AN ANALYSIS OF CLASSROOM DISCOURSE BASED ON SPEECH ACTS THEORY

Abdullahi Mamuda, Sani Iguda Usman & Abdussalam Sani

Abstract

The paper focuses on expressions from classroom discourse between the teacher and students. The aim of the study is to analyze classroom discourse based on the speech acts theory and the main objective is to identify the various speech acts used in the classroom discourse.The paper adopts speech act theory for the analysis in order to identify the various Speech acts used in the classroom discourse. The study's motive is to trace the causes of students' withdrawal from expression in teaching and learning situation through excessive study and analysis of classroom discourses. It is also a concern of this study to present a systematic blueprint that elaborately showcases the real patterns of classroom discourses and their attributers' effects in students' language proficiency. The method employed is ethno-methodology. The paper considers the functions of Searle's (1969) speech acts (Assertive, Directives, Commisives, Expressive, Declarations) in the analysis. The sampled data were obtained from the classroom discourse. Data collection instruments via the talk interaction were used. The result shows that the predominant speech acts that are usually found in classroom discourse are assertives and directives.

Key words: Speech Acts, Discouse Analysis, Locutionary, Illocutionary, Perlocutionary, Assertives, Directives, Commisives, Expressives, Declarations

Abbreviations: Tr for teacher, St for students.

Introduction

This paper studies the discourse between teacher and students in the classroom. The theoretical framework adopted is Searle's (1969) speech acts theory. The theory states that "the basic unit of Linguistic

communication is the performance of speech act". That is whenever we make an utterance, we perform an intended function with it. Austin (1962) opines that the speech act is a minimal functional unit in human communication. He believes that language is not only used to inform or describe things. It is often used to do things. So speech acts, according to Austin and Searle, have three levels of meaning as follows: (A) locutionary act: it is the act of a speaker's saying or the literal meaning of an utterance. (B) illocutionary act: it is the extra meaning of the utterance produced on the basis of its literal meaning (C) perlocutionary act: it is the effect of the utterances on the hearer on specific circumstances. The theory was originally developed by Austin (1962) but further modified by other scholars that followed him. Searle (1969) made his own classifications as follows:

Assertives (speech acts that have a truth-value)
Directives (attempts to get the hearer to do something)
Commisives (commit the speaker to some future course of action)
Expressive (feelings of the Speaker about a state of affairs) and
Declarations (change in status or condition of an object or situation through the utterances).

This theoretical framework was chosen for this paper because the framework is relevant in the context of the paper which is concerned with the identification and analysis of speech acts in classroom discourse. The classifications of speech acts by Searle into five, provides explicit framework upon which the participants/interlocutors' speech can be analysed.

Background to the study

Human beings basically use language as a medium with which they interact and understand each other. Other nonverbal supplements (e.g gestures, nods etc.) intuitively complement language use among interlocutors to ensure language intelligibility. Language itself attains high level of competency and performance through interaction, and by interaction it means exchange of language expressions between language users. Language learners are potential language users together

with a language expert (teacher). Interaction takes place between students and the teacher in the classroom setting; together, they form a classroom discourse. Language learners (students) would exhibit competent language behaviours only if they are given adequate chance of expression in the classroom. A chance of expression includes a space to talk and stimulants (inferential questions) that trigger communication. Where the chance is deniably small or absent, language learning and usage become difficult and less realizable. And where the classroom discourse is harmoniously guided and shared between the teacher and the students, language flows and fluency become possible and steadfast hence language intelligibility. An enthusiastic teacher, at this juncture, may ask, is a chance of expression given to students? Is the chance adequate, guided and harmonious? Do students adequately use the chance to experience language flow and fluency? These are challenges in language learning that urge the study to set about observing, recording, and examining series of classroom discourses with a view to finding out patterns of classroom discourse and comparing them with desired ones.

