon of teasing throughout the interaction, and more specifically, the relationship between teasing and the participants' varying levels of conversational dominance. Remembering the importance of observing variation in a different setting, I sought out a similar group setting, but of male-only data, retrieving the POKER data from a colleague. After closely reviewing both sets of data, it became evident that one speaker in each recording had a tendency to dominate the conversation in one-way or another, and I was interested in discovering how this dominance was constructed for each group. This is the question that the present study aims to tackle through careful analysis of the data.

### *Summary*

Although Conversation Analysis found its start in the sociological realm, it has quickly expanded and become relevant in a number of other disciplines. A successful CA study involves finding and collecting data, careful transcription of relevant segments of the data, and analyzing both *what* is said and *how* it is said in the interaction. CA relies on “unmotivated looking,” or an

open-minded approach to the data. This thesis uses CA methodology to collect and transcribe data, but also relies on a broader understanding of Discourse Analysis to take what is actually happening in the data and connect it to relevant, real-world implications.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Data Analysis

The traditional view of conversational dominance emphasizes quantifiable measures as a means of determining a dominant speaker. However, this view neglects to observe the more covert ways that dominance is constructed in conversation, namely that it is not only gained, but also granted by less assertive members of a group. The Conversation Analysis (CA) approach allows for the observation of both the overt and covert measures of conversational dominance.

#### *Conversational dominance as “gained”*

According to Itakura (2001) and the research that preceded him, conversational dominance is measured quantitatively and manifests through topic control, overlap and interruption, and contribution in number of words and length of turns. The dominant speaker is the one who displays these features the most frequently. From this perspective, dominance can be identified as something that one speaker claims for him or herself through discursive actions. In other words, one speaker *gains* it. Itakura and the researchers who preceded him assume this viewpoint in describing dominance in terms of the decisions one speaker makes during the course of an interaction.

Of the four females in the CLUE data, one participant, Maddie, quickly emerges as the participant who speaks more frequently than the others and has fewer reservations when it comes to interrupting others at the table. A closer look at the transcript for the data shows that by purely quantifiable means,

Maddie dominates the table. In the first three minutes of the recording, Maddie takes charge at the table by directing the others in the rules of the board game, resulting in a high number of turns for Maddie. Throughout the interaction she continues to speak the most frequently, change the topic the most often, and hold the floor the longest during her speaking turns.

A clearly dominant speaker also emerges in the POKER data. However, the dominant speaker among the men does not follow the same pattern that Maddie does. While Maddie follows a predictable pattern of identifying dominance, Bert, the dominant speaker among the men, has different strategies. Bert obtains his power by remaining quieter. When he does speak, he often speaks directly after another speaker named Stan, evaluating the things Stan says whether by a criticism, correction, or a joke. This pattern of chasing Stan's utterances that Bert establishes implies a "having the last word" mentality that is not unusual for a dominant speaker, specifically in a masculine conversation which invites competitive interactions.

Bert's dominance at the table is also evident in his posture. Picture 1 below displays Bert's position at the table as compared to the other three participants. Note that Bert is sitting furthest to the left at the table.

*Picture 1: Bert claims dominance through his stance*



Early research in nonverbal behavior indicates that participants in conversation will communicate submissiveness by assuming a tenser, more restrained posture and avoiding relaxed positions (Frieze & Ramsey, 1976; Henley, 1977; Mehrabian & Friar, 1969). With these studies in mind, Aries et al. (1983) observed the display of nonverbal dominance through three categories: arms away from the body, open legs, and leaning backward. They conclude that these nonverbal gestures correlated with verbal cues of dominance, such as total time talking, interruptions, and overlaps. A study conducted by Cashdan (1998) finds that for both men and women, open body positions correlated with more dominant participants or participants of higher status. She finds that the stance a participant assumes may either be due to toughness or due to the ease that a participant feels knowing that he or she is highly regarded at the table.

In the CLUE data, the widely accepted measures of dominance work well to determine the dominant speaker. Maddie asserts her dominance through sequential, participatory, and quantitative dimensions (Itakura's dimensions are defined on p. 5 of this thesis). The video and audio-recorded data show that she has a strong tendency to change the topic of conversation and to interrupt other speakers. She also takes the greatest number of turns by a significant amount. Bert presents an interesting case for a dominant speaker because while his gestures and overall posture support that of a typical dominant participant, his verbal actions do not. The measure of dominance prescribed by Itakura does not work well to describe the POKER conversation. Bert is not particularly quick to interrupt, and other men at the table take longer turns and participate in the conversation to an equal, if not greater extent. The

following table shows the speaking turns taken by each participant during a random two-minute time frame.

*Figure 1: Number of speaking turns taken by each participant in 2 minutes*

CLUE		POKER	
Maddie	23	Bert	15
Jess	13	Mike	15
Anne	10	Fred	14
Claire	9	Stan	9

In the CLUE data, Maddie takes significantly more speaking turns than any other speaker, speaking 23 times in two minutes, with Jess following at 13 speaking turns. The POKER data, however, shows that the men speak on a more level playing field. Bert, Fred, and Mike all speak about the same amount within the sampled data. However, an outsider viewing the interaction would easily conclude that Bert is the dominant speaker at the table. In terms of the speakers' actions alone, whether verbal or nonverbal, the data sets at hand do not present a universal explanation for the construction of dominance. Is there, then, a universally applicable way to describe conversational dominance among a group? The data implies that quantitative measures of dominance as defined by Itakura are not always enough to predict dominance.

