

Classroom Discourse Analysis as a Tool for Reflective Practice: Focus on Form Approach

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Abstract

The present research aimed at investigating the interaction of the classroom talk to have a better understanding of the teachers' practice teaching which can pave the way for reflection on teaching. The study benefitted from conversation analytic perspective to qualitatively and interpretively examine the classroom discourse of the teacher-learner interaction. The classroom talk was analyzed through conversation analysis perspective with taking the extracts of the learners' and teacher's interactions into account to see whether tasks paved the way for the learners to learn the target from through 'Focus on Form' approach. The findings could be beneficial for the practitioners in the field.

Keywords: Classroom Discourse Analysis, Conversation Analysis, Teacher-learner Interaction, Reflective Practice

1. Introduction

Teacher education is concerned with raising teachers' awareness of their teaching behavior which demands teachers' reflection. Teachers have been encouraged to reflect on their practice as part of their own professional development (Farrell, 2007; Garton & Richards, 2008; Richards & Farrell, 2005). This reflective process really means that teachers are consciously involved with examining what they believe about their practice or as Mann (2005) has suggested, articulating "an inner world of choices made in response to the outer world of the teaching context" (p. 105). In other words, by articulating their beliefs, assumptions and values about teaching and learning, and comparing these to what they do in the classroom, teachers can become more aware of what they think and they can make practical decisions about their practice. This type of reflection on practice also allows practicing teachers to take more responsibility for their actions.

Hence, it is important to reflect on the various roles that teachers take on during their careers as well as the roles that are imposed on them by institutions or others so that they can make informed decisions about which roles are still relevant for their needs as they continue in their careers as teachers. Reflective practice can be taken into account through various ways one of which is classroom observation, which is a sort of action research for teachers.

Reflective practice can be done with respect to all aspects of language (e.g. teaching language skills or sub-skills). The present study considers the role of classroom observation as a reflective tool in teaching grammar. Hence, in the following, introductory sections on form-focused approach to teach grammar in line with the application of classroom discourse are provided. Then, the teacher's extracts of her talk and a brief analysis are provided.

There are a lot of controversies among researchers whether grammar should be taught explicitly through formal presentation of grammatical rules or implicitly through exposure to meaningful language use. Regarding this issue, Long (1996) presents that FonF approach is more effective than both FonFs and focus on meaning. He believes that FonF can be the optimal consideration for learning since this approach is learner-centered and represents acquiring grammatical forms in the context of meaningful communication. Recently, structure-based focused tasks have been proposed that aim at making grammar forms obvious to the learner through conscious-raising activities. (Ellis, 2003; Nassaji & Fotos, 2004). Because tasks are communicative in nature, learners are engaged in meaning focused interaction.

Classroom discourse analysis has become an increasingly attractive analytic method for researchers in second language development (Björnsdóttir, 2016; Baleghizadeh, 2010; Yu, 2013). One of the central concerns of discourse analysis in educational settings has been to uncover the ways in which talk at school is unique and thus what children must be able to do linguistically in order to succeed there.

Because teachers' reflection plays an important role in teachers' development and scrutinizing teacher-learners' interactions can pave the way for better reflection through classroom discourse analysis, the present study aims at qualitatively looking into the classroom talks of a grammar class taught in the context of meaningful interaction, and how this can lead to assisting the teachers to analyze their classroom interactions for interpreting their classroom and practically reflect on their teaching more tangibly. The present study answers the following research question:

1. To what extent, can classroom discourse pave the way for teachers' reflection of their teaching in practice?

2. Method

2.1 Design and Setting

Following a qualitative and non-experimental design, the current research was conducted to look into the classroom interactions and see whether the teacher's and learners' talks can provide teachers with enough insights regarding better teaching in their classroom performance guided by reflecting on their practice teaching as a whole.

In the present study, an analysis of a class in a private language institute was qualitatively done in terms of grammar teaching which was observed. In this

class, the teacher was teaching simple past tense and some adjectives. The participants of the study included one teacher and 11 students at the intermediate level. The purpose of the study was to show that whether it is effective to have classes in which grammatical forms are in the focus attention (FonFs) (that is traditional grammar instruction) or these forms can be learned within a communicative context and meaningful interaction (teaching grammar implicitly within focus on form approach).

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

In the present study the teacher was teaching simple past tense and also some adjectives. The students were taught some activities such as filling the blanks and matching exercises in order to make them understand the target form. Learners received some feedback during the course of teaching and were expected to correct themselves in response to the feedback. All the interactions of the students and the teacher were observed and recorded and transcribed for analysis.

There were some activities used to draw learners' attention toward the past tense. These activities were in the Student book taught in the institute. These exercises were applied to make the students learn the target tense. There were some activities that the students were required to do such as filling in the blanks while listening to the conversation and they were supposed to write the correct adverb.

Another target form taught was comparative and superlative form of adjectives. Drawing learners' attention to this linguistic feature, the students were provided with matching exercises in which they were required to put the correct form of adjectives. The students received feedback (verbally and nonverbally) and they were required to do revisions if necessary. The following section refers to the results of the study following the conversation analysis perspective.

