

Classroom Discourse Analysis: A Case Study of EFL Reading Class

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Abstract:

More than the recognition, perception, and interpretation of written materials, reading has been dubbed as our bridge to other skills that are necessary for success. Subsequently, one way for teachers to monitor both the quantity and quality of output of the students is through Classroom discourse analysis, which is an aspect of classroom process research (Jiang, 2012). This paper, therefore, aimed to determine teacher's questioning versus students' reading strategies in the case of an ESL reading class in one of the private schools in Khartoum City, Sudanese through classroom discourse analysis. As a qualitative endeavor, it made use of classroom observations with the aid of an audio recorder to enable the analysis. A total of 113 exchanges were generated in a 40-minute discussion, with roughly 23 minutes allotted to the said discourse, and the rest for other activities. Teacher-Student- Teacher (TST) captured as Teacher-Student-Teacher (TST) in the case of this paper, is the recurring sequence during the whole duration of the discourse. Discourse analysis that was done to an audio recording transcript of a reading class observation revealed patterns that are primarily present in some, if not most, discourse analysis (DA) research literature. Interestingly, it, however, uncovered the following: for teacher's way of questioning (in this case, echo and epistemic), epistemic questions (mostly, rhetorical for this matter), were made reference(s) by the students in answering questions. Consequently, the lesson or activity became, to some extent, communicative, because of the above-mentioned points.

Key Words: Classroom Discourse Analysis Classroom Interaction English as a Foreign Language

تحليل الخطاب الصفي: دراسة حالة لفئة قراءة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

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المستخلص:

أكثر من التعرف على المواد المكتوبة وإدراكها وتفسيرها ، فقد أطلق على القراءة اسم جسرنا إلى المهارات الأخرى الضرورية للنجاح. بعد ذلك ، تتمثل إحدى طرق المعلمين لمراقبة كمية ونوعية مخرجات الطلاب في تحليل خطاب الفصل الدراسي ، وهو جانب من جوانب بحث عملية الفصل الدراسي (جيانغ ، 2012). لذلك ، هدفت هذه الورقة إلى تحديد أسئلة المعلم مقابل استراتيجيات القراءة لدى الطلاب في حالة فصل قراءة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية في إحدى المدارس الخاصة في مدينة الخرطوم بالسودان من خلال تحليل الخطاب الصفي. كمسعى نوعي ، استفادت من ملاحظات الفصل الدراسي بمساعدة تسجيل صوتي لتمكين التحليل. تم إنشاء ما مجموعه 113 تبادلًا في مناقشة مدتها 40 دقيقة ، مع تخصيص ما يقرب من 23 دقيقة للخطاب المذكور ، والباقي لأنشطة أخرى. المعلم - الطالب - المعلم (TST) الذي تم التقاطه كمعلم - طالب - معلم (TST) في حالة هذه الورقة ، هو التسلسل المتكرر خلال مدة الخطاب بأكملها. كشف تحليل الخطاب الذي تم إجراؤه على نسخة تسجيل صوتي لملاحظة فئة القراءة عن أمطام موجودة بشكل أساسي في بعض ، إن لم يكن معظم ، الأدبيات البحثية لتحليل الخطاب. ومن المثير للاهتمام ، مع ذلك ، كشفت عن ما يلي: بالنسبة لطريقة المعلم في طرح الأسئلة (في هذه الحالة ، الصدى والمعرفية) ، تم جعل الأسئلة المعرفية (في الغالب ، بلاغية لهذه المسألة) ، مرجعا (مراجع) من قبل الطلاب في الإجابة على الأسئلة. وبالتالي ، أصبح الدرس أو النشاط ، إلى حد ما ، توصليا ، بسبب النقاط المذكورة أعلاه.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تحليل الخطاب الصفي، التفاعل الصفي، تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة اجنبية

1.Introduction

Generally, reading comprehension can be defined as “the ability to understand information in a text and interpret it appropriately” (Akbari, 2014, p. 122).