#### *Conversational dominance as "granted"*

When the focus of the interaction is transferred from the dominant speaker to the remaining speakers in the conversation, both recordings show that dominance may actually be *granted*, or given to the dominant speaker by



the non-dominant speakers. In other words, not only does the speaker make choices that help him or her to claim dominance, but the other participants also allow the construction of dominance to come into being.

The first example, taken from CLUE, shows one participant placing Maddie in an unwarranted position of authority at the table. Before Dialogue 1 begins, Jess, Maddie's friend and roommate, is snacking on a plate of brownies. Anne, a younger friend of Maddie's, brought the brownies as a gift for everyone to share. Jess is seen eating from the plate of brownies throughout the beginning of the recording, periodically commenting on how delicious they are. At a certain point, Jess gives Maddie the plate of brownies to place on a counter positioned behind them, where they would not interfere with the game play happening on the table.

Dialogue 1—*Jess places Maddie in a position of authority* (2013Clue, 9:57)

- |   |        |   |
|---|--------|---|
| 1 | Maddie | Doubles AGAIN look at that                          |
| 2 | Jess   | Actually I really want another bite of that         |
| 3 |        | → ((laughs)) Please? ((looks pleadingly at Maddie)) |
| 4 | Maddie | ((stares at Jess but doesn't move))                 |
| 5 | Anne   | ((reaches for brownie plate))                       |

When Jess decides that she wants another bite from the plate, she pleads with Maddie to allow her to have more. Maddie is in no way manning the plate of brownies, nor do they belong to her, as they were a gift to the table from Anne. However, in line 3, Jess communicates with Maddie that it is now in Maddie's control whether or not Jess is allowed to have another bite from the plate. By asking for permission, she signals that she views Maddie as having a certain amount of control over the actions of others in the group by giving Maddie control over her own personal choices. Maddie, receiving that place of authority, puts it to use by staring blankly at Jess but refusing to reach for the

plate. Ultimately, Anne grabs the plate from the counter and passes it to Jess. In this instance, Maddie's dominance is granted, as Maddie is only able to claim the authority that was given to her through Jess' action.

A dialogue between the men playing poker displays a similar construction of dominance. In Dialogue 2, Fred initiates a new topic of conversation by asking if the other men at the table are planning on attending an upcoming basketball game. Although Fred takes a dominant stance by changing the course of the interaction, he immediately shifts his attention toward Bert's opinions, and the other men at the table quickly align to Bert's views as well.

Dialogue 2—*Fred and Mike value Bert's opinion* (2004Poker, 20:18)

- |    |      |   |
|----|------|---|
| 1  | Fred | → Are y'all gonna (.)                                   |
| 2  |      | → Are <u>you</u> ((looks to Bert)) gonna go to the game |
| 3  |      | tomorrow night?   |
| 4  | Bert | Prolly  |
| 5  | Fred | Are you gonna boo Kenny Taylor?                         |
| 6  | Bert | I'm just gonna boo UT in general                        |
| 7  | Fred | [[Yeah  |
| 8  | Mike | [[Yeah (((laughs))                                      |
| 9  | Bert | [It doesn't really matter who's on their                |
| 10 |      | team I'm just gonna [boo                                |
| 11 | Fred | (((unintelligible)))                                    |
| 12 | Mike | ((unintelligible))-                                     |
| 13 | Bert | Quats (1.0) quats                                       |
| 14 | Mike | → I hate UT   |

The dialogue starts with Fred framing Bert as dominant in lines 1 and 2, as Fred readdresses the focus of his question from the entire group to only Bert. The switch from the pronoun "y'all" to the pronoun "you," along with the redirection of his gaze and focus, indicates that Fred has more concern about whether or not Bert is going to the game than if Mike or Stan have plans to go.

This attention on Bert elevates Bert's status at the table and places his decisions in a position of higher status under which the other participants may then choose to align. After Bert responds, he directs another question to Bert immediately, instead of returning the question to the group. Again, he uses the second person singular pronoun "you" indicating that he is only addressing Bert. In line 6, Bert openly expresses his opinion regarding the UT basketball team, and Mike and Fred affirm his statement by providing the minimal response "yeah" along with laughter. In line 14, Mike aligns under Bert's opinion by stating, "I hate UT," a statement that could have gone unspoken because Mike has already expressed his dislike for UT through the response he gives in line 6. However, by going on record and stating that he hates UT, Mike makes a conscious decision to align with the opinions Bert has put forth. It is interesting to consider, in another situation, if Fred or Mike would be less likely to express their opinions about UT basketball so openly. In this specific interaction, Fred and Mike grant authority to Bert by placing value on his opinions and aligning themselves in agreement with him.

Both Maddie and Bert make their own efforts to gain a dominant position at their respective tables. For Maddie, dominance is claimed through her verbal choices, such as the length and frequency of her turns and her tendency to interrupt, overlap, and control the topic. Bert claims his dominance nonverbally through his posture, the positions of his arms and legs, and his general disposition. Yet, in both sets of data, there is evidence of dominance being granted, resulting in the conclusion that in order for one participant in a group to be dominant, the others must agree to it and make certain choices that

align with that arrangement. Ultimately, Maddie and Bert are dominant due partially to a promotion on the part of the others who are present.

