ANALYZING THE SEQUENTIAL ORGANIZATION OF TALK AND A TEACHER'S IDENTITY FORMATION THROUGH CLASSROOM INTERACTION *

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a report on a qualitative research study based on analyzing an elementary school teacher's talk by means of the Conversation Analysis Methodology. The aim of the study was to gain a deep understanding regarding the organization of talk of classroom interaction and the way it helps at constructing their identity as English language teachers. The results revealed that the teacher used a lot of discourse markers to catch students´ attention and encourage students to follow and obey her directions at some specific moments. Accordingly, some factors that shape the teacher's identity were disclosed when analyzing classroom interactions in the light of the IRF/E cycle (Initiation, Response, Feedback /Evaluation).

Key Words: Conversation Analysis, teachers' talk, teacher identity, IRF/E cycle.

RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta un informe sobre un estudio de investigación de tipo cualitativo, basado en el análisis de la charla de un maestro de escuela primaria a través de la Metodología de Análisis de la Conversación. El objetivo del estudio fue obtener una comprensión profunda de la organización de la conversación en la interacción en el aula y la forma en que ésta ayuda a construir la identidad como profesores de inglés. Los resultados revelaron que la docente usó muchos marcadores discursivos para captar la atención de los estudiantes y animarlos a seguir y obedecer sus instrucciones en algunos momentos específicos. Por tanto, algunos factores que dan forma a la identidad del profesor fueron revelados al analizar las interacciones del aula, a la luz del ciclo IRF/E (Iniciación, Respuesta, Realimentación / Evaluación).

Palabras clave: Análisis de la conversación, charla del docente, identidad del docente, ciclo IRF/E.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a very essential system that human beings have in order to Exchange transactions every day. In addition, conversation is a component that leads to interaction in a society with the purpose of keeping a relationship among members of a community. However, there are many more components that are immersed in a conversation than the mere use of the linguistic code. For instance, proxemics, kinesthetic, eye gaze, body gestures, among others, they are aspects that complement a conversational interaction. Furthermore, many sub-competences of the Communicative one, such as pragmatics, linguistics, and sociolinguistics might play an important role when exchanging meaning.

Regarding the importance that a conversation has in our contexts and lives, an approach emerged in order to understand and study on this common phenomenon in a deep way. In this sense, there is an approach in order to approach the underlying study of conversation. It is called Conversation Analysis, which focuses on the study of talk in interaction. This approach emerged from the ethnomethodological tradition in sociology. One of its advocates is Garfinkel (1964, 1967, 1988). Hence, ethnomethodology has an emphasis on understanding the social structure of everyday lived experiences mediated by interaction, and more specifically, it focuses on the "how" these structures are ordinarily and routinely produced. In addition, the social order does not pre-exist, but it is constructed by the social actors that partake in different contexts.

In the same line of thought, the way social actors make sense of and attribute meaning to reality or social world regarding a huge variety of contexts occurs by means of a method named "The documentary method". It accounts for a selection process of certain facts from a social situation in which some particular features or patterns are involved. Then, the social actors go through a process of making sense of the facts in the light of the patterns that permeated the social situation. The context is an essential component of the

documentary method because people make sense of the occurrences that happen within a context. This method is used in daily people´s lives in order to gain a better understanding of the social world, which is taken-for-granted. Then, the fact of taking for granted the understanding that everybody has in relation to reality means that social knowledge is implicit.

