
Ebonyi Journal of Language and Literary Studies

Volume 1, No. 2: 16 – 25 (2018)

ISSN 9091 4582 7142

**THE STRUCTURE OF CLASSROOM DISCOURSE: ‘MOVE’ AS
A TEACHING EXCHANGE**

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Abstract

A variety of structural exchanges are noted to occur in our (language) classrooms which seem to define the course which teaching takes. Such exchanges otherwise called “moves” can either be mere boundary or teaching exchanges. This paper is interested in the latter category. It examines the structure of such exchanges as well as how they are initiated and managed in language classrooms in Nigerian secondary schools. Data for the study were collected from ten English language lessons in five secondary schools in Birnin Kebbi (Kebbi state-Nigeria), two lessons for each school. The data were tape-recorded, transcribed and analyzed using Sinclair and Coulthard’s (1975, 1992) classroom discourse analytical framework. The research observes that it is the teacher who usually makes the first move and in most cases the last one. The study concludes that an understanding of how such teaching exchanges are initiated and managed can be used to enhance teaching and learning of English as a second language in our secondary schools.

Key words: move, classroom discourse, teaching exchange, English as a second language

Introduction

Classroom interaction has been a major research phenomenon in various fields of knowledge such as Discourse Analysis, Applied Linguistics and Education for some years now. Interest in classroom discourse dates back to “the 1940s” (Sadiq 2016: 247). Since then, the importance of classroom interaction as “a pedagogical tool and its critical role in improving the quality of the student learning experience” (Hardman, 2015: 7) has gained wide recognition. Classroom interaction involves how teachers interact with students in a teaching activity in the classroom. Walsch (2011:158) sees such interactions as “a tool for mediating and assisting learning”, and which tend to define the course which teaching takes. Effective initiation and maintenance of such interactions, as Hattie (2011) observes, can have positive effects on students learning outcomes.

However, despite the strength of research demonstrating the importance of classroom interaction as a pedagogical tool and its role in enhancing teaching and learning, we know little about how such interactions take place in some Nigerian secondary schools. In this paper, we examine the structure of such teaching exchanges (otherwise known as “moves”) and how they are initiated and managed in English language classes in selected secondary schools located in Birnin Kebbi, Kebbi State-Nigeria. The study draws inspiration from the gap observed in previous studies that have limited

their focus on aspects of classroom discourse such as turn-taking and related issues, the present study broadens the scope to include examining who says what, when and why, as a way of identifying and describing classroom discourse in our secondary schools. Using Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975, 1992) classroom discourse analytical framework, the current research investigates patterns of teaching exchanges in language classrooms in some Nigerian secondary schools. This is important because, as Widdowson (1978:22) notes, linguistic behavior does not consist of random production of separate sentences but involves "the use of sentences for the creation of [classroom] discourse". Bearing this in mind, our paper aims at identifying the structure of teaching exchanges as observed in language classes in the schools.

Classroom discourse

Spoken interaction particularly in formal setting can be described in terms of hierarchies or structure or what Anna-Britta (1994) refers to as hierarchical levels which comprise transactions, exchange, turn, move and act. This description was informed by Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) submission which Cook (1989) equally concurs with. Coulthard, Montgomery and Brazil (1981) have also shown that the major feature of teacher-student talk lies in the analysis of initiation and responses which are characteristic of interaction between two or more individuals.

To initiate according to Coulthard, *et al* (1981) is to make the first move, to lead, to introduce an idea or concept for the first time. Responding on the other hand, Flanders (1970) and Aber-Terna (2016) notes, means conforming or even complying to the will expressed by others. She further states that any utterance which looks forward and require another person to speak must be initiating, and that any utterance by the teacher base on something a student has said is certainly a response. Consider:

PI: The rain would make plants to grow
T: Is that so, Habiba?
P2: Yes, Sir

Similarly, Bellack, Kliebard, Hyman, & Swith (n.d) propose four major categories to explain structure of classroom talk. These are *structuring* where the teacher informs student about the activity of the day for example "today, we will look at *active* and *passive* verbs; *soliciting* which involves the use of questions, request, commands, imperatives etc; *responding* in which answers are offered to questions either from the teachers or students; and *reacting* which involves situation in which teachers clarify, expand or comment on students responses. This categorization shows that utterances consist of one or more move but not more than three; a responding or reaching move followed by structuring and soliciting moves.

