

Classroom discourse

Classroom discourse is an institutional discourse that involves the teacher and pupils interacting and exchanging ideas. The teacher initiates the discourse and ensures that it follows a particular course, which he/she has pre-determined. The typical structure of the classroom discourse identified by Sinclair and Coulthard is IRF (Initiation, Response and Follow-up). This means that the teacher initiates the discourse while the students supply response to the initiation and the teacher typically gives the feedback. Though, there are several ways teacher and students exchange ideas, the teacher is the one saddled with the responsibility of controlling the discourse and determining the direction it goes. The teacher has a role that is described in discourse as [+ HIGHER ROLE], while the students have the [- HIGHER ROLE]. With this tenor relationship between the teacher and the pupils, the classroom discourse is able to run smoothly. In the next section we will discuss the features of classroom discourse as observed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975)

3.2 Discourse Structure

Sinclair and Coulthard's (1976) work represents one of the earliest descriptive work on classroom discourse as an institutional discourse. The work was based on Halliday's scale and category. Discourse was seen by them as a level of language higher than grammar. They did an extensive study of the language used by teachers and pupils in classroom in Britain and proposed a five scale category of discourse, namely: lesson, transaction, exchange, moves and acts. These are discussed in the next section.

3.3 Lesson

Lesson is the highest unit in the discourse rankscale. It is everything that happens in the classroom from the point the teacher enters till he/she leaves. The structure of a lesson is determined by several factors. These include pupils' responses to the teachers' instructions and the teachers' ability to respond to the pupils' responses. For instance, a teacher may initiate a discussion that the whole class would be on for the entire lesson. Good teachers do not rush their lessons with the aim of finishing everything they set out to do. As they teach, they monitor pupils' responses and sometimes repeat and go over a lesson they had taught earlier.

3.4 Transaction

Transaction is next to lesson. It is the basic unit of interaction. It has to do with minimal contribution made by the participants in a discourse. Every transaction has an opening, which is usually a greeting and it possibly closes with a greeting as well.

3.5 Exchange

An exchange is the whole dialogue between the teacher and the pupils. It is the fundamental unit that realizes social interaction (see Taiwo and Salami, 2007: 29). The structure of a

typical exchange is an initiation followed by a response and followed by a follow-up. Initiation simply refers to the starting up of a topic by the teacher when he enters the classroom. The teacher expects his/her initiation to elicit a kind of response from the students. An initiation is usually a question or a comment. Teachers use questions a lot for initiating responses from their pupils. Then the response will come in form of an answer to the question. The exchange will not be complete without the teacher responding as a follow-up to the pupils' response. A follow-up may be a commendation for a good answer, a rejection of the answer, and so forth.

3.5 Move

Move refers to the contribution made by one of the participants in the discourse at a point in time. Speakers take turns in conversation and when they have the floor, they speak for a specific period of time before another speaker takes over.

3.7 Act

Act is the smallest unit of the discourse structure. According to Sinclair and Coulthard (1992: 4), "discourse acts are typically one free clause plus any subordinate clauses, but there are certain closed classes where we can specify almost all the possible realizations which consist of single words or groups." Acts are defined principally by their functions. Sinclair and Coulthard recognized 22 classes of act in the classroom discourse .

3.8 Classes of Acts

To discuss the classes of acts, shall present a table showing them, how they are realized and their functions in discourse.

SN	CATEGORY	REALIZATION AND FUNCTION
1	Elicitation (elc)	This is realized by a question. Its function is to request a linguistic response
2	Directive (dir)	This is realized by a command. Its function is to request a non-linguistic response
3	Informative (inf)	This is realized by a statement. The function is to provide information. The only response is an acknowledgement of attention or understanding
4	Prompt (prm)	This is realized by a closed class of items – 'go on', 'come on', 'hurry up', 'have a guess', etc. Its function is to reinforce a directive or elicitation by suggesting that the teacher is no longer requesting a response but expecting or demanding one
5	Bid (bid)	This is realized by a closed class of verbal and nonverbal items – 'sir', 'miss', teachers name, raised hand, 'finger clicking', etc. Its function is to signal a desire to contribute to the discourse

6	Re-state(res)	This is realized by statements that tend to repeat a point or an idea that had earlier on been mentioned
7	Focus (foc)	This is realized by statements which are not strictly part of the discourse but inform us about what the topic is all about
8	Frame (frm)	This is realized by words that indicate the boundaries in a lesson, such as 'right', 'today', 'good', 'well', etc.
9	Repetition (rpt)	This is realized by statements that are repeated to emphasize the importance of the message in the discourse
10	Demonstration (dem)	This is realized by statements showing that the teacher is giving a practical illustration of what is being presented to the pupils
11.	Contrastive (con)	This is realized by a statement that are opposite of what had earlier been said. They are usually marked by expressions such as, in contrast to...', 'on the contrary', etc.
12	Illustrate (ill)	This is realized by a statement that further explains a point being discussed
13	Expatiate (exp)	This is realized by a statement that adds to the information that had already been given
14	Additive (add)	This is realized by a statement, which gives additional information to the discourse. It is realized typically by words such as, 'and', 'in addition' , etc.

15	Hearing/check (h/c)	This is realized by words such as 'hen', 'abi', (Yoruba expressions for 'is it so?') or any local language equivalent, which are meant to check whether the pupils are following the discourse.
16	Accept (acc)	This is realized by a closed class of items such as 'yes', 'no', 'good', 'fine', and a repetition of pupil's reply, all with neutral low-fall intonation. Its function is to indicate that the teacher has heard or seen and that the information, reply, or react was appropriate.
17	Comment (com)	This is realized by a statement or a tag question. It is subordinate to the head move. Its function is to expand, justify, and provide additional information.
18	Evaluation (eva)	This is realized by statements and tag questions including words and phrases such as 'good', 'fine', with high-fall intonation and repetition of pupil's reply with either a high-fall (positive evaluation) or a rise of any kind (negative evaluation).
19	Causative (cau)	This is realized by a statement showing that what is about to be said is as a result of one thing or the other. It is typically realized by words such as , 'so', 'therefore', 'as a result' etc.

20	Reply (rep)	This is realized by a statement, question or moodless item and non-verbal surrogates, such as nods. Its function is to provide a linguistic response, which appropriates elicitation.
21	React (rea)	This is realized by a non-linguistic action. Its function is to provide the appropriate non-linguistic response, which is appropriate to the directive
22	Nominate (nom)	This is realized by a closed class consisting of names of all students. You, anybody, 'yes, etc.. The function is to give permission to a student to contribute to the discourse

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