Consequently, teaching reading is as complex as the reading itself. The understanding of complex reading process and the ability to use a wide array of teaching approaches are evidence of effective teachers, which yield “confident and independent readers” (Professional Development Services for Teachers, p.2). More than the recognition, perception, and interpretation of written

materials, reading has been dubbed as our bridge to other skills that are necessary for academic success. Subsequently, one way for teachers to monitor both the students’ quantity and quality of output is through Classroom discourse analysis, which is an aspect of classroom process research (Jiang, 2012). Cook (1989) defined discourse as the “language in use” (p.9) and the analysis of the language in use refers to

us as discourse analysis (Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 1).

Because of this, discourse analysis involves looking at the language form and language function; thus, it identifies linguistic features that depict various genres and social and cultural factors that assist our interpretation and understanding of manifold of texts, as well as types of talks (Jiang, 2012).

2.Study questions

2.1 What are the patterns and interactions prevailing in the EFL class consideration teacher questioning strategies?

2.2 What are the reading strategies for learners of English as a foreign language?

3.Objectives of the study

This study attempts to realize the following objectives:

3.1 To investigate the patterns and interactions prevailing in the EFL class consideration teacher questioning strategies?

3.2 To identify the reading strategies for learners of English as foreign language?

4.Literature review

4.1Discourse analysis in the classroom

In the language of Gee (1999a), beyond just a talk, discourse embraces any meaningful use of language and communicative gestures as well.

Information on two of the primary functions of language can be sourced out by looking closely into the discourse: “to support the performance of social activities and social identities, and to support human affiliation within cultures, social groups, and institution” (Gee, 1999, p.1). Hence, intimately, discourse is consistent with the presentation of social activities (e.g. classroom lessons), the formation and as well the maintenance of social identities, the interactions of social groups, and the setting up of social institutions. Discourse analysis provides an insight about the way things are in a certain circumstance.

One of the most common models of discourse analysis is the Sinclair and Coulthard Classroom discourse analysis. Sinclair and Coulthard’s (S&C) 1975 method of discourse analysis (DA) has been described as a litmus test for whether or not a lesson is communicative (Raine, 2010, p. 19, as cited in Cockayne, 2010). Sinclair and Coulthard’s Model consists of five ranks: lesson; transaction; exchange; move and act. The highest rank in this model the lesson, but they were unable to show structurally how a lesson is made up of transactions (Coulthard,

1985, p. 123 as cited in Heinel, 2017). The other four ranks, on the other hand had well defined structure. Transactions were made up of exchanges, exchanges were “expressed in terms of moves”, and moves consisted of “one or more acts” (Coulthard, 1985, p. 124-125).

There are two (2) major classes of exchange as indicated by Sinclair and Coulthard (1992) in their model: boundary exchange and teaching exchanges (p.25). The former typically signals the beginning or the end of a lesson, transaction, or a change topic normally marked by words such as ‘right’, ‘alright’, ‘now’, and ‘OK’, either with falling or rising intonation and a short break (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1992 as cited in Heinel, 2017). On the other, the latter is described as “the individual steps by which the lesson progresses” (Ibid).

Teaching exchanges consist of a minimum of one move and a maximum of three: a required opening move, followed by a possible answering move, and consequently a probable follow up move (Cook, 1989 quoted in Heinel, 2017), and Sinclair and Coulthard (1992) also termed these as Initiation (I), Response (R), and Feedback (F) (p.26), and these are used to express structure of exchange. Typically, move, in an exchange pertains to the minimal contribution of a speaker (to make an exchange) (Coulthard, 1985, p. 125 quoted in Heinel, 2017). In the said model, Initiation (I) moves are created by the teacher, and occasionally followed by a student (verbal or non-verbal) response (R) moves. Afterwards, response (R) moves are followed by some kind of a Feedback or Follow-up (F) move which is made by the teacher in order to accept, reject, evaluate or comment on the response made by the students (Hellerman, 2003, p. 80 as cited in Heinel, 2017).

