

CONVERSATION ANALYSIS IN AN ELS CLASSROOM INTERACTION

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Abstract

This paper examines the conversation techniques used in an ELS real-life classroom interaction to establish how useful conversation techniques are to the realisation of effective classroom pedagogy. Working within conversation and discourse analysis theories, with restriction to five conversational techniques -turn-taking, turn design, sequence organisation, repair mechanism and overlapping-, data was drawn from six (6) teacher-student classroom interactions randomly recorded, transposed to writing, labelled and subjected to a quantitative methods of analysis. The transcripts labelled A – C were analysed based on the five conversation techniques above. The finding revealed that five conversation techniques – turn-taking, turn design, sequence organisation, repair mechanism and overlapping – were engaged in real-life classroom. It was also observed that turn-taking was the most frequently used conversation technique, followed by turn design and repair mechanism. While sequence organisation and overlapping were less frequently used because a classroom conversation is an organised type of conversation. The paper therefore concludes that turn-taking as a conversational technique will go a long way improving students' ability of getting involved in classroom interaction because turn-taking, as a vital aspect of conversation technique, enables one to start and be involved in an effective conversation.

Key Words: Conversational analysis, Teacher-student conversation, Turn and turn- taking, ELS classroom interactions

Introduction

The classroom is the practical meeting point of nearly all the educational practices ranging from curriculum planning to implementation (Fagbamiye, 1998). The success or failure of the goal of classroom activities may be affected by the different aspects of educational system, but it primarily dependent on the pedagogical technique used by the two major participants in the classroom – the teacher and student (Hall & Walsh, 2002). The knowledge of the right interactional patterns to adopt in an ELS classroom is paramount to understanding the activities in the classroom. Through these same patterns, communication in the classroom would improve, so also will students

participation and learning opportunities. Kumaravadivelu (1999) believes that what happens in a classroom, to a large extent, determines the degree to which desired outcomes are realised.

Evidence of teaching and learning are shown through language use, also, patterns of interactions are formed through language. Walsh (2006) holds that language in a second language (L2) classroom serves a special purpose, which makes it different from other classrooms. He also believes that in L2 classrooms, learners learn better when they get involved in interaction amongst themselves or with the teacher. In most L2 classrooms, language is not just a medium of instruction but also, an objective for learning (Lee, 2010). Lier (1996) argues that interaction is the most vital element of the curriculum while Chandron (1993) concludes that teachers talk for about two/third of the interaction time. Nunan and Bailey (2009) affirm to the findings of Chandron (1993) that teachers dominate the class during interaction for two reasons; either because the teacher does not give the students the opportunity to express themselves; or the students are not willing to be involved in the interaction. Based on the above findings and conclusions, this present study examines the pattern of conversation characteristics in an ESL classroom in a tertiary institution to determine to what extent this pattern will help in the development of learners' interaction in an ESL classroom. Basically, the major purpose of this study is to examine classroom pedagogical processes to find out what really goes on in different context classrooms, and, to unearth what pattern of conversation could enhance meaningful pedagogical process.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Conversational and Discourse analysis theories which are the mostly used theories for analysing talk-in-interaction are adopted for this study. Conversation Analysis (CA) is a rigorous empirical approach to the analysis of oral discourse, with its discipline rooted in sociology. It employs inductive methods of searching for recurring sequential features by investigating various cases without appeal to intuitive judgement of what speaker means or thinks (Boxer and Cohen, 2004). The CA theory began with Harvey Sack's lecture on conversation in 1964 where he discovered that talk-in-interaction is orderly, methodical, and systematically organised (Seedhouse, 2004). Discourse analysis (DA) on the other hand came into research through Zellig Harris, since 1952 whose interest was the distribution of linguistic elements in extended texts, meaning; viewing language above the sentence level. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) were among the earliest researcher to use DA approach in a classroom discourse.