*Conversational dominance as “dialogically constructed”*

Conversational dominance, therefore, is not only something claimed by one speaker, but is often enabled by other participants in an interaction, resulting in a co-construction of dominance that relies on the participants’ alignment with one another. Whether conscious or subconscious, the other speakers look to the dominant speaker for affirmation of their utterances and actions. Furthermore, the non-dominant speakers often align under the views or opinions of the dominant speaker, creating alliances with him or her against other participants. As conversational dominance is gained and granted, the established dominant speaker can use that dominance that has been granted as a tool for achieving various goals. Both the granting and gaining aspects are necessary for the successful construction of dominance in conversation. This thesis will now observe multiple sections of dialogue from both CLUE and POKER, taking note of both what the dominant speaker is doing to gain his or her dominance *and* what the other speakers are doing to simultaneously grant or continue the dominant speaker’s possession of it.

In an interaction among the females, Maddie uses her dominance to determine a course of action for the group, which reinforces her position as the leader. In Dialogue 3, Anne, Claire, and Jess are working together to achieve a collaborative goal. Jess expresses her discontent for her position at the table, and Claire and Anne seek to remedy her situation. However, Jess and Anne

ultimately reinforce Maddie's dominance over the group by surrendering to her desires when she strays from working collaboratively.

Dialogue 3: *Jess and Anne surrender to Maddie* (2013Clue, 2:43)

1	Jess	Not gonna lie because I was sitting on a
2		different side of the board last time I'm really
3		disoriented now
4	Maddie	Oh ok I'm sorry
5	Jess	Well
6	Anne	Should we turn=
7	Claire	=Do you wanna switch? Or we [could
8	Maddie	→ [Well this is how
9		→ I was facing so now I'm gonna be disoriented=
10	Anne	→ =Ok it's fine=
11	Jess	→ =I'll [deal with it (.) I'll deal]
12	Maddie	[Wait do we wanna use the ghost] how do
13		we feel about the ghost

Multiple aspects of this interaction are interesting. First, it is clear that Jess, Anne, and Claire are working cooperatively to ensure that everyone at the table is happy with her position and that no player feels disadvantaged or uncomfortable. After Jess expresses her concern (lines 1-3), Maddie apologizes but does not take immediate action to help. It is as if to say, "I'm sorry you're uncomfortable, but we are not changing anything." Anne and Claire, however, take immediate action to help Jess, making suggestions for how to reorient the board to accommodate Jess' discomfort. Anne and Claire both use the pronoun "we" in their suggestions (lines 6-7), signifying a desire for unity. Claire is even willing to put herself in the disoriented position in order to move Jess to a place where she will feel more at ease (line 7). Maddie stops any potential for reconciliation with her utterance in lines 8-9. She expresses that changing the orientation of the board would result in disorientation for her. Maddie, who took control of the table from the very beginning of the interaction, is asserting

the dominance that she has claimed by boldly making her opinions known to the table.

Instead of continuing to work for solutions, both Anne and Jess immediately drop Jess' wants and oblige Maddie's situation. Just ten seconds earlier, Jess had expressed her desire to change places at the table or to move the positioning of the board, but after Maddie expresses a desire for things to stay the same, Anne says, "Ok it's fine" and Jess responds with, "I'll deal with it, I'll deal." The equal signs (=) in lines 9 and 10 show that Anne immediately says "Ok it's fine," almost as a continuation of Maddie's statement. Both Jess and Anne would rather appease Maddie's wants than argue for their own. Again, Maddie's dominance here is dialogic. She claims it for herself by making a decision that affects the group, but the other females' decision to align with Maddie affirms her position of control.

As soon as Anne and Jess accept to leave the board as-is, Maddie interrupts and attempts to change the topic of conversation by asking how the group feels about using an optional game piece, the ghost. This interruption can be viewed from two different perspectives. On the one hand, Maddie interrupts before Jess has had a chance to express her opinion; she moves on without allowing the opinions of others in the group to be fully heard. According to Itakura (2001), interruption is a signal of dominance that limits and prohibits the speech of others in the group. By interrupting and changing the topic, Maddie is able to keep things the way they previously were. Maddie could be attempting to maintain a continued dominant presence at the table through this interruption.

Maddie's action in lines 9 and 10 could also be viewed as an attempt at solidarity, as she switches from the pronoun "I" to the pronoun "we." Dialogue 3 is reproduced below (as 3a), and each pronoun has been bolded.

*Dialogue 3a: Maddie switches pronouns* (2013Clue, 2:43)

4	Maddie	→ Oh ok <b>I'm</b> sorry
5	Jess	Well
6	Anne	Should <b>we</b> turn=
7	Claire	=Do you wanna switch? Or <b>we</b> [could
8	Maddie	[Well this is how
9		→ <b>I</b> was facing so now <b>I'm</b> gonna be disoriented
10	Anne	Ok it's fine=
11	Jess	=[[I'll deal with it (.) I'll deal]
12	Maddie	→ [[Wait do <b>we</b> wanna use the ghost] how do
13		<b>we</b> feel about the ghost

In lines 4 and 9, Maddie is expressing her personal opinions and wants, evidenced by her use of "I." Anne and Claire, however, both use the pronoun "we," symbolizing a desire for a group mentality. After Anne and Jess align with Maddie's decision, however, Maddie attempts to give value back to the others at the table by involving them in a group decision. In other words, since the group has just obliged Maddie's desires, Maddie wants to give control of a different decision to the other women. In her statement in lines 12-13, Maddie switches from the pronoun "I" to the "we" pronoun that the other three participants have been using. With this switch, she communicates that it is not her choice alone what should be done with the ghost character piece, but a decision that should be made collaboratively. In this circumstance, Maddie uses her dominance to achieve solidarity among the group by including each person in a decision and placing significance on the opinions of others.

