

TURN ALLOCATION TECHNIQUE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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Abstract

In recent times, there has been a sharp decline in teaching of the language skills using students' centered techniques. This study sought to find out the turn allocation techniques employ by language teachers in teaching the English language as well as the turn taking techniques among the students during interaction. This would enable the researcher make suggestion on how well to improve interaction during the teaching of the English language in order to make the process mainly learner-centered instead of the usual teacher- centered. Recording and observation methods were used to capture what goes on in the classroom. It was discovered by the researcher that most language teachers select next technique by the use of questioning method. The chorused yes- technique by the students was used to determine the level of comprehension. Again, there is the method/ technique of current-speaker-select-next-technique, self- select as well as students' yes response which form the basic approach used by the classroom teacher to engage the students in classroom discourse. On the part of the students during the interaction exercise, it was discovered that there was a lot of overlapping speech due to a serious violation of the rule of turn taking. In conclusion therefore, this method could be of immense help to the teachers to get to the desired and more articulated and orderly response from the students.

Keywords: Turn allocation, technique, teaching, learning, second language

INTRODUCTION

One basic attribute of human beings is the ability to communicate. The society cannot function properly without communication; neither will communication be possible without the use of language. Members of a social group use the language of the environment to express their thoughts and feelings. Speech is used in social interaction while talking is one of the activities human beings engage in during conversation. It enables them socialize among themselves. Many classroom activities take the form of talk. To a great extent, spoken language and face to face interaction constitute the fundamental aspect of both teaching and learning at school. The analysis of the discourse flow and the language of interaction revealed that classroom talk is highly structured and reutilized (Hinkel, 2006).

“In conversation, speakers and hearers engage in talk in such a way that one person speaks at a time” (Olateju in Oyeleye, 2004 pp157). The interactional function of speech involves the attitude of the hearer as well as the speaker. This means that the attitude of an individual/ student is manifested in his/her manner of speech. Again, social interaction fosters turn taking among participants. Students engaged in group work in the classroom talk and interact among themselves. They intermittently change role or take turns in the course of discussion with little or no overlap in between the turns. A number of findings have emerged from the study of classroom discourse and spoken language.

Turn Taking/ Turn Allocation

Many scholars have made several attempts to define ‘turn’ although it is a very complex concept to define. Jaffe and Feldstem in Oyeleye (2004) see turn as solo talk which starts when someone starts to talk and ends when another speaker starts speaking. Turn taking however, is a process of each speaker talking when the floor is open for him/her. Orestrom quoted in Pipek (2007) describes turn-taking in terms of linguistic interaction as recurrent switching from the speaker to the listener, from action to reaction, from foreground to background activity. To Edelsky (1981), it is an on- record utterance which may include non-verbal activities behind which lies the intention to convey a message that is both referential and functional. Yngve (1970) is of the opinion that turn is a state of the mind in addition to the display of specific behaviours. In order words, turns may be non-verbally manifested. For some scholars, the people engaged in talks should organise the turns properly to minimise long silence as well as overlap between speakers. This actually means that there should be coordination and a smooth transition of turn from the time the current speaker stops and the time the next speaker takes over to eliminate silence or what we call discourse interruption. This is also regarded as speaker clash. It occurs when a speaker makes a move and takes over the floor from the current speaker while the current speaker is still on. Transition points is a term use to refer to points where another speaker takes over from the current speaker (Benson and Hughes, 1983) .

According to the influential model of turn taking by Sacks et al (1974), conversation participants aim to minimize gaps and overlaps in conversation. There were some rules proposed by Sacks et al. which operate on a turn by turn basis. For them, a speaker initially gets one unit of talk (turn constructional unit or TCU). The end of a TCU is what is called a Transitional relevance place or TRP. It is at these predictable TRPs that speaker change can occur.

