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Classroom Discourse

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Classroom discourse refers to the interaction between teachers and students in a classroom setting. It encompasses the language, dialogue, and communication patterns used to facilitate learning. Below are definitions with sources .

1-Enhances Understanding.   2-Promotes Critical Thinking.

 3-Builds Relationships.   4-Encourages Active Participation.

5-Develops Communication Skills.- <u>History:</u>

Classroom discourse research began in the 1950s to objectively evaluate teaching and provide feedback to student. Tools like Flanders' Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC) categorized classroom talk into teacher

talk (direct/indirect influence) and student talk (predictable/unpredictable responses), offering insights into teaching patterns. Later, more observation tools were developed for teacher self-analysis and improvement.

L2/FL classroom teaching studies began in the 1960s, aiming to evaluate teaching methods and find the best one. Early projects, like the Pennsylvania Project, sought to prove the superiority of methods like audiolingualism but yielded inconclusive results, revealing the limitations of such comparisons. Researchers shifted focus from prescribing methods to describing classroom processes, emphasizing teaching styles and the link between teacher behavior and learner outcomes. Inspired by general education research, tools like FIAC and Moskowitz's FLint were developed to analyze verbal interactions in FL classrooms, including the use of L1 by teachers.

L2 classroom discourse research was influenced by L1 classroom discourse studies from the 1960s, part of Britain's language across the curriculum movement. Barnes (1969) focused on teacher questions (open vs. closed, pseudo vs. genuine), learner responses, types of learner talk (exploratory vs. final draft), and the mental processes involved.In the 1970s and 1980s, tools for teacher training based on Flanders' work became popular, though doubts remained about the link between teacher behavior and student achievement.

Alternative systems were also used to analyze classroom discourse. Bellack et al. (1966): Identified four pedagogical moves— structuring, soliciting, responding, and reacting—to explain how language shapes the learning environment.

Sinclair and Coulthard (1975): Built on Bellack's ideas to create a model of spoken discourse using Halliday's grammar categories. They introduced a hierarchy of acts, moves, exchanges, and transactions, with the basic unit being the IRF exchange (initiating, responding, follow-up).

Fanselow (1977): Developed the FOCUS system, which analyzed five features of classroom communication: source, medium, use, content, and purpose. It was useful for teacher training and research.

In the 1970s and 1980s, studies on classroom talk shifted from strict rules to exploring and explaining how things happen. Researchers started focusing on how teachers' language affects learning. Early studies looked at what could be observed in classrooms, but later, they also considered unseen factors like students' learning styles, emotions, cultures, and beliefs. For

instance, Asian students were found to participate less in mixed classrooms due to cultural values and learning habits. Similarly, teachers' questioning and feedback depend on their ideas about teaching and past experiences.

The study highlights the importance of understanding unobservable aspects of classroom discourse, questioning traditional etic (non-participant) methods. Instead, it promotes emic (participant) perspectives through ethnographic approaches like observing, interviewing, and collecting diverse qualitative data, including lesson plans and classroom interactions. Ethnomethodology, particularly Conversation Analysis (CA), is used to explore how classroom discourse evolves dynamically. Seedhouse's model connects micro (classroom interactions) and macro (broader contexts) levels, showing both diversity and commonalities in L2 classroom discourse while emphasizing its reflexive and context-dependent nature.

Over the past 50 years, research on classroom talk has improved significantly. It has shifted from a simple view of classroom activities to a more complete understanding of how classrooms connect to society. Early studies focused only on small, isolated parts of classroom interactions, but now research combines both small and big-picture perspectives, using ideas and methods from different fields. The next part will explore key issues, future directions, and challenges in this area.

Major issues in classroom discourse research :

Information –processing approach to classroom discourse research.

Classroom discourse research (1970s-1980s) was guided by information processing theory of learning based on an input-output model that perceived learning as a process that takes place **inside** the head of individual. The majority of the studies focused on the analysis of language, input and interaction and language. From an etic perspective, a minimalist approach was adopted with regard to the role of context.

There are several strands of research on language input:
1-**Teachers' comprehensible input** :

    Early Focus: This strand initially focused on how teachers modified their language similar to native speakers (NS)when talking to non-native speakers (NNS) make it easier for learners to understand referred to as "foreigner talk".

    Subsequent studies : Researchers later shifted their attention to how teachers modified their language in light of learners' responses. This included techniques like confirmation, clarification, and comprehension checks.

2- The study of teachers 'questions and Corrective Feedback:

    Referential vs. **Display** Questions: This strand explored the difference between questions that genuinely seek information (referential) and those that test learners' knowledge (display) Modification of Questions: Researchers investigated how teachers modified questions to help learners understand and respond better.

    Corrective Feedback: The focus was on how teachers provide feedback, not just to evaluate learners' responses but also to provide information that helps them learn Both strands highlight the importance of how teachers use language to support learners' language development.

 3-The language output produced by learners:

    The lack of evidence that comprehensible input actually produced higher quality learner output led to the shift in focus from teachers' comprehensible input to learners' language output. **Swain**(1985) proposed the **Output Hypothesis**, which states that pushing learners to produce comprehensible as well as grammatically accurate output is equally, if not more important to language acquisition .**In addition** to the quality of language output ,studies of learner's output also include learners' turn –taking behavior and the extent to which they participate orally in different classrooms setting .

Sociocultural perspectives of classroom discourse research:

Shift in Research Paradigm.