These two interpretations are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Whether Maddie's interruption of Jess in line 9 is intentional or not, it still asserts her dominance by limiting the speech of another participant. In this way, Maddie might be gaining dominance through her interruption, while simultaneously making a conscious effort to involve the rest of the group in a decision related to the game.

This dialogue shows that among the females, dominance is both gained and granted. At the beginning of Dialogue 3, Maddie uses her dominance to determine a course of action that she desires. She claims authority at the table by boldly making her desires known and setting the expectation that others will take her wishes into account. However, for Maddie to obtain the outcome she desires, the other women at the table must choose not to argue with her opinions, but to align beneath them. Jess and Anne do this by quickly moving past the issue in order to avoid conflict. Then, Maddie uses the position she has been granted to give value back to Jess, Anne, and Claire, ultimately establishing solidarity through a group decision.

A conversation in POKER describes a scenario in which Bert claims a dominant position for himself, but then has his position affirmed by another participant. Prior to Dialogue 4, Stan, the youngest of the group, reveals that he has a straight, which wins him the hand. Bert, instead of reacting positively to Stan's victory, immediately criticizes his choices in betting to reaffirm his own status at the table. Then, Bert's place of authority over Stan is affirmed when Fred aligns with him to emphasize this competitive relationship.



Dialogue 4: *Fred aligns under Bert against Stan* (2004Poker, 38:00)

1	Bert	→ You bet <u>twenty</u> ? You haven't been <u>betting</u> ? Oh
2		my gosh.
3	Stan	Wh. It was on the flop so=
4	Bert	=so [why (.) that's called the river buddy
5	Stan	[I didn't wanna start betting er not on the
6		flop yeah the river (.) so I didn't wanna start
7		betting high before I had it
8	Bert	((unintelligible))
9	Fred	Yeah don't it teach to him man.
10	Stan	Because
11	Bert	I'm not gonna say anything.
12	Fred	We need to have
13	Bert	You do whatcha want man
14	Fred	→ We need to have one poker b**ch at the table
15	Bert	→ That's true (.) so we can take his money
16	Mike	(3.0) Well (.) I'm about to go ((unintelligible))
17	Bert	It's ok man you got it (.) you got it
18	Mike	I'm good.
19	Bert	→ Your goal is to take the rest of Stan's money.
20	Mike	((unintelligible))
21	Bert	If you can do that in the next half hour you're
22		good (.) I think Stan has enough

After Stan reveals his winning hand, Bert criticizes Stan's choice to bet twenty at the beginning of the hand in lines 1-2. In line 4, Bert corrects Stan and belittles him with the term "buddy," while also showing off his better knowledge of the game. According to Coates (2004), men have a tendency to "play the expert" in order to establish hierarchical relationships (p. 134). Therefore, Bert reaffirms his dominant position at the table by first criticizing Stan and then displaying his own better knowledge of the game, despite having just lost a hand.

This dialogue also contributes to the notion of a dialogic construction of dominance. Fred, who throughout the data has already established an alliance with Bert (see Dialogue 2), advises Bert not to teach Stan any tricks of the game, so that there can always be "one poker b\*\*ch at the table" (line 12). Bert and

Fred continue in this back-and-forth against Stan. Although Bert initially begins the attack against Stan, Fred quickly joins in, once again aligning with Bert and affirming his statements and beliefs, which sustains Bert's dominance at the table. As a result, Bert remains conversationally dominant partly due to the actions of the other participants. Fred's decision to join in on the competitive talk against Stan gives positive face to Bert, or in other words, makes Bert's wants seem more desirable.

A bi-product of this conversation is that Bert successfully creates an ordered hierarchy based on alliances. As the dominant speaker, Bert holds a certain amount of control over the actions of the other three. However, when Fred aligns under Bert, Fred raises his own status of power at the table; when Bert invites Mike into the joke against Stan, he includes Mike in this powerful alliance. Subsequently, both Fred and Mike hold a certain amount of control over Stan, who has now been excluded entirely from an alliance that has been formed among the other three men.

In an interesting way, Stan also contributes to the dialogic construction of dominance, but through his silence. In terms of alliances, it is clear that Bert, Fred, and Mike have formed an alliance against Stan. This dialogue follows Kangasharju's (2002) patterns for alliances (reviewed on pp. 9-10 of this thesis): Bert speaks, Stan responds, then both Fred and Mike align under Bert's stance, and finally, Stan stays silent. Instead of fighting back, turning the tease around to Bert, or even making a statement about his current status as the winner, he remains silent and accepts the position that has been assigned to him at the table. Furthermore, as long as Bert and the other men continue to talk, Stan cannot. According to Itakura (2001), holding control over the table eliminates

another participant's ability to get a word in and contributes to the overall recognition of the one(s) speaking as dominant. In this way, Stan's conversational actions, or lack thereof, sustain Bert's conversational dominance even further.

### *Dominance and teasing*

Research has shown that dominant speakers, or any speaker of higher power, will be more likely to tease (Zjadman, 1995; Keltner et al., 2001). Likewise, a speaker may be able to gain or obtain a more dominant position through a successful tease. Teasing is a face-threatening act (FTA), meaning that it inherently damages the face of the hearer by either opposing his or her desires or being an imposition upon his or her personal life (Brown and Levinson, 1978). However, as reviewed in the literature, the success of a tease also relies on the response of the target. Therefore, scenarios of teasing also support the dialogic construction of dominance, as the speaker, the target, and the third-party hearers must all align to make a tease successful and reinforce the dominance of the teaser.