In the field of ethnomethodology, the study of social interaction does not have a vital importance to the information that was approached or discussed within a conversation, but it rather focuses on understanding on the nature of the interaction. It means that the way in which a social interaction occurs is what really is of concern to ethnomethodology. Thus, the key issue in Conversation Analysis has to deal with the fact of studying actual instances of social interaction. Goffman (1959, 1963, 1967) stated that the ordinary activities of daily life were an important subject of study. Hence, the data for the study must be actual talk occurring in actual contexts (Heritage, 1995). Having genuine contexts relies on the fact that this method claims for the analysis of real-world. Therefore, data must provide several opportunities to be analyzed in order to look at detail that might have been ignored at a first instance. Video and tape recordings seem to be the most suitable strategy to collect data for purposes of implementing

the approach of Conversation Analysis. Additionally, in conversational interactions there are external and internal factors that shape the performance of conversation. Most of the time human beings are involved in conversations or interactions as part of the fact of being social individuals. In this sense, conversation analysis is a great approach to deep understand our daily transactions because it does not focus on the fact of classifying conversations in formal, informal, or institutional talks. It is fantastic because we are involved in very rich contexts in terms of language functions that can help us make a meaningful sense of our reality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As language has a social dimension and conversation is a correlative component that makes it happen. Conversations lead to interaction in a society with the purpose of keeping a relationship among members of a community. Liddicoat (2007) defines conversation as "the way in which people socialize and develop and sustain their relationships with each other" (p. 1). However, there are many more components that are immersed in a conversation than the mere use of the linguistic code. For instance, proxemics,

304

kinesthetic, eye gaze, body gestures, among others, they are aspects that complement a conversational interaction.

In addition, there is a methodology to delve into research regarding a conversation which is called Conversation Analysis (CA). This is a methodology to the study of social interaction that emerged in the 1960s in the writings and lectures of the late sociologist Harvey Sacks and was consolidated in his collaborations with Emanuel A. Schegloff and Gail Jefferson in the later 1960s and early 1970s. CA is not a subfield of linguistics and does not take language per se as its primary object of study. Rather, the object of study is the organization of human social interaction. Thus, this methodology focuses on the study of the talk in interaction that happens in a natural way and a key issue in Conversation Analysis has to deal with the fact of studying actual instances of social interaction. Goffman (1959, 1963, 1967) stated that the ordinary activities of daily life were an important subject of study. Hence, the data for the study must be actual talk occurring in actual contexts (Heritage, 1995). In this sense, the main data for this paper were collected from a teaching session at a private school, which is a real and genuine context

In order to have data from conversations, the research must transcribe them. Then, this process demands the researcher not only to write down what was said, but also to have knowledge or expertise to write speech in the way it was said. Additionally, the transcript must contain a brief description with information about the circumstances in which the recording was produced in order to make a contextualization of the conversation itself because they have analytic consequences of high importance for the analysis.

Accordingly, Sacks et al., (1974) claim that every single interaction involves the use of some kind of turn- taking organization as ordinary conversation. Hence, turn-taking is one of the most prominent features of the talk that takes place in classrooms. According to Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974), conversational turn-taking is a locally managed, party-administered, and internationally contingent system, in which participants orient to the achievement of "one speaker at a time" with the minimization of gaps and overlaps.

In the same token, interaction in second language has a great significance and it has been explained by Gass and Selinker (2008) by means of the Input-Interaction-Output Model in which once input is given, interaction will take and the learner will move towards the production of output. According to Block (2003), the Input-Interaction-Output model posited that

learners need to know how to negotiate for meaning because of its relevance and importance to the acquisition process. Regarding this model, negotiation for meaning is the construct central to communication as information transaction in which interlocutors exchange information while conducting communicative tasks. Long (1996) defined a number of negotiation devices that interlocutors might employ as they negotiate for meaning during social interaction, such as recasts, repetitions, seeking agreement, reformulations, paraphrasing, comprehension and confirmation checks, clarification requests, and lexical substitutions .

Additionally, *classroom interaction* is a quite relevant issue to delve into research following CA methodology. The first and most influential study regarding formal speech-exchange in education was carried out by McHoul (1978) which was focused on the organization of turns in classrooms. In the same way Seedhouse (2004) focused his study on the interactional organization of second language (L2) classrooms and uncovered the relationship between pedagogy and interaction. Seedhouse (2011) stresses the dynamic nature of context by "exemplifying how the institution of the L2 classroom is talked in and out of being by participants and how teachers create L2 classroom contexts and

shift from one context to another" (p.12). Hence, these micro-contexts might be identified and analyzed in the data gathered form a classroom interaction in a private school in Boyacá. This fact contributes to this study in the way the researcher can have wider ways to look at data.