Generally, discourse analysis refers to structural analysis in macro and as well as micro views (Chang, 2017). The first phase, which is the macro analysis, refers to the surface understanding in English reading comprehension. On the other hand, micro analysis involves the analysis of vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and information structure. Both analysis phases are crucial in the discourse analysis.

4.2 Schemata and meaning making

Consideration of the different facets in addition to the task of reading by students who have already established a schema in relation to the topic in another tongue or speech must be noted by language

teachers (Landry, 2002). McCarthy (1991) quoted in (Landry, 2002) put schemata as “the underlying connections that allow new experiences and information to be aligned with previous knowledge” (p.168). Further, logical relationships are necessary to make sense out of a text. By the same token, there are three types of schemata: content, formal, and abstract. Content schemata refers to evident relationships, obvious from a topic; formal, this refers to distant connections based on understanding of generalizations and mindset, and; abstract, hidden factors and thematic consideration.

Faulty or inaccurate constructs usually resulted from the absence of schema or the inability to activate it (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983, in Carrell, et al, 1998, p.85) in (Landry, 2002). Further, benefits from either being more prepared for a text or the text itself could be modified for easier comprehension are expected of the readers (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983, in Carrell, et al, 1998, p.85); however, it is arguable whether text modification.

Dichotomous views on schemata must be considered as well. On one hand, a strong view perceives schemata as something that influences the opinion of the readers prior to reading a text or selection (Landry, 2002). Van Dijk (1981) puts schemata as higher-level complex knowledge structures (p.141) that operate as what Anderson (1977) termed “ideational scaffolding”. On the other hand, weaker views state that schemata are structured background knowledge on a topic leading to predictions of discourse; independently. Messages are perceived in a particular manner determined by the following: person’s history, interests, gender, excreta (Anderson et al., 1977). Moreover, Bartlett (1932) viewed memory as constructive and mental representation was built from current discourse and background knowledge; hence, memory is developed from organized pieces by way of schema’s nature as an active feature.

Furthermore, fixed or flexible schemata are a way to account for interpretation and production of discourse ((Brown & Yule, 1983) in (Landry, 2002).

In the language of Anderson & Pearson (1984); Bernhardt (1991), Carrell, (1991); Grabe, (1991); Rumelhart, (1980) as quoted in (Maarof & Yaacob, 2011), in the process of reading, reader is an active participant, constructing meaning from clues found in printed texts (p.211). Thus, meaning is not intrinsic aspect of the text; rather, “texts have the potential for meaning” (Widdowson, 1984).

5. Methodology

The paper subscribed to qualitative design of research specifically, discourse analysis. A single case of a secondary school reading class (in Sudan- Khartoum) was the unit of analysis of the paper, permissions were importantly sought from the principal and consequently, of that of the teacher handling the reading class. an audio recorder was utilized to record the conversations during the reading class.

Similarly, the researcher also took observational notes to record the explicit behaviors of the learners during the event.

6. Analysis

6.1 The Reading Class Observation

Previously, important concepts were put forward in the light of the subsequent analysis. The reading class observation was done at Khartoum in Magmouat AL-nogoom School for Girls . Audio recorder was used in order to capture the conversation that was to be transcribed in order to discover patterns, hence, phenomenon, eventually, that might have occurred.

In brief, a total of 123 exchanges were generated in a 45-minute discussion, with roughly 30 minutes allotted to the said discourse, and the rest for other activities. TST, or Teacher-Student-Teacher (Teacher-Student-Teacher, in the case of this paper) is the recurring sequence during the whole duration of the discourse. Teacher dominated the discourse.

Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) as cited in Jiang (2012), established that TST is a regular sequence in the classroom discourse.

In recapitulation, the teacher had an assigned reading which is a novel *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson. One (1) week time, as evident in the transcript, was allocated to the students to read the said novel. The instruction was that a discussion would be done after the students read the novel, and active participation was quite expected as always.