The dialogic construction of a tease is evident among the females in the CLUE data. Prior to Dialogue 5, Claire mispronounces the name of a Harry Potter character mentioned in the game they are playing, which is a game similar to "Clue," but replaced with Harry Potter characters, classrooms, and spells. Claire and Jess both admit that they are unfamiliar with the Harry Potter series, and this information surprises Maddie.

Dialogue 5: *The females contribute to Maddie's successful tease* (2013Clue, 26:30)

1	Jess	Mm=
2	Claire	=Yeah I haven't either
3	Jess	[[ <i>(inaudible mumbling)</i> ]]
4	Claire	[[That's why I (don't know his) name=
5	Maddie	=oh my go:sh
6		(3.0)
7	Maddie	You people (1.5)
8	Jess	You <u>people</u>
9	Maddie	→ No: taste (.) Nebraska
10	Jess	→ Hey (.) Don't diss the home state=
11	Anne	[[ <i>(laughter)</i> ]]
12	Maddie	→ [[=people in Nebraska do not like [good movies
13	Claire	[Nebraska
14	Maddie	°I don't think so°
15	Jess	We have a healthy appreciation for all [(types of...)
16	Maddie	[special ca:rd
17		Get this one °get it get it get it°

Claire's statement in line 2 is a reference to just earlier in the conversation when Jess says that she "really needs to watch these movies," referring to the Harry Potter series, and Claire says that she has not seen them either. Although it is Claire who earlier mispronounced the name of a character, Maddie directly attacks Jess with a tease in lines 9 and 12, claiming that people from Nebraska, where Jess is from, have no taste in movies. Maddie says nothing to address Claire's lack of knowledge of Harry Potter. This could be for a number of reasons. One possibility is that Jess may pose the biggest threat to Maddie's dominance at the table. Returning to Itakura's (2001) quantifiable means of describing dominance, Claire takes the least number of turns, she rarely interrupts, and she does not often control or change the topic of conversation. In other words, Claire is the least threatening participant to Maddie, so while both Claire and Jess lack knowledge of Harry Potter and

should both receive teases from Maddie, only Jess receives the attack. From this perspective, Maddie is asserting her dominance through this exchange.

Another explanation might be that Maddie and Jess have a closer relationship than do Maddie and Claire. Keltner et al. (2001) speak on the importance of closeness in social distance in order for teases to be interpreted as friendly. Claire, the youngest and newest to the group, may not have established close enough relationships with the other participants yet to a point in which a tease would be appropriate. However, for Maddie and Jess, who are roommates and close friends, a tease could be an appropriate form of talk. It is possible that Maddie only teases Jess because she sees a close enough relationship with her to do so.

Finally, it could be true that it is irrelevant whom Maddie decided to tease, but it is the tease itself that is important. Keltner et al. (2001) argue that social power is related to teasing because higher power participants are less dependent on others for their identity, and therefore tease more aggressively. This claim is certainly true for the interaction in Dialogue 5. Maddie is not covert with her tease; she boldly claims that Jess has no taste and that people from Nebraska do not like good movies. She takes little redressive action, and Jess or any other participant could easily misconstrue this tease as mere insult. It is possible that Maddie's position at the table allows for this type of behavior; because she has taken note of the ways in which others align to her wants, she claims for herself a certain social power that allows for this type of aggressive teasing.

By criticizing something that is inherently a part of Jess, that her family is from Nebraska, Maddie's tease hurts Jess' positive face by making her less

desirable to the group. FTAs are statements that can threaten a speaker or hearer's positive face (i.e., the wish for a participant to be desirable and accepted by others) or negative face (i.e., the desire of a participant to not be imposed upon). According to Zajdman (1995), FTAs that impose on the positive face of the hearer create a greater social power between the two, putting, for example, the teaser in authority over the teased. Therefore, this face-threatening act creates an increase in social power between them, resulting in a reinforcement of Maddie's control. In line 16, Maddie interrupts Jess before Jess can finish her statement of justification. Maddie changes the topic and succeeds in shifting the attention of the table to Anne's current turn, in which she has just drawn one of the "special cards" in the deck. Again, interruption and topic control are signals of a participant's conversational dominance. By the end of the interaction, Maddie has successfully exerted her dominance over Jess through a direct tease and she remains in control in terms of the course of the interaction.

Maddie's tease is only successful because the rest of the group allows it to be so. Although Maddie does the teasing, the dominance Maddie claims as a result is dialogically constructed. In line 15, Jess attempts to defend herself by giving an account that people from Nebraska have a healthy appreciation for all movies. According to Tholander and Aronsson (2004), people create defenses against teases on a continuum from defensive to offensive. Jess's response in line 15 would qualify as an account, or a justification for the tease. She is not fighting back or proactively preventing a future tease, but merely giving a defense for herself. On the continuum, an account appears as the least offensive type of response-work. Jess could have easily retaliated or played along, but

instead she chooses the type of response-work which is the least threatening towards Maddie, the teaser. Jess does not respond in a way that could be construed as offensive by any means. In this way, Jess accepts her position as the target and poses no threat to the dominance that Maddie claims.