The data sample for this study consist of six (6) full-length 400 level teacher-student classroom interactions randomly recorded from three departments - English and Literary Studies, History and International Relations and Philosophy- in the College of Humanity, Veritas University Abuja. The recorded interactions and discussion of the subjects on varied topics in the classroom were recorded; and because the classroom discourse is dominated by the teacher, the areas of dialogue between the teachers and students (not necessarily the entire lecture) were purposively transposed to writing for convenience of analysis. The study adopts both conversation and discourse analysis approach in analysing the data.

Conversational Analysis

Conversational analysis (CA) was a method of analysing discourse, introduced by Emmanuel Schegloff, Harvey Sacks and Gail Jefferson in the early 1970s. CA can be said to be an approach to discourse analysis that is concerned with the study of talk in interaction. The major aim of CA is to describe how conversationalists achieve orderliness in their interaction. It studies how interactions are structured in a sequential manner. CA studies any instance of talk, which may include institutional discourse, such as, classroom discourse between the teacher and the students, doctor-patient interaction, antenatal classroom discourse, courtroom discourse. It also studies routine or casual conversation. CA's guiding principle is that interaction should be orderly at all points (Sacks, 1992). This orderliness is produced and maintained by the participants themselves in their orientations to social rules or expectations. A vital conversational norm is one party speaks at a time' (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). This is evidenced not only by the fact that conversations tend to proceed well in this way, but also maintains to an extent, some degree of orderliness and understanding of one another.

Participants in a conversation attend to talk not for its propositional content, nor as a channel through which information is received, but because of achieving the actions in the conversation (e.g., asking, requesting, complaining, noticing, and so on), and the real life consequences of those actions (Schegloff, 1995). Furthermore, talk is examined not as isolated utterances, but as talk-in-interaction, an activity that transpires in real life settings between people. In this respect, actions in interaction are always contextually situated. There are several intersecting machineries required for conducting a conversational analysis but five would be used for this study: Turn-taking, Sequence Organization, Turn Design, Repair Mechanism and Overlapping.

Turn-taking: Turn taking is a basic characteristic of any normal conversation. Speakers and listeners change their roles in order to begin their speech (Coulthard, 1985). Turn taking mechanisms may vary between cultures and languages. Scholars have identified a set of rules that govern turn taking in discourse. These are:

- 1 When the current speaker selects the next speaker, the next speaker has the right to and is obliged to commence the turn •
- 2 If the current speaker does not select the next speaker, any one of the speakers has the right to self-select and become the next speaker.
- 3 If neither the current speaker selects the next speaker, nor the next speaker self-selects him/herself, the current speaker may resume his or her turn (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974).

Turns are composed of one or more turn-constructive units (TCUs), which consist of linguistic units (words, phrases, clauses, etc.) that form a recognizably complete utterance in a given context. As one turn approaches a point of adequate completeness, then comes the possibility of turn-transfer—a transition-relevance place (TRP). At a TRP, participants use turn-allocation techniques (self-selection or selection by current speaker). Turn-taking provides for the orderly distribution of turns-at-talk in any organised conversation.

Sequence Organization: This refers to how successive turns link up to form coherent courses of action (Schegloff, 2007). The adjacency pair is the basis of this organization: two turns/actions, produced by different participants, where the first pair part (FPP) is followed in next position by a type-matched second pair part (SPP), which, where not produced, would be 'noticeably absent'. Examples of adjacency pairs include greeting-greeting, question-answer, invitation acceptance/declination, complaint-account, and so on. The property that unites FPPs and SPPs is called conditional relevance because the relevance of the second action is contingent upon the production of the first.

Turn Design: Turn design refers to how speakers format their turns to implement some action, in some position, for some recipient(s) (Drew, 2013). A basic assumption in CA is that participants use talk and other conduct to produce recognizable actions, often employing particular grammatical formats as resources to do so (see Levinson, 2013). To make an offer, for example, speakers can design their turn as a conditional (if your parents would like weekend online classes, I would gladly administer them), declarative (I'll come to school on Sunday), or interrogative (do you want me to get you a bottle of

water?), each of which systematically occurs in particular sequential positions (Curl, 2006).