Sacks et al. as was quoted by Olateju (2004) work on the basic rules for turn allocation instruction which enable a speaker to take a turn in a conversation. Their contributions can be summarized as followed. If a ‘current-speaker-select-next technique’ is used, the selected participant at that point has the right and is constrained to produce the next contribution. No other participant has such rights or obligations. If a ‘current- speaker-select next-technique’ is not applied, then the current speaker may, but need not continue with the talk. Self-selection has a technique which allows the speaker to make the next contribution. The process by which the current speaker decides on who speaks after him is called next speaker selection. This means that the current speaker may address the next speaker by name. The classroom discourse is meant to make use of this process. Sacks et al (1974) claims that there are two ways which the next speaker could be selected in an ongoing talk. This could be done through linguistic and non-linguistic means. It is linguistic, if the current speaker asks a question and addresses the next speaker by name or title or non-linguistic if he selects by a gaze, nod, a point or other kinesthetic signals (body language). Note that one non-linguistic ‘current speaker-selects technique’ is gaze direction. For Sacks in Olateju(2004, pp 159),”this is a situation where the current speaker fixes his/her eyes on a particular person which gives the person the impression or non verbal invitation to contribute to the discourse.” Repetition of parts of proceeding turn with a rising intonation using series of one word question such as ‘what’, ‘who’ as well as tag questions like “He didn’t do it, did he?”, can be a good way to select the next speaker(718). According to Kurtic, .et al (2006) the transition relevance place (TRP) of Sacks et al, overlaps occurs in cases where the current speaker does not select the next speaker, so that one or more participants may self-select, potentially giving rise to a simultaneous start otherwise called overlapping speech. If on the other hand the current speaker doesn’t select and no participant self-select, there may be a long silence (a gap) which if not stopped may finally bring the conversation to an abrupt end.

There is a formal setting in a classroom discourse between teacher/student. There is a sort of control of the speaker-select because it is the teacher alone who selects the next speaker but students can also self select. It is worth noting that classroom situations comprise pupils or students of varying abilities and background settings. These situations give teachers the added advantage of being able to make a lot of initiations all of which have expected responses (Olateju in Oyeleye 2004).

Statement of Problem

It is quite obvious that the English language used by Nigerians in different areas of life is made up of four skills namely: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The teaching

and learning of these skills especially the speaking skill are being done in such a way that the teacher does most of the talking without even giving room for active participation of the students thereby neglecting the rule of turn taking during classroom interaction among students. They should be given room to practice the act of speaking because “speaking is the productive skill in the oral mode. It is the ability to express oneself clearly in flexible conversational English” (Adejumobi 2007). A passive classroom inhibits the true nature of speaking skill. According to Firth (1962), Coulthard (1997), for the true nature of language to be seen, its use in conversation needs to be studied.

Several studies have been carried out by scholars on classroom discourse. This study has concentrated on the nature of classroom interaction during the teaching of speaking skill. There is need to focus on some specific aspect of teaching speech with particular attention on turn taking/ turn allocation technique. Previous studies related to this area of investigation seem to have placed premium on the use of L2 in teaching in general. This work is not just interested in explicating the turns among students’ interaction in the classroom. It is rather examining the extent the students can take their turns while practicing the act of speech in the classroom setting.

Again, it is pertinent to know according to Tannen (1983) that “ways of communicating meaning in talk are learned in speech community that is by talking to people with whom one identifies socially “.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims at looking into the provision of the co-operative maxims of Grice. The work is situated within conversation analysis, an aspect of discourse analysis. The classroom interaction is highly recognised. These objectives are captured below:

- a. To investigate the extent of interaction by participants in an interactive activities in the classroom.
- b. To apply the cooperative maxim of quantity of Grice in the explication of the conversation.
- c. To investigate the turn allocation by the language teacher in the classroom.
- d. To bring to consciousness the awareness to improve turn taking in the classroom interaction among students.

