A Study on Power Relations in Succession

A Conversation Analysis Approach to the Study of Power

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Södertörn University | Institution of Culture and Education
Bachelor’s essay 15 credits
English | Autumn semester 2020
Abstract

This study investigates how power relations are organised in conversation between two sets of characters from the HBO-series *Succession*. The aim has been to analyse how power can be exercised, shifted or struggled over in conversation. The main method has been conversation analysis; particularly Hutchby’s methods and concepts (2013) have been applied both for this study’s use of the concept of power and for this study’s understanding of argumentative structures and Action-Opposition sequences in conversation. There has also been a significant focus on swearing, especially with the first research question, where the instances of swearing were analysed in terms of their function and type and whether they contributed to a shift in power relations. The study found asymmetrical relations of power with both sets of characters and that one can use the conversational possibilities at one’s disposal to exercise, resist or shift the power that is omnipresent in all contexts. The findings supported the theory that the second position in an argumentative structure generally has more power. However, the findings also suggested ways in which this can be avoided, for example by using the practical implications of one’s statement in particular contexts to overpower the opposition or to selectively choose which counter statements or questions to respond to to control the outcome of the conversation.

KEYWORDS: Conversation analysis, power, swearing, Succession, power relations, argument structure.
Table of contents

1. INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 1
2. LITERATURE REVIEW ........................................................................................................ 4
   2.1 Background: Conversation analysis and power ......................................................... 4
   2.2 Background: Action-Opposition sequences .............................................................. 6
   2.3 Background: Swearing ............................................................................................... 7
   2.4 Relevant and similar studies .................................................................................... 8
3. MATERIAL AND METHODS ............................................................................................... 10
   3.1 Source of data ............................................................................................................. 10
   3.2 Conversation analysis method .................................................................................. 11
   3.3 Swearing analysis method ......................................................................................... 12
4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION ........................................................................................... 13
   4.1 Research question number one: Logan and Kendall ............................................... 13
   4.2 Research question number two: Shiv and Tom ......................................................... 19
5. CONCLUSION .................................................................................................................... 25
REFERENCES ......................................................................................................................... 28
APPENDIX 1 ............................................................................................................................ 29
APPENDIX 2 ............................................................................................................................ 30
1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of power is a highly debated topic within the field of applied linguistics. However, most discussions and research on the power of language deal with generalizable conclusions and power as an abstract factual characteristic of language. What is often missing is the power of language found in specific instances and particular segments of language, i.e., a concretisation of the exertion of power through language.

The aim of this essay is to analyse power relations in the HBO-series *Succession* to investigate how exertion of power can be organised and realised in conversation. The scope of the investigation is to analyse not how language is powerful, but how language can be used in conversation to exert power and establish power relations. A conversation analysis approach to the topic of the power of language is worth pursuing because it often gets overshadowed by discussions of general qualities of language, while a CA-approach concretises the topic of power of language by focusing on linguistic power exertion in practice. An example of a general discussion of the quality of power within language is how Bourdieu discusses power (1991). Although he uses concrete examples, like how one’s language reflects one’s relational position in a social space in terms of for example swearing, dialects or speaking a language which can also be written, his findings are qualities of language and he does not investigate power exertion in conversational practice. This is an example of a theoretical discussion which often overshadows the study of the power of language in practice.

The definition and understanding of power which will be used in this essay is based on Foucault’s model but adapted and concretised for a CA-approach by Hutchby. Generally, power is not viewed as a zero-sum game in which a finite amount of social power gets distributed between agents and groupings. Rather, power is viewed as a set of omnipresent potentials that can be varyingly exercised, resisted, shifted around and struggled over by social agents. Power is practice exercised within a relational network, equally inclusive of those who exercise it and those who accept or resist it, rather than power being possessed by an agent or collectively and lacked by others. The relational network is consequently seen as a structure of possibilities, rather than a concrete relationship between determinate social entities (Foucault 1977; Hutchby 2013:114-115).

The main difference between Hutchby’s and Foucault’s views on power lies in the level of empiricability. Foucault’s work is often discussed at particularly broad theoretical levels, as he argues that certain discourses, or certain modes of reasoning and rhetoric embody and
reproduce power relationships within society. His interest in the form and function of the manifold discourses by which we understand and make sense of the world, ourselves and others leads his research toward the larger spans of history traced in archived documents. Hutchby, on the other hand, focuses on the sequential micro details of interaction, particularly arguments in order to illustrate the idea that power is a phenomenon brought into play through discourses, using the possibilities at one’s disposal (Hutchby 2013:115).

The HBO-series *Succession* revolves around a dysfunctional family that owns a global multimedia and hospitality company, where the health concerns of the hierarchical head, the father, creates uncertainty among the family members, who start fighting for control of the empire. Due to the dysfunctionality of the family and the nature of big-business ethics and tactics, language is used to exert concrete power and gain control over family members and other businessmen- and women.

This study will focus on two sets of characters and their respective relations of power. The first relationship to be analysed is that between Logan and Kendall. Logan is the head of the company and the patriarch of the entire family, which generally awards him the highest status and authority both within the company and within the family. Kendall is the second oldest of Logan’s four children but the oldest one working with the family company and is therefore poised to take over the company, which he believes is the right course of action due to Logan’s health concerns. These circumstances create a conflict of power not just in workplace settings, but also in personal settings.

The second relationship to be analysed is that between Shiv and Tom. Shiv is Logan’s only daughter and youngest child who is technically not involved with the company but spends a lot of time at the office with her siblings and father discussing the business and tactics, giving her influential power. Tom is Shiv’s fiancé, a highly valued member of the company but not related by blood to any members of the family. These circumstances create an unbalanced relation power, since the potentials of Tom’s career, whether they are positive or negative, are highly influenced by his relation to Shiv, a core family member and influential party to the CEO.

What one can see then is that *Succession* provides ample opportunities for analysing power and language due to the complicated combinations of group membership, practical possibilities at one’s disposal and natural hierarchies within families. While these relational and professional variables contribute to the conflicts of power greatly and are important to
understand the full scope of the power relations at hand, they cannot be addressed in depth in the analysis, due to the limited scope of the essay. The intersectionality of different types of relationships between Logan and Kendall and the gendered language between Shiv and Tom could be the target of a deeper analysis, but this essay will focus primarily on Hutchby’s conversation analysis framework. To summarise, the data will be discussed in relevance to the interpersonal/familial and personal/professional relationships when the critical dynamics of the dyads chosen needs to be explained and referenced to in order to fully grasp that power has significance in the conversations chosen.

The research questions are as follows:

1. How do Logan, the patriarch, and Kendall, the poised successor, use language to exert power in their interactions and what does their relation of power look like?

2. How do Shiv, the influential family member, and Tom, the family outsider, use language to exert power in their interactions and what does their relation of power look like?

To answer the research questions, two excerpts, one per research question, from transcripts of the tenth episode of the first season of Succession will be analysed. The primary method of analysis will be conversation analysis. Specifically, the data will be analysed in terms of 1) attempts of gaining power and control of the conversation’s structure and outcome and 2) swearing.