Though the researchers cited above do agree that classroom discourse can be hierarchically described, Cook (1989), Sinclair and Culthard (1975) acknowledge lessons as the first hierarchy. While the likes of Anna-Britta (1994) think that transaction form the first hierarchy. If we collapse all these views, we will be safe to propose:

Lesson-transaction-exchange-turn-move-act as the six hierarchical levels of teacher-student discourse. Now while *lessons* are series of cycles which in turn consist of one or more moves, transactions consist of one or more exchanges dealing with the one single topic as one or more *transaction* make up a 'conversation'. An *exchange* is the smallest interactive unit consisting minimally of two turns produce by two different speakers. Similarly, the *turn* is everything that a current speaker says before the next speaker takes over. It consists of one or more moves. The *move* itself is what a speaker does in a turn in order to start, carry

on and finish an exchange that is the way speaker interacts. A move consists of one or more acts. Finally the *act* signals what the speaker intends, what he/she wants to communicate. It is, in fact, the smallest interactive unit of discourse.

From the explanation of the element of the hierarchy above, a certain picture seems to emerge which is that acts combine together to make moves which in turn combine to form various kinds of exchanges. One of such exchange is called the teaching exchange which consists of a number of moves.

Move as a teaching exchange

Anna-Britta (1994) submits that 'move' is a verbal reaction which carries the conversation forward. Coulthard and Brazil (1981) and Cook (1989) have identified three classes of move, viz: *opening*, *answering* and *follow-up* or what may be called *eliciting*, *informing* and *acknowledging* moves.

Burton (1981) recognizes seven types of moves which include *framing*, *focusing*, *opening*, *supporting*, *challenging*, *bound-opening* and *reopening*. He submits that framing and opening moves are markers of transaction boundaries and involve acts that are essentially attention-getting, for example "now let's open to page 20 of our textbook". While the opening moves may be transaction-initial which are realized as informative, elicitations or even directives, they too are essentially topic carrying items which are recognizably 'new' in terms of the immediately preceding talk, for example 'our topic for today is 'tenses'. Supporting moves occur after frames, focuses, opening, challenges, bound-and re-openings have occurred. These involve items that occur with the initiatory move they are supporting. Challenging moves on the other hand, function to hold up the progress of the topic-introduction in some way. These move types can occur after any other move except the supporting move because some clarification may be required before progress can be made. The bound opening move occurs after a preceding opening move has been supported as it enlarges the discourse framework by extending the ideational-textual aspect of the original opening move through employing the various types of informative and comment acts. The last move types, i.e. the re-opening move occurs after a preceding opening or bound-opening moves have been challenged. It reinstates the topic that the challenged either diverted or delayed.

In what seems to be an improvement on Burton's (1981) seven move types, Anna-Britta (1994) identifies eight move types. The first she calls summons which call listeners attention; focus which introduces the initiate; initiate which opens the exchange; repair which holds up the exchange; response which confirms or terminates the exchange; re-open which delays the termination of the response; follow-up which terminates the exchange; and backchannel which signal listeners attention.

These two positions are more or less the same, Burton's framing are Anna-Britta summons; focusing agrees with focus. Opening with initiate; challenging with repair; bound opening with responses; re-openings have the same nomenclature for both researchers. Burton's supporting move has no equivalent while Anna Britta's follow-up and backchannel moves stand out clearly.

Theoretical Framework

As the underlying aim behind the teaching and learning of any language is communication (see Krashen, 1988; Allright, 1988; Nwosu, 1998; Eluwa, 1999), usually sentences used communicatively in discourse do not in themselves express independent proposition; their values rests in relation to other propositions expressed through other sentences.

A number of proposals have been made which aim at showing the relationship between the discourse exchanges that take place in our classrooms (e.g. Di Pietro, 1987) but those of Sinclair and Coulthard

(1975) capture the attention and interest of this paper and so form the *raison d'être* of the research. However, we adopted Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975,1992) model to guide our analysis.

Sinclair and Coulthard (1975, 1992) have proposed five ranks to handle the structure of classroom exchange which they classify as lesson, transaction, exchange, move, and act. The lesson is the totality of the interchanges that ensure between the teacher and the students from the start to the end of an encounter. A transaction can be said to be that official lead-in to an encounter while the exchange contain an A-B format where an initiation obligates or causes a response. An act is that singular effort by a party to communicate a message either verbally, gesturally or even sententially.

Data Collection

A total number of ten lessons were observed in five schools in the Birnin Kebbi metropolis, and in each of this schools, only the senior secondary classes were involved. Each lesson was observed to contain at least three parts: the presentation, the drill and the practice. The lesson lasted for about 40-45 minutes each. The object of research was, however, not made known to the teachers and students observed in order to forestall and lessen observer effect. Of the ten lessons observed, recording were made and notes taken. Still of those ten lessons, one stood out as model and seemed to contain the 'moves' which the rest exhibited. That model lesson is the one reported and explicated below.