In the course of this analysis, themes and concepts would follow and be given explications (along with the excerpts from the transcript) and these were grounded on the observed phenomenon. An important highlight of this analysis, which is very crucial to every language teaching, and specifically, teaching reading, is the art of questioning employed by the teacher. Strategies, if there were any being employed by the students, would be determined as well,

though meaning is always constructed subjectively by those who engaged in the discourse, researcher who analyzes discourse also brings his own subjective interpretations and meaning constructions to the discourse s/he analyzes.

At the beginning, the teacher set the mode before proceeding with the discussion. It was necessary because it could serve as some sort of an activation of the previous knowledge for the reason that the students might have forgotten what's to be done on that day or the other way around. However, it would be logical enough that even if the teacher did not do that, students still have to be responsible with the task they were assigned with.

6.2 Teacher's questions in the discussion

Basically, the reading teacher, during the event was asking questions that were really geared toward the context of the discussion. Comprehension questions were the dominant of the teacher, as evident in the transcript. Cognitively, in Bloom's Taxonomy, comprehension questions basically encompass understanding usually of the facts and ideas by organizing, describing, interpreting, translating, and stating (general concepts). Teachers can check comprehension by asking their students open-ended questions, having them justify answers, or by collecting summaries (Landry, 2002).

Teacher: Okay... Treasure Island.... So, anyone? Who could give me... ahm... a little bit of an overview of what... ahm, Treasure Island is.... Actually is? So... anyone? Who could give me a little summary of it? Or what is the gist of the novel by Robert Louis Stevenson, Treasure Island.... Okay... anyone? Okay Omnia...

At the beginning of the discourse, the teacher started to ask question (s) eliciting an overview, summary or the gist of the selection from the students.

Consequently, a student answered and provided a direct to the question. At this point, it was hard to determine whether the student read the selection or the other way around. However, in the transcript the student mispronounced the word "imaginary" and as well as "Edinburgh", having pronounced it as "End burgh". It might suggest that the student did not comprehend the selection and rather relied on the available summary of the story. Conversely, this concurs well enough with Cohen et al (1979) that inessential unknown vocabulary words disrupt comprehension unless the reader recognizes that

they can be ignored. Strategy is an integral part of learning, more relevant than specific linguistic knowledge. How readers solve problems is a better focus than looking at what is problematic for them (Cohen et al. 1979 in (Landry, 2002).

In each episode, the teacher directed the discussion by remarking on student responses and asking supplementary questions. Each question set off a question- answer-comment cycle. At the beginning of the first episode, the teacher set the context by repeating the question several times. This focused the students' attention and let them know (from their previous experiences with this teacher) that they were expected to know the answer.

13 Teacher: Our story treasure Island, we said this story is imaginary is not real story, we are going to talk about the author this story is ...

13 Students in

(chorus): Robert

Louis Stevenson

14 Teacher: Robert

Louis Stevenson

was born in ...*14*

Students in (chorus

): Edinburgh, in

Scotland

15 Teacher: When was Robert Louis Stevensons born?

15 Student: in November, 1850

16 Teacher: so, he was born in Edinburgh and lived there then he travelled to another place, to where? And why?

16 Student: Samoa, because he was ill and the weather was warm there.

For the numbered 13 of teacher's turn, it was clear that the teacher was kind of revealing (asked a question but answered it anyway, though it may not be necessarily the direct answer), Long and Sato (1983) developed the classification of questions. In the said classifications, questions are categorized into echoic and epistemic questions. The former are mainly questions that ask for the repetition of an utterance or a confirmation that the utterance has been interpreted as intended, and these are utilized for comprehension checks, confirmation checks, and clarification requests. The latter, on the other hand, are questions that serve the purpose of acquiring information

(Long & Sato, 1983 in Vivekmetakorn & Thamma, 2015).