It is hypothesised that the results of this study will suggest that power can be exerted, shifted around and struggled over by using the conversational possibilities and options at one’s disposal, accordingly with Foucault and Hutchby’s understanding of power. It is also hypothesised that the results of the analysis will support Hutchby’s theories regarding Action-Opposition sequences and the hierarchical positions of the roles taken within those sequences. Furthermore, it is hypothesised that the results of this study will argue for the legitimacy of using conversation analysis when studying and analysing language and power.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Background: Conversation analysis and power

At the heart of CA lies the concept of turns, which can be analysed in terms of three dimensions: the sequential, inferential and temporal order. The sequential order of turn-taking concerns how it is organized, how participants accomplish orderly (or disorderly) turn taking and what systematic resources that have been used for said accomplishment (Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008:41). The inferential order or turn-taking concerns how the participants actively analyse and understand the ongoing production of talk and the action that the prior turn has been designed to do. In other words, the inferential order concerns the cultural and interpretative resources that participants rely on to understand one another. The field of CA has a shared consensus on the idea that the sequential and inferential order are two sides of the same coin, since participants can utilize the sequential ordering of a turn, i.e its place in an unfolding sequence, as an interpretative resource to determine the action of the turn and to understand one another (Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008:42). The temporal order of turn-taking concerns how talk is produced in time, in a series of ‘turn constructional units’ out of which turns themselves are constructed. While turns act as vehicles for actions, conversational structures are the crux of the interplay between these three dimensions (Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008:42). This interplay can be discussed in multiple areas, one of which is particularly relevant to this essay: adjacency pairs and preference structures.

Certain classes of utterances come in conventional pairs, like questions and answers, invitations and acceptances/declinations or greetings and return-greetings. These pairs of utterances are ordered, in the sense that there is a recognizable difference between first parts and second parts of the pairs. Additionally, the first part of an adjacency pair is usually recognized to allow follow-up only by a specific range of responses. Ideally, these pairs occur next to each other, but they can also be broken up by insertions, where the insertions function as a second pair part in an adjacency pair sequence. Insertions usually occur in relation to the first part of the adjacency pair, and the outcome of the insertion pair affects the second part of the adjacency pair without it losing relevance, despite not happening in the following serial turn of the initiated adjacency pair (Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008:42-43).

An inferential aspect of adjacency pairs is that of preference structures, which stems from the fact that the first parts of pairs are recognized to be followed by certain relevant actions in the second part. However, research has shown that the production of acceptances, grantings
and agreements are systematically non-equivalent with their negative counterparts. The systematic differences of their production are described in terms of preference organisation, where the format for agreement is called a preferred turn shape and the format for disagreement is called the dispreferred turn shape. For example, the phrase ‘isn’t it?’ might be added to an assessment, not only making that turn the first part of an adjacency pair, but also, giving the speaker’s assessment a preferred second part by specifically inviting the recipient’s agreement (Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008:46-47).

Many studies on institutional discourse often begin with the assumption that institutional settings involve forms of interaction and relations of institutionalised power that are structurally asymmetrical, unlike the ideally equal nature of participation in everyday conversation. This dichotomy has recently been recognised to run the risk of both oversimplifying the nature of asymmetry and overlooking the multiple ways in which participation in conversation itself may be asymmetric (Hutchby 2013:16). Everyday conversations can be described like this:

… everyday conversations can involve various asymmetries that are consequential for their courses and outcomes. These include asymmetries between the initiator of an action and its respondent, between participants’ respective states of knowledge, as well as asymmetries in conventional rights to certain kinds of knowledge invoked in conversation. (Linell and Luckmann 1991)

Furthermore, an extensive amount of research considers these kinds of asymmetries to be unproblematically related to the participant’s institutional identities. The claim is often made that institutions are characterized by hierarchical relations of power between the institutional positions and consequently, that agents might act so as to exercise the power that is bound to their institutional role. CA distances itself from this idea and conversation analysts generally agree upon a less theoretical understanding of asymmetry and power, which instead are seen as oriented to institutional features of context, and produced by actual talk, rather than being predetermined by a theoretical establishment of context. Therefore, since a good amount of CA can be seen as dealing with a possible analysis of power, power is understood in terms of differential distributions of discursive resources (Hutchby 2013:17).
To summarise, these concepts and theories are relevant because they suggest that conversational and discursive resources can affect the relations of power at hand. Hutchby’s definition and understanding of power suggests adjacency pairs and preference structures and similar key phenomena within conversation analysis to be potential discursive resources to be used for establishing power.

2.2 Background: Action-Opposition sequences

An Action-Opposition sequence is when an arguable statement is made and met with a statement that challenges or questions the first statement thereby starting an argument (Hutchby 2013:22). The challenging of the initial arguable statement means to take the second position in an Action-Opposition sequence, and this allows for dismantling or discrediting the initial statement without even having to come up with a counterstatement (Hutchby 2013:50). In other words, the role of the second position generally has more power compared to the first position (Hutchby 2013:48). Talk radio is designed in such a way that the second position is almost exclusively taken by the host, thus granting the host even more control of the program, making Action-Opposition sequences especially applicable for talk radio. However, the Action-Opposition sequence and the asymmetry between first and second positions are ideas which are applicable for a lot of argumentative structures. One must the extent to which these findings can be generalised or applicable in all conversational contexts vary due to the structural nature of talk radio.

Those who go first are generally in a weaker position in an Action-Opposition sequence because the latter can argue with the former’s position without an opinion of their own. This is because the first position requires putting one’s opinion on the line and arguing for it, while the second position can choose to challenge the first position by simply taking it apart. Therefore, first and second positions are open to competition and speakers often try to systematically avoid taking the first position or maneuver the other speaker into taking the first position (Sacks 1992; Hutchby 2013:48). An example of this would be the phrase “isn’t it?”, which can be added onto an initial statement or opinion, thus turning it into a question with a preferred confirmation of the initial statement. An agreement from the second speaker would make them explicitly take an official stance on a matter and therefore, also take the first position which puts them in a more vulnerable position despite speaking second.
Hutchby explains three common devices for starting an Action-Opposition sequence, which simultaneously puts the speaker in the second and generally weaker position, including **validity challenges**, **formulating** and the **‘You say (X)’ device**. Validity challenges are phrases like ‘So?’ or ‘What does that have to do with this?’ which oppose the claim on the grounds of its relevance, and therefore, completely undermine the claim’s value unless explained and argued for (Hutchby 2013:50).

Formulating is when the second position tries to selectively formulate, summarise or develop the gist of the first position’s statements to establish control over the conversation (Hutchby 2013:53).

The ‘You say (X)’ device can be argued to be a construction, where the general lexical form is ‘You say (X) but what about (Y)?’, where (X) represents the attributed claim and (Y) represents the competing version through which the fault in that claim is made clear. It is similar to formulating because the second position manages to selectively summarise the first position’s statement, but it also manages to point out flaws, controversy or hypocrisy in the formulated version of the initial statement (Hutchby 2013:60). Therefore, not only does the second position try to establish control, but also tries to take apart the initial statement. However, the introduction of (Y), a competing statement or version does technically open up the possibility of starting a new Action-Opposition sequence in turn. These three devices are applicable in many argumentative structures of conversation and have therefore been applied to this essay's study.

To summarise, the theory of Action-Opposition sequences and its included concepts and phenomena are applicable in most argumentative structures of conversation. This is relevant to this study because the application of these theories gives one the opportunity to systematically organise and analyse argumentative structures in terms of power.

