Classroom Discourse as Institutional Interaction: From the Perspective of Conversation Analysis

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Abstract

In this study, classroom discourse is chosen as the subject to be analysed in terms of the basic structures of conversation analysis (CA) which are turn-taking organisation, sequence organisation, repair and action formation, as developed principally by Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson. As a form of educational talk, classroom interaction should be scrutinised not only in a conversational perspective, but also from an institutional view. Many controversies and debates regarding this particular discourse are present from the conversation analytic point of view, indicating that it is indeed an important subject that need extended studies on. This study analyses learner-learner interaction in task-oriented, learner-centred classrooms, instead of traditional classroom interaction, from the conversation analytic perspective. It helps expanding the research on this subject to a new focus, which is modern classroom interaction.

1. Definition

Classroom discourse describes what happens in classroom. It is a form of discourse that happens in classrooms that only specifically concentrates on verbal routines. It is an intricate sociocultural process that involves techniques of meaning construction in the development of students' social identities (Smadi, 2017). In Conversation Analysis, the focus is on the procedural

analysis of talk-in-interaction, how participants systematically organise their interactions to solve a range of organizational problems, such as the distribution of turns at talking, the collaborative production of particular actions, or problems of understanding. The analysis is always based on audio or visual recordings of interaction that are carefully transcribed in details (Alali, 2020a). As there are many books, journals and studies discussing this particular approach on the classroom discourse, this study is supposed to provide continuation of those studies, with the relevance with current time. As classroom situation changes from time to time, from very strict traditional teacher-dominated classrooms several decades ago to loose task-oriented learner-centred ones like we relatively have today, the interaction among teacher and students differs.

There are several studies made on the classroom interaction as an institutional and conversational matter. It is, as a matter of fact, one of the most chosen settings to be analysed as a representative of educational constitution. Two broad areas that are agreed as two main sections within studies of classroom interaction are the focus of studies of institutional talk, in which CA is one of the most used approaches to be utilised, and the focus of issues of understanding, learning and knowledge transmission (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Preston, 2016). Even though CA is put under the former section, there is a debate going on whether or not CA also works as a methodology in dealing with the issues in the latter section.

2. Literature Review

Hall (2004) argues that CA only can be applied in describing action, not learning. Although she does not fully reject the prospect of CA making a contribution in learning, such as the post-expansion position from interactional practice of teacher-repair initiation leading to enhancing cognition among the students especially if it joins with Vygotsky Sociocultural Theory[1], the idea of CA contributing in measuring the understanding and knowledge as much as it does in evaluating action is not concurred by her (Hall, 2019). On the other hand, some people are quite optimistic on the effectiveness of CA on classroom discourse (Huth, 2021). Markee (2005) supports the connectivity of CA for Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and argues that the CA-for-SLA researchers may prove it by showing how second-language learning works in everyday context. This is supported by Kasper (2009) who asserts that CA is actually useful to demonstrate understanding or learning as an essential condition in language learning.

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[1]Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory describes learning as a social process and the origination of human intelligence in society or culture. The major theme of Vygotsky's theoretical framework is that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition (See: Gauvain, 2020; Rashid, 2016).

Most researches on the theme of CA in classroom discourse were done in language learning classrooms especially in second-language and foreign-language classrooms, like the studies mentioned above (Hale et al., 2018). However, with too many researches regarding SLA, they are criticised to be narrowly focusing on grammatical competence (Sidnell & Stivers, 2012). The data and observation that were used mainly focus on interaction (whether it involves turn-taking, sequence, repair or action) about grammatical competence (Tavakoli et al., 2018).

Another common discussion regarding this discourse is teacher-learner interaction. Each structure in CA is analysed mostly based on the interaction between a teacher and a student or students (Rahmawati et al., 2021). Classrooms traditionally are teacher-fronted with teacher dominating the communication. In turn taking, the normative practices are teacher selecting a student as the next speaker, the student then projecting the interaction back to the teacher and even if students might have rights for next speaker solution, it is limited. For the sequence organisation, it is normally in IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback) sequence. Teacher normally plays the first-pair parts and are most likely to speak in third position while students form the second-pair parts. Repair is also prominently made by teacher towards students (Rustandi et al., 2017). Teachers must support and value students so that they do not fear being ridiculed when contributing something to the team, suggest alternatives when the team is unable to decide, monitor the team's progress, reflect to seek understanding and clarification of what is occurring, and give clear, positive and specific feedbacks to help students improve their learning (Alali, 2020b).