In the **1990**s,the shift in the research paradigm in general education from **information processing** to **sociocultural theories of learning** began to make an, **impact on L2 research**) (see papers collected in Modern Language Journal, vol. 78, 1994). This shift has led to a reconceptualization of language, context, and learning in profound ways. Sociocultural theories(**SCT**) of learning conceptualize the relationship between the learner and the social world as dialectical and mediated by cultural artifacts, among which language is primary .

Sociocultural Theories of Learning (SCT).

SCT views the **learner-social** world relationship as dialectical and mediated by cultural artifacts, primarily **language**. Both learners and teachers are **active participants in the learning process,** with the sociocultural context shaping the learning experience.

Limitations of Input-Output Models.

These models provide an incomplete and overly simplistic view of L2 learning, while SCT offers a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between learners, teachers, and the sociocultural context.

Classroom Discourse from a Social and Cultural Perspective.

Studies have begun to redefine classroom discourse as a resource that facilitates learning, viewing curriculum materials and educational activities as semiotic resources. Concepts such as **mediated learni**ng, **the Zone of Proximal Development** (**ZPD**), and **scaffolding** are **used to analyze discourse,** emphasizing that scaffolding is effective when teachers consider learners' language proficiency.

Activity Theory.

Based on Vygotsky's concept of "mediated interaction," Activity Theory helps understand mental processes by showing that goal-directed activities are shaped within a broader sociocultural system, using cultural tools that transform the nature of the activity.

Importance of Activity Theory.
Q: Why is Activity Theory important for understanding learning?
1. Activity is the foundation of learning.
2. Cultural tools assist us in learning.
3. Interaction with others is essential for learning.
4. Tasks are not fixed and can be approached in various ways.

Sociocultural Perspective in Language Learning.
      The learning environment offers various opportunities (affordances) for learners to engage in meaningful language use, influenced by social, cultural, and contextual factors. Learners actively select and use these affordances based on their needs and perceptions.

Role of Collaboration in Classroom Discourse.
      Collaboration requires mutual engagement in a socially meaningful project, taking time to develop, and analyzing isolated task completion does not reflect how learning is co-constructed in collaborative work.

Constructing Identity Through Classroom Discourse.
      The classroom is viewed as a community of practice where learners construct their identities through discourse, influenced by cultural diversity and moment-to-moment interactions.

Importance of Holistic Classroom Discourse.
1. A holistic view of classroom interactions.
2. Attention to neglected aspects like silences, disruptions, and non-verbal features.
3. The impact on what is taught and learned, and the empowerment of learners.
4. The importance of diverse roles and agendas of all participants.

Critical Approach to Classroom Discourse Analysis.

Q: What does a critical approach to classroom discourse analysis entail?
1. Viewing the classroom within a broader social context.
2. Analyzing discourse from poststructuralist and post colonialist perspectives.
3. Using critical ethnography to uncover hidden meanings related to ideology, power, and identity.

Fischer and Larkin's Study (2008).

The study showed significant differences between student and teacher perceptions of classroom talk, highlighting unequal power relationships that invite teachers to reassess their expectations and appreciate the skills children bring.

Future Developments:

Research on classroom discourse has advanced the field in several respects:

First, as we have seen, there has been an emphasis on context, an aspect which was minimalized in the 1970s and 1980s.

Second, the theoretical frameworks drawn from neighboring disciplines to illuminate the Complexity of classroom discourse data will continue to widen.

Third, classroom discourse studies will increasingly adopt eclectic research methodologies Young (2009) has adopted analytic tools from three different theoretical frameworks, namely systemic functional linguistics, social theory of learning and ethnomethodology, To analyze discursive practices of learners and instructors.

Finally, the teachers' and the learners' voices in the analysis of classroom discourse data is Still under-explored.

Q/what does Classroom Discourse Emphasize on?

It emphasizes on the importance of classroom discourse analysis. It highlights how both teachers and learners should be aware of the impact of their interactions, as they collaboratively create the learning environment. Additionally, the text stresses the value of incorporating both perspectives (teacher and learner) in research, as they offer unique insights into the dynamics of the classroom

Micro and Macro Analysis .

Micro Analysis : Examines individual units, behaviors, or small – scale interaction. Example in sociology :studying small group, families.
Macro Analysis: Examines a large – scale patterns, trends and systems.
Example in sociology : studying social structures, institutions or culture norm.

Input and output Model.

An input-output model is a quantitative economic model that represents the interdependencies between different sectors of a national or regional economy. It shows how the output of one sector Is used as Input by other sectors.

Key Components

* Input: Resources, materials, or energy that are consumed in a production process
* Process: The transformation of inputs into outputs.
* Output: The goods or services produced by the process.

Challenges In The Classroom Discourse:

There are many challenges for the Classroom discourse:

First, as the field draws on theoretical concepts from a variety of disciplines, It is important To ensure that these concepts are explicitly and rigorously defined, with full awareness of their Theoretical assumptions, irrespective of whether they have been adopted wholesale, extended or Redefined.

Second, as the field adopts an eclectic approach to research methodologies, there could be a Tendency to adopt methodologies without understanding their origins and theory-method Relationships.

Third, the analysis of classroom discourse as situated in its socio historical context typically involves an eclectic approach in data collection from different sources over a period of time. A rigorous analysis of data requires an iterative process of data interpretation and theory generation, which is extremely time-consuming

Finally, similar to all educational research, most classroom discourse studies are motivated by the ultimate goal of improving student learning. Yet, as we have seen in this review, classroom processes are highly complex, and the large number of mediating variables makes it difficult to substantiate claims data analyzed. This is also why the findings of research studies relating classroom discourse to SLA have so far been inconclusive.

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