**2.3 Background: Swearing**

Stapleton describes swearing as “forbidden”, in the sense that swearing is based on that which is taboo. However, the issues/actions themselves are not actually forbidden, but rather, give rise to a set of conscious and unconscious rules about how they may be referenced or discussed appropriately. Indeed, swearing is therefore to transgress linguistic taboo, to perform particular social, interpersonal and psychological functions (Stapleton 2010:289). The interpersonal functions of swearing can be discussed under four main headings: ‘expressing emotions’,
‘humour and verbal emphasis’, ‘social bonding and solidarity’ and ‘constructing and displaying identity’ (Stapleton 2010:289), with the last two headings being of particular interest to this essay.

Swearing plays a central role in many group and community settings, similar to how dialects play a central role in feelings of solidarity in larger community settings. Swearing and expletives can often be related to, or combined with, the use of slang and can create a sense of connection to certain communities like the working class, typical masculine culture or vernacular speech communities. There is a growing body of research focusing on swearing in the workplace and the way that it can create and reinforce workplace solidarity but also, its associations with status, power and the acceptance within a group setting. She refers to Baruch and Jenkins with the example of a new member potentially not being accepted as part of the group or subculture until they prove their solidarity by swearing and therefore passing the profane linguistic initiation rite (Stapleton 2010:296).

Similarly, swearing provides an efficient, yet complex, resource for the construction and display of personal or group identities. Particularly, swearing functions as a means of demarcating group boundaries along with confirming and validating group membership. Therefore, swearing can be used to identify oneself with particular social groups or smaller contextual groups but also to separate oneself from other individuals or social groups. Although swearing has evolved and continues to change in meaning and function, the linguistic practice of swearing remains a unique and powerful way to shock, abuse, insult, alienate or cause general offence. That could perhaps be why it also functions so well for interpersonal actions, not just negative ones, but also ones like joking, affirming individual and group identities, displaying solidarity and general bonding. To summarise, swearing has unique and powerful abilities to change the value and effect of one’s statements and furthermore, to change or modify the action that one’s statements perform (Stapleton 2010:298).

Linguistic theory regarding swearing is relevant to this study because the use of swearing in different contexts and for different reasons carries the potential to exercise power, due to its ability to change the value and effect of one’s statements.

2.4 Relevant and similar studies

In institutional medicinal discourse, power is asymmetrically distributed between the participants for the efficiency of patient-centered consulting. In their study Parents and nurses
During the immunization of children—where is the power? A conversation analysis (2008), Plumridge, Goodyear-Smith and Ross studied the conversations between nurses and parents of children whose health was being examined to analyse power relations in institutional settings. What they found was that the nurses generally asserted their power through their expertise within the field, which was accepted by the parents, regardless of the gender of the parents (all nurses were female). One of the most common examples of this being apparent in conversation was when parents asked questions and accepted the nurses’ answers as knowledgeable, trustingly accepting the asymmetrical levels of knowledge and power within the conversation (Plumridge, Goodyear-Smith and Ross 2008:16). Another example is when a parent would make incorrect statements or speculations regarding the medical matters of their child, whereas the nurse would correct them with the correct information and the parent would accept the correction without argument (Plumridge, Goodyear-Smith and Ross 2008:16). To summarise, the findings suggest that signs of asymmetrical levels of knowledge within a certain field, like context-relevant question-answer segments or immediate acceptance of disproving/correction, can be interpreted as asymmetrical levels of power within the context of the conversation. These findings are relevant to this study because it suggests that if one shows relevant expertise or superior knowledge within the context of the conversation, one can assert power. It also suggests that if one feels inferior to another person in the conversation in terms of expertise or knowledge of the topic, one may be more likely accept one’s subordination in the current relations of power.

In her dissertation A descriptive analysis of the social functions of swearing in American English (2000), Beers Fägersten found swearing to be the most offensive when used denotatively or injuriously, i.e., to intentionally cause offense and the least offensive, if considered offensive at all, when used metaphorially. Additionally, the latter use was found to be the most common type (Beers Fägersten 2000:174). Furthermore, her data found swearing between inter-group and out-group members, i.e., members of different gender, race, social status/distance, strangers, parents, elders or instructors, to be a scarce and reluctant occurrence (Beers Fägersten 2000:174). As this essay does not take common social factors like gender, race, age etc. into account, what one can take from Beers Fägersten’s findings is that personal injurious swearing is considered the most offensive, metaphorical swearing is the most common form and that swearing occurs more frequently between in-group members than inter- or out-group members (Beers Fägersten 2000:174). These findings are relevant to this study.
because the characters have different relationships with each other and different needs for swearing in the conversation and therefore, they use swearing for different purposes with different effects.

In their study *Swearing at work and permissive leadership culture* (2006), Baruch and Jenkins found that in work environments, swearing occurs regularly among low level employees but spreads through the line of management to professional and executive levels, all of which occurs to strengthen the sense of solidarity (Baruch and Jenkins 2006:501). Furthermore, they theorise that when applied to workplace language, managerial philosophy is not sufficient enough for a code of conduct which bans swearing outright to be seen as part of management responsibility. They suggest mastering the ‘art’ of knowing when to turn a blind eye to norms of communication that do not confer with one’s own standards for swearing in the workplace. This, combined with the results of their own and other research, suggests that managers realise that swearing and taboo language can serve the will and need of people to develop and maintain solidarity and to cope with stress (Baruch and Jenkins 2006:503). These findings are relevant to this study because they suggest that in work environments, swearing is usually used for social bonding and the purpose of strengthening the sense of solidarity which suggests that other uses and purposes of swearing tend to be used in non-work environments. This is applicable to the use of swearing found in the data.

3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

3.1 Source of data and data transcription

The source of data in this essay is an official script of the tenth episode from the first season of *Succession* where two particular conversations have been selected and analysed, one between Logan and Kendall and one between Shiv and Tom. *Succession* was chosen as the subject of the analysis because the struggle for power due to the clash of hierarchical systems provides ample opportunities for analysing power and language in conversational practice. This particular episode (S1E10) was chosen because it is the season finale and naturally, it contains some of the fiercest struggles of power of the entire show. Additionally, it was chosen because it was the only episode which had an official script released for the public.

The relationship between Logan and Kendall was chosen because the conflict that arises when being part of both a father-son dyad and a dyad between a CEO and an ambitious successor, which eventually turns into a dyad between business rivals provides multiple
instances of struggles for power with different conversational approaches. The conversation chosen for Logan and Kendall is about the moment when Kendall tells Logan that he has decided to join forces with one of Logan’s largest rivals in an attempt to buy Waystar, Logan’s company, and force Logan to give up control. This particular conversation was chosen because it has a clear conflict and dramatically changes the nature of their relationship, in terms of power and in terms of personal feelings about each other.

The relationship between Shiv and Tom was chosen because the conflicts that arise in a long-term committed relationship when one party is directly related to the head of the company which the second party is a core member of provides multiple instances of arguments where asymmetrical relations of power are being exercised and organised. The conversation chosen for Shiv and Tom is about the moment that Shiv confesses her infidelity to Tom, which happens to be on their wedding night. This particular conversation was chosen because it contains one of their most severe and overt conflicts in the series and therefore, it is one of their few actual argumentations in the series.

