

ASPECTS OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ON THE LANGUAGE OF THE CLASSROOM

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Abstract

Literature showed that the English Language assumed the hegemonic status in Nigeria since 1851 (Ogu, 1992; Anyachonkeya and Izuagba, 1999); Eka, D. (2000). And this foreign language in contact with the indigenous languages has undergone so many stages till the present time of Nigerian English (NE), the kind of English language that is spoken and accepted by all the ethnic groups in Nigeria, as Nigerian is multilingual. The coming together of the English language and the indigenous languages brought about some kind of deviations. These deviations, some linguists called “errors”. Albeit the utterances may be phonologically, syntactically and morphologically anomalous, the researcher hypothesised that those anomalies are “innovations”, “motivators”, or “catalysts”, which promote teaching and learning in the Nigerian educational system. Positive communication is important in everyday discourse and semantics (meaning) is the crux of every communication. Therefore, this paper examined some discourse units (features) such as code switching, code mixing and turn taking, as found in the recordings of some classroom discourse, anchored mainly in Grice’s cooperative principle. The result showed that there were some deviations from the normal use of the English language in English as Second Language (ESL) classrooms by both the teachers and the students. The researcher’s stance was that those discourse units analysed in the data collected, promote both the English language and the indigenous language. Finally, the researcher suggests the continuous use of those discourse units in education and that the units be incorporated into the curriculum as teaching skills or methods at all levels.

Keywords: Discourse Analysis, code switching, code mixing, turn taking, Grice’s cooperative principle.

Although the English language in Nigeria is hegemonic over the indigenous languages, the mixture has bastardised both the English language and the indigenous Nigerian languages. Despite the changes, the situation, as the researcher observed in the study, generally promotes the teaching and learning in

English as a Second Language (ESL). With it, the researcher submits to the linguists who advocate that innovations or "errors" in the use of the English language are no more logjams to educational progress but maintain proficiency in the usage as observed by Bamgbose (1995). Some school authorities, especially the private schools in Nigeria, have disciplined their teachers and pupils / students for speaking vernacular in school or inside the classrooms for fear of spoiling their English.

The analysis of code switching and code mixing, as discourse units, for instance, seems an aberration. Many of the researchers observed some of these discourse units in their studies ranging from the legal, religious, medical, classroom situations etc. This study observed these discourse units in ESL classrooms.

In this study, code switching and code mixing are innovations which enhance the proper understanding of the subjects especially at the primary and secondary school levels. The variants got from the normal usage of the English language in conjunction with the local or indigenous languages seem to be acceptable by both teachers and students and are preferred by them (TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTION [TSI]) which depicts Nigerian diverse cultures. This paper identifies and examines the innovative usages to determine how functional and dynamic they are in Nigerian educational system.

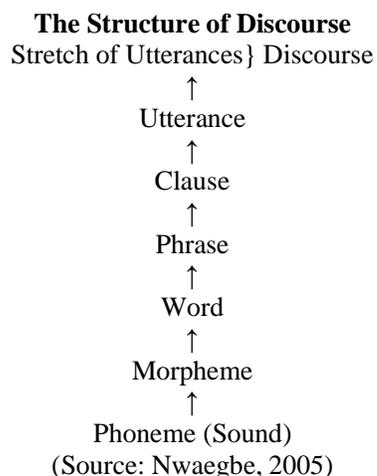
The Meaning of Discourse

The term discourse may be regarded as both formal and informal long exposition on a topic or subject matter. The classical notion of discourse limits it to conversation or speech. Hence in this study, discourse is regarded as speech or conversation. The researcher was concerned with spoken discourse which was later transcribed into written discourse for easy analysis. The definition of discourse points at the use of language to refer or to talk about something, for human beings express their feelings, ideas, culture etc., to one another. Language, therefore, is very essential for human interaction and human interaction is a form of discourse. Language is a system of conventional signals used for communication by a whole community (Gimson, 1980, p.4). This pattern of conventions covers the arrangement of words, the association of meaning with words and system of significant sound units. Speech equals language. It means that "Speech is both instantaneous and collaborative engagement of one participant with another with separate actions of each finely meshed together" (Osuafor, 2003, P. 4). It then means that So, language can be heard, spoken and written for communication.

The identity and crucial nature of language could strongly be felt in the words of Okonkwo (1997, p.13):

We can neither ponder nor teach about such philosophical problems as quality, relation, substance, causality etc, if these words did not belong to our language and the ideas implied and expressed in them

did not belong to our culture. Culture depends on society for its existence and society and culture are dependent on language.



It could be deduced from the structure that some sentences strung together (Discourse) is the highest in speech while phoneme (individual sound) is the lowest in the ranking or hierarchy.

Communication in the classroom involves the teacher and the students in discourse where the teacher controls every situation. Teachers could help their students learn and share knowledge. As this study is an attempt to analyse the discourse situation of a classroom (a classroom being a room in a school or college in which classes or lessons are held or any place where one learns or gains knowledge or experience), let the term "Discourse Analysis".(DA) be discoursed.