Furthermore, Voss (1997) suggests that the success of a tease relies on the target's willingness to accept the tease as a playful interaction. In line 10, Jess responds playfully to the tease in saying, "Don't diss the home state." Teases are potentially face-threatening for the speaker as well, and Maddie faces a risk when teasing that her humor will not be well received. Jess, in her playful acceptance of the statement as a tease and not an insult, affirms Maddie as "successful" in her tease. Finally, this teasing interaction brings up the study by Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997) in which the "insider knowledge" the teaser had on the teased mitigated the effect of the statement and served a unifying purpose. Maddie displays through the tease that she knows something about Jess's personal life that the other two may not know. Jess could receive this tease as an indication of the closeness of their friendship; only Maddie could tease Jess about being from Nebraska because only Maddie knows that information.

Anne and Claire also contribute to the dialogic construction of Maddie's dominance in subtle ways. Anne's response of laughter (line 11) to Maddie and Jess contributes to a friendly environment in which she acknowledges that the interaction is playful rather than harmful. In line 13, Claire repeats Maddie's word, "Nebraska," while chuckling, acknowledging that she perceives the joke as humorous and playful. Because Jess, Anne, and Claire all receive the

interaction in a positive manner, the tease is successful, and any risk Maddie faces of losing her dominant position at the table is avoided.

A tease that Bert puts forth against Stan in the POKER data shows a similar pattern. Teasing often reinforces hierarchical relationships, with the teaser positioned above the target. In Dialogue 6, Bert addresses the group and asks if anyone has ever tried Bud Dry, a type of alcoholic drink. He then capitalizes on an opportunity to tease Stan, the member of the group who has already been excluded from multiple formed alliances throughout the interaction.

Dialogue 6: *Stan stays silent* (2004Poker, 11:14)

- |   |      |   |
|---|------|---|
| 1 | Bert | Why not?  |
| 2 | Mike | Oh [I   |
| 3 | Fred | [Why ask why? =   |
| 4 | Bert | =drink Bud Dry? ((to Fred))                             |
| 5 | Fred | That was before my time                                 |
| 6 | Bert | Anybody ever had Bud Dry?                               |
| 7 |      | ((Bert looks around and all their<br>shake heads "no")) |
| 8 | Bert | → Yeah you probably haven't ((to Stan))                 |
| 9 | Stan | → ((shakes head))                                       |

In response to Bert's question "Anybody ever had Bud Dry?" in line 6, Mike, Fred, and Stan all shake their heads "no," implying that none of them have ever had the drink that Bert is referring to. In line 8, Bert chooses to directly address Stan with his statement, "yeah you probably haven't." This statement follows the Keltner et al. (2001) description of a tease in that it is intentional, playful, and directed at a target. The provocation of this tease attacks an unchangeable characteristic of Stan. Bert is pointing out that because Stan is the youngest member of the group, he probably is not old enough to have ever tried this alcoholic beverage. He is also reinforcing something about



the relationship between the teaser and the target; Bert shows his own masculinity by belittling Stan's. Bert is able to reestablish his superordinate position in the group by directly threatening the face of the weakest (and in this case, youngest) member. Similar to the tease in Dialogue 5, Bert is criticizing an inherent part of Stan's character, his age. Again, this makes Stan generally less desirable to the group by making it more difficult for him to "fit in"; this attack to Stan's face reinforces the difference in power between them and allows Bert to once again assert his dominance over the table.

In this dialogue, Bert succeeds in creating an "in-group" that includes Fred and Mike, but blatantly excludes Stan. By only addressing Stan with his comment in line 8, Bert focuses not the fact that Stan has not tried the drink, but on the broader implication that Stan is the youngest at the table and therefore would be the least experienced. With this action, Bert creates a subgroup, or an alliance, among himself, Mike, and Fred. After the interaction displayed in dialogue 6, Bert, Mike, and Fred continue to talk about alcohol and whether or not it will be allowed on their upcoming retreat. These three participants are continuing their alliance throughout the remainder of this interaction, an alliance that does not include Stan and therefore leaves him on the outskirts of the interaction. By choosing a conversation topic that cannot involve Stan, Bert asserts his position as the conversationally dominant speaker. Dominance revolves around a speaker's control over others' conversational actions during discourse; by forming an alliance and excluding Stan from the topic, he succeeds in limiting Stan's speech throughout the interaction.

Finally, by remaining silent, Stan further grants dominance to Bert. After Bert's tease in line 8, Stan does not respond (line 9) but simply shakes his head.

In terms of the continuum of response work, ignoring or denying a joke is also considered a defensive, as opposed to offensive, strategy. In other words, by remaining silent, Stan does not pose any threat to Bert, and Bert faces no risk of losing face by means of an unsuccessful tease. On the contrary, Stan reinforces and sustains Bert's dominant position. Over the next minute that the men continue to discuss alcohol, Stan remains completely silent. He does not talk again until the topic of conversation shifts back to the poker game almost a minute later. Bert does make conversational choices (i.e., on record teases) that contribute to his conversational dominance, but his dominance is only sustained because Stan accepts the position that has been assigned to him. Again, dominance is simultaneously gained and granted in conversation.