In order to ensure this, the study recorded the discourses and wrote out their transcripts. Each and every statement made was studied and examined based on the categorization of speech acts. In view of the above, the study examined the class involving a teacher and students from a classroom discourse upon which the investigation was concerned. The study focused on the structure of discourse used in the classroom environment. The study attempted to understand how teachers interact with their students in the classroom. The aim of this paper was to analyze the classroom discourse based on speech acts approach. The researcher strove to identify the various speech acts used in a classroom and identify the chances of expressions given to students in the classroom.

Review of Related Literature

To establish the line of enquiry for the paper, the following concepts were reviewed:

Discourse Analysis

Schmitt (2010) states that discourse analysis provides valuable insights into the way we pattern and organize our speech in every way possible; learners should be alerted to the special qualities of spoken language and encouraged to accord equal 'validity' to both spoken and written formulations of language.

Schffrin et al (2001) views discourse as a stretch of language beyond sentence level; for example written or spoken texts that are coherent and meaningful to participants who are involved in the production and/or reception of those texts.

Discourse analysts try to take note of patterning in language use and the circumstances surrounding such patterns in terms of participants, situations, recorded purposes and outcomes of events associated with the language use. The discourse analyst does a deliberate and systematic study of language use by describing, interpreting, and explaining, what has been observed. The principal concern of applied linguistics is the study of language in use as a goal of education, a means of education and an instrument of social change . This is why discourse analysis is one of the topics in applied linguistics. Life is all about discourse from greetings, news items, television shows, the internet, classroom talk, casual conversations, lectures, marketing affairs, and football (Trapped-Lomax 2006).

Speech Acts

Cohen (2008) states that speech acts are often, but not always the patterned, reutinized language that natives and pragmatically competent nonnative speakers and writers in a given speech community (with its dialect variations) use to perform functions such as thanking, complimenting, requesting, refusing, apologizing, and complaining.... Speech act theory provides a reliable and valid basis for examining

Mey (2001) views that speech acts are verbal actions happening in the world. Uttering a speech act, I do something with my words; I perform an activity that at least intentionally brings about a change in

the existing state of affairs, hence the label, 'performative utterance' that originally was attached to speech acts.

Austin Searle (1962) opines that speech act is a minimal functional unit in human communication. They believe that language is not only used to inform or to describe things, it is often used to do things. So, speech act according to Austin and Searle has three levels of meaning as follows:

i. Locutionary act: It's the act of speakers saying or the literal meaning of the utterance. In addition, Yule (1996) sees Locutionary act as the basic act of utterance, or producing meaningful linguistics expression.

ii. Illocutionary act: It is the extra meaning of the utterance produced on the basis of its literal meaning. However, Yule (1996:48) opines that illocutionary act is performed via communicative force of utterance.... to make a statement, an offer, an explanation, or for some other communicative purposes.

iii. Perlocutionary act: It is the effect of the utterances on the hearer in depending on specific circumstances (Yule 1996:48). Example: It is hot in here. The hearer accepts to open the windows, because the weather is hot.

In view of the above, Yule (1996: 47) sees speech acts as simply things people do through language or actions performed via utterances and there are five classes of speech acts: assertive directives, commissives, expressives and declaration.

Theoretical Framework

The theory adopted for this study is speech act theory by Searle (1969).The theory states that "the basic unit of linguistic communication is the performance of a speech act". That is, whenever we make an utterance, we perform an intended function with it. This theory was originally developed by Austin (1962) but further modified by other scholars that followed him. Searle (1969) makes his own classifications as follows: Assertive (Speech acts that have a truth-value), Directives (an attempt to get the hearer to do something), Commissives

(Commit the Speaker to some future course of action), Expressive (feelings of the Speaker about a state of affairs) and Declarations (Change in status or condition of an object or situation through the utterances). Despite all the criticisms, we however believe the theory is suitable enough to carry out this research because it provides an analytical framework to determine and say what functions a particular utterance forms in a specific context of usage. However, Searle's categories of speech acts are used for the data analysis in this research.

Methodology and Data Presentation

This paper adopted ethno-methodology, as a method of data collection, by observing the classroom discourse, between teacher and the students. Data was collected via the talk interaction and tape recorded. The study class involving a teacher and students served as a source of information.