Additionally, the IRF/E is widely recognized and has been implemented by many researchers since Bellack, Kliebard, and Hyman (as cited in Fajardo, 2013) identified that the structure of classroom interaction is focused on three distinctive exchange patterns: solicit, respond and react. In the same way, Kasper (2001), states that learners could benefit more if teachers provide some opportunities for them to talk and interact because sometimes the teacher is a person who controls the class, and is the only person who talks the entire session. This is related to teacher –centered approach.

Another underpinning issue regarding Conversation Analysis is related to identity, and more exactly, to teacher identity in naturally-occurring interactions. The latter feature is quite connected to the conceptualization of identity as a process of continuous changes which are framed within the dynamic of spontaneous and different daily situations. In this sense, the analysis between talk and institutional goals might display an image of the way

identity is co-constructed and negotiated in interaction. This premise is further expanded by Wenger (1998) when she proposes that identities are formed amid the "tension between our investment in the various forms of belonging and our ability to negotiate the meanings that matter in those contexts" (p. 188). Therefore, identity formation is a dual process of *identification* and *negotiation of meanings*.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What does classroom interaction reveal about the sequential organization of talk and teacher´s identity formation through Conversation Analysis?

METHODOLOGY

Conversation Analysis was the methodology adopted to analyze data as it focuses its interest on the interpretation of naturally-occurring interaction. This approach emerged in the 1960s with Schegloff & Sacks. Besides, this encompasses some ethno-methodological principles which are not taken into account in this study. What is of concern to this study is the deep understanding of the sequential organization of talk and its interactional effects.

The main data for the current paper were collected from a classroom interactional session at a private school.

First, the session was video-recorded as it is the most effective technique to gather data for CA purposes. Then, the video was transcribed from minute 0.0 to 6.0. Hence, the transcription system adopted in this study was developed by Jefferson (as cited in Liddicoat, 2007). The conventions used in this paper are described in (Annex 1). Subsequently, three chunks of data were selected by the researcher because they were considered as excerpts in which interaction occurred in higher levels than in the others.

SETTING

The setting displays an image of 15 first-grade students at a private school in Nobsa, Boyacá. Their age ranges from 5 to 7 years. They are learning English as a foreign language. In the same way, the teacher is a foreign language teacher who is currently studying an M.A in Language Teaching.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The organization of talk in this paper is essentially focused on the IRF/E cycle, turn taking, some aspects of repair such as completion and comprehension check, latching, discourse markers, interruption, overlapping, and display questions. Such aspects are analyzed and described in a micro-level of interpretation.

The IRF/E is widely recognised and has been implemented by many researchers since Bellack, Kliebard, and Hyman (as cited in Fajardo, 2013). Identified that the structure of classroom interaction is focused on three distinctive exchange patterns: solicit, respond and react. In the same way, learners could benefit more if teachers provide some opportunities for them to talk and interact because sometimes the teacher is a person who controls the class, and is the only person who talks the entire session (Kasper, 2001). It is time to change it, and through the data gathered, it is seen that students have more opportunities to practice and rehearse their language skills. In the following excerpt, the IRF/E is portrayed.