However, language teaching pedagogy has been varying from time to time to task-oriented and learner-centred pedagogies. As the pedagogy varies, the organisation of classroom interaction also varies (Seedhouse, 2004). There is more conversational element when the teacher's control of turn taking and sequence organisation becomes more flexible. Rather than just teacher giving a talk with occasional interaction with the students, students get to take part in the interaction more often (Alali, 2020a). They ask questions, initiate sequences, self-select and select next speaker more frequently and even repair their fellows (Mori, 2007). The roles of teacher and student are not static as some studies proved to be. Through the application of CA, the variance of this interactional structure according to the pedagogical focus is explicit. It is also relevant, as He (2004) states, to reveal the "creative and transformable nature of classroom interaction". These task-oriented, learner-centred classrooms are not only about IRF, but other speech-exchange systems as well (Denman & Mahrooqi, 2018).

Focusing on the CA structure of turn taking, McHoul (1978), based on the first rule set proposed by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson in 1974, summed out the rules that may be relatively

found in traditional teacher-dominated classrooms. Rule 1(a) when teacher as the current speaker (C) selects student as the next speaker (N) to speak at transition-relevance place (TRP). This is similar with the non-institutional casual conversation. Rule 1(b), however, is not in accordance with ordinary conversation, as Rule 1(a) is, where teacher continues his/her talk if he/she does not select the next speaker. Self-select among students is rare. Even so, these rules cannot be adapted the same for student as they are for teacher. Unlike teacher, student has limited access to selecting the next speaker as they are expected to project their interaction to only one figure which is the teacher, not their fellows. Even if they do not select the next speaker, teacher has every right to self-select.

In terms of the sequence organisation, several studies have been made with most of them are also based on traditional classroom interaction. Adjacency pairs, which involves questions, answers and post-expansion, are what these researches tend to focus on (Schegloff, 2007). Teacher and student interaction creates a pattern of turns, with teacher takes the first and third turns while student takes the second turn. The relevance of teacher selecting the next speaker and self-selecting, and the restriction of student self-selecting and selecting others than teacher to be the next speaker, make this pattern of turns constant. This pattern is mostly known as IRE (Mehan, 1979). The third turn or position is the most interesting concern. It is here that the second turn, which is normally made up of student's answers, is assessed, evaluated and responded. It could be just a mere confirmation of answers, repair (which relates to the other structures of CA) and the proposing of other related questions (Joni, 2019). Several other studies also suggest the third turn as a repair-initiation which leads to the fourth turn where student makes a correction of their response in the second turn (Lee, 2007). Lerner (1995) also states that the fourth turn can be produced when student feels the need of another response or answer to the teacher's third-position evaluation. Even though this three-part instructional sequence is proposed based on traditional classroom interaction, it is found apt in modern classrooms as well. However, there is some addition to it where the interaction might not only be restricted to an adjacency pair but might involve more than two speakers, and it could be traditionally among teacher and student as well as among students themselves.

Languages classes are the focus of almost all the researches on turn design in classroom interaction (Sidnell & Stivers, 2012). Carroll (2004), for example, studies the turn design of Japanese learners of English. Their aspects of turns include the negative transfer of Japanese pronunciations and the utterances through gesture. Another style turn design in language learning classrooms is through pedagogical scaffolding where teacher designs an incomplete sentence for the student to complete. In the case of ordinary conversation, the CA structure of repair might not come as often as

it does in classroom interaction. In classrooms, whether it is teacher-dominated or learner-centred, the role of teacher especially is preserved of assessing and correcting student, as it is part of cognitive process. However, as MacBeth (2004) proposes, there is a difference between repair and correction in classrooms. He argues that we cannot put repair in conversation and correction in classrooms in the same category, as correction in classrooms deals with the issue of "identifying task and achievement of classroom teaching". As correction normally involves professional concern of teachers, this explains why self-repair and self-initiation of repair are less frequent in classroom interaction than in casual conversation.

3. Conversation Analysis (CA) Approach

Conversation analysis (CA) is an approach to the analysis of social interaction contemplating both non-verbal and verbal conduct in daily circumstances. It basically involves a casual conversation which, to be analysed, may imply to different methods depending on the task or institution concerned. Developed principally by Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson, CA was said to have four basic structures which are turn-taking organisation, sequence organisation, repair and action formation (Schegloff, 1992). It is one of the distinctive and successful approaches to the study of social interaction.

CA is commonly used in the study of interaction in an institution. It is practical to comprehend what the participants' point of views are within the interaction in terms of how they gain and produce social order and intersubjectivity (Hall, 2019). In an educational interaction, specifically classroom interaction, the CA structures are present. Concerning learner-learner interaction, which is frequently present in task-oriented learner-centred classrooms, it is relatively distinct from teacher-learner interaction. In teacher-learner interaction, there is a fundamental expectation of teacher proposing talk and questions while student responding or giving answers. In learner-learner interaction, however, we cannot really expect how and what their interaction will be. Is it going to be in an adjacency pair and IRE sequence as well, or is it not going to be as fixed or expectable as in teacher-learner interaction? The question of whether the participants will be speaking at transition-relevance place (TRP)[2] throughout the interaction will also be argued (Hara, 2019).