Successful teasing relies much more on the reactions of the speakers than previous research has accounted for. Voss (1997) notes that the success of a tease relies on the response of the target. To take this claim one step further, the teases in both the CLUE and POKER data display evidence that a successful tease can contribute to the maintenance of one speaker's dominance. However, for the teaser to assert his or her dominant position through a tease, the target and the third-party observers must respond positively, or as the POKER data shows, not at all. In CLUE, Jess' playful response, alongside Anne and Claire's interpretations of the joke as harmless, makes Maddie's tease a successful one, and contributes to her dominant presence at the table. In the POKER tease, Stan's silence and acceptance of his status in the group allow for Bert's dominance to continue.

*Both granted and denied?*

If other participants in an interaction can grant dominance to a speaker, can it then also be denied? The idea that dominance is co-constructed between all speakers invites the conclusion that all speakers must collaboratively support and sustain one speaker's conversational dominance. In that case, it is only logical that just as speakers in an interaction have the power to grant dominance to one speaker, a participant in an interaction may also have the power to take dominance away, or deny one speaker from asserting dominance. The denying of dominance is an aspect of dialogic dominance that certainly requires further research and investigation, but dialogue from the CLUE data provides initial support for the idea.

Prior to Dialogue 7, Maddie makes a bad call in the card game they are playing, which would cause her to take a number of cards into her hand and fall behind. When Maddie tries to take it back, Anne does not allow it.

*Dialogue 7: Anne does not concede Maddie's wants (2013Clue, 45:40)*

- |    |        |  |
|----|--------|--|
| 1  | Anne   | You have t- (.) You said it on me                      |
| 2  | Maddie | You said you had one queen? Fine (.) I'll let you have |
| 3  |        | It (.) ((Anne pushes cards toward Maddie) [No I didn-  |
| 4  | Anne   | [Mmm yeah  |
| 5  |        | you called it  |
| 6  | Maddie | I didn't call it                                       |
| 7  | Anne   | → Well actually you did                                |
| 8  | Maddie | Well I don't <u>think so</u> anymore                   |
| 9  | Jess   | [((laughter))  |
| 10 | Anne   | → [[well we have it on (.) video so                    |
| 11 | Maddie | KINGS (.) FOUR of them                                 |
| 12 | Anne   | Oh my gosh   |

In line 1, Anne asserts that Maddie has to take the cards from the pile because she made a bad call. In line 2, Maddie attempts to review what had happened

previously and changes her mind, telling Anne, "Fine. I'll let you have it." Anne pushes the cards towards Maddie, and Maddie starts to deny having to take the cards, but in line 4, Anne interrupts her. In this case, Anne's interruption makes her the dominant presence at the table. Furthermore, the back-and-forth between lines 6 and 10 show that Anne will not allow Maddie to have her way this time. In Dialogue 2, Maddie expressed her wants to the group, and Anne and Jess both affirmed her by dropping their own desires to affirm Maddie's. In this dialogue, however, Maddie makes her wants known, but Anne does not concede. In this particular dialogue, it seems that Anne does not cooperate in the dialogic construction of Maddie's dominance, and therefore, Maddie's attempt at dominance is denied.

#### *A note on gender and dominance*

This research shows that the "gaining" and "granting" of dominance in conversation occurs independently of the participants' genders. However, it is important to keep gender in mind when evaluating an interaction. For example, research has shown that men have a tendency to create hierarchies in groups, and talk among men is often more competitive than collaborative. According to Cheshire and Trudgill (1988), men prefer a style of interaction that stresses their individual personalities and emphasizes hierarchical relationships. This claim makes sense when reviewing Dialogue 4, in which Bert's assertion of dominance comes in the form of emphasizing his hierarchical status above Stan. While knowledge of gender discourse can offer insight into the analysis of an interaction, it ultimately does not have an effect on the construction of dominance in this study.

Furthermore, teasing is evident in the groups of both genders, although research claims that women avoid this type of talk and that it is a generally masculine tendency. The way in which Bert teases, therefore, cannot only be accounted for by his gender, because Maddie displays a similarly direct style of teasing. Therefore, assertion of conversational dominance through teasing is not based on gender, but based on other factors, as previously discussed.

Dominance is not entirely aligned with gender issues, as it has been previously argued. Research has stereotyped men as being dominant in conversation and women as being submissive when observed in cross-gender interactions. But it is not simply that women are passive in conversation, and men are dominant, specifically in the current data, which are made up of same-gendered groups of participants. Even when isolated into same-gender groups, one speaker emerges as dominant, regardless of gender. This research suggests that the tendency of group interaction to align underneath one speaker is not gender-biased. It may, on some level, be a fundamental tendency of group interaction to put one person “in charge.” Dominance is constructed dialogically for both groups, regardless of gender.

### *Summary*

Clearly, the construction and usage of conversational dominance in interactions is not as cookie-cutter as some theories have implied. While dominance is something that can be claimed by a speaker through his or her conversational choices, the POKER data reveals that the dominant speaker in an interaction will not necessarily always speak the most, interrupt the most, or do anything else that an observer would immediately deem “dominant” in

conversation. Both recordings introduce the idea that dominance is dialogically constructed. When a speaker's dominance is co-constructed with other participants, it implies that a speaker is only granted control over a group that has already agreed to that arrangement.

Dialogues 1 and 2 display how dominance can also be granted in conversation. In both of these dialogues, Maddie and Bert did not do anything in particular to put themselves in dominant positions, but they were placed there by less assertive members of the group. Dialogues 3 and 4 show what this thesis defines as the dialogic construction of dominance, that dominance most often is simultaneously gained and granted during an interaction. In dialogues 5 and 6, dominance was co-constructed through teasing.