Discourse Analysis (D. A.)

Discourse Analysis (D. A.) is the study of organisation of language above the sentence or above the clause and therefore the study of larger linguistic units such as written texts or conversational exchanges (Stubbs, 1983, p.1.). This simply says that discourse analysis is the study and interpretation of discourse. Discourse Analysis comprises style, appropriateness, cohesiveness, rhetorical force, topic or sub-topic etc. Discourse Analysis in the words of Emezue (1998, p.22) is primarily interested in the relationship between language and the environment in which it is used. Different scholars such as the structural linguist, Zeilig Harris in the USA in 1950s, the American linguist Anthropologist, Dell Hymes, J. L. Austin, J. R. Searle, H. P. Grice and more recently, Olateju (1998), Nwaegbe (2005), to mention but a few names, have tried in the field of discourse in a diversified way to analyse the nature of human speech in different social milieux. In a classroom situation, the teacher controls discourse and no pupil/student challenges it. The teacher dictates the topic of the lesson in a way he or she feels and can accept or reject the pupils'/students' answers or contributions.

A discourse analyst investigates the use of language in context by a speaker, writer and more concerned with the relationship between the speaker and the utterance on the particular occasion of use than with the potential relationship of one sentence to another regardless of their use. The discourse analyst probes into

what the participants have in mind; their unspoken interaction, belief, system, anxieties, dedications and how these affect their linguistic behaviour. For instance:

Speaker A: How can I get some water this evening?

Speaker B: My mum is in the house.

Analysis

The two sentences A and B are not connected, but they could be understood that speaker A, probably an older person, is asking a favour from speaker B to get water for him. Speaker B has a constraint and that is his mother in the house who can never allow him (the younger person) to do speaker A that favour. These are the things a discourse analyst is interested in.

Code Switching and Code Mixing

Code, according to Crystal (1994, p.74) is used in sociolinguistics as a label for any system of communication involving language. The encoder (speaker) expresses the ideas, thoughts, feelings etc, while the decoder (hearer) interprets the message. When a speaker, in the course of making a speech, shifts or moves from one language to another or makes speeches that contain more than one code, knowingly or unknowingly, consciously or unconsciously, this act is called either code switching or code mixing.

Code Switching

A teacher code switches when he or she uses more than one language (or code) in carrying out thoughts in the classroom (from one to the other). For instance, if a teacher in a classroom

discourse makes a stretch of utterances in the English language (second language) which is a code and explains further to the students in the Igbo language or any other language, he has code switched. On a topic such as “mourning”, and after explaining the concept to the students in English and the teacher feels the students did not quite understand him and if the class is made of different ethnic groups, he can use their various languages to explain it e.g. “igba mkpe” or “ida mkpe in Igbo etc. First, he explains in English without a single Igbo word and later explains in Igbo without a single English word. However, one can code switch between two languages as explained above and also within a language using different dialects or registers in that language; as code switching is a verbal strategy among bilinguals, (Eckman, 1976, p.3) which may be used to discover when a child or a stranger has mastered a language. But in classrooms, teachers use it to discover when their students have understood the lessons, for emphasis, warning or to show class grade or level among the educated ones.

Code Mixing

Code mixing is that which involves the transfer of linguistic elements from one language into another (Crystal 1994, p. 70). For example, the researcher heard a student saying to another:

- | | | |
|----|-----------|---------|
| 1. | Achoghị m | trouble |
| | ↓ | ↓ |
| | Igbo | English |
- Putting the lexical “trouble” which is of English origin into the Igbo clause

stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged". Four maxims support this principle. The maxims are:

1. **Quantity:** this requires one to make one's contribution as informative as required, but not more, or less, than is required;
2. **Quality:** do not say that which you believe to be false or for which you lack evidence;
3. **Relation:** Be relevant;
4. **Manner:** Be clear, brief and orderly.

For instance, if a participant according to Yule (1997, p.145) says "well, to make a long story short and I won't bore you with all the details" seems to obey the maxim of quantity- not trying to say more than required. Again, if a participant says "the much I know...; I am not too sure ...", this shows the maxim of quality is taken into consideration- not giving false or untrue evidence. However, that of relation is obeyed this way; when the teacher says "The colour of a cockroach is like that of a termite, if he is describing a cockroach to the students. This is relevant to his lesson. That of manner requires that the speakers be organised in their discourse by making their words unambiguous and taking appropriate 'turns'. These maxims can be violated and yet achieve a desirable goal and may cause some problems. Borrowing from Palmer (1996, p.173), the maxim of quality can also be used to account for the fact, if a teacher asks the student: "have you finished your class work and put your books away?" and the students answered; "we have finished our class work". The

teacher can infer that the books have not been put away. The students in this case have violated the maxim of quantity. They would have given the information that is required- that they had put the books away as well. In the same way, the maxim of quality can be violated when one utters "it may be late" shows that the participant does not know whether it will be late or not, otherwise, he could have said "it will be late". Considering that of relation (say what is related or relevant to the issue or subject matter at stake), it is a very difficult situation to know when an utterance is relevant or not. Grice's example helps in explaining it a bit. Echoing his example (1975, p.51):

Speaker A: I am out of petrol.

