Interactional Techniques Used in Class Opening and Closing in EFL Classes

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Abstract

The present article attempts to investigate the interactional techniques employed by the basic level teachers to begin and end English language classes. For this purpose, 15 English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers who have been teaching English at basic level in Banke district were purposively selected as the participants of the study. The data was collected employing an observational technique. Each of the observed classes was audio recorded and then transcribed. The transcribed data was analyzed based on thematic technique of qualitative data analysis. The findings showed that teachers engaged in several interactional micro actions that were included in the class starting and ending moves. A variety of interactional techniques including greeting students, calling names, checking the assigned homework and phatic communion were found to be used by the teachers to begin the classes. Similarly, interactional techniques such as assigning homework and describing the upcoming lessons were found to be the most common sub-moves used to close the lesson.
Keywords: *Discourse analysis, interactional analysis, opening move, closing move, Basic Level teachers*

Introduction

Discourse refers to any piece of text, written or spoken larger than the sentence. According to Cook (1989), discourse refers to stretches of language perceived to be meaningful, unified, and purposive. It performs the roles like entertaining, educating, informing, warning, threatening, asking, etc. Discourse can be classified based on medium, formality, and reciprocity (Fairclough, 1989). According to him, the discourse is classified as spoken and written based on the medium. A spoken discourse is less formal and therefore less orderly. There are frequent interventions from the receiver's side. Friendly talks, dialogues and conversations are some of the examples of spoken discourse. Written discourse, in contrast, is formal and therefore, more orderly in its expression. There is more lexical density in the written text. It means written discourse consists of more content words as compared to spoken discourse. Written texts, for example letters, notices are more orderly than the spoken ones. It implies that written texts or discourses are more coherent and cohesive in comparison to the spoken texts or discourses. Based on formality, as

suggested by Fairclough (1989), discourse can be classified into two types namely formal and informal discourse. Informal discourse is less orderly as compared to formal discourse. Whereas interaction between two classmates can be taken as an example of informal discourse, a pupil asking his head teacher for leave is an example of formal discourse. In the same way, based on reciprocity, discourse is either reciprocal or non-reciprocal. A discourse is said to be reciprocal when there is possibility of interaction by another participant. The receiver can influence the course of direction of what is being said. A face to face conversation such as dialogue and interviews can be taken as an example of reciprocal discourse. A letter to the editor for a newspaper, on the contrary, is an example of non-reciprocal discourse where the sender and receiver have no chance of interaction. Reciprocity, however, is not an absolute matter. For example, an informal interaction between friends has more reciprocity than the speech delivered by a political leader. The speech delivered by a political leader, in the same way, has more reciprocity than a written discourse such as a novel, poem, etc. In the same way, based on the purpose of discourse, it can be either transactional or interactional discourse. Transactional discourse refers to the use of language for content expression which is used for the exchange of goods and services, interactional discourse is used for phatic communion to establish and maintain social relations and expressing our personal feelings, sentiments, emotions, and attitudes. Some discourses, however, serve both functions.

According to Cazden (2001), classroom discourse is a problematic media. The implication of this remark is that any analysis of EFL classroom discourse must be considered with immense importance. Keeping this view in mind, this observational study tries to investigate interactional techniques used by the teachers to begin and end EFL classes utilizing the conversational approach (CA) of DA.

Literature Review

Classroom Discourse

The language that teachers and students use to interact with one another in the classroom is referred to as classroom discourse. Furthermore, classroom discourse refers to the type of language use that is found in the classroom situations. According to Richards and Schmidt (1999), discourse which takes place between students and teacher is also referred to as pedagogic discourse, and it is different in form and function from language used in other situations due to the distinct social roles of students, teachers and the activities they are engaged in. It is also known as classroom interaction, and it is not only concerned with the interaction between the teacher and learners but also amongst the learners in the classroom. Most of the classroom discourse happens with the pattern of initiation, response and evaluation. Teacher, in this structure, is the initiator of the conversation. The student, then, responds to what the teacher has asked and finally the teacher evaluates the student's response. Classroom discourse is a key area for the study of social relationships and their impact on language learning in the classroom. The process of face to face classroom instruction and interaction is, therefore, studied in the study of classroom discourse.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis (DA) refers to the description of natural spoken or written discourse. It is concerned with the study of what gives a stretch of language unity and meaning. In this regard, Cook (1996) mentioned that discourse is a linguistic stretch

