

A LINGUISTIC STUDY OF CLASSROOM DISCOURSE

BY

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Abstract

Classroom discourse is an institutional discourse that involves the teacher and the pupils interacting and exchanging ideas. The teacher initiates the discourse and ensures that it follows a particular course which he has pre-determined. This paper, therefore, examined some of the discourse models that could be fashioned into language classroom to enhance effective and efficient delivery of instruction. The data for the study was sourced from English Language interactive session between the teacher and SSS II students, while Sinclair and Couthard (1975) Act form was adopted for our analysis. The paper, recommends among other things that every language teacher must use relevant discourse model in his/her lesson to enhance effectiveness.

Keywords: *Classroom discourse, Institutional discourse and Exchange ideas*

Introduction

In addressing teacher's talk and its role in providing opportunities for learning in classrooms, a growing number of studies have investigated different ways through which teachers demonstrate L2 classroom interaction. In classroom discourse analysis a tool for critical reflection, Besty Rymes (2009) offers a lucid, engaging, compelling account of how discourse analysis can be fruitfully exploited as a self-reflective tool by teachers to examine interactional dynamics in the classroom.

Central to the book is the argument that discourse level inequality in the classroom is in large part produced by long-standing inequalities present in society outside the classroom. It follows

then that the purpose of classroom discourse analysis is not to analyze discourse as an isolated linguistic phenomenon but to focus in the grey areas in the classroom interactions. One way that teachers can promote learners participation in classroom discourse while creating a positive discourse space is through thoughtful and meaningful teachers questions, an area that has received much attention. That is classroom interaction pattern (Thomas, 2012).

In the article entitled Positioning in classroom discourse studies, a state of the-art-review by HayriyeKayiAydar and Elizabeth R. Miller (2018), the authors extensively discussed classroom interactional pattern. This article reviews to the growing number of studies that have drawn on positioning theory in exploring the interactional dynamics of classroom discourse. It discusses the concepts of the theory, provides an overview of empirical studies that focus on student positioning, in mainstream content, classrooms and classrooms that include learners or speakers of additional languages, as well as studies that concentrate on teacher positioning. The authors critically synthesized the studies, and discuss implications of positioning for learning and teaching. They offer a critique of positioning theory and provide guidelines for future research in the area.

In the analysis of classroom discourse, a case of a selected English class in the Eastern Cape of South Africa by Munbenbe L. et.al (2006), the authors extensively discussed the ingredients that enhanced classroom discourse. This study reviews the classroom interaction between the teachers and learners in selected primary schools in South Africa. The discourse analysis was used to examine verbal interactions as a significant component of teaching techniques for enhancing effective learning of English language. The main objective of this study was to analyze the verbal communication between the teachers and pupils in the classroom during the teaching and learning of materials in English language. Qualitative research design was used in this study. As the teaching and learning of English Language develops between the teachers and pupils in primary schools, both negative and positive factors were observed when they were communicating, the study revealed. The result of this study shows that pupils faced different hindrances in understanding some English vocabularies taught in the classroom. The authors,

therefore, recommend that the teaching and learning of English Language should be improved at the primary school level by using appropriate mechanism of strategies to obtain desirable results.

Theoretical framework

Farinde (2006) has stated that several discourse models exist for various discourse situations. He cited Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), Coulthard and Brazil (1979), Burton (1981), Stubbs (1983), Ventola (1987), Berry (1987), Onadeko (1992), Francis and Horton (1992), Farinde (1998), Farinde and Ojo (1991), Ogunsiji (2001), Olaleju (2001) and others. Of all the discourse Act forms stated above, we have adopted the one proposed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) for our analysis. The following are discourse models proposed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975). These are: Act, Move, Exchange, Transaction and Lesson. They proposed many Act forms which include Marker, Starter, Elicitation, Check, Directive, Informative, Prompt, Clue, Cue, Bid, Accept, Nomination, Acknowledge, Reply, Loop, Reject, Comment, Evaluate, Meta-statement, Conclusion and Aside (Farinde, 2006). Burton (1981) also adapts all these forms of Act for her data and she also proposes some additional Act forms which include Summon, Accuse, Excuse and Inform.

In this research paper we are going to adapt some of these Act forms for our data. Those utilized in this research are explained below:

S/No	Category	Realization and function
1.	Elicitation	This is realized by a question, its function is to request a linguistic response.
2.	Informative (inf)	This is realized by a statement. The function is to provide information. The only response is an acknowledgement of attention or understanding.
3.	Prompt (prm)	This is realized by a closed class of item – “go on”, “come on”, “hurry up”, “have a guess” etc. Its function is to reinforce a directive or elicitation by suggesting that the bearer is no longer requesting a response by expecting or demanding

		one.
4.	Bid (bid)	This is realized by a closed class of verbal and non-verbal item – “Sir”, “Miss” – teacher’s name, raised hand – “finger clicking”, etc. Its function is to signal a desire to contribute to the discourse.
5.	Focus (foc)	This is realized by statements which are not strictly part of the discourse but inform us about what the topic is all about.
6.	Frame (frm)	This is realized by words that indicate the boundaries in a lesson, such as “right”, “today”, “good”, “well” etc.
7.	Repetition (rept)	This is realized by statements that are repeated to emphasize the importance of the message in the discourse.
8.	Demonstration (dem)	This is realized by statements showing that the teacher is giving a practical illustration of what is being presented to the pupils.
9.	Summons (sum)	This is formed by the ringing of a telephone, knocking or calling somebody’s name.