The data has been transcribed in turn construction units only and therefore, the data does not include pauses, overlaps, latching etc. This is because the data will primarily be analysed in terms of Action-Opposition sequences, which only rely on turns and the content of the utterances in order to be applicable. Additionally, the source of data is a script which only included the characters’ lines in their sequential and temporal order which only provided enough information to construct turn construction units. To manually transcribe the conversations in terms of turn construction units and overlapping, pauses, latching etc. was deemed too ambitious and time-consuming in a study of this scale. Therefore, the transcription of the data chosen for this study contains enough information for an analysis to be made but is not transcribed in as much detail as conventional conversation analysis data generally tends to be, due to the conditions of applicability of the theoretical framework.

The final products are therefore two excerpts, one per conversation and one per research question, consisting of 297 and 354 words, respectively, and 651 words totally.

3.2 Conversation analysis method
The study presented in this essay has primarily been analysed within the field of conversation analysis using Hutchby’s methods of analysis, with a large focus on Action-Opposition
sequences, the positions taken within those sequences and the different oppositional devices used to start those sequences.

The application of Hutchby’s conversation analysis framework was done by reading and identifying patterns which fit the Action-Opposition template. This application allowed the data to be organised in terms of the argumentative roles taken within the conversation. Furthermore, it allowed the data to be analysed in terms of how the speakers used their argumentative roles, specifically in terms of what their role generally had the conversational ability to do within the argumentative structure. This was done by discussing the utterances in terms of how they function and affect the Action-Opposition sequence and also by applying Hutchby’s oppositional devices or key concepts of conversation analysis like preference structures, where applicable.

To summarise, the methods used for the conversation analysis part of the analysis are Hutchby’s collected theories and devices regarding Action-Opposition sequences, where these sequences begin, what devices are used to start these sequences and what roles the speakers take within these sequences.

3.3 Swearing analysis method

Additionally, a more sociolinguistic/pragmatic approach to swearing has been used to analyse the profanity which has contributed to the asymmetrical power balances of the conversations. Specifically, the swearing has been analysed in regards to whether it was used to intentionally cause offense, for social bonding or to construct/display identity. Most importantly, the swearing was analysed in regards to whether it contributed to the struggle of asymmetrical relations of power.

The method for identifying swearing was to search for words commonly viewed as profanity, which was quite simple as all instances of swearing stems from the word “fuck”, and then analysing the context in which it was used and the effect it had on the utterance. Since this study focuses on how language can be used to exercise, establish and struggle for power, the instances of swearing that have been included in the analysis are the instances which has contributed to the struggle for power, either explicitly, like the denotative or injurious use, or implicitly, like using swearing for the amplification of particular points or parts of one’s utterances. Swearing can have powerful effects on the value of one’s utterances but the scope
of the study is to analyse power, not swearing and therefore, the analysis will focus on the instances of swearing which directly contributed to the struggle of power.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Here, the findings will be discussed in detail with numbered examples from the excerpts.

4.1 Research question number one: Logan and Kendall

The study found asymmetrical relations of power between Logan and Kendall in their conversation. Kendall generally uses the impact of the implications of his utterances to gain the momentum and control of the conversation and seemingly comes out as the speaker with more power, for example in Example 1, lines 5-7 (see p. 13), despite taking on the first position of the Action-Opposition sequence (see p. 6). Logan generally gains power using only language as he takes on a strong secondary oppositional position against Kendall’s initial actions, most evidently in Example 3, line 11 (see p. 16).

Swearing was used only by Logan in this conversation and it was used to oppose Kendall’s attempt to keep the conversation professional. Once Logan starts swearing to insult Kendall in Example 3, line 2 (see p. 16), the conversation turns personal and consequently, Kendall’s momentum eventually falls apart due to his business tactics also functioning as a personal betrayal against his father.

Their relation of power seems to be that Logan generally has more power than Kendall in personal contexts as his father, but Kendall can potentially overpower Logan in professional contexts if he has a professional attack against Logan as well.

Example 1, from excerpt 1.

1. K: Hey. This isn’t a nice thing, I’m afraid.
2. L: Hello?
4. L: What is it?
5. K: It’s - it’s - a proposal, to buy Waystar
6. K: for $140 a share. We’re asking you
7. K: to come to the table - open the books.
8. L: Ugh?
10. L: Huh?
11. K: Yeah. There it is, I’m not going
12. K: to get into feelings.
13. L: It’s - this is - a - fucking bear-hug?
Here, Kendall begins by preparing his father for the oppositional stance which Logan is bound to take by saying “This isn’t a nice thing” in line 1. He continues to offer Logan a letter and then explains the content of the letter and eventually, proposes an action in lines 5-7. As per the rules of Action-Opposition sequences (see p. 6), the argument does not officially begin until the second oppositional position (see p. 6) has been taken which Logan takes in line 13. However, up until then, Kendall is aware that his father will oppose the proposition, as shown in line 1, and is also aware of the fact that it will evolve into an argument. This is clear in line 9, where Kendall starts arguing for the action proposed in lines 5-7 before Logan has even had the chance to take an official stance in the matter, and before Logan has even had the chance to question Kendall’s motives.

As Logan struggles to grasp what it is that Kendall has actually said, Kendall signals the end of his statement in line 11 and subsequently tries to keep the conversation strictly professional in lines 11-12 by announcing that he will not get into feelings. Finally, Logan grasps what it is Kendall is saying and starts the actual argument by formulating Kendall’s statement and thereby taking on the second position within this Action-Opposition sequence.

This instance of formulating (see p. 7) revolves around the word ‘bear-hug’ which is described as a company’s offer to buy another company’s shares for much higher per-share price than what the company is actually worth. The target company is essentially forced to accept the offer as the management is legally obligated to look out for its shareholders’ best interests (Kenton 2020). For Logan, this ‘bear hug’ means losing control of his company and having it taken away by his son; a professional attack and a personal betrayal. This explains why Kendall argued for his statements before an opposition was stated and why he attempted to keep things professional, since a bear hug puts him in a professionally more powerful position but in a personally vulnerable position as the black sheep of the family who betrayed their father.

The conversation continues with Kendall’s immediate response to Logan’s question in Example 1, line 13.

Example 2, from excerpt 1.

1. K: That’s right.
2. L: Guh.
3. K: Well, fine. We have the financing.
5. K: Let’s keep it professional.
6. K: You know, it’s just the situation that has arisen
7. K: and you’re very tough and so am I,
8. K: as your son, so, I think this is just the way
9. K: it has to be with us.
10. K: We know several major investors are in favor.
11. K: We go public with the letter tomorrow.
12. K: So then we’ll have to see - to see -
13. K: what the arbs make of it?
14. L: Who?
15. K: It’s me and Stewy. And Sandy.
16. K: He’s some of the cash so. I’m not sorry for
17. K: what I’m doing which is - correct,
18. K: but I am sorry for how it makes you feel.

Here, Logan’s attempt to point out that what Kendall is saying is, in fact, a bear hug and both a professional and personal attack against him in Example 1, line 13, is not met with guilt, hesitation or an attempt to reformulate the connotational sense of Kendall’s statement. Instead, Kendall accepts and confirms Logan’s formulation and stands by it by saying “That’s right.” in line 1, which leaves Logan speechless, only muttering a mere “Guh.” in line 2.