that is in use, taking on meaning for its users in context, and being viewed by them as having a purpose, being significant, and being related. Moreover, DA is the study of how stretches of language give meaning and purpose in context. It serves the purpose of how the formal and functional properties of language help in serving to communicate our thoughts and feelings efficiently and appropriately. It studies the various cohesive devices employed to bring out meaning and purpose of speech acts. It seeks to interpret how the cohesive devices and coherence in the discourse generate meaning, bring about a purpose and provide a unity in the given discourse. It, in narrow terms, is the study of language in use that extends beyond sentence boundaries. This is not the broader consensual view however, as context and social factors are not subsumed in this view. The wider consensual view of DA is that it studies meaning of words in context, analyzing the parts of meaning that can be explained by knowledge of the physical and social world, and the socio-psychological factors influencing communication, as well as the knowledge of the time and place in which the words are uttered or written (Yule, 1996). For the complete understanding of the text in discourse, we must recognize the sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, semantic and pragmatic contexts. It is a general term for several approaches to analyzing written, spoken, signed language use or any significant semiotic event. It covers an extremely wide range of activities, from the narrowly focused investigation of how words such as *oh*, *well* are used in casual talk, to the study of the dominant ideology in a culture as represented, for example, in its educational or political practices. According to Richards and Schmidt (1999),

> DA deals with how the choices of articles, pronouns and tenses affect the structures of the discourse, the relationship between utterances and sentences in a discourse and the moves made by speakers to introduce a new topic, change the topic or a higher role relationship to other participants (p. 52).

It examines how stretches of language, considered in their full textual, social and psychological context, become meaningful and unified for their uses. It is a rapidly expanding field, providing insights into the problems and processes of language use and language learning, and is, therefore, of foremost importance to language use and language learning, and is, therefore, of immense importance to language teachers. Traditionally, language teaching was concentrated on pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary and while these remain the basis of foreign language knowledge; DA can draw attention to the skills needed to put this knowledge into action and to achieve successful communication in the classroom and outside. In other words, DA serves the purpose of how the formal and functional properties of language help in serving to communicate our thoughts and feelings efficiently and appropriately. For the complete understanding of the text in a discourse, we must recognize the sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, semantic and pragmatic contexts. It studies the various cohesive devices employed to bring out meaning and purpose of speech acts. It seeks to interpret how the cohesive devices and coherence in the discourse generate meaning, bring about a purpose and provide a unity in the given discourse. Thus, it examines how words relate to each-other within the text and how the participants in the discourse use language and in which context. To sum up, DA focuses its study on exploring the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used.

Approaches to Analyze Classroom Discourse

Investigating L2 classroom interaction may be done in several diverse ways. Interaction analysis (IA) might be regarded as the most traditional. A substantial number of observational tools for these methods have been developed during the 1960s and 1970s. Then, a more structured and advanced form of IA known as system-based methods (Wallace, 1998) was presented. These methods involve a greater number of preset categories that have been decided by numerous observations made in educational settings. Among the observational frameworks of this category are Flanders' (1970) Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC), Moskowitz's (1967) Foreign Language Interaction (FLINT), and Spada and Frohlich's (1995) Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT).

Discourse analysis (DA)is the next method for classroom interaction analysis. It studies classroom interaction in terms of interlocking moves in larger interactional units of classroom discourse. Fanselow's (1977) method is one of the discourse-based methodologies that is like system-based methodologies. But it differs from system-based methodologies in that it shows how the categories work together to create bigger discourse units.

Conversational Analysis (CA) was proposed in response to the requirement for more ethnographic and naturalistic investigation of classroom dialogue (Have, 2007). The fundamental tenet of CA is that participants constantly shape social situations using language during turn-taking, turn-sequencing, and opening and closing turns (Sidnell, 2013; Walsh, 2011). It is an approach to DA from the structural and situational point of view. According to Crystal (2003, p. 108), "it is a method of studying the sequential structure and coherence of conversations (in their everyday sense), usually employing the techniques of ethnomethodology". It studies recordings of real conversations, to establish what properties are used in a systematic way when people linguistically interact. It is an empirical, inductive study. It examines discourse from the perspective of sequencing utterances within the context of language use. For example, the utterances may be sequenced as adjacency pairs, insertion sequence, side sequence, etc. CA views discourse as a process rather than a product. "It demonstrates that conversation is systematically structured" (Cutting, 2008, p.26). According to Richards and Schmidt (1999, p. 64), conversation analysis includes the study of how speakers decide when to speak during a conversation (i.e. rules of turn taking), how the sentences of two or more speakers are related (i.e. adjacency pair) and the distinct functions that conversation is used for (for example, to establish roles and to communicate politeness or inquiry).