Repair Mechanism: This practice address troubles in speaking, hearing, and understanding A repair procedure includes three basic components: trouble source (e.g., an unfamiliar word), repair initiation (i.e., a signal that begins a repair procedure), and repair solution (e.g., a rephrasing of the unfamiliar word). Either the speaker of the trouble source or its recipient can initiate a repair procedure and/or produce a repair solution. Thus a distinction is made between, for example, self-initiated self-repair (e.g. so she didn't come on Saturday Friday), in which the speaker of the trouble source initiates and executes the repair procedure independently (e.g., A: so she didn't come on Saturday. B: Saturday? A: Friday.) (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1997).

Overlapping: An overlap in speech occurs when two or more interlocutors are trying to take their turns at the same time when the current speaker had or is about to finish his turn. The real overlap occurs when the two participants start their turns simultaneously and none of them relinquishes the floor for the other. An overlap in speech may occur in any of the following situations: when a speaker deliberately comes in while another speaker is having turn; when a speaker thought the current speaker had finished their turn and decided to come in; or when two speakers self-selects themselves as next speakers (Levinson, 2013).

Classroom Interaction

Walsh (2002) sees classroom interaction as a place where language use and pedagogic purpose coincide, and learning opportunities are facilitated. Sinclair and Coulthard, (1975) on the other hand, view classroom interaction as relying heavily on teacher-initiated three-part sequences, (Initiation, Response-Feedback/Evaluation). Another growing body of micro-analytic research challenged the assumptions of earlier discourse analytic studies (i.e. Sinclair and Coulthard 1975) which allows us to have a better understanding of the context-sensitive nature of classroom interaction by reporting, for instance, how participants accomplish learning collectively (Pochon-Berger, Hellermann and Doehler, 2010; Mondada and Doehler, 2004). Classroom interaction has been researched using different methods of inquiry ranging from; Discourse Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, Systemic Functional Linguistics to; various qualitative and quantitative paradigms within Applied Linguistics. One should be aware of the fact that different research methodologies, when applied to the same discursal data, can reach diametrically opposing conclusions (Seedhouse, 2010).

Below is a tabular breakdown of the data collection

Table 1: Summary of Data Collection

Department	Level	Course	No. of Students	Duration of Recording	Date of Recording
English and Literary Studies	400	ELS 432 Multilingualism	15	10:00am – 12:00am	Monday, 20 th and 27 th May, 2019
History and International Relations	400	HIR 442 Nigerian Foreign Policy since Independence	46	2:00pm – 4:00pm	Wednesday, 29 th May, and 5 th June 2019
Philosophy	400	PHL 452 Existentialism and Phenomenology	3	8:00am – 10:00am	Tuesday, 11 th and 18 th June, 2019

The researcher coded the data collected as Transcript A, B and C; A for Department of English and Literary Studies, B for History and International Relations and C for Philosophy, for proper analysis

Findings and Discussion

The patterns of conversation found in the transcripts are shown below in their number of occurrences.

Table 2a: Summary of Patterns of Conversational Techniques and their number of occurrence in Transcript A

Patterns Conversation	No. of Occurrence
Turn-taking: when a speaker takes the floor	30
Turn Design : Using talk to produce action	18
Repair mechanism: Rephrasing an earlier speech	8

Sequence Organisation: Forming coherence with successive turns	2
Overlapping: Two or more speakers taking a turn at the same time	2
TOTAL	60

The table above presents the summary of the various CA patterns and their number of occurrences observed in a real life English and Literary studies classroom situation. From the findings shown in table 2a above, it was observed that turn-taking -when a speaker takes the floor- was mostly used in the class, making it the most frequently occurred with 30 occurrences. The reason for this as observed in the study is because, in a classroom interaction, speakers are not allowed to talk constantly during a conversation. Turn-taking in this class was used by both teacher and students showing that an interaction has ended and another has begun. Example: **Transcript A:**

Students: Noise, sounds and chattering everywhere, seeing the lecturer walk in, all became quiet and went to their seats.

Lecturer: Good morning class. Can someone remind us where we stopped last week?