Ultimately, it seems that dominance is cyclical in nature. One participant may gain dominance through his or her actions, but it is also granted and sustained by other members of the group. The affirmation of other participants is what allows dominant speakers to continue making certain conversational choices that reinforce their dominance.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion

Although research has presented conversational dominance as something that participants claim for themselves, this research shows that dominance is dialogically constructed among participants in conversation. Therefore, dominance is not simply claimed by one speaker, and it is not simply given by the other speakers. Dominance is a construct of conversation that involves all speakers and is both gained and granted at all points.

Both the CLUE and POKER data display dominance as something that is gained through a particular speaker's choices. Maddie's dominance was visible through purely quantifiable means, as previous researchers had defined, such as her frequency of turns, interruptions, and topic control. Bert's choices in posture, and his general use of nonverbal communication, establish him as dominant as well. However, Bert's verbal actions do not align with the general understanding of what a "dominant" participant does in conversation, and the POKER data shows, through Bert, that the dominant speaker will not always be the most active participant. Therefore, the quantifiable means of determining dominance are not enough to explain the way in which dominance actually plays out in conversation.

This thesis supports a modification of dominance theory that involves the acknowledgement of the other speakers' actions throughout the course of a conversation. Even Itakura's dimensions of dominance rely on the other speakers' submission to the dominant speaker. For example, a speaker who

takes exceptionally long turns is seen to be dominant, but the speaker is only allowed to continue such a long turn because the other speakers present are choosing not to interrupt. Similarly, a speaker who changes the topic of conversation is seen as dominant, but in order for topic change to be successful, the other speakers must allow this new topic.

The quality that the two data sets share is dominance indicated through alignment. Alignment has not previously been associated with dominance in research, but this data shows a clear correlation between the two. Both sets of data show the recurring phenomenon that participants in an interaction will naturally align under the ideas and actions of the dominant speaker, for one reason or another. Ultimately, it may be so that the males and females in the data align under Maddie and Bert's dominance in order to maintain solidarity or enforce a group identity. Imagine, if one participant decided not to align with Maddie or Bert, it might "rock the boat" in the group and result in an inharmonious group mentality. In this way, one participant's dominance is reassured and reinforced by other participants for the ultimate goal of a maintaining a collaborative environment. When order exists in a group and every participant understands the arrangement of power, the group may ultimately be a more cohesive one.

It is important to keep in mind that these conclusions only apply to the data sets at hand, and given additional sets of data, these theories might require modification. The conclusions of this research are limited to the POKER and CLUE data, both of which are low-pressure, informal conversational settings. Additional research may explore whether dominance is co-constructed in a more formal setting, such as a business meeting, or a police interrogation. It is



also reasonable to assume that certain manifestations of dominance, such as teasing, would be more characteristic of an informal setting than it would be in another context. Therefore, conversational dominance will not always look the same for all people. However, even if only applicable to the POKER and the CLUE data, this research still offers an addition to the understood method of measuring dominance.

The two dominant speakers in these recordings ultimately reach similar goals of dominance, and they achieve these goals in some of the same ways. The conclusion of this research is that the existing notion that there is a gender divide separating how men and women will do dominance might not be the best perspective. It is not a gender divide, but an issue of personality and group identity. Returning to the concept of a community of practice, it can be said that it is not Bert's masculinity that allows him to assert a certain control over the group. Instead, his personality and the relationships he chooses to maintain, or sometimes rebuff, contribute to the way he behaves. The same conclusion can be drawn for Maddie, whose personality and closeness to the other women at the table allow her to respond to them in particular ways.

So, who's got the power? The power in a conversation does not only rest with the most dominant speaker. In a sense, the dominant speaker relies entirely on the others present in order to keep his or her dominance in tact, leaving some of the power in the hands of the less-dominant speakers. Ultimately, the power to dominate a conversation is shared between every participant involved. While a seemingly dominant speaker may appear to claim a certain power or control over a group, this research makes it evident that power is granted and sustained by the actions of the others who are

present. The non-dominant speakers in an interaction have the power to give or take away dominance from a speaker at any given time as they please.

An understanding of the construction of dominance in conversation may contribute to better interactions in a particular community of practice, specifically among friends. A group that cooperatively aligns under a dominant speaker might experience less conflict. A dominant speaker who uses his or her power to the advantage of the group might experience more group solidarity. No matter the circumstance, a deeper understanding of conversational dominance may ultimately contribute to more cohesive group interactions.

## APPENDIX

## *Jefferson Transcript Notation*

Symbol	Example	Use
[text]	S1: Did [he go? S2: What [are you talking about	Indicates the starting/ending points of overlapping speech
=	S1: Did he go?= S2: =What are you talking about	Latching; one word or turn occurs directly after another (no overlap)
(# of seconds)	Yeah. (3.0) What do you think?	A number in parenthesis indicates the time, in seconds, of pause in speech
(.)	Did (.) did he go?	A brief pause in speech, less than .5 seconds
-	What are you ta-	Word is cut off (could be due to interruption)
:	No wa:y	Elongated sound
°word°	°Did he go?°	Quiet/whispering
<u>Word</u>	What are you <u>talking</u> about?	Speaker emphasizes underlined portion
ALL CAPS	WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?	Loud/yelling/raised voice
(words)	What are you (talking about)	Transcriber's doubt; A guess at what may have been said
((words))	Did he go? ((laughter))	Representing something difficult to write phonemically, i.e. laughter, nonverbal communication, movement

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