Data Analysis

Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) show that move are of many kinds. For example, there are the framing and the focusing moves which are categorized as boundary exchange while opening, answering and follow-up move are teaching exchanges. The interest of this study is limited to the teaching exchanges.

The function of the opening move is to cause others to participate in the exchange and its purpose is to pass on information or direct an action or elicit a fact. For this move, the teacher selects or chooses the respondent.

The answering move, on the other hand, is predetermined because its function is to provide an appropriate response in the terms laid down by the opening move. Answering move could be indicated by a mere nod to show attention or it could be done verbally.

The follow-up move is aimed at letting the students know how well they have performed. The teacher judges the value of an unelicited contribution from student, usually in terms of its relevance to the discourse. A follow-up move may consist of showing acceptance, evaluation and commentary.

What can be deduced from the above is that a typical verbal classroom teaching exchange consists of an initiation (opening) by the teacher, followed by a response (answering) from the student and finally a feedback (follow-up) to the student's response from the teacher, e.g. teacher-student-teacher. The above structure type is present in the transcript of the data under consideration, as exemplified in 1:

Sample 1

Teacher: Where, Abubakar, where, where is it, do you think?
Student: In Spain or Italy
Teacher: In Spain or Italy

This is also the case with sample 2:

Sample 2

Teacher: So we can say that Lulu?

Student: Studies
Teacher: Studies Okay

Another type of teaching exchange structure indicated by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975, 1992) is that of free bound exchanges. We shall first of all consider free exchanges. The free exchanges are used in informing, directing, eliciting, and checking. In this regard, the teacher informs the students about facts, ideas, new information and the like. The student may, but usually do not, make a verbal response to the teacher's initiation.

The teacher then directs their attention to something to be done, but which he expects to be done non-verbally, e.g. "I want you all to look at the man in the picture". He then elicits a move designed to obtain a verbal contribution from them and having given their replies, the teacher then gives a feedback.

The above structure i.e. where the teacher informs, the student respond non-verbally, the teacher directs a verbal response, student comply and the teacher gives a feedback is available in the transcript, as demonstrated in excerpts 3 and 4:

Sample 3

Teacher: Now look carefully at the picture in front of Suleiman you
Can see some things
(Students) (The students look at the picture)
Teacher: What can you see erm Yusuf ?
Teacher: A hat

Sample 4

Teacher: Just one moment, Yusuf, put it on the back of your hand
(Teacher gives a piece of paper to the student I and Yusuf as directed)
Now say rode
Student: rode
Teacher: No, rode
Student: Roder
Teacher: That's it...that's better...rode

It also highlighted that students ask questions, and to do that they have to catch the attention of the teacher and get permission to speak. The permission may or may not be granted and students are not expected to provide any feedback and neither are they expected evaluate the teacher's reply. This is to say that if a student initiates a move, the teacher may or may not allow to mature and if the student is allowed, he accomplishes it, e.g. P-T-P-T. This is also seen in the transcript, as shown in sample 5:

Sample 5

Student: Can I have a question?
Teacher: Yes
Student: Er...wrote...the infinitive is write...
Teacher: Right...to write

It is also possible for a student to ask a question without attracting the teacher's attention for permission, as illustrated in 6:

Sample 6

- Student: What's the difference...between writing...and ride?
Teacher: Oh I see well er...first of all...sn difference in speaking?
Actually but...um...the spelling is r.i.d.e
Student: Erm ride...ride
Teacher: Yes

Our data do not however show an instance where a student wanted to ask a question and was refused audience by the teacher.

In the course of the lesson, the teacher might wish to check or discover how well the students are getting on. So he asks them certain questions, the answer to which he does not know himself. This is found in the transcript. This can be seen in excerpt 7 below where the teacher wanted to find out if the students had done what he asked them to do.

Sample 7

- Teacher: Put a number, number one...that's right/the next one number three... number three...and number four...okay?
Students: (nodded to show they were with him)
Teacher: Right....good (to show satisfaction).

The bound exchange on the other hand, may not contain initiating move, and even if it does have one, it may simply consist of nomination, prompt or clue. The bound exchanges to be considered are those to do with re-initiation, listing and reinforcing.

