

On the functional distribution of talk in the E.F.L. classroom

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The use of language is dependent upon a speech event. The position of the participants of a speech event determines the functions of their utterances. Teaching a foreign language is a speech event whose participants do not share the same position with reference to the language knowledge which is the aim and means of their verbal interaction. This paper investigates how this unequal position is reflected upon the level of the language functions performed in the E.F.L. classroom.

Having investigated the corpus of transcribed tape-recorded samples of the E.F.L. classroom talk in our schools, the author defines the functions of the classroom language have been defined. A quantitative analysis is made in order to discover the presence of each function within the teacher and pupil talk. The distribution of a particular function in teacher and pupil talk is analysed with reference to the communicative task being performed.

The obtained results are discussed and their implications for further research are stressed.

Investigation in the F.L. classroom is carried out in order to get more insight into the nature of classroom discourse. By means of quantitative and qualitative analysis, various aspects of teachers' and pupils' verbal behaviour are investigated, the final aim being to establish how teachers' and learners' language use in the classroom might promote better learning results.

Our investigation supports the hypothesis that the use of language in a speech event is dependent on the position of its participants. Teaching a foreign language is a speech event. The positions of its participants, the teacher and learners, are not the same with reference to language knowledge which is the aim and means of their verbal interaction. It is to be expected that this inequality is reflected in the basic features of language use, such as the amount of teachers' and pupils' talk, language functions, turn-taking, and so on.

The first aim of our investigation was to recognize the basic characteristics of F.L. classroom discourse with regard to form and organization and to show that communicative behaviour is a form of discourse in its own right and different from other forms of discourse.

The second aim of this investigation is defined with regard to teaching foreign languages as seen by contemporary theoreticians and methodologists. The final scope of language learning is seen as the ability to engage successfully in various speech situations in natural conversation. For this purpose, learners should be given the opportunity to engage in those communicative situations that will enable them to use and develop the communicative strategies that are used in everyday conversation.

Based on collected data of classroom talk, we wanted to find segments of discourse that seem to contribute to the development of communicative strategies and the achievement of communicative efficiency.

Several aspects of talk in the E.F.L. classroom were investigated. The results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the functions of teachers' and pupils' acts will be presented in this paper.

1. Observation system

For the purpose of our investigation, a system for observing and recording classroom talk had to be developed. An utterance or part of an utterance that has a different meaning from the previous one was taken as a unit of analysis. By means of this type of segmentation of discourse, we were able to identify the type of verbal behaviour whenever it occurred.

Our observation system is a modification of existing systems, with some subcategories introduced by the author of this paper. The system consists of 8 main categories, six of which are broken down in 26 subcategories or aspects.

These are :

1. ELICITATIVE

- a) extralinguistic content – common knowledge
- b) extralinguistic content – feelings, opinion, experience
- c) linguistic content

2. RESPONSIVE

- a) gives a complete response
- b) gives a partial response
- c) continues responding
- d) repeats (partial repetition)
- e) gives no response

3. EVALUATIVE

3.1. Accepts response

- a) praises
- b) repeats
- c) expresses attitude
 - content
 - language

3.2. Shows incorrectness

- a) repeats initiative
- b) repeats (part of) response
- c) repeats up to the incorrect part
- d) repeats the incorrect part
- e) elicits another speaker

4. CORRECTIVE

- a) gives correct form
- b) gives explanation

5. CONDUCTIVE

- a) gives instructions
- b) nominates
- c) disciplines

6. EXPLANATORY

- a) content
- b) language

7. AFFECTIVE REACTIONS

8. SILENCE

The same categories were used for both the teacher and the learners. In the development of this system, several principles were followed. These are :

– I-R-F (Initiation-Response-Feedback) should be taken as the basic structure of classroom verbal interaction

– the categories should cover all aspects of pedagogical, communicative and affective parts of verbal behaviour

– a distinction between the linguistic and the non-linguistic context should be made with some categories in order to get a better insight into the communicative and metacommunicative uses of language

– subcategories and aspects of some categories should be introduced in order to get more insight into the ways in which a particular function is performed

2. Corpus

The analysis was made on the basis of 24 transcribed samples of tape-recorded teacher-pupil verbal interaction in the E.F.L. classroom. The recordings were made by the author between March 1992 and November 1993. The average length of the recordings is about 15 minutes (min. 10 – max. 20). The cause of the varying length should primarily be seen in the author's wish not to interrupt the communicative exchange, or in the desire to analyse the verbal behaviour with various communicative techniques and procedures dealing with the same communicative content.

10 recordings were made in 4 primary schools (two in Split and two in Zadar), 7 in 3 secondary schools in Split and 7 in one school for foreign languages in Split.