Kendall continues arguing for his statements despite not receiving any more oppositional statements. What one can see here is that Kendall continues to acknowledge the existence of their personal feelings in the matter but chooses to only argue for the professional aspects of the proposition. One example of this is in lines 6-9, where Kendall argues that the situation came to this moment by itself and that they both have to handle it from the sides they stand on, despite how they may feel about it and each other. The most evident example is, however, in lines 16-18 where Kendall refuses to apologise for doing what is “correct” but acknowledges and apologises for how it affects Logan personally. Here, Kendall argues for the objectively correct thing to do from a professional perspective and shows that he prioritises that over personal feelings involved.

This encapsulates Kendall’s approach to gaining power and control of the conversation. By arguing for the professional aspects in a professional manner and by acknowledging but distancing himself from personal feelings, Kendall can use the momentum of his actions, i.e., the power that comes from the sheer magnitude of his statements’ content, and the submissive professional role he has put his father in to come out as the dominant speaker in this moment of the conversation, just like he at this moment is the more powerful businessman.
However, another reason why Kendall comes out as the speaker in power thus far is due to Logan’s lack of oppositional statements. So far, Logan has only made one real attempt to shift the balance of power, but Kendall incorporated Logan’s formulating and continued arguing for his sake. Logan’s currently dormant role in the conversation can be argued to be out of shock or confusion as Kendall’s proposal was very surprising but it can also be argued to be the product of feeling outpowered. While remaining professional, as Kendall suggests they do in line 5, Logan has no real counter, validity challenge (see p. 7) or oppositional statement which could change the professional situation or that has not already been argued for by Kendall.

Thus far, Kendall controls the organisation and the manner of the conversation by staying strictly professional and only arguing for professional aspects, which has Logan in a submissive position professionally and seemingly in a submissive second position of this argument structure. This would contradict Hutchby and Sacks (see p. 6) and suggest that a first position can remain in power despite being met with potential oppositional devices of conversation by arguing for one’s statements well or by essentially stunning the opponent with the practical consequences of one’s statements. This, however, changes in example 3.

Example 3, from excerpt 1.

2. L: No. Fuck off. I haven’t got pants on!
3. L: Do you even know what you’re doing this for?
5. L: Uh-huh?
6. K: To save the business and and and do-
7. K: do things that are --
8. L: You can’t even fucking say it.
10. L: ‘Do good things’ Be a fucking nurse.

In line 1, Kendall attempts to give Logan the letter containing the specifics of the proposal, but Logan rejects it in line 2 and goes on to tell Kendall to leave in a deliberately offensive manner. Logan then states the fact that he does not wear pants, which one can assume is meant to signal that he is caught off guard in a very personal and submissive situation.
Line 2 introduces the second instance of swearing but the first instance of swearing that is used injuriously, to deliberately cause offense. Swearing in institutional settings like common office-centred workplaces has been argued to benefit from casual swearing used non-injuriously (Baruch and Jenkins 2006:503). However, swearing in the workplace has not been found to promote deliberate attempts to cause offense in institutional settings. On that note, swearing in general has been found to occur more among in-group members rather than out-group members and generally occur more frequently the closer one’s relationship is with a particular person (Beers Fägersten 2000:174). Particularly, it has been reported that fathers swear more among their children than children swear among their fathers and furthermore, that children swear the most among their friends (Beers Fägersten 2000:155-157). What one can see in line 2 then is that Logan does not swear to strengthen the sense of solidarity or to establish his sense of self in relation to a group (see p. 8). This instance of swearing goes against the general rules of an institutional setting and rejects Kendall’s attempt to keep the conversation strictly professional. Indeed, Logan swears with the intention of causing offense as a reaction to his personal feelings of being betrayed by Kendall. One could say that Logan does not swear as a businessman asking an associate to leave, but rather as a father who is angry and disappointed with his son.

This use of swearing is personal rather than professional and marks the start of a personal conversation rather than a professional conversation and with that, Kendall loses his momentum. Logan’s utterance “Fuck off.” turns the conversation personal, as it is a personal insult, and he continues both to make it more personal and to argue that Kendall’s timing deems the professional attack even more personal by saying “I haven’t got pants on!” To be caught off guard, to not be warned of bad news and to not even be appropriately dressed for professional conversations makes Kendall’s statements seem like a personal attack against his father in personal settings when he is vulnerable. This strengthens the lack of professionalism in their conversation which Kendall previously used to his advantage.

In line 3, Logan asks Kendall if he even knows what he is doing this for. In an institutional professional setting, Logan’s question in line 3 would already have been answered by Kendall’s utterances in Example 1: line 9 or Example 2: line 6 or 10. However, Logan’s utterances in example 3: line 2 turned the conversation personal and this question could now be interpreted personally rather than professionally which is exactly what happened.
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Kendall answers by arguing for his personal ideas and wishes in line 4 and 6-7 but stutters noticeably compared to before. The acceptance of the changed nature of the conversation despite requesting, almost declaring, the conversation to be strictly professional clearly shows Kendall losing control and power in the conversation. He does not remind Logan of the fact that he does not want to “get into feelings” but rather, expresses his personal feelings regarding the proposition and thereby accepts Logan’s agenda of the conversation.

Kendall’s vague and stuttering responses allow Logan to strengthen his oppositional statement in line 3 by pointing out Kendall’s struggles with responding to his question in line 8. The utterance “You can’t even fucking say it.” can be argued to express either that Logan deems Kendall’s personal motives to either be so bad or vague that he cannot argue for them confidently or that Kendall’s true motives are disrespectful and shameful but hidden behind professional lies and excuses. Whatever the true meaning may be, it suggests Kendall’s motives to be bad which strengthens Logan’s second position in the Action-Opposition sequence (see p. 6) without needing to actively argue against it. Once again, swearing is used to strengthen the message of the utterance and it also contains the conversation within the limits of what is personal and professional by using non-institutional language.

Kendall tries to save himself in line 9 by correcting Logan’s claim and suggesting that he wants to do some good things. This argument opens up for new criticism which Logan tries to take apart by using the ‘You say (X)’ device (see p. 7) in line 10. While the (X) in this instance is an inaccurate quote rather than a selective formulation, it still serves the function of (X). This is followed by “Be a fucking nurse.” which functions as (Y) since it is a competing alternative based on what was said in (X). It could be argued that this is a case of formulating (see p. 7) as Logan selectively interprets Kendall’s argument as the duties of a nurse but since it is juxtaposed with an inaccurate quote and suggested as an alternative to what Kendall is doing, the ‘You say (X)’ device seems more fitting. This is one of the three common devices used by the second position in an Action-Opposition sequence and it is used to undermine and devalue Kendall’s argument in the now personal setting rather than professional.

It is also worth noting that the final instance of swearing was used in a more denotative way, which means it was used to deliberately cause offense but also to call someone something. In this case, Logan adds the swear word to primarily strengthen the impact of the utterance, but it can also be argued that it was used to either belittle the thing which Kendall was compared to or to exaggerate the sense of remoteness of this particular profession in comparison with
managing billion-dollar companies. The swearing was used in a denotative context to strengthen likeness between Kendall and his motives and being a nurse which in this context is either a bad thing or simply a completely different thing.