Theoretical Framework

A speech act is an utterance that has performative function in language and communication. From the words of Kent Bach, "almost any speech act is really the performance of several acts at once, distinguished by different aspects of the speaker's intention: there is the act of saying something, what one does in saying it, such as requesting or promising, and how one is trying to affect one's audience."(46)

In the course of performing speech acts we ordinarily communicate with each other. The use of speech acts dates back to Austin's series of lecture titled *How to do Thing with Words*. His analysis of speech acts were in three parts namely:

1. A locutionary act: the performance of an utterance: the actual utterance and its ostensible meaning, comprising phonetic, phatic and rhetic acts corresponding to the verbal, syntactic and semantic aspects of any meaningful utterance; Phonetic acts are acts of pronouncing sounds, phatic acts are acts of uttering words or sentences in accordance with the phonological and syntactic rules of the language to which they belong, and rhetic acts are acts of uttering a sentence with sense and more or less definite reference.(Filosofici 2006)

2. An illocutionary act: The concept of an illocutionary act is central to the concept of a speech act. Although there are numerous opinions regarding how to define 'illocutionary acts', there are some kinds of acts which are widely accepted as illocutionary, for example promising, ordering someone, and bequeathing. Austin classifies illocutionary acts into five types, i.e., *verdictives*, *exercitives*, *commissives*, *behabitives*, and *expositives*. Austin classified it as an attempt to give a general picture of illocutionary acts: what types of illocutionary act one can generally perform in uttering a sentence. For example one can exercise judgment (Verdictive), exert influence or exercise power (Exercitive), assume obligation or declare intention (Commissive), adopt attitude, or express feeling (Behabitive), and clarify reasons, argument, or communication (Expositive). .(Filosofici 2006)

3. A perlocutionary act: This is the actual effect, such as persuading, convincing, scaring, enlightening, inspiring, or otherwise getting someone to do or realize something, whether intended or not (Austin 1962). Unlike the notion of illocutionary act, which describes the linguistic function of an utterance, a perlocutionary effect is in some sense external to the performance.

Furthermore, in conversation, it is required that the participants should comply whether consciously or unconsciously with the social rules of discourse. Grice (1975, pp 45-47) maintains that there are certain maxims which guide conversation. He calls these the maxims of

1. Quantity: "Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of exchange)." Do not make your contribution more informative than is required. Thus, 'I don't drink' gives rise to the implicature< the speaker doesn't drink alcohol.> by Quantity₂

2. Quality: "Try to make your contribution one that is true. (a) Do not say what you believe to be false. (b) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence."

3 Relation: "Be relevant" This means that everything one says should be relevant to the interaction.

4. Manner: "Be perspicuous. (a) Avoid obscurity of expressions. (b) Avoid ambiguity (c) Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity) (d) Be orderly"

"These maxims can be flouted. When they are, they typically entail or imply another meaning. Thus meaning is effected both by adherence to the maxims and by their being flouted." (Chaika,1994 pp. 159) . When the maxim of manner is violated, for example, the hearer can immediately initiate repairs so the speaker can sharpen his/her manner.

Methodology

The process of gathering data for this research involved surveying different teachings of English teachers during English lessons in different schools. The adoption of the above design is to enable the researcher to discover those non-verbal cues in conversation that may not be gathered through other means. The researcher was a participant observer and not a distant one in order to capture all aspects of turn allocation. It is very necessary to have a close observation to view the teachers' manipulations of turn allocation and violation of turn taking by the most active students. The qualitative approach which is basically concerned with capturing the essence of individual's expressions and actions in everyday conversation in order to assign meaning and interpretation to them is used to explicate interactive structures within the transcripts of turns of the students and teachers speeches. Observational notes were taken during the duration of the class. The researcher positioned herself at a corner in the classroom to observe the interactions between the teacher and the

students. For most of the recordings that were done, the researcher used the handset in order to keep it secret. The main problem of this type of recording is that most students did not speak loud enough for their voices to be captured by the recording system. Some of the recorded materials were faint and unclear. Such materials were left untranscribed.