CA is the study of talk in interaction both verbal and non-verbal in situations of everyday life. Furthermore, it attempts to describe the orderliness, structure and sequential patterns of interaction, whether institutional in school, market, court, etc. or in a casual conversation. It is an approach to the study of natural conversation, with a view to determine participants' method of turn taking, constructing sequences of utterances across turns, identifying and repairing problems, and employing gaze and movement and to determine how conversation works in different conventional settings (e.g., interviews, court hearings, telephone conversations, card games, etc.). To conclude, conversation analysis is a descriptive study of actual use of language. Research in conversation analysis requires recordings of naturally occurring

conversations to discover how sequences of activities (both verbal and nonverbal) are generated spontaneously in verbal interaction.

The next approach is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)which is a socio-political approach to analyzing discourse. As mentioned by Crystal (2005, p. 123) "Critical discourse analysis is a perspective which studies the relationship between discourse events and socio-political and cultural factors, especially the way discourse is ideologically influenced by and can itself influence power relations in society." Discourses are based on power and ideology of the society, and society is changed and influenced by the content and structure of the discourse. The study of how power and ideology of the people or society structure discourses and how discourses change the society is the domain of CDA. For Holmes (2008, p. 389), "CDA is explicitly concerned with investigating how language is used to construct and maintain power relationships in society; the aim is to show connections between language and power, and between language and ideology. CDA refers to the analysis of how texts work within specific socio-cultural practices. It deals with the explanation of how discourse is shaped by relations of power, ideology and at the same time, is used to construct social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief. Thus, CDA regards discourse as a form of socio-cultural practice. To sum up, CDA states that discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned. Furthermore, discourse is an instrument of power, of increasing importance in contemporary societies. The way this instrument of power works is often hard to understand, and CDA aims to make it more visible and transparent.

Walsh (2006) has presented Self-evaluation Teacher Talk (SETT)as the most recent approach for examining classroom dialogue. It is a framework that splits classroom discourse into many micro-contexts based on various pedagogical objectives that the instructors in an ESL context adhere to. In SETT, there are four micro-contexts that influence classroom conversation. The first micro concept is referred to as 'managerial' and it involves the teachers having a variety of pedagogical objectives, such as initiating an activity, switching to another activity, or directing pupils to content. The second one is 'materials in which the teachers offer language exercise, stimulate student responses, and provide clarification as needed. The third micro context is 'skills and Systems' which entails teachers giving pupils the right feedback, assisting them in producing the right forms, and giving them more experience in various sub skills. The last one is 'classroom context' in which the teachers emphasize oral fluency among students.

Methods and Procedures

This small scale study prepared on the CA approach is based on the primary source of data. The primary justification for using CA as the research's theoretical framework is that it focuses on a naturalistic analysis of classroom discourse (Have, 2007). The sample population consisted of 15 basic level EFL teachers teaching in community schools which are in Nepalgunj sub-metropolitan city of Banke district. Among the 15 participants, eight were male and seven were female. I employed convenience sampling to select the area of the study and nonprobability judgmental sampling to select the participants. The sole technique used in data collection was observation. Each of the observed classes was audio recorded with the written consents

of the participants. The audio recordings were transcribed, thematized and presented and interpreted employing thematic technique of qualitative data analysis. Ethical issues were considered by informing the participants of the recording's purpose, its usage, and the method employed to maintain their anonymity.

Results and Discussion

Opening in Classroom Conversation

A total of six sub-moves were found to be used while opening the class. The sub-moves include greeting, phatic communion, name calling, checking the assigned homework, reviewing and giving brief explanations of the lesson. Out of these six sub-moves, three namely greeting, phatic communion and name calling were the most constant sub-moves which were found to be used in all EFL classes. Among the exponents used in the greetings, "good morning/afternoon" was the most common exponents found to be used in the discourse. Another much used sub-move was phatic communion. Among the phatic communion expressions, expressions namely 'How are you? 'How is the day?', 'How are you feeling today?' and 'Are you alright?' were found to be commonly used while opening the classroom discourse. The next sub-move which occurred in all the EFL classes was "name calling". The teacher occasionally inquired the reasons for their absence after calling out the names of the students who had missed class of the previous session; the tactic of "asking reason for the absences" was not found to be used among all the teachers. "Checking the assigned homework" was the third most frequent sub-move to open the class. Teachers used this sub-move to assess how seriously the students had done their given schoolwork. Among the various exponents used in checking the assigned homework, 'have you done your homework' and 'have you completed the homework or not' were the most frequent exponents which were used by the teacher to check completion of assigned homework. "Giving brief explanations about the session plan" was the final sub-move used in opening the lesson. The teachers provided a general outline of what they taught in the classroom.