While the first two examples from excerpt 1 suggested Kendall to be the speaker in power, example number 3 showed Logan completely shifting the balance of power using language alone. Hutchby and Sacks’s theory (see p. 6) was eventually confirmed within this conversation as a whole but not without particular instances which could suggest otherwise.

4.2 Research question number two: Shiv and Tom

The study found asymmetrical relations of power between Shiv and Tom in their conversation. Similarly to my hypothesis regarding Shiv and Tom, Shiv has more power and control in their conversation but not in a covert struggle of power. Instead, she exercises her power through Tom’s willingness to comply with what she says, for example in Example 6, lines 1-7 (see p. 23). Therefore, Shiv is almost in total control of the conversation despite taking on the first position in their Action-Opposition sequence. Tom often starts with acceptance and understanding of Shiv’s utterances but then goes on to suggest his uncertainty and reluctance in a way which functions like a polite validity challenge (see p. 7), for example in Example 4, line 7.

Their relation of power seems to be that Shiv easily takes advantage of Tom’s willingness to comply and level the asymmetrical relations of power at hand by using selective argumentation and preference structures (see pp. 3-4). Shiv often gets the chance to choose how to define key elements of their conversation and arguments and consequently, she gets the chance to structure conversation towards the outcome she prefers. Tom tries to level with Shiv and keep their relation of power balanced and symmetrical but unknowingly allows her to take advantage of his unyielding compliance.

Example 4, from excerpt 2.

1. S: I should say something Tom. I should have said.
2. S: But I’ve had a little number?
3. T: A little number?
4. S: And I think we both agreed we were grown ups.
5. S: I mean I think we had
6. S: an unspoken agreement, that we were --
7. T: Right. Did we?
8. S: I think I always implied, you know?
9. T: Right. Okay. Do you want to say who?
10. S: And if I’ve hurt you, and I’ve got it wrong,
11. S: I’m so fucking sorry.
12. T: Was it Nate?
13. S: But I think, from this point on, I want everything
to be really open and honest.
14. T: Right. Can I send him home?
15. S: Sure. Although, what if people ask
16. S: why he’s being sent home?
17. T: Can I at least spit on his cheesecake?

Here, Shiv confesses to Tom that she has been unfaithful in line 2. Tom’s response in line 3 does not take an oppositional position and does therefore not begin the Action-Opposition sequence (see p. 6). Tom repeats the phrase Shiv used to describe her infidelity either to confirm that he is listening or to ask if she means what he thinks she means, since it is a rather ambiguous but suggestive way of confessing infidelity. Either way, Shiv continues in lines 4-6 by rationalising and arguing for her actions without acknowledging Tom’s utterance in line 3.

By now, “a little number” needs no clarification for Tom and so, in line 7, Tom initially agrees with Shiv but then questions her arguments on the grounds of their supposed agreement ever existing. This is the first and only actual Action-Opposition sequence of excerpt 2 and the reason why is that it is technically resolved rather quickly and the fact that Tom never directly opposes Shiv again. Tom’s utterance “Did we?” questions Shiv’s claims and arguments which sought out to lessen the impact of her wrongdoing and make her infidelity more forgivable or acceptable for Tom. Shiv replies in line 8 with the claim that she has performed an unspoken implication which would confirm the lack of an agreement and therefore deem her previous argument incorrect. This gives Tom an opportunity to establish power as the second position (see p. 6) within the Action-Opposition sequence. He could use one of Hutchby’s second positional devices (see p. 7) or he could simply condemn Shiv and her actions, but he does neither. Tom accepts her explanation which technically ends this argument structure. This is the first example of how Tom has the possibility to take on a powerful second position but chooses to level with Shiv and accept her actions.

Tom continues in line 9 to ask Shiv if she can tell him whom she was unfaithful with which Shiv completely ignores and starts line 10 as if she were interrupted. Shiv goes on in lines 10-11 to apologise if she has hurt Tom or misunderstood the rules of their relationship.
Tom specifies his previous question with a guess as to who it was in line 12 which once again is completely ignored by Shiv in line 13 in the same manner as before. Shiv starts her utterance with a “But” as if she were interrupted in the middle of her sentence and goes on in lines 13-14 to argue for the future of their relationship as a means to mend the wounds she has conflicted. At this point, Tom seemingly interprets her reluctance to answer his questions as a confirmation of what his questions suggest. He does not ask Shiv to clarify “a little number” again in the same way that he gets no response after asking Shiv if she was unfaithful with Nate and chooses to ask if he can send Nate home in line 15.

This marks the second time in Example 4 where Shiv acknowledges Tom’s utterances and answers him directly. What is noteworthy, however, is that Shiv responds to a request asking for permission. She does not respond to anything which either questions her arguments or which does not put her in a position of power. Initially she agrees with Tom’s request but then questions it with a potentially negative outcome. She does not say no and she does not say that she would rather not, she merely proposes a downside in form of a question which in itself can be argued for or against. Whether she personally wants Nate to leave or stay is unclear. However, Tom asks for permission to spit in Nate’s cheesecake instead, as opposed to arguing for his initial request because he interprets her follow-up question as a rejection and accepts that rejection.

What one can see here then is that despite the fact that Shiv had her first argument disproved, admitted to potentially being wrong and even apologised for in case she was wrong, Shiv controls the organisation of the conversation almost completely. She chooses which of Tom’s questions to answer and which to ignore and argues for her sake whether Tom challenges her or not. The main reason why Shiv remains in power is, however, primarily because of Tom’s reluctance to take on a more aggressive secondary position within the argument structures. Shiv’s arguments come in the form of excuses, reasons why her wrongdoing is redeemable and her wishes for the future, all of which can be easily challenged, undermined or argued. Tom, however, chooses acceptance and tries to level with Shiv despite his clear dissatisfaction with Shiv’s infidelity, which Shiv uses to her advantage.

Example 5, from excerpt 2.
1. S: Tom. I just think - I’m not sure. I’m not sure
2. S: I’m a good fit for a monogamous marriage.
3. T: Right?
4. S: Yeah?
5. T: Okay.
6. S: Is that okay? Is that okay to say to you?
7. T: Of course. I mean I kind of wish I guess
8. T: maybe we’d talked about it
9. T: before our wedding night?
10. S: Yeah, maybe that would have been wise.
12. S: I just think, you know, I needed you, very much,
13. S: I was not in good shape when we hooked up
14. S: and I think the business angle, works,
15. S: we know that. We have a plan on that.

Example 5 shows Shiv rationalising her infidelity as if it is simply part of who she is in lines 1-2. Shiv takes advantage of Tom’s willingness to be understanding and levelled with Shiv by going deeper and deeper into redefinitions of her infidelity, her personality and their relationship to mend the wounds inflicted by her wrongdoing. Although she is aware that she has probably hurt Tom, as shown in Example 4: line 10, she does not ask what he thinks, how he feels or what he wants out of their relationship and Tom does not take any initiative to state that either.