6.3 Schemata in Reading

As evident in the transcript of the discourse, it can be inferred that the students in the class mainly applied schemata as a reading strategy when they approached the given text. Aside from that, meaning making was also clearly found. It was possible that not all of the students in the class did the reading of the selection. Some of them, when asked a particular question, answered profoundly, that is, they were able to state (an) answer(s) but did not seem to really have understood their own response.

10 *Teacher*: If someone reciting.... Please keep quit and listen okay,.... Now Treasure

11 *Student*: Treasure Island is a novel that [...] imaginary to paint a broader picture...

11 *Teacher*: okay so what do you mean by that?

12 *Student*: okay,...imaginary.. / what?

12 *Teacher*: Ahm.... It means it is the picture of what happened next?

13 *Teacher*: Our story treasure Island, we said this story is imaginary is not real story, we are going to talk about the author this story is ...

In the same way, the students seemed to make meanings out of every feedback and/or follow up of the teacher. Readers, as active participants construct meaning (s) from clues that are found in the printed text; hence, to put it another way, meaning is not necessarily found in the texts but the texts have the potential for meaning (Widowson, 1984 in Maarof & Yaacob, 2011). At this point, the students were not actually looking or reading the selection itself, but relied heavily on the unpremeditated narration of some part of selection by the teacher.

52 *Teacher*: so definitely they did that because it's parts of the tradition ... Okay so anyone give an unforgettable quote from Captain Bill Jim and his father?

53..... *Student*: Captain// said to me
Captain Bill.

54..... *Student*: Captain said to Jim's father//..... where is my room.

55 *Teacher*: so, who can say to me, what does the story talk

about?

56 *Student*: the story talks about the pirates steal the treasure from the ship.

57 *Teacher*: okay, who's the storyteller?

56 *Student*: Jim Hawkins.

In the discourse part above, it's indicated that it's already the student who was asking a question to the teacher. On the part of the teacher, it was unusual at this point since the student were expected to have known of it, yet the teacher did not answer the question; instead, the teacher had the question answered by another student. The students answered "no". Now, by the same token, the teacher asked the students who is Jim Hawkins' father?, obviously, this is an easy question, but there is a kind of focus on deep and careful reading. When the teacher was asked why did he ask the question, he said that it was to know whether the students have it as a link or something that served as their basis for answering, which was quite vague, so to speak. Furthermore, this might be in line with the finding that reading a great deal of different material for different purposes, a reader can "achieve the capacity for creating, refining, and connecting diverse arrays of cognitive schemata" (Grabe, 1986, p. 36 in Landry, 2002). Significantly, a student made a justification of the answer by saying that they [Jim Hawkins]if we said Jim Hawkins that mean his father is Hawkins!.

Ausubel (1963, 1968 in Anderson, Spiro, & Anderson, 1977) in his language, said that, "... new ideas and information are learned and retained most efficiently when inclusive and specifically relevant ideas are already available in cognitive structure to serve a subsuming role or to furnish ideational anchorage" (1968, p. 153).

On one part of the discourse, it was obvious that the class was implementing an English Only Policy. Interestingly, based on the transcript it could be noted that students in this class were not really doing well in the English language (although it could only be furthered by a content-specific observation, that is, when its focus is on English speaking skills [of the Not all of the students participated in the discussion; only a few students contributed to the exchange.

7. Discussion

Mustapha (1995) puts reading as a multileveled, interactive, and hypothesis- generating process in which readers construct a

meaningful representation of text by using their knowledge of the world and of language.

With the data generated through the observation transcript, the analysis focused on the questioning of the teacher and as well as the strategy(ies) employed by the students in reading the given selection. Discourse analysis was done to the audio transcript of the reading class observation in order to find out some patterns and describe any occurring phenomenon in the said class.