Student 1: Good morning ma. In our last class, you introduced Multilingualism and said we'll continue with "Nigeria as a Multilingual Society" in the next class.

The above Transcript A extract opens with a non formal and unorganised interactive session, as the students in the class were in disarray in little groups of twos/threes, having their separate discussions. In this opening, there is to some degree Sequence Organization where adjacency pair (which includes greeting-greeting, question-answer and a host of others) is obvious as the students are seen in little groups of twos and threes.

As the lecturer walked into the class, the mood in the class immediately took a turn to a conversational class mood. The lecturer started with, *Good morning class*, a discourse initiator the lecturer's question; *can somebody remind us where we stopped last week*, portrays the Turn-taking characteristic of, 'current speaker (lecturer) does not select the next speaker' (Sacks and Jefferson, 1974). The lecturer's question was thrown to all of the students, no one in particular. Also, **Student 1** who said, ... *In our last class, you introduced Multilingualism and said*

we'll continue with "Nigeria as a multilingual Society" in the next class in response to the lecturer's question depicts another Turn-taking characteristic by Sacks and Jefferson (1974) which says, "next speaker self-selects current speaker. The current speaker (the lecturer) did not select who takes the turn after her, so the **Student 1** self-selected himself and current speaker when the floor was free. A remarkable feature of the interaction in extract A is that speaker change is coordinated smoothly. Both interruptions (or other kinds of simultaneous talk) and gaps are relatively rare

Table 2b: Summary of Patterns of Conversational Techniques and their number of occurrences in Transcript B

Patterns of Turn-taking	No. of Occurrence
Turn-taking: when a speaker takes the floor	36
Turn Design : Using talk to produce action	12
Repair mechanism: Rephrasing an earlier speech	8
Sequence Organisation: Forming coherence with successive turns	3
Overlapping: Two or more speakers taking a turn at the same time	2
TOTAL	61

Table 2b above presents the summary of the various turn taking patterns and their number of occurrences observed in a real life History and International Relations classroom situation. It is also obvious from the findings above that turn-taking -when a speaker takes the floor- was mostly used in the class, making it the most frequently occurred with 36 occurrences. This was as a result of the lecturer adopting turn-taking in the administration of the lecture. Nevertheless, some other conversational machineries were also evident in the cause of the lectures as can be seen in **Transcript B** below.

Lecturer: Judith, can you say one thing you observed between Nigerian Foreign Policy under military rule and Nigerian Foreign Policy under Goodluck Jonathan?

Student 1 (Judith): There are no genuine conscious efforts to move closer to any of the communist powers but during Jonathan's reign, there was mindful effort to break the communists' power, curb insecurity and corruption and economic diversification.

Lecturer: Thank you Judith, but it will be nice if someone else counters Judith's take.

Student 2: I stand to disagree with the Judith concerning curbing insecurity and corruption. Research has proven that there was no insecurity and corruption under the regime of Jonathan. Sorry, meant to say, there was a high rate of insecurity and corruption.

The above extract from Transcript B started with the lecturer asking a specific student (Judith) a question. The lecturer, directing her question to Judith has automatically selected who takes the turn after her, -current speaker selects next speak-, which is also an aspect of turn-taking. Turn design, with which participants use talk to produce actions in the hearer, is seen in the lecturer's second utterance where he said *...but it will be nice if someone else counters Judith's take*. The use of *if* in the above utterance produced the action/utterance of *Student 2* where he tries to debunk or counter the take of *Student 1*. The basic assumption in Turn design is that participants use talk and other conduct to produce recognizable actions, often employing particular grammatical formats as resources to do so (Levinson, 2013). Also in the utterance of *Student 2*, there is a trace of Repair mechanism where the student said, *Sorry, meant to say, there was a high rate of insecurity and corruption*. According to Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks, (1977), a repair procedure is tripartite; trouble source, repair initiation and repair solution. The repair mechanism used in the above extract is repair solution as the speaker tries to rephrase his utterance by removing an unfamiliar word *no*.