For a proper analysis of the collected data, the adoption of Akindele's (1987:136) definition of turn will be used. For him, "a turn is a contribution (linguistic or non-linguistic) which is bounded by the utterance of another participant unless it is turn initial or turn final with simultaneous utterances assigned to the appropriate speaker as part of the turn. This definition includes the fact that a turn could be either linguistic or non-linguistic. (Olateju in Oyeleye: 161)

Findings/Data Analysis

In this finding, the researcher is looking at the technique used for the analysis. That is, the current- speaker-selects-next technique. A whole lot of differences exist between the turn taking of casual conversation and that of the formal classroom setting. In some of the casual conversation recorded, it was discovered that exchange of turn follow a more competitive way where the turn taking rules were violated leading to constant overlapping speech by the co-participants. Unlike the classroom formal setting where the English teacher was seen as the current speaker who would always select the next speaker by way of questioning except in some rare occasions where a student may not wait for the teacher to select by calling name or by mere gaze or nod. This shows that the current-speaker-selects-next-technique could be used in four ways according to Olateju (2004):

1. That the current- speaker-selects- next technique could occur without the speaker mentioning the name of the individual.
2. That the current-speaker-selects-next technique could involve the speaker mentioning the name of the next speaker.
3. That the current-speaker-selects-next technique could be used in such a way that the speaker expects a chorus answer from the pupils.
4. That the current-speaker-selects-next technique could be used in such a way that the next -speaker[s] would be a joint chorus of responses by the teacher and pupils together. In this case, the speaker still becomes part of the next speakers to respond to the questions or discourse.

The researcher has decided to group the techniques used to select the next speaker under the following:

cs ² n ² o	-----	current-speaker-selects-next with no name
cs ² n ²	-----	current-speaker-selects-next with name
cs ² nsc	-----	current-speaker-selects -next with student's chorus
cs ² ntsc	-----	current-speaker-selects-next with teacher/students chorus
s ²	-----	self-select
syr	-----	students' yes response

After the identification of the techniques used, the frequency of occurrence were calculated based on percentage by dividing the number of times a technique was used by the total number of times the turn allocated techniques were used in the text. For example, corpus 1 cs²n²o

$$\frac{6}{21} \times \frac{100}{1} = 28.57\%$$

From the findings, it was discovered that the current-speaker-selects-next-no-name cs²n²o has the highest figure. That means that the teacher selects the current speaker without mentioning name. In selecting the current speaker, the teacher made use of non-verbal cue. A lot of questioning that elicited a chorus 'yes response' were made like 'are you following, do you understand'. The chorus answers made the teacher to continue not minding whether they are following or not. Among all the turn allocation, corpus 5 has the highest number of turn. This shows the high level of teacher-student interaction. Corpus 3 has the lowest number of turns. Furthermore, the current-speaker-selects-next with students' chorus got the highest in two corpuses 1&2. It was discovered that some teachers were not comfortable with chorus answers while some see it as an interactive method between them and the students. Other turn allocation techniques like self-select s² and cs²nsc were also used accordingly.

The table below shows the distribution of turn allocation techniques in ESL lesson on teaching and learning of speech as one of the language skills.

Distribution of turn-allocation techniques in English as a second language classroom

	cs ² n ² o	cs ² n ²	cs ² nsc	cs ² ntsc	s ²	syr	Total No of turns
Corpus 1	06 28.57%	03 14.28%	08 38.09%	06 28.57%	–	–	21
Corpus 2	–	02 16.66%	01 8.33%	03 25.00%	02 16.66%	04 33.33%	12
Corpus 3	04 40%	–	01 10%	02 20%	07 70%	02 20%	10
Corpus 4	09 56.25%	–	02 12.5%	01 6.25%	03 18.75%	–	16
Corpus 5	11 31.43%	09 25.71%	13 37.14%	04 11.42%	05 14.28%	03 8.57%	35
Corpus 6	01 3.33%	02 6.66%	02 6.66%	02 6.66%	02 6.66%	03 10%	30

These extracts below are some of the questions the teacher asked the students in the course of teaching to determine the current speaker selection technique.