When a teacher gets no response to an elicitation, he can start again using the same or a rephrased question or he can use prompt, nominate or clue in order to re-initiate. If Sinclair and Coulthard's reference to 'no response' means lack of any move to answer the teacher's question whether gestural or verbal, then, this is not seen in the transcript. However, there are instances where the students either hesitate, halted in the course of their response or uttered 'erms, uhs, ahs, etc., which we consider responses, though incoherent, incomplete or meaningless. There are also cases where students respond by asking the teacher another question instead of answering the one he was asked, as exemplified in sample 8 below:

Sample 8

- Teacher: Now erm...think of a name Suleiman for that girl
Student: A name?
Teacher: A name, think of a name
What is what's her name?
Student: Eh. Lulu...Lulu

Also when a teacher gets a wrong answer, there are two major routes open to him: he either tries with the same student to work him round to the right answer or keeps the question and moves to the next student. This is shown in the following exchanges in excerpt 9 below:

Sample 9

- Teacher: Where...did he go last year Yusuf?
Last year where did he go
Student: Last year...he goes
Teacher: Ah...last year last year he?
Student: He go em...
Teacher: Shihh...yes yes all-right em he doesn't know...help him
Student: Went

Teachers also engage in listing, a move they employed when they decide to withhold evaluating responses until they get two to three answers. The structure is Teacher-Student-Student-Student-Teacher, as illustrated in the exchange in excerpt 10 below:

Sample 10

- Teacher: I'm, I'm a teacher that's my job and what is the action?
Student: Teaching
Student: Teaching
Student: Teaching
Teacher: Erm
Student: Teaching
Teacher: Yes

It is, however, important to point out that a chain of student responses does not necessarily mean that what the student are saying is true and the teacher is trying to reinforce that response. It may sometimes mean that the teacher is intensifying effort to get the correct answer from who possibly knows, as demonstrated in the exchanges in excerpts 11 and 12 below:

Sample 11

- Teacher: Okay okay yes...fly is the general verb
The past of fly?
Student: Flow
Student: Flew
Teacher: Flew

Sample 12

- Teacher: What does she do first she?
Student: Lie
Student: Is lying
Student: She's lie
Student: Lies
Teacher: She?

Student: Is lying on the beach

Also observed is a situation in which a student does not hear what is said to him/her or fully understood the instruction given by the teacher, and the teacher finds him/herself either reinforcing or repeating him/herself, as shown in the following exchange in sample 13 below:

Sample 13

Teacher: Now am I, am I lying or standing at the moment....Yusuf?

Student: She lies

Teacher: Ah, no am I...I?

Student: You

Teacher: Am I lying

Student: Standing

Apart from the exchange types Sinclair and Coulthard (1975, 1992) have itemized, this paper has also identified some more exchange types that do not appear to have been captured by Sinclair and Coulthard and other previous researchers/discourse analysts.

There are occasions when a teacher directs a student to ask another student something after which he gives a feedback, as excerpt 14 below shows.

Sample 14

Teacher: Ask him if he has a nice breakfast

Did you have?

Student: Did you have nice breakfast?

Student: Thanks very

Teacher: Yes Thanks

Student: Yes thanks

The above move we will call 'training' as the teacher is showing the student what to do.

Apart from the T-Students structure of exchange which occurred several times which Sinclair and Coulthard have not included, another structure is also noted here. It is the teacher directs and both the teacher and the students respond after which he comments i.e. T-T and Students-T, as demonstrated in excerpt 15 below:

Sample 15

Teacher: These two words are very important when we
communicate that sentence to...we've got...she studies
French

Teacher & Students: She studies French

Teacher: Do that with the movement

Teacher & Students: She studies French

Teacher: Okay...yes

This type of exchange is where the teacher direct and both teacher students respond at once (i.e. combined-practice move).

Another structural exchange which seems to be a favourite of the teachers is initiating a move whereby all the students respond, then a single student responds after which he gives a feedback, as exemplified in 16 below:

Sample 16

Teacher: So we have to say where does she go every summer?

Students: Where does she go every summer?
 Student: Where does she go every summer?
 Teacher: Again

Concluding remarks

This paper has looked into the question of move as a teaching exchange. The findings in the research seem to agree with Abdul's (1998) position that language teaching and learning is an important aspect of classroom experience, and that for the teacher to develop the students' ability to use language, some concerted efforts have to be made, particularly in the realm of not only talk distribution (see also Abdul 1999) but also in the initiation of moves, in the course of teaching.

The paper noted that move as a teaching exchange can be used by the teacher to cause student to be drawn into exchanges. This is known as the opening move. When a teacher nods to a student and the student in turn respond, the answering move has been put to use. Similarly, when a teacher passes judgment at a student's answering move, a feedback has been provided and that informs the student whether this contribution has been well received or not.

The paper went further than Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975, 1992) categorization of moves to introduce some dimensions hitherto not yet captured. It is found that moments abound in our language classes when teacher instructs the students to play the role of teachers by asking other students questions, and that was termed a 'training' move. Sometimes also teachers join the students in answering a question asked by them (the teachers) and that was named a 'combined-practice' move.

Finally, the paper has shown that move as a teaching exchange is a way of involving both the teacher and the students in the learning process, so that maximum effect could be achieved from the teaching-learning encounter in their teaching exchange in order to facilitate their students' productive use of language.

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