

# Spoken Discourse Analysis: A Case Study of Kathmandu Shiksha Campus

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## Abstract

*Discourse analysis has emerged as a gradually-growing discipline because of growing interest of linguists in studying language in natural setting: Some study of spoken discourse analysis in the few last decades has manifested that spoken discourse is sometimes highly-organized (in a fixed pattern) and sometimes loosely organized. In this paper, I have attempted to analyze how naturally occurring spoken discourses are organized in natural as well as in formal setting. This analysis is based on Sinclair-Coulthard analysis model developed in 1975. I have analyzed three different discourses; viz. Classroom Discourse, Discourse outside the classroom and Talk as Social activity observing the three different settings; viz. classroom, outside the classroom and social (where more than two participants are involved) settings. The findings of this analysis show that classroom discourse occurs in a fixed pattern rather discourse outside the classroom and talk as social activity do not occur in a fixed pattern.*

**Keywords:** *Discourse analysis, Spoken discourse analysis, lesson, interaction, exchange, move, act, turn taking mechanism, face-preservation.*

## Introduction to discourse analysis

The phrase discourse analysis was introduced for the first time in 1952 by the American linguist Zellig Harris. He explained it as a method of analyzing connected writing and speech (Paltridge, 2012:2). According to Paltridge, discourse analysis takes into account the connection between language and the social context in which the language is applied (2012:2). It is confirmed by Cook, who says 'discourse analysis is not focused only on language but it also considers things such as: why is somebody communicating and with whom is communicating; in what situation the communication takes place and also in what society, via which medium and also how various acts of communication are developed (2005:1). Discourse analysis involves both written language and spoken.

To be more specific, McCarthy (2010) defines discourse analysis as "Discourse analysis is concerned with the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used". McCarthy further mentions discourse analysis is

interdisciplinary discipline, wide ranging, heterogeneous and hybrid field of human inquiry (2010). Discourse analysis is connected with others disciplines like, linguistics, semiotics, psychology, anthropology and sociology so it is interdisciplinary discipline.

Hence, discourse analysis is interdisciplinary discipline which is concerned with the study of language beyond sentence level including the general inquires of textual features, interrelationship between language and societies, language use in higher level, meaning and context and features of interaction of everyday language.

### **Objectives**

The major objective of the study was to find out how naturally occurring spoken discourses are organized in natural as well as in formal setting. The other objectives of the study were: to analyze the classroom and outside the classroom discourse and discourse of social talk.

### **Methodology**

I analyzed three different discourses; viz. Classroom Discourse, Discourse outside the classroom and Talk as Social activity observing the three different settings; viz. classroom, outside the classroom and social (where more than two participants are involved) settings. The analysis was based on Sinclair-Coulthard method.

### **Delimitation**

Discourse analysis involves both spoken and written discourse but this analysis is only limited to spoken discourse one.

### **Discussion and results**

#### **Spoken discourse analysis**

Spoken discourse is highly informal and complex in its structure. Any piece of cohesive and coherent language use in oral mode is spoken discourse. For instance, dialogue, conversation, interview, casual talk, classroom interaction, family gossip, committee meeting, etc. McCarthy (2010) says, "Spoken language is a vast subject and little is known in hard statistical terms of the distribution of different types of the speech in people's everyday lives.". There is no going back and changing or restructuring our words as there is on writing; there is often no time to pause and think, and while we are talking or listening, we cannot stand back and view the discourse in spatial or diagrammatic terms as we did. Spoken language, therefore, is often unplanned, less socially structured and more reciprocal. However, it is more contextual than the written discourse. Casual conversation, which occurs most frequently among different types