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[2] TRP is defined as a timing when the current turn can be completed and other participants are able to take the turn (Hara, 2019)

The classroom interactions that are being studied and analysed are chosen randomly from various sources. Due to lack of learner-centred classroom interaction sources, for example, there is only traditional classroom interaction recorded in YouTube, the transcripts presented in the Analysis section are the ones that were being analysed in previous teacher-learner interaction studies, as well as from researches of classroom interaction of other approaches. The analysis is based on the author's observation and inspection on the interactions that are studied upon. Reviews on CA's concepts and theories from several sources are considered, with Schegloff's *Introduction to Sacks: Lectures on Conversation* referred mainly as a handbook and guideline in viewing data from a conversation analytic approach (Schegloff', 1992).

Because the data analysed are random and not obtained from the same one classroom interaction, there will be some problems to figure out the frequency and statistics of each CA structure present in a learner-centred classroom interaction. The issue of whether teacher-student interaction and student-student interaction convey the same style of communicating, and if they do, to what extent are they similar, also cannot be precisely determined due to restricted data. To go on with the analysis, each CA structure will be inspected and explained with textual evidence from the random data of learner-learner classroom interaction.

4. Analysis and Discussion

Turn taking in CA takes place when the conversation flows from one speaker to another. Three main conditions in turn taking are when current speaker (C) selects next speaker (N), next speaker self-selects and current speaker continues. In institutional interaction like in formal classrooms, wait time can be part of the turn taking structure compared to in ordinary conversation, regardless of whether it is teacher-learner interaction or learner-learner interaction. The wait time is called *pause* if it is the gap in between one's conversation and is known as just *gap* (without another term used) if it happens in the turn taking between two speakers.

Learner-learner interaction can also be a debate. A debate between students may occur when a teacher asks a question or proposes a topic in which a student responds to and another student self-selects to give another answer or present opposing view (Seedhouse, 2004). A leaner-learner debate between both students then happens, as the example below, with Tim as teacher and other characters as students:

Example 1:

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268 Tim:      …which is the first prime number.
269 Jordan:   one
270 Alex:     tw[o
271 Jamie:     [zero
272 Alex:     two
273 Jordan:   one
274 Tim:      one [two
275 Alex:        [two
276 Riley:    is seven one sir?
277 Tim:      okay we might discuss it tomorrow
278 Jordan:   one
279 Tim:      which one's the first prime number?
280 Jamie:    um
281 Tim:      why one?
282          (2.1)
283 Tim:      why is it not a prime [number ]
284 Jordan:                         [because] you can only divide it by,
285          one
286 Alex:     yeah but you can divide it by itself, because it divides by
287          itself
288 Jordan:   yeah but you can't, you can only divide it by one though
289 Alex:     yeah and that's dividing by itself
290 Jamie:    yeah but one's ((inaudible) number)
291 Tim:      wind them up and let them go ((directed at camera)). so what
292          is it, one or two, one or two.
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Based on the interaction between students above, we may conclude that leaner-learner interaction is more similar to an ordinary conversation compared to teacher-learner interaction. This is because no particular person is expected to dominate the other, like teacher dominating classroom interaction, and there is no nominated speaker much involved. In the extract above, there is no teacher-student oscillation and all the students involved self-select in the interaction (Sidnell & Stivers, 2012). The role of a dominating character like teacher in traditional classroom interaction who is expected to select the next speaker is not present in the situation. Focusing on the learner-learner interaction among Jordan, Alex, Jamie and Riley, we can see that there are no pauses and gaps within turns, with a number of overlaps, which resemble casual conversation. Their turns include justifications and explanations of their answer with no intervening from the teacher to claim which answer is correct, which keep the conversation ongoing and the cessation debatable.

Another way of producing turn taking is via initiating a repair. Initiating a repair, although closely related to another structure of CA which is repair, is still considered as one of the approaches of creating turn taking.

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Example 2
Lee: If oil mix with water
Drew: Mixes
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Example 3
Jung: Topsoil washes away
Jasmeen: No, it's passive
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In the examples above, repair initiation is made by recasting and explicit correction respectively. The way Lee makes a sentence and Drew immediately recasts it is not common in traditional teacher-dominated classrooms. Usually in traditional classroom interaction, teacher is rarely corrected by student and if he/she is, it is not done by an immediate recast. Student would normally raise their hand, stop teacher's talk politely and initiate a repair at TRP with decent voice or maybe implicitly, so that teacher's respectability remains. The participants' ranks in learner-learner classroom interaction are not differently regarded, as those in an ordinary conversation, so recast and explicit correction among them are acceptable.

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Example 4
John: If they stopped
Neil: Turned off
John: If they turned off yeah
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After recasting and making explicit correction by other fellows as Examples 2 and 3, the following turn might be of modified output, as a response to the feedback in previous turn. This turn-taking style is quite similar in teacher-learner interaction when student says something, probably responding to question by teacher, and the answer is not accurate that leads to teacher making immediate correction and student restructuring their answer.

On the level of sequence organisation, the most common sequence in a learner-learner interaction is IRF, which is quite similar to other interactions including teacher-learner interaction. This IRF sequence in a learner-learner interaction normally begins with a student asking or proposing a question. This question is then responded and answered by another fellow student, and a feedback is

given in the following turn either by the same first-turn producer or a new participant. Each response to each turn should be relevant so the interaction and the topic of the conversation, unfold sequentially and pertinently (Rustandi et al., 2017).

Example 5

Adam: Do you think the value of x is a prime number?

Sophie: Yeah, I'm positive it's either 5 or 7.

Adam: But, if we use this alternative, we'll get the answer 4 instead.

Example 6

Adam: Do you think the value of x is a prime number?

Sophie: Yeah, I'm positive it's either 5 or 7.

Joe: But guys, I tried to use this alternative and I got the answer 4 instead.

The question of whether the sequence organisation in a learner-learner interaction should be in an adjacency pair or not cannot be statically determined. It could be and it could be not, depending on the number of active participants in the interaction. In Example 5 above, the discussion involves two people, or mostly called as an adjacency pair, which is different from the following example which involves three active participants. We cannot simply deduce that the number of participants take part in an interaction depends on the number of people present in that particular group, as not every person chooses to be active. This is also germane in a traditional teacher-dominated classroom interaction, where a particular interaction could only be between two people, a teacher and a student, despite the numerous number of people in the classroom. As compared to traditional classrooms, there is more flexibility in terms of the number of turns involved and the sequences of turns in learner-centred classrooms. The turn design is oscillating among the participants with possible interruption from new participants.

The interaction in a task-oriented learner-centred classroom does not rely on the pedagogy applied. Even if teacher utilises pedagogical scaffolding in the classroom, there is no scaffolding happening in the interaction between students. Scaffolding, or the proposal of incomplete sentences to other people in order to get them finishing the lines, is not relevant in a learner-learner interaction. The purpose of teacher using this pedagogical scaffolding is to make them respond with the correct point and at the same time validate their understanding. The participants in a learner-leaner interaction do not utilise this pedagogical style as none of them is assigned to make others understand the topic discussed as teachers are. Instead of scaffolding, they just proceed with their explanations without having the full concern of relaying their understanding to other fellows (Schegloff, 1992). Another approach of turn design in a learner-learner interaction is via gestures or utterances. One example of this is when a participant wants to interrupt another's statement, he/she will make a slight movement with their hand to capture the speaker's attention to allow him/her to say something (Preston, 2016). Utterances are also a useful way to make a turn-taking. For instance, when one says "um but…" or "sorry to interrupt, but..." or just a mere "umm…", he/she can make the current speaker and subsequently, listen to what he/she has to say.

Repair in a learner-learner interaction may not be as frequent as it is in a teacher-learner interaction. Not being mistaken with casting different views and projecting doubts which are what often happens in a learner-learner interaction, repair or correction occurs when someone realises the wrong point other makes and corrects him/her with the accurate fact-based answer (MacBeth, 2004). It, however, appears more often than in a casual interaction or conversation. It is rather not important to actually raise and clarify facts in an ordinary conversation because it is not to gain knowledge on anything like in a classroom interaction. The use of repair as a structure of CA in the interaction among students has been mentioned and explained above under the turn taking discussion.

5. Conclusion

From the findings above, we can clearly see the distinction between teacher-learner interaction in traditional classrooms and learner-learner interaction in modern learner-centred classrooms from the conversation analytic point of view. The turn taking between learners are dissimilar like those between teacher and learner in terms of its frequency, the gaps or pauses and also the methods. Sequence organisation is rather messy and unrestricted as compared to teacher-learner interaction sequence, and repair or correction emerges less often between students, not being mistaken with their practices of casting different views and projecting doubts among

themselves. This study is hopefully discerned as the acceptable response and reacting analysis towards previous existing studies, especially ones that are referred to throughout this research.

As the structures of CA in both types of classrooms, which are traditional teacher-dominated and learner-centred, are now clear, future researches of CA may go in the direction of more specific classroom interactions such as in the classroom of children with special needs and of deaf students who communicate with non-audible language. CA (conversation analysis) is one of the proficient and useful tools to study interactions, especially ones involving educational talk, as it focuses both on the studies of talk as well as on the understanding, learning and knowledge transmission, to a certain extent.

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