Table 2c: Summary of Patterns of Conversational Techniques and their number of occurrence in Transcript C

Patterns of Turn-taking	No. of Occurrence
Turn-taking: when a speaker takes the floor	18
Turn Design : Using talk to produce action	8
Repair mechanism: Rephrasing an earlier speech	2
Sequence Organisation: Forming coherence with successive turns	1
Overlapping: Two or more speakers taking a turn at the same time	1
TOTAL	30

Table 2c above presents a summary of the various CA technique patterns used in the study and the number of their occurrences observed in a Philosophy real life classroom situation. From the findings in table above, it was observed that turn-taking was mostly used in the class, making it the most frequently occurred with 30 occurrences. Going by the observation in the study, turn-taking appeared most frequently because, in a classroom interaction, speakers are not allowed to talk randomly during a conversation. Turn-taking and some other CA techniques were used in this class by both the teacher and the students, showing that a mutual interaction has taken place. A good example: is seen in the extract from **Transcript C** below:

Lecturer: Good morning class.

Students: Good morning ma.

Lecturer: Can anyone remind us where we stopped in the last class?

Students: (All at the same time) we stopped at..... , No, you introduced, we were about to start..... (and so on).

Lecturer: Hello, can there be some orderliness in this class please.

Student 1: Ma, we stopped at Existentialism.

Student 2: (Talking to Student 1) Did we stop at Existentialism or where she introduced us to Phenonology and said that's where we'll continue from in this class?

Student 1: Oh yes, that's true ma, you introduced Phenonenology at the end of the last class and said we are continuing from there.

This extract above opens with some sort of adjacency pair of greetings – greetings which is commonly used by two interlocutors to initiate a conversation. Nevertheless, the *Lecturer* in this class employed the adjacency pair technique to initiate interaction in her class. This technique was successful as the *Students* in one voice chorused back the greetings to her - *Good morning ma* - as though it was one person answering. Also, it succeeded in helping to captivate the interest of the students in the class to carry out an interactional session, hence conversation initiation. Coulthard (1985) posits that turn-taking has three major turn allocation techniques: current speaker selects next speaker; next speaker self-selects him/herself; or current speaker resumes a new turn. The lecturer's question - *Can anyone remind us where we stopped in the last class* - which was not thrown to any student in particular (did not select next speaker) gave room for any student to self-select him/herself. In the above scenario in

this particular class, all three of the students self-selected themselves and spoke at the same time - *we stopped at..... , No, you introduced, we were about to start.....* - resulting in overlapping. According to Levinson, (2013) an overlap in speech occurs when two or more interlocutors try to take their turns at the same time when the current speaker had finished his turn. He further explained that the real overlap occurs when the two participants start their turns simultaneously and none of them relinquishes the floor for the other. This is evident in the students' response after the lecturer had asked her questions. Again, the lecturer used one of the three turn-taking techniques -current speaker resumes a new turn- to get back the attention of the class. Finally ensued repair mechanism again. In the last two utterances above, *Student 2* made an assertion which was corrected by *Student 1*. *Student 2* keyed into the correction and came up with the obtainable situation. In repair mechanism, this is known as repair initiation -a signal that begins a repair procedure- because the repair was initiated by *Student 1*.

Conclusion

The findings in this study, it has been observed that classroom interaction, various conversational techniques were used in the classrooms which helped the learning ability of the students as lecturers were free to conduct their lectures the way they prefer. Also from the findings of the study, using five conversational techniques, have shown that turn-taking conversational technique is highly used in real life classroom observation of 400 level students from three departments -English and Literary Studies, History and International Relations and Philosophy- of the College of Humanities; Veritas University Abuja . bIt was also observed in the study that it will be difficult to have mutually flowing interactive class conversation without the use of turn-taking technique as the only time a lecturer did not use it, there ensued overlapping. Hence, it also was observed that turn-taking as a conversational technique will go a long way improving students' ability of getting involved in classroom interaction because turn-taking is a vital aspect of conversational technique, enabling one to start and be involved in a conversation.

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