Teacher: How many speech sounds do we have in English? ----- 1

Student: (bid) raise hands

Teacher: Mary answer - ----- 2cs²n²

Student: We have 44 speech sounds. -----3

Teacher: Hmm? -----4

Student(s): 20 vowels &24 consonants -----5ss

Teacher: 44 -----6

Teacher: Mention the two divisions of a vowel sound? -----7

Students: bid (students raise hands)

Teacher: Yes (pointing) -----8cs²n²o

Student: Monothongs and Diphthongs -----9

Teacher: Good, monothongs and diphthongs -----10

Ok. These two concepts mentioned above can further be divided.

Teacher: What are the divisions of the diphthongs? -----11

Yes, (looking at a student) -----12

Student: Long and short vowels -----13

Student (s) noise

Student: Ending and Closing -----14ss

Teacher: Yes. Uche -----15cs²n²

Student: Centering and Closing diphthongs -----16

Teacher: Both of them are still regarded as what? -----17

Teacher: Vowels} -----18cs²nts
 Students: vowels]
 Teacher: All vowels sounds are all voic... -----19
 Students: Voiced -----20cs²nts
 Teacher: The vibration of the vocal chords signifies that the sound is a -----21
 Students (chorus) voiced sounds -----22cs²nsc
 Teacher: This means that the twenty vowel sounds are all voiced. Do you all know
 how to check whether a sound is a voiced sound? -----23
 Students: (chorus) yes -----24cs²nsc
 Teacher: The vibration of the vocal cords signifies voiced sounds -----25
 Students(s): Yes -----26syr
 Teacher: Do you understand that? -----27
 Student(s): Yes -----28syr
 Teacher: Are you sure? -----29
 Students: -----30syr

In the extract above, the letter of the alphabet T stands for the teacher while S(s) represents the student or students as the case may be. During the interaction, speaker T (turn 2) selects the next speaker by mentioning her name (cs²n²). This is called a linguistic method of turn exchange. Speaker S (turn 3) answers the question. Another student, speaker in (turn 5) self selects herself (ss) by further analyzing the 44 speech sounds. Speaker T (turn 8) selects next speaker without mentioning the name. The speaker used a non-verbal communication of pointing at the student; this signifies that she should answer the question. Speaker T (turn 12) selects the next speaker without naming. Speaker T self-selects and answers the question but speaker T still selects the speaker in (turn 15) by mentioning her name (cs²n²). Furthermore, speaker T (turn 17) indulges in speech elicitation. He selects the next speakers including him. This makes the speaker T and speaker S (s) to chorus the answer jointly in (turn 18). This means that speaker T self-selects himself along with the other speakers. Therefore, cs²nts is a combination of self-select technique and current- speaker- select-next-technique. In (turn 21), the speaker T elicited the introduction of cs²nsc which is current-speaker-select-next-students'-chorus. There is another cs²nsc in (turn 24) by speakers. The normal and usual students' 'yes' response (syr) followed at the end of the text.

Recommendations/Conclusion

From the discussion above, it is very clear that the turn allocation used in the classroom discourse is mainly current-speaker-select-next-technique in teaching and learning of English as a second language. This poses some constraints in the level of language acquisition by the students. The findings revealed four ways of interpretation of the turn allocation techniques depending on the student's response. The turn allocation technique in the classroom setting still leans towards the teacher-centered method of teaching. Although there were some cases of self-select- technique exhibited by some students which the teacher did not rebuke but rather ignored. However, the study revealed that to some extent the teacher engaged the students in an interactive section during the teaching of spoken English. Students should be encouraged to engage in discussion to make the learning more student-centered. Research method should be encouraged where students will be asked to research and teach some topics to their fellow students with the supervision of the teacher. When this happens, the students are using the turn allocation techniques by themselves and the teacher can self-select when he/she wants to correct an error or throw more light on a particular expression.

Turn taking in conversation whether institutionalized or casual controls and curbs a lot of indiscipline among co-participants. The rule of turn taking should not be violated by any means to avoid overlapping speech.

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