The most interesting part of Example 5 begins with line 6, where Shiv asks if it is okay that she does not believe she is fit for monogamous marriage. Tom immediately says that it is okay, but also adds that he wishes they had discussed that before their wedding night in lines 7-9. Shiv agrees and says that it would have been wise to do that. What is interesting about this is that on the surface, Shiv asks Tom a question with the possibility of him saying no and arguing why she is wrong but in reality, Shiv already knows that Tom will accept whatever she says. Tom’s “Of course” in line 7 marks the fourth time that he has agreed with Shiv’s explanations, excuses and arguments despite being hurt by her actions. Shiv knows this and that is why she continues to argue for definitions, technicalities and her own feelings regarding their relationship.

Tom will continue to accept what Shiv says, or gently signal towards hesitant doubt (for example in Example 4: line 7) which ultimately gets disregarded by Shiv, and Shiv will continue to control the conversation entirely. Almost all of Shiv’s utterances open the floor for oppositional statements but Tom’s willingness to level with Shiv allows her access to the power
to define what her wrongdoings will mean and the power to control the outcome of this conversation.

Example 6, from excerpt 2.

1. S: But in terms of the relationship.
2. S: Is there an opportunity for something different
3. S: from the - whole, box-set death-march?
4. S: A different shape of relationship?
5. S: Could that be exciting?
7. S: Right? It’s exciting?
8. T: It’s exciting.
9. S: We’ve pulled everything else down.
10. S: But love’s the last one,
11. S: it’s the last fridge magnet left.
12. T: Right. How do you mean?
13. S: I mean ‘love’ is about 28 different things -
14. S: it’s a lumpy sack. And it needs to get emptied out
15. S: because there’s a lot of ugly products
16. S: in that Santa sack. Fear and jealousy
17. S: and control and revenge - and they get
18. S: such a pretty fucking wrapping in that stocking,
19. S: it looks so nice, but you open it up --
21. T: Love, it’s - it’s bullshit.
22. T: But - I do love you.
23. S: I love you too.

Here, Shiv starts speculating about alternatives to classic monogamous relationships, which are described in a very negative way, in lines 1-4 and ends with asking Tom if that could be exciting in line 5. Tom responds in line 6 with hesitant agreement, including both “Maybe.” and “I guess.” which shows his doubts. Shiv picks up on this and tries to encourage her idea and make sure that it can be a good alternative by repeating her question but now with a clear preference (see pp. 3-4) as to what kind of answer she is looking for. The utterance “Right? It’s exciting?” has a preferred turn shape and invites Tom’s agreement, which he does in line 8, this time without adding any hesitance markers.

Shiv then goes on in lines 9-11 to start discussing what love is, using an obscure metaphor. Tom initially agrees in line 12 but goes on to ask for clarification, once again trying to level with Shiv despite not even fully understanding what she is saying. In lines 13-19, Shiv
tries to define how she sees love and uses multiple negative connotational words like fear, jealousy and revenge in a slightly less obscure metaphor. She includes a swear word when describing how love seems wonderful on the surface in line 18, which exaggerates the message but also makes the idea of the pretty wrapping paper to be negative in itself. To summarise, she essentially argues against conventional ideas of love and what they entail which, on one’s wedding night, subsequently argues against conventional ideas of relationships.

Initially, Tom agrees with Shiv in line 20 and goes on to add onto her general message in line 21 by describing love as “bullshit”. However, in line 22 Tom states that he loves Shiv without rejecting or arguing against his or Shiv’s negative description of love. Shiv responds with “I love you too.” and completes the conversation’s only adjacency pair (see p. 3).

What one can see here then is that as Shiv has established power and control over this conversation, she has also established the power and control to define their relationship. Tom’s willingness to comply and level with Shiv gives her the ability to come with any argument she likes. Tom’s behaviour can be likened to the findings of Plumridge, Goodyear-Smith and Ross’s study study Parents and nurses during the immunization of children—where is the power? A conversation analysis (2008). Tom seems to accept Shiv’s arguments either immediately or after Shiv argues against his hesitance markers, similarly to how the display of relevant expertise or higher levels of knowledge can result in the acceptance of asymmetrical levels of both knowledge and power within the conversation. The difference, however, lies in Shiv’s behaviour as she actively takes advantage of Tom’s acceptance to gain power, whereas the nurses from the study established dominance by using their expertise required as a medical professional within a medical context (Plumridge, Goodyear-Smith and Ross 2008:16). Regardless, the results of Tom’s behaviour is in accordance with Plumridge, Goodyear-Smith and Ross’s findings, that the display of relevant expertise or higher levels of knowledge can result in the acceptance of asymmetrical levels of power within the conversation.

By taking advantage of Tom’s attempts at levelling the balance of power, Shiv can go from the excuses behind her actions, to their established definition of a relationship and finally to what love ‘truly’ means and essentially control the outcome of their relationship, just like she controls the outcome of this conversation. Shiv uses ambiguity, selective methods of answering questions and preference structures to overpower and control Tom’s contributions in the conversation. Tom uses polite markers of hesitance to signal doubt and questions of clarification to indirectly nudge Shiv into thinking again and perhaps into seeing a strategy
where they can compromise. His unwillingness to take the oppositional chances he gets, to actually attack, leaves Shiv with too much freedom as she tries to rationalise and excuse her way out of her own admitted mistakes.

To summarise, Shiv comes out as the speaker with more power and control from beginning to end, primarily because of Tom’s reluctance to actually take on a strong secondary position within an Action-Opposition sequence (see p. 5). This does not reject Hutchby’s findings and Sacks’s theories regarding the secondary position generally having more power (see p. 5). This is because Tom does not take strong, secondary, oppositional positions despite having multiple chances to do so and therefore, he never gives himself a chance to exert power in the conversation.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study conclude that conversation is a medium with its own linguistic tools, possibilities and devices at its disposal capable of dealing with, exerting and establishing power. The findings agree with Hutchby and Sacks’s theory but with aspects that question the extent to which it can be trusted to be accurate. Although the idea that the secondary position in an Action-Opposition sequence has more power is stated to be a generalised assumption, the findings of this study did not show an overwhelming amount of evidence which supported that claim. Excerpt 1 showed how the tides can turn mid-conversation in terms of asymmetrical relations of power between the first and secondary position, but the second position generally has a linguistic and situational advantage. Excerpt 2 showed how the first position can escape the power of the second position by selectively choosing utterances to respond to or to take advantage of the other speaker’s wish to establish a symmetrical relation of power. To summarise, while the evidence is not overwhelming, the findings agree with Hutchby’s findings and support Sacks’s theory. One can use the conversational possibilities at one’s disposal, like the impact of one’s information, swearing, shifting of setting or selective argumentation, to exercise, resist or shift the power that is omnipresent in all contexts. **Succession** provides an ample opportunity for analysing language and power in conversational practice, particularly in terms of how a character can initially be assumed to be submissive in particular contexts but still manage to take control of the conversation and stand out as the more powerful speaker using conversational tactics.
The findings show that Kendall uses the professional implications of his statements to stun his father by exercising his power as a business rival and then sticks with professional language and arguments to keep control and power of the conversation which revolves around business tactics. He avoids swearing and personal feelings because if the conversation stays around the professional situation, he has the advantage and can control the structure of the conversation. He takes advantage of his role as the ambitious successor by challenging Logan on the grounds where Kendall can triumph, which is in professional contexts. Logan uses common oppositional devices to undermine and challenge Kendall without coming with his own argument which in turn can be challenged. He uses swearing to turn the conversation personal which tears Kendall’s momentum and manages to take control of the structure of the conversation. He uses his role as the patriarch of not just his company, but his family to intimidate and discredit Kendall as his son rather than his business rival. Overall, their relationship of power seems to put Logan in a more powerful position since Logan’s power comes from the combination of being both a corporate head and the male head of the family which means Kendall’s attempts to exert power are already disadvantaged from the start. However, since Logan will always be superior in personal contexts as his father but not always in professional contexts as his boss, Kendall can exercise the power that comes from strong business tactics to potentially shift the relations of power, at least in professional contexts.