It was found out that the teacher primarily utilized a combination of echoic and epistemic questions, as put forward by Long and Sato (1983). The former are mainly questions that ask for the repetition of an utterance or a confirmation that the utterance has been interpreted as intended, and are utilized

for comprehension checks, confirmation checks, and clarification requests. The latter, on the other hand, are questions that serve the purpose of acquiring information (Vivekmetakorn & Thamma, 2015). Specifically, for echoic, comprehension checks, clarification requests, and confirmation checks were evident. For epistemic, the most prominent was rhetorical because the teacher predominantly asked for effect only, maybe because of the fact that the students were not, to some extent, answering and just remained silent. Another pattern is about the reading strategy of the students. It is clear that the students mainly relied on the schema (maybe their strategy to approaching the given selection). For this observation, though it is in anyway clear that some of the students seemed to have not read the selection fully as it appeared in the transcript, their strategy, i.e. banking on the epistemic questions (e.g. rhetorical) and feedback of the teacher, allowed them to at least make inferences (backed up to some point by the ideas that they got, probably when they read) about the story.

I also have to note that based on my observation, some students' inability to comprehend the text (which is a novel), can be attributed to Structural deficit hypothesis which claims that lack of grammatical knowledge or of processing ability interferes with higher level text comprehension (Stein, Cairns & Zurif, 1984; Bowey, 1986a, 1986b; Bentin, Deutsch and Liberman, 1990; Menyuk et al., 1991; Scarborough, 1991 in Akbari, 2014). Syntactic awareness is also believed to assist readers in accomplishing their reading comprehension tasks effectively (Ibid.) Akbari's (2014)

finding indicates that it may be argued that “grammatical knowledge predicts better comprehension and may be used as an indicator of success in reading”(p.125). However, in this case, further and specific inquiry has to be done yet. I have raised this assumption based on how students answered in the discussion.

In connection with Sinclair and Coulthard CDA. this discourse somehow fitted the model, given that the teacher predominantly did the talking, and it supports the findings of Vivekmetakorn & Thamma (2015) that Initiation- response-feedback interaction pattern (I-R- F) was the most recurring pattern and “teacher’s questions served to initiate much of the talk in classroom”(p.63). The predominance of IRF pattern in the discourse certainly means that the discourse was teacher-centered. The class, however, was “communicative” only to an extent: probably because the students, albeit and obviously had little comprehension of what they read, were able to get into play by referencing with the epistemic questions of their teacher to recover and generate ideas and inferences, respectively.

8. CONCLUSION

This discourse analysis that was done to an audio recording transcript of a reading class observation found patterns that are primarily present in some, if not most, DA research literature. Interestingly, the analysis, however, uncovered the following: for teacher’s way of questioning (in this case, echoic and epistemic), epistemic questions (mostly, rhetorical for this matter), were made reference(s) by the students in answering questions. This was also true the feedback of the teacher to each and every raised question; another was that schema served as their strategy to both (probably) approaching the text, and as well as during the discussion. Consequently, the lesson or activity became, to some extent, communicative, because of the abovementioned points.

Furthermore, it is put forward that schemata is relatively important in any reading activities, and appropriate and sufficient schema should be given to the students. Aside from that, it should be noted that questions generation should always be in line with the students’ level of understanding. However, the level of the students’ understanding is not always the issue and we should not let that cloud our thinking. From the analysis above, it will always be for teachers to teach reading strategies to students so that they will be guided enough whenever they encounter problems along the way.

Students who received instruction on reading strategies along with being taught the reading texts proved to be more proficient readers than those who did not (Sattar & Salehi, 2012). Although the given selection was written perhaps in a manner that can be grasped by lay readers, it is important to note that it's still a novel, and aside from its length, syntactic complexity is always present. Possessing linguistic knowledge at sentential level would not suffice, yet necessary; having enough control over different lengths of texts and ability to deal with them applying appropriate strategies to those texts is what the learners need (Ibid.) Finally, it all boils down to the fact that reading teachers should strike a balance between how to read and what to read when teaching reading to students.

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