The recorded samples cover different levels of language knowledge: elementary, intermediate and advanced, estimated according to the number of years the pupils had been learning. Different types of communicative tasks were covered. For the purpose of analysis, the recorded communicative activities were divided into four types. The first type deals with communication focused on extralinguistic content which is supposed to be known to all the participants, such as the content of a didactic dialogue in the pupils' textbooks. This type of communication is usually called pseudocommunication. Half of the samples in our corpus cover this type of communication. The second type of activity is that focused on the communication of pupils' own attitudes, opinions and experiences. This activity with reference

to its content is said to contain elements of real communication. Four recorded samples in our corpus belong to this group. The third type of activity is focused on linguistic content. Here the pupils acquire new grammatical and lexical items by means of various techniques. Six recordings cover this activity. Finally, two recorded samples in our corpus are labelled as simulations, as they simulate the kind of conversation that is likely to occur in a natural speech situation.

3. Aim of analysis

As previously mentioned, the aspect of the E.F.L. classroom verbal behaviour presented in this paper is speech functions as distributed in teacher and pupil talk in general and with the four types of communicative activities in particular.

Our analysis of speech functions in the E.F.L. classroom attempts to answer the following questions :

1. How are the functions distributed in teacher and pupil talk ?
2. Does the type of communicative activity significantly influence the presence of utterances performing a particular function ?
3. In which way, that is by means of what speech acts, is a particular function performed ?

In putting the first question we wanted to discover which speech functions contribute to the teachers' domination in classroom talk. We also tried to find out how pupils' unequal position, with reference to language knowledge, is reflected upon the speech functions they perform in verbal interaction. The findings are expected to provide information on the form of classroom discourse, which is the first aim of our investigation.

In order to achieve the second aim of our investigation, we wanted to discover, for this level of analysis, whether in some communicative tasks behaviour similar to natural conversation can be identified.

In answering the third question we tried to discover speech acts which perform particular functions. The subcategories and aspects of verbal behaviour in our observation system were particularly useful for that purpose. Close inspection of transcribed data was necessary.

This paper will present the results of the analysis made in order to answer the first two questions. The answer to the third question, owing to the limited time, will only partly be mentioned in the discussion.

4. Results and discussion

Based on the categories for analysing verbal behaviour in our system, the following functions of classroom talk have been proposed: elicitive, responsive, evaluative, corrective, conductive and explanatory. The presence of each function within both teacher and learner talk was counted for each of the 24 samples and the medium value for each type of activity was calculated. The results are presented in two separate tables, one for teacher talk and one for pupil talk. The distribution of functions in teacher talk will be discussed first.

4.1. Functional distribution of teacher talk

Table 1

Function of verbal behaviour	CA 1	CA 2	CA 3	CA 4	Total %
1. Elicitive	32.49	28.36	13.14	6.5	20.12
2. Responsive	3.67	2.04	1.35	0	1.76
3. Evaluative	33.07	38.80	36.84	31.42	35.03
4. Corrective	6.35	4.76	7.01	12.93	7.76
5. Conducive	20.89	16.02	22.49	28.41	21.34
6. Explanatory	7.09	0	9.66	0.5	5.13

CA1 = communication focused on extralinguistic content – common knowledge

CA2 = communication focused on extralinguistic content – own attitudes, opinions

CA3 = communication focused on linguistic content

CA4 = simulation

The general belief that teachers tend to evaluate every utterance by pupils seems to be proved by this analysis. More than one third of teacher talk speech is evaluative in function. It is evident that this function dominates teacher talk with every type of observed communicative activities. Teachers' evaluative behaviour is highly repetitive. This is particularly true of accepting pupil utterances, when the teacher often repeats the praising words or the pupil's utterance in order to inform the pupil that he has produced a correct utterance. The repetitive aspect of the

teacher's verbal behaviour may be considered as one of the causes for the significantly high amount of teachers' evaluative behaviour in our corpus. Showing incorrectness is mostly present with Communicative Activity no 1. In these situations teachers most frequently repeat a part of the pupil's utterance up to the incorrect part or simply inform the pupil that his or her utterance is not acceptable, using the word »No« or something. However, this aspect of teacher evaluative behaviour is not very much present in teacher talk. They mostly tend to correct mistakes in pupil talk, usually by giving the »correct« form of a language item.

The elicitive function is the second in use in teacher talk in our corpus. About one fifth of teachers' utterances elicit pupils', usually verbal, responses. A diversity in the amount of this function can be observed with reference to the communicative activity. The highest amount of this activity is observed with CA 1. Teachers' verbal behaviour that elicits communication on pupils' own opinions and attitudes is the most frequent with the three types of activities. This is true even of the language-oriented activities.

Teachers' elicitive behaviour is mostly performed by a question. A separate analysis has shown that the type of question being put is highly dependent upon the familiarity with the content which is the topic of communication. Thus, in samples covering CA1 closed questions are put more frequently, while with CA2 teachers' questions tend to be open-ended. Various modifications of teachers' verbal behaviour when putting questions have been observed, repetitive talk being one of the most prominent.

Controlling pupils' verbal behaviour is as much present in our corpus as elicitation. It is almost equally found in all types of activities. The highest amount of this function covers nomination of the next speaker and giving instructions on conducting verbal behaviour. A negligible amount of teacher talk refers to discipline.