Opening the class has been referred to as the first major action in each class. Teachers in this movement adhere to several pedagogical objectives, including verifying student attendance, looking into student absences, reviewing assignments, reflecting on previous lessons, and developing a lesson plan for the current class. Based on the findings, it may be claimed that the four most common sub-moves of teachers in EFL classrooms for the beginning of the class are greeting, calling names, reviewing, and seeking for the reasons for absences. Additionally, as this stage of classroom conversation is the most basic structurally, no patterns of combination were found for it. Teachers can incorporate tonal themes to their discipline objectives.

Closing in Classroom Conversation

The important moment during classroom instruction is closing or ending classroom teaching of the very same day. Altogether eight sub-moves were found to be used in classroom discourse to close the conversation. These sub-moves include giving the assignments, thanking, explaining upcoming lessons, asking questions, stating the attitude to the lesson, students' opinion about the lesson, farewell and explanation of what has been learnt. Among these eight sub-moves, giving assignments is the first and most common sub-move. As the name implies, in this micro-action the teachers gave the students homework. There were 32 instances of this in the classroom

environment. In certain instances, the teachers reminded their students to complete their assignment after giving it to them, this happened 12 times. The next sub-move was the teachers thanking the students for coming to class today with a frequency of 21. Third sub-move was the briefing of the upcoming lesson, which happened 30 times. While using this sub-move, the teachers summarized the material that will be covered in the upcoming lesson. Similarly, the next sub-move was asking questions. The teacher asked their students if they had any questions or concerns about the present lesson in this sub-move. This was also one of the most common sub-moves used in closing the class which happened 28 times. The next and less frequent sub-move with a frequency of 11 was the teachers sharing their perspective on the lesson. During this stage, the teachers expressed their viewpoints on a variety of topics in the classroom, including student learning, individual and class progress. Like the previous sub-move, in a subsequent sub-move with a frequency of 11 was elicitation of students' opinion about the lesson. The teachers tried to elicit the opinions of the students on the present lesson, the degree of difficulty of the assignments or materials, and their understanding. Furthermore, the teacher asked the students if they had any questions or concerns about the present lesson in the subsequent sub-move. This was the least common micro-action in this section happening only five times. The next least frequent sub-move, with a frequency of four, was the teachers expressing how the students felt about the lesson. Moreover, the teachers discussed a variety of topics at this stage, including student learning, individual student achievement, and class success. Similarly, the least used sub-move was taking leave which was found in five classes. In these micro actions, the teachers just said goodbye or similar comments at the end of the lesson. The final sub-move with a frequency of two was teachers' description of what has been done in the session.

Conclusion

The analysis of the data collected at the beginning and the conclusion of the two classroom discourse phases revealed the size and complexity of the classroom interactional architecture. Even a situation that seems simple on the surface like the start and end of class or classroom discourse have their own set of interpersonal micro-actions. In addition to this, analysis of classroom discourse helps to determine how interaction affects acquisition, how social relationships in the classrooms coordinate, and how this learning is held. Moreover, a wide variety of different talk strategies used in classes, including calling names, checking homework, briefing students about the lesson, and asking students why they were absent show that the teachers' pay attention to the students. Therefore, this research will be beneficial for EFL teachers and educators. In addition to this, sub-moves which the study revealed familiar pre-service and in-service teachers about the variety of sub-moves used in the start and end of the EFL classes. More specifically, the set of interactional moves used in the start and end of classroom conversation might be a useful action plan for teacher educators to concentrate on in teacher training courses, especially at their commencement. For instance, they can see the variety of methods through which a class may begin or end. Additionally, teacher educators can encourage critical thinking and reflection in their students' instructors by examining these micro-actions in conjunction with teachers throughout various workshops and post-observation

sessions. Future research should pay greater attention to what is happening at the beginning of class or right before it ends. The examination of starting and concluding session moves yielded results that suggest the phases of the classroom's interactional architecture are interconnected, which suggests that more micro-analytic research is required to examine classroom discourse.

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