Extract 1 (Turns 1-24)

1. T: Ok sh::: so we are going to start (0.1)
2.   right now↓
3.   So we are going to move to page 92 (0.3)
4.   and we are going to do these exercises
5.   ok↑ ok↑=
6. Ss: =yes
7. T: So here (.)sh:: we have to match (0.2)sh:::
8.   the corresponding body part with the corresponding animal↓

ok↑
9.   so for instance
10.   you didn´t have to do that (0.2)
11.   > i didn´t ask you to do that <
12.   You´re just going to ↑do it↓
13.   so (.)what part of the body is this↑=
14. S1:   =rabbit
15. T: < what part of the body is this↑>
16. Ss: rabbit rabbit rabbit
17. T: < what part of the body is this↑>
                  (0.2)
18. S2:   con:: rabbit
19. T: < what part of the body is this↑>=
20. S2:   =orejas=
21. T: =in ↑e:::nglish class .
22. S3:   u:::h
23. SS: ears
24. T: ↑this is an ear (.)good↓

The first Turn Constructional Unit, in extract 1, portrays a sample of the IRF/E cycle. The teacher is the one who initiates the flow of interaction. The teacher starts using a discourse marker "ok" in order to catch students´ attention and make sure students are going to listen to the direction she is going to give. Then, the teacher is concerned with students' discipline and she pronounces a stretching sound (sh:::) in

308

order to have their attention. There is a 0.1 second pause to hold the floor for the upcoming utterances (Turn 01).

The teacher uses "right now" in order to encourage students to follow and obey her directions at that specific moment (Turn 02). The teacher uses a discourse marker again (so) to continue having students´ attention to her instructions and she continues providing more details regarding what students are supposed to do. Furthermore, there is a 0.3 second pause in order to provide room for clarification or repetition about the information that is already given (Turn 03). Many linguists such as Heritage (1998), Schrock (1999), Levinson (1983), Schriffin (1987), Aijmer (2002), and Lenk (1998) are in agreement that Discourse particles, or later called discourse markers by Schourup (1982) could be used to 'stabilize' conversation with different meanings so that there is no vacuum 'period' during the conversation, and it makes the flow of conversation run smoothly. The use of discourse markers could make conversation more interesting, more understandable, and even more polite, and more powerful, though it won't change its grammatical meaning.

As there are no questions, the teacher carries on giving information (Turn 04). In order to make sure students understood what the teacher just said, the teacher uses "ok" as a comprehension check ((Turn 05). Long (1996) defined a number of negotiation devices that interlocutors might employ as they negotiate for meaning during social interaction, such as recasts, repetitions, seeking agreement, reformulations, paraphrasing, comprehension and confirmation checks, clarification requests, and lexical substitutions.

Then, there is a latching when students answer straight without hesitation, doubt or pause. It means that students affiliate with teacher´s request and also "yes" is the response that shapes the IRF/E cycle (Turn 0.6). Latching is a term used in Conversation Analysis referring to the absence of 'natural beat of silence' between two turn constructional units. It is generally interpreted as a turn-holding device (Zhang, 2010).

The teacher uses a discourse marker in order to have students´ attention or commitment. There is micro-pause and a stretching sound in order to ask students to be quiet. A 0.2 second pause is used to let students know that their discipline or behavior is not the appropriate and the teacher again wants students to pay attention to what she is saying (Turn 0.7). The teacher provides more information regarding what students have to do and in the middle of the Turn Constructional Unit, the teacher uses a comprehension check in

order to make sure students are following her (Turn 0.8). In this sense, the teacher is going to provide an example in order to confirm the information is clear to students (Turn 0.9), but unfortunately, the teacher´s utterance is interrupted by an unexpected action by a student. The teacher exactly establishes a disaffiliation with a specific student because she uses the personal pronoun "you" and a 0.2 second pause which might mean the teacher is expecting any response or reaction from the student (Turn 10). As the student did not say anything, the teacher continues making an emphasis on the fact student is not engaged in class. Hence, the teacher uses faster speech and emphasizes the verb "ask", so students are supposed to do just what teacher asks them to do (Turn 11) which is confirmed in (Turn 12).