Adapted from NT1 Bachelor’s Degree Manual (2010) – ENG 352. Discourse Analysis (pp 223 - 227)

Source of Data

The source of the data for this research work was obtained from English language classroom interaction among the SSS II students and the teacher of English language in Rescue Model College, Okeho, Oyo State. The researchers went personally to obtain the data.

Exchange I

Teacher: Who among you can state the characteristics of morphological functions of nouns?

Students: Raising up their heads.

Teacher: Yes, Tolu

Student: Brain ... (hesitation)

Teacher: Yes, go on.

Exchange II

Teacher: A noun in any given sentence can be identified though the morphological and syntactic functions it performs in such a sentence.

Examples are:

A. Morphological Functions

- i. ion = Occasion, emission, erosion
- ii. al = Betrayal, immoral, portrayal
- iii. er = betrayer, soothsayer, buyer.
- iv. ty = punctuality, immortality, ability
- v. ce = significance, importance, practice

B. Syntactic functions

- i. A noun can be identified by determiners, articles and the rest e.g.
 - m h
 - a. The boy (mh)
 - m h
 - b. Her beauty (mh)
 - m h
 - c. Some men (mh)
- ii. A noun can be the headword of the sentence e.g.
 - m m h
 - a. A beautiful girl (mmh)
 - m m h
 - b. A clever teacher (mmh)
- iii. A noun can function as the subject, object and complement in a sentence e.g.

- a. **Ibrahim** is the class captain (subject of the sentence)
- b. The man bought **Fatima** a bag (object of the verb “bought”)
- c. Amina is a **nurse** (as the complement of the subject)

Student: Yes

Exchange III

Teacher: Please, note that the most important element in a sentence is verb. Again, verb is an obligatory element in a sentence.

Student: Yes, Sir. (Chorus answer)

Teacher: Good

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In exchange I, the teacher uses elicitation act form to prepare a ground for his lesson. Elicitation act becomes very pertinent at the opening of a lesson so that the teacher would be able to link his previous lesson with the new one.

This is closely followed by the use of summon. The teacher uses “summon” to control the class because many students signified interest to answer the question by raising up their hands.

The inference to be drawn from this classroom discourse is that, the students understood very well the content of the last topic taught.

Finally, the teacher uses “prompt” in Exchange I since the response of the student who attempted the question was accurate and apt.

In exchange II, the teacher uses informative act form. The main function is to provide information. The students on their part showed clear understanding to the message sent.

In exchange III, the teacher uses repetition Act form to explain his point. The use of this act form becomes germane in a classroom discourse purposely to emphasize the importance of the content of the message. The teacher rounds off this exchange with the use of frame Act form. This signals effective delivery of the lesson.

Exchange IV

Teacher: Today, we shall be looking at the topic entitled place of articulation of English consonant sounds.

Students: Yes

Teacher: Does anybody have any question to ask on the last topic taught?

Student: (Raised their hands) yes, sir.

Exchange V

Teacher: Now, look up. I want you to listen and hear how I would produce the labio-dental sounds-voiceless and voiced ones /f/ and /v/. The teacher pronounced the two sounds. Can you all repeat after me /f/ and /v/.

Students: (The students repeat the sounds)

Teacher: Good. Let us move on to the next sound.

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Exchange IV

In Exchange IV, the teacher uses frame act form to signal the beginning of his lesson. Frame Act is another discourse tool which a language teacher could use to start his lesson.

Another discourse tool in exchange IV is the use of bid act form.

All these discourse tools used by the language teacher in exchange IV made the discussion in the class very interesting, understandable and enjoyable.

In exchange V, the teacher starts his lesson with the use of focus act form. The purpose of this discourse tool is to inform the students about what the topic is all about.

Next, the teacher uses demonstration act form. This is done by giving a practical illustration of how the sounds being taught are pronounced.

This exchange rounds off his lecture with the use of a frame act form. The use of this Act Form signals effective delivery of the topic taught.

Conclusion

English, as a second language, is perceived to be too difficult to teach especially in the Nigerian context where we have pupils in our various classrooms drawn from different linguistic background. The mother tongue interference constitutes a bane to the effective and efficient delivery of instruction in the English language classroom. In order to ease this difficulty, the

teacher of English language is expected to use appropriate discourse tools in his class to make his lesson very interesting, simplified and enjoyable.

Finally, we want to submit here that some of the relevant discourse models which are geared towards effective delivery of language instruction in classrooms are exemplified in this research paper for adaption into our lessons. This is because the teacher is the one saddled with the responsibility of controlling the discourse and determining the direction it goes. The teacher has a role that is described in discourse as [+ HIGHER ROLE], while the students have the [- HIGHER ROLE]. With this tenor relationship between the teacher and the pupils, the classroom discourse is able to run smoothly.

Recommendations

Based on the above conclusion, the following recommendations are made. These are:

- i. The teacher of English language should establish a good rapport with his pupils.
- ii. The teacher's introduction at the beginning of his lesson should be attention-catching in order to make the lesson very interesting and enjoyable.
- iii. The language instruction must be presented systematically so that the content taught would be properly understood.
- iv. Every language teacher is hereby encouraged to use relevant discourse tools in his lesson for better understanding.
- v. The pupils in the language classrooms should be actively involved in the various activities at every stage of the lesson.
- vi. There must be proper evaluation of language instruction at the end of every lesson, so as to ascertain that the behavioural objectives stated at the beginning of the lesson have been achieved

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