3. Results

The present study aimed to qualitatively investigate whether analyzing classroom discourse in a grammar class could result in better understanding of the classroom communication and creating an atmosphere for teachers to have reflection on their classroom. In fact, teaching grammar was as an example and teachers can take into account each part of their classroom talk and carry out interpretive analysis of the teacher-learner interactions for the purpose of better understanding of the flow of communication, which finally leads to reflection on the teaching in practice, and subsequently teacher development can be fulfilled. The study focused on the teacher-learner extracts of classroom talks through which grammar was taught, along with the analysis of the interactions to figure out the teachers' practice, and how grammar was taught to foster reflection in reality within the classroom context.

Analysis of the first interaction of the classroom showed that although the teachers took a lot of turns, it was necessary sometimes to benefit from the space available for them to provide the sufficient information for the learners. In fact, the

teachers should act as managers to take control of the provided materials and give the learners enough guidance to understand the task thoroughly. They should give the learners self-regulating autonomy in their classroom interaction by the provision of the task, although teacher support seemed to be demanding when peer interaction appeared to be impractical. The second interaction of the classroom was the time when the teacher invited the learners to initiate their challenging discussion on the task.

he noticeable point was the eagerness of the learners to get involved with the flow of communication in the classroom. In fact, the task seemed to stimulate the learners to take turns and initiate talks with the teacher and peers. Suitable feedback created a space for the learners to share their opinions and freely negotiate with their classmates. The teacher attempted to initiate the conversation and allowed the learners to take over the flow of conversation and benefit from peer interaction although teacher's support was needed when she distinguished the need for interruption and did the necessary correction or feedback on the content. In many cases the teacher attempted to benefit from the interactional resources, that is, feedback or pedagogical tasks, to arm the learners with enough material to participate in the classroom interactions.

In comparison with the two above-mentioned interactions in the classroom through which the teacher benefited from the tasks to teach simple past tense, in the third type of interaction of the classroom, the normal initiation by the teacher was followed by the learners' responses and teacher's evaluation happened at the end and communication went on similarly. In fact, peer interaction was not well performed in the classroom interaction although the teacher attempted to encourage the learners to take part in short discussions. In this regard, the significance of a task was highlighted in that teacher could take advantage of a well-organized activity to involve all the learners in the learning context and the teacher's responsibility lied in the provision of the necessary support and encouraging the learners to voluntarily initiate turns and provide peer feedback under the supervision of the teacher. In other words, task-based instruction aimed to remove the monotonous flow of communication and add variety to the materials covered in the classroom and decorate them in a satisfying matter for the teachers and particularly learners to orchestrate the classroom interaction themselves.

4. Discussion

According to Nassaji and Fotos (2004), a purely meaning-focused approach to task-based is often problematic in the foreign language situation, where real life needs for the target language rarely exist. It seems that tasks play the major role in grammar instruction. Considering the class which has been observed, it was clearly understood that it lies in the FonFs approach regarding Long's (1991) distinction. The learners' attention was drawn only to form without any meaning-focused interaction among the students, thus resulting in a student-teacher interaction. In

fact, the real interaction that should have been performed in terms of grammar instruction was not obtained. Although feedback was given to the students, there was no real interaction among the students within the communicative context that leads to noticing. There were some activities done in the class, but it was observed that these kinds of exercises drew learners' attention to linguistic forms without any meaning focused activities. In fact, task generated the activity which led to interactional feedback. Therefore, it is concluded that feedback was a byproduct of the task.

Grammar task research has provided a variety of formats to integrate grammar instruction and task-based instruction, presenting methods of combining form-focused and meaning-focused activities that would positively affect various pedagogical position, teaching styles and teaching contexts. The findings of this study are in alignment with the findings of Nassaji (1999) in that by providing fruitful feedback, the teacher could implicitly attract the learners' attention to the simple past tense while guiding them to engage in interaction with the teacher as well as their peers. Nassaji pointed out that there were two types of task that fulfill the requirement in which focus on form could be achieved in communicative tasks: through design and through process. He stated that the design method involves constructing tasks that have a deliberate focus on form component. The findings of the study showed that the teacher could decide in advance what forms should be focused on and which tasks should be designed. The form comes to the attention of the learner as a result of completing the task. As a result, the learners attend to different forms depending on their previous knowledge and specific task requirement in the course of meaning-focused interaction.

The findings of this study highlights the fact that if learners have interaction with each other and use language pragmatically with the help of more knowledgeable person (such as a teacher) learning would be more effective. In the observed class, if the teacher could design a task in advance, and the students are informed about the target feature, the class could have a meaning-focused communication by which the learners' attention is drawn to form in the course of interaction through the guidance of the teacher.

5. Conclusion

The major concern of this study was investigating how to design work plans which could make the learners have a better understanding of the target structure through the course of interaction among them and also with the teacher, in a way that feedback could be received in the light of this communicative context. In fact, tasks create a real environment for learners to use language pragmatically and its effectiveness lies in the fact that it should be designed in a form-meaning mapping context.

Moreover, analyzing classroom interaction seems to be a productive technique for teachers to foster reflective practice through classroom observation for the purpose of teacher development in the long run. In fact, if teachers reflect upon their teaching practice, this action research will lead to their self-awareness of their

classroom context and what goes on in the classroom while teaching. Therefore, classroom observation can be served as a practical tool for teachers to reflect on their teaching and enhance their teaching quality. The findings of this study are limited to the context and setting of this study. Further research in different settings and contexts are suggested to generalize the findings of this study.

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