The teacher starts with a discourse marker and a micro-pause. In the same way, this first part of an adjacency pair is the Initiation of the IRF/E cycle. The teacher starts the flow of classroom interaction, but she does not nominate students (Turn 13). Student 1 provides a straight answer to the teacher´s question. He self-nominates to answer the question and affiliate with the teacher´s discourse. It could be the complementary part of the adjacency pair, the answer (Turn 14). The teacher is not pleased with the answer and she decides to repeat it a little bit slower and emphasizing

the word "Body". Then it was a failed adjacency pair because she did not get a correct answer. (Turn 15).

Then, students provide an answer to the question, they are willing to participate and repeat the answer in order to demonstrate their engagement (Turn 16), but again, the answer represents a dispreferred action because it does not fulfill the teacher´s expectations and the Transitional Relevance Place has a 0.2 second pause in order to provide a room for students to re-think and reformulate the answer (Turn 17). S2 self-nominates to provide an answer and to try to complete the adjacency pair that was set some turns before, but the answer is not appropriate (Turn 18). The is a latching between S2 answer and the teacher´s repetition of the same question. In this opportunity the teacher makes an emphasis on the question by pronouncing it slowly, so she keeps repeating the same display question. (Turn 19). A display question is regarded to as the question whose answer is already known by the teacher.

S2 is still engaged and interested in continuing providing the teacher with an answer. He answers straight to the display question proposed by the teacher. Finally, the student is able to provide the correct answer (Turn 19), but the teacher is not satisfied because the answer is not given in the target language. Therefore, there is a

stretching sound on the word "e:::nglish" in order to foster communication in that specific language. She does not nominate students to answer (Turn 21). The identity portrayed here is that she is a teacher who is concerned about fostering participation, communication, and interaction in English. She does not accept an answer in Spanish. Later, S3 self-nominates and shows a kind of affiliation to the teacher´s request (Turn 22). Subsequently, SS answer in English, so they are following suggestions and they finally could come up to an accepted answer. Besides, this answer is the complementary part of the adjencicy pair that was set many turns above. In the same way, this is the Response to the IRF/E cycle. (Turn 23). There is a completion to students´ answer, which is followed by a micro-pause, and also, there is feedback from the teacher (Turn 24)

In general terms, regarding the sub-question: what does a chunk of data reveal about the language teacher identity?, it is found that the teacher identity portrayed in this chunk of data is that she is in charge of interaction, but at the same time, she likes her students to talk in the target language. Likewise, she controls students´ discipline which represents that the teacher´s role is to be dominant over students. The teacher assumes more than a half of the communicative turns in the classroom. In the same way, the chunk of date above shows a portrait of asymmetric power relations. Wenger (1998) proposes that identities are formed amid the "tension between our investment in the various forms of belonging and our ability to negotiate the meanings that matter in those contexts" (p. 188). Therefore, identity formation is a dual process of *identification* and *negotiation of meanings*.

CONCLUSIONS

It was attempted to describe two competing phenomena in a single case. On the one hand, teacher-centered IRF/E cycle, "sequences of sequences" in Schegloff, 2007). On the other hand, during teacher–whole class interactions, certain elements of professional identity formation through classroom interaction were identified and analyzed. It showed that the teacher is the person who is in charge of the teaching and learning processes. Besides, there are some asymmetries regarding teacher and students' relationships. Students usually answer to the teacher's questions and their roles were rather passive. Although they tried to be engaged in the classroom activities, they just answer and repeated what they were asked to. Regarding the teacher´s professional identity, the teacher prefers having quiet teaching environments rather than talkative ones. She is very concerned with students'

behavior, but at the same time, with students' performance in the target language. Hence, studying and gaining understanding of our immediate reality or world though interaction is a fascinating task that helps us better understand ourselves as individuals and members of a society. In the field of education, and everywhere, social relationships, which are socially constructed, are commonplace aspects of an active community mediated by interaction. Thus, analysis explains to us the nature of some different roles and behaviors that each individual might have in a specific context.

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