Teachers' explanatory verbal behaviour is not significant in our corpus. We think that this is partly due to the corpus on which the analysis was made but also to a very high degree of verbal interaction between the teacher and the pupils, as proved by the high amount of elicitive and evaluative behaviour. We would also like to point out that approximately the same amount of teachers' explanatory talk is concerned with extralinguistic and linguistic content.

Teachers' responsive behaviour is rather poor. The analysis of the transcript shows that teachers seldom answer pupils' questions. Very often teachers tend to answer their own questions, either when they are not patient enough to wait for the pupil's answer or when they get no answer at all. This has been noticed with CA1. It seems that this aspect of teachers' behaviour supports the thesis that the aim of teachers' questions is not the communicative value of pupils' responses but their linguistic acceptability.

4.2. Functional distribution of pupil talk

The results of the analysis of functional distribution of pupil talk are also presented in a table.

Table 2

Function of verbal behaviour	CA1	CA2	CA3	CA4	TOTAL%
1.Elicitative	7.07	6.18	4.37	25.83	10.86
2.Responsive	88.87	75.85	84.72	49.87	74.67
3.Evaluative	0.33	3.30	0	15.27	4.72
4.Corrective	2.22	0.52	0.41	0.87	0.76
5.Conductive	0.39	2.75	0.41	1.34	0.87
6.Explanatory	0	2.54	0.57	0	0.77

Most learner talk is responsive in function. The pupils more often respond to teachers' elicitive behaviour and less often to peers'. The amount of this function considerably differs between CA4 and the other types of activities since with this activity they have the same right for turn-taking as their collocutors, so they do not speak only when asked but they also use self-selection. This is the cause for a smaller amount of learners' responsive talk in this activity. Pupils mostly tend to give full answers to teachers' questions, particularly with CA1. With communicative activities in which real exchange of information takes place, pupils tend to continue their response after either the teacher or another pupil has taken a turn. The continuation of their response usually contains some additional information. With communicative activities defined as pseudocommunication, pupils continue their responses, usually interrupted by the teacher, only in order to give a complete answer to the initial question.

Pupils' elicitive behaviour is most frequent with simulations. Here pupils put questions to one another. With the other activities they put questions to peers only when asked by the teacher to do so. In these situations they are often given an opportunity to put real questions dealing with their own experience, likes and dislikes, and so on. Pupils very seldom put questions to teachers. If they do so, they want to obtain information on the meaning of a target-language unit.

Evaluation is not an important feature of pupils' talk. The nature of pupils' evaluative behaviour is significantly different from that of teachers. While the teachers almost always tend to evaluate the acceptability of the pupils' utterance from the linguistic point of view, pupils mostly evaluate the content of their peers' utterance expressing

agreement, disagreement, disbelief, etc. This feature of pupil talk, which was observed with activities CA2 and CA4, proves that pupils are likely to use the conversational strategies they use in natural conversation in their mother tongue.

Other functions of pupil talk are very poorly present. It might be interesting to point out that pupils seldom correct mistakes in their peers' utterances. If they do so, it is with CA1. It seems that pupils are aware of the purpose of the activity. Like their teachers with this type of activity, the pupils' attention is focused on linguistic form, since they are all familiar with the content.

5. Conclusion

In the concluding part of this paper we should only like to point out that the inequality of the participants in the speech event observed can also be described on the level of speech functions. The results of analysis of the functional distribution of talk in the E.F.L. classroom have shown that a greater number and variety of functions have been performed by the teacher.

Some functions seem to be characteristic only of the classroom situation. This is particularly true of teachers' evaluative behaviour, which is most often present even with the activities in which natural discourse is being simulated.

Also, it has been noticed that there may be a considerable difference in the functional use of language with different communicative activities. With the procedures suggested by the communicative approach to foreign language learning, pupils show a tendency to use the communicative strategies that they use in natural discourse.

Concerning the aspect of verbal behaviour by means of which particular functions are performed, it might be useful to investigate the influence of the most frequent aspects (for example repetition) upon the learning process in order to see if these aspects promote better learning results.

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O FUNKCIONALNOJ DISTRIBUCIJI RAZREDNOG GOVORA PRI NASTAVI ENGLESKOGA KAO STRANOG JEZIKA

Uporaba jezika ovisi o govornom događaju. Položaj sudionika govornog događaja određuje funkciju njihovih iskaza. Nastava stranog jezika je govorni događaj čiji sudionici nisu u jednakom položaju s obzirom na jezično znanje, koje je i cilj i sredstvo njihove verbalne interakcije. U ovom se radu istražuje kako se taj nejednaki položaj odražava na razini govornih funkcija u nastavi engleskoga kao stranog jezika.

Nakon što smo istražili korpus transkribiranih magnetofonskih snimaka razrednog govora u nastavi engleskoga kao stranog jezika, definirali smo funkcije razrednog govora. Izvršili smo kvantitativnu analizu kako bismo otkrili prisustvo svake funkcije u govoru nastavnika odnosno učenika. Analizirali smo distribuciju pojedine funkcije u nastavnikovu odnosno učenikovu govoru s obzirom na komunikacijski zadatak. Dobivene rezultate smo komentirali i ukazali na njihove implikacije za daljnja istraživanja.