Speaker B: There is a garage round the corner.

Unless speaker B wants to say that the garage is probably open, otherwise, there is no relationship between what is said and what is replied. Grice further explained that when a speaker did not give adequate information to a question or answers more than to a question or violates all the maxims, that the speaker is still co-operating for there must be reasons for that 'rule violation'. The maxims are indeterminate as meaning itself is indeterminate

Presentation of Data

The researcher recorded four full length classroom lessons (teachings), tagged Text 1, Text 2, Text 3 and Text 4. Text 1 and Text 2 are two mathematics lessons from Senior Secondary (SS classes) and Junior Secondary Class (JSS

classes) respectively. Text 3 and Text 4 are two English language lessons from both Senior and Junior Secondary levels. These four Texts or lessons were taught by four different teachers. Some units were identified; the Discourse Units (DU) mentioned in the previous sections (introduction) such as code switching, code mixing and turn taking and their Discourse Roles (DR) were also identified and foregrounded to see how they facilitate or inhibit teaching and learning in ESL classrooms. For lack of space, the researcher presented and analysed only one full length lesson as follows, as it also exposed those discourse units.

Findings / Discussion

It was observed that the teacher(T) initiates discussion, holds the floor for a long time, grabs and yields it when he wants to and gives feedback(F); dictates when students take part (turn taking) and any attempt by the student(S) to interpolate is termed 'rudeness' if the teacher did not sanction it. The students give response(R). The teachers and students (T/S) also obey the Grice's co-operative principle. Their digressions were relevant. Besides, teachers (T) and students (T) code mixed and code switched at some points during the interaction or utterances (TU and SU) which obeys Sapir – Whorf hypothesis. The teacher code switched and code mixed when emphasis was needed to know whether the students knew the answers to the questions or not. This study as a model of discourse analysis, accounted for all these discourse functions

and how participants understood discourse as a communicative activity. This greatly enhanced teaching and learning in ESL classrooms. Information was smoothly transferred in this way (See the Tables).

Summary, Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research

Summary

This study examined aspects of discourse analysis on the language of the classroom (educational setting) as there were other aspects of Discourse Units on other areas such as religion, medicine, sports, law etc, and on non-formal setting in Nigeria, as a multilingual country. This investigation examined the Discourse Roles (DR) of code mixing, code switching and turn taking in the ESL classroom situation. Four full-length lessons (40 minutes) – mathematics and the English language; Maths lesson from the SS3 (Senior level) and English (JSS2) Junior level were recorded, observed and later transcribed into written discourse for analysis. Although the use of code switching and code mixing waters the use of Nigerian indigenous languages (Idiagbon, 2007) and bastardises both languages (English and Indigenous), the researcher observed that the use of codes (mixing/switching) promote teaching and learning in ESL classrooms. Students understood more when the teachers mixed codes (See the Table). The result also showed that the teacher (T) dictates when the students (S) should take part, chooses his topic and methods and ends as he likes.

The researcher's proposal that some discourse units promote teaching and learning in ESL classrooms was corroborated by the data collected and analysed.

Conclusion

The importance or relevance of Discourse Units (DU) to teaching and learning is obvious in this study. Therefore, education should not be built on false premise rather on the correct one. The ESL students should mark the power in the code or codes teachers use in classrooms. Seminars or conferences on discourse analysis should be conducted on those discourse features that help in teaching and learning for all groups of teachers so that they would not be restricted in their choice of codes while teaching at all levels. Over population can never make a conducive environment for teaching and learning. Consequently, the teacher could be confused and may make some utterances that may destroy the effective interaction with the students. Therefore, the conditions of our schools especially classrooms should be made to reflect an academic environment.

Suggestion

Abdullahi-Idiagbon (2007, p.35) and some other linguists frowned at the use of code mixing and code switching though in a sociolinguistic milieu but the researcher's investigation seems to suggest and advocates vehemently, the continuous use of code switching, code mixing and turn taking in the Nigerian educational system and they be

incorporated into the curriculum as teaching skills. Although the discourse units attested in our data bastardise both the English language and the indigenous languages, they should be considered indispensable in teaching and learning as the researcher's intuition as an experienced and trained teacher seems to suggest. The researcher suggests also that more work be done on STUDENT – STUDENT (S-S) classroom interaction, because, at some point as the researcher observed, the students interacted among themselves. It is only then that the idea of incorporating these Discourse Units (DU) into the curriculum would be lent more weight.

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