The findings also show that Shiv takes advantage of Tom’s willingness to comply and level their relation of power to excuse, minimise and rationalise her wrongdoings whilst admitting to them. She selectively chooses which utterances and questions to respond to, redefines key elements of the conversation to her advantage and produces clear preference structures which she knows Tom will agree with. Shiv has most likely cultivated the power that comes from her affiliation with the Roy family, the head of which is Tom’s employer and one of the wealthiest people in the world, during her entire relationship with Tom. Whether this cultivation has been intentional or not is unknown, but one can clearly see that Tom is hesitant to aggressively oppose Shiv, which only allows Shiv to continue defining the outcome of their conversation as well as their relationship. Tom uses hesitance markers and questions asking for clarification as a polite indirect way to signal doubt and make Shiv reconsider her own statements. He is presented with multiple chances to take on an oppositional secondary position but chooses to agree with his wife rather than argue with her. One cannot say that Tom actively uses his role as the family outsider but rather that he is put in it whether he wants to or not. He
has no institutional leverage against Shiv since she does not work at Waystar and personally, he wants their relationship to be equal in terms of relation of power. The case seems to be that his role as family outsider is inevitable when his fiancée’s family happens to be one of the most powerful families in the world. Overall, their relationship of power clearly suggests Shiv to be in a more powerful position, despite Tom having the opportunity to undermine and tear apart her ambiguous and misleading arguments.

It would be injustice to not acknowledge that the dynamic between Shiv and Tom subverts gender convention. Their conversations have multiple hallmarks of gendered language, but the roles have been switched which concurs with recent social constructivist theory that “gendered” language has been shown to be more a function of one’s social status (or in other words, power) rather than one’s gender. This is a target for a potentially deeper analysis, along with the intersectionality of relationships between Logan and Kendall and the power that comes with these relationships and statuses. These additional variables do of course play a central role in an analysis of language and power, but the limited scope of this essay limited the extent to which these variables could be analysed.

Future research should take into consideration that this study was done on scripted material and not authentic conversations. The findings may be applicable in particular authentic conversations, but one should remember that the point of the study was not to find out how actual people deal with power in conversation but rather to study and analyse how it can potentially be dealt with. Furthermore, the theory that secondary positions in Action-Opposition sequences generally have more power (Hutchby 2013:48) functions as a general assumption in argument structures and should be kept in mind when applied to data.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1

Excerpt 1.

12. K: Do you want to, come out Dad?
13. L: Come in. I’m not on the can. Nice service right?
14. L: Shame it wasn’t Catholic but there you go.
15. L: Fucking all those kids will hurt the brand.
16. K: Hey. This isn’t a nice thing, I’m afraid.
17. L: Hello?
19. L: What is it?
20. K: It’s - it’s - a proposal, to buy Waystar
21. K: for $140 a share. We’re asking you
22. K: to come to the table - open the books.
23. L: Ugh?
24. K: It’s great value for shareholders.
25. L: Huh?
26. K: Yeah. There it is, I’m not going
27. K: to get into feelings.
28. L: It’s - this is - a - fucking bear-hug?
29. K: That’s right.
30. L: Guh.
31. K: Well, fine. We have the financing.
32. K: Let’s see what everyone thinks.
33. K: Let’s keep it professional.
34. K: You know, it’s just the situation that has arisen
35. K: and you’re very tough and so am I,
36. K: as your son, so, I think this is just the way
37. K: it has to be with us.
38. K: We know several major investors are in favor.
39. K: We go public with the letter tomorrow.
40. K: So then we’ll have to see - to see -
41. K: what the arbs make of it?
42. L: Who?
43. K: It’s me and Stewy. And Sandy.
44. K: He’s some of the cash so. I’m not sorry for
45. K: what I’m doing which is - correct,
46. K: but I am sorry for how it makes you feel.
47. K: I’m sorry it had to be now. It was out of my hands.
49. K: Here.
50. L: No. Fuck off. I haven’t got pants on!
51. L: Do you even know what you’re doing this for?
52. K: I - ideas. I have - wanted to do things.
53. L: Uh-huh?
54. K: To save the business and and and do-
55. K: do things that are --
56. L: You can’t even fucking say it.
57. K: I can say it. Do, some, good, things.
58. L: ‘Do good things’ Be a fucking nurse.

APPENDIX 2
Excerpt 2.

24. S: I should say something Tom. I should have said.
25. S: But I’ve had a little number?
26. T: A little number?
27. S: And I think we both agreed we were grown ups.
28. S: I mean I think we had
29. S: an unspoken agreement, that we were --
30. T: Right. Did we?
31. S: I think I always implied, you know?
32. T: Right. Okay. Do you want to say who?
33. S: And if I’ve hurt you, and I’ve got it wrong,
34. S: I’m so fucking sorry.
35. T: Was it Nate?
36. S: But I think, from this point on, I want everything
37. S: to be really open and honest.
38. T: Right. Can I send him home?
39. S: Sure. Although, what if people ask
40. S: why he’s being sent home?
41. T: Can I at least spit on his cheesecake?
42. S: Tom. I just think - I’m not sure. I’m not sure
43. S: I’m a good fit for a monogamous marriage.
44. T: Right?
45. S: Yeah?
46. T: Okay.
47. S: Is that okay? Is that okay to say to you?
48. T: Of course. I mean I kind of wish I guess
49. T: maybe we’d talked about it
50. T: before our wedding night?
51. S: Yeah, maybe that would have been wise.
52. T: Hey. Well.
53. S: I just think, you know, I needed you, very much,
54. S: I was not in good shape when we hooked up
55. S: and I think the business angle, works,
56. S: we know that. We have a plan on that.
57. T: Uh-huh.
58. S: But in terms of the relationship.
59. S: Is there an opportunity for something different
60. S: from the - whole, box-set death-march?
61. S: A different shape of relationship?
62. S: Could that be exciting?
64. S: Right? It’s exciting?
65. T: It’s exciting.
66. S: We’ve pulled everything else down.
67. S: But love’s the last one,
68. S: it’s the last fridge magnet left.
69. T: Right. How do you mean?
70. S: I mean ‘love’ is about 28 different things -
71. S: it’s a lumpy sack. And it needs to get emptied out
72. S: because there’s a lot of ugly products
73. S: in that Santa sack. Fear and jealousy
74. S: and control and revenge - and they get
75. S: such a pretty fucking wrapping in that stocking,
76. S: it looks so nice, but you open it up --
77. T: No. I’m sure. You’re right. You are.
78. T: Love, it’s - it’s bullshit.
79. T: But - I do love you.
80. S: I love you too.