This study concentrates on teacher-students interactions as variables in the classroom. The speeches conducted were observed and studied as inputs for further analysis.

The primary data of this paper are presented serially in a tabular form for easy understanding of the discourse that occurred between a lecturer and his students. The frequencies of occurrence are presented in a table. Each strand of utterances identified is presented according to its serial column. Consider the table below:

Table: The Recorded Classroom Discourse (English Lesson)

S/N	Utterance	Assertives	Directives
1	What is the meaning of syllable? Tr: How do you explain it as a unit?		questioning
2	Tr: What do you mean by this word "re"?		questioning
3	Tr: I don't want the chorus answers. Tr: Please just raise up your hands.		warning/ commanding
4	Tr: What do we mean by the word "re"?		questioning
5	Tr: Yes!		Inviting
6	St: It's a worthy question	Responding	
7	Tr: Is this a question?		questioning
8	St: No	Responding	
9	Tr: what is the actual meaning?		questioning
10	Tr: you are on the way but ...		inviting/ encouraging
11	St: something that is available	Asserting	
12	Tr: alright this		
13	Tr: something that is available, like money, because money is available	Claiming Reasoning	
14	Tr: alright "re" is attached to the word.	Stating	
15	Tr: can you attach it to give another meaning.?		questioning
16 17	Tr: consider these two sentences. Malam Adamu is very rich man that is the first sentence. The second: " She prepared a very rich meal".		commanding /stating
18	Tr: my questions in the second sentence, what is "Meal"?		questioning
19	St: Food.	responding	
20	Tr: Now when we say Malam Adamu is a very rich man. What do we mean?		calling attention questioning
21	St: Wealthy man	responding	
22	Tr: What do we mean by "She prepared a very rich meal".		questioning
23	St: delicious food.	responding	
24	Tr: so the rich attach with what?		questioning
25	St: food	responding	

The above table shows the discourses made between teacher and students and illustrates the categories of speech acts each statement falls under. The lesson is made up of statements, questions, warnings, commands and invitations while the students gave responses accordingly.

Data Analysis from the English Lesson

Tr: "What is the meaning of syllable"?

Tr: "How do you explain it as unit?"

Tr: "What do you mean by this word 're'?"

The teacher's utterances are rhetorical questions which do not require answers. The statements are locutionary expressions in that they express or demand ideas, and the speech acts fall within Searle's illocutionary force of directives (requesting). The perlocutionary effect on the students is to let them react to the directives. Tr: "I don't want the chorus answers." "Please just raise up your hands."

The expression is a warning /commanding; . The locutionary statement demands or imposes some action on the listeners. The speech act falls within Searle's illocutionary force of the directives (warning /commanding). The perlocutionary effect on students is to comply with an instruction.

Tr   "what do we mean by the word "re"?

The teacher's utterance is a rhetorical question which does not require an answer. The locutionary statement emphasizes on some idea. The speech act falls within Searle's illocutionary force of directives (requesting). The perlocutionary effect on the students is to let them react to the directive.

Tr   "yes"

This is an expression with high tone which invites or permits the students to say something. The locutionary statement encourages the students to say more. The grammatical function is considered as imperative. The speech act falls within Searle's illocutionary force of

directives (inviting). The perlocutionary effect is to encourage students to act or stimulate them to give more.

St: "It is a worthy question"

It is a response to the first speaker (teacher). The locutionary statement is an act that presents an idea; the speech act falls within Searle's illocutionary force of the assertive (informing). The perlocutionary effect on the students is to admit the gesture, claim for acceptance or otherwise.

: Tr: "Is this a question?"

The expression is a question that requires an answer. The locutionary statement solicits a response. The speech acts fall within Searle's illocutionary force of directives (requesting). The perlocutionary effect on the student is the expectations of immediate response.

St: "No"

This expression is a response to the first speaker (teacher). The locutionary statement is a response to the question. The speech act falls within Searle's illocutionary force of assertive (informing). The perlocutionary effect on the teacher is to let the listener acknowledge the stance of the speaker.

 Tr: "You are on the way but ..."

This utterance encourages and invites the students/listeners to say something. The grammatical function is declarative; the locutionary statement solicits some attempts from the listeners, and the speech act falls within Searle's illocutionary force of directives (encouraging). The perlocutionary effect on the students is to caution them on the implication and say the right thing.

Tr: "Something that is available."

The utterance is an uncertain response. The locutionary statement expresses an affirmative response. The speech act falls within Searle's

illocutionary force of the assertive (ascertain). The perlocutionary effect on the teacher /hearer is to acknowledge the gesture.

Tr: "Alright this"
This utterance is acknowledging the claim of the previous response. The locutionary statement signifies an approval of the previous claim . The speech act falls within Searle's illocutionary force of the directives (admitting). The perlocutionary effect on students/listeners is to acknowledge the speaker's approval.

Tr: "Something that is available, like money, because money is available?"
The utterance is claiming/reasoning. The locutionary statement expresses some logical reasoning. The speech act falls within Searle's illocutionary force of the assertives (requesting). The perlocutionary effect on students/listeners is to have the feeling of reaffirmation.

Tr: "alright 're' is attached to the word."
The utterance is stating an idea. The locutionary statement expresses an idea. The speech act falls within Searle's illocutionary force of the assertive (informing). The perlocutionary effect on the students/listeners is to identify and acknowledge the logic.
 Tr: "Can you attach it to give another meaning?"
This utterance is a question. The locutionary statement expresses some logical reasoning. The speech act falls within Searle's illocutionary force of the directives (requesting). The perlocutionary effect on the students/listener is to exert at some logic.

Tr: Consider these two sentences:
"Malam Adamu is a very rich man". That is the first sentence;
The second sentence is "she prepared a very rich meal".
The expression is commanding /stating. The locutionary statement emphasizes some idea. The speech act falls within Searle's illocutionary

force of the directives (commanding/stating). The perlocutionary effect on the students is to strengthen the logic in them.

Tr: my question in the second sentence "what is meal"
It is questioning. The locution statements demands or imposes some action in on the listeners. The speech act falls within Searle's illocutionary force of directives, . The perlocutionary effects on the students is to instill a challenge in them for action.

St: 'Food'
The expression is the student's response to the teacher. The locutionary statement is a response to the question. The speech act falls within Searle's illocutionary force of assertive (response). The perlocutionary effects on the teacher is stating for approval.

Tr: "Now when we say malam Adamu is a very rich man" what do we mean.?
The expression is calling students' attention to reason. The locutionary statement demands idea. The perlocutionary effect on the students is to have a piece of example for instinctive reasoning and to respond to the speaker.
 St: "wealthy man"
This expression is a response to what the teacher uttered. The locutionary statement is a response to the question. The speech act falls within Searle's illocutionary force of assertives (ascertain).   The perlocutionary effect on the teacher is to acknowledge the gesture or claim.

Tr: What do we mean by "she prepared a very rich meal?"
The expression is a response to the teacher's question; the locutionary statement expresses some demand. The speech act falls within Searle's illocutionary force of directives (questioning). The perlocutionary effect on the students is to present a challenge to the students for response.
St: "delicious food"

It is a response to what the teacher uttered. The locutionary statement is a response to the teacher. The speech act falls within Searle's illocutionary force of assertives (responding). The perlocutionary effect on the teacher is to acknowledge the gesture or claim.

Tr: "so the rich is attached with what"
It   is questioning. The locutionary statement solicits some attempts from the listeners, and the speech act falls within Searle's illocutionary force of the directives. The perlocutionary effect on the students is to make them give an immediate response.

Tr: "Food"
The expression is a response to what the teacher demanded. The locutionary statements expresses an affirmative response. The speech act falls within Searle's illocutionary force of the assertives (ascertain). The perlocutionary effect on the teacher is to acknowledge the response.

Conclusion
        Based on the data presented above, the paper has clearly shown that the teachers were the initiators of the classroom discourse and fairly involved their students in sharing their thoughts in the classroom. The research has further discovered that the frequent speech acts used in the classroom (teacher/students) discourse are directives and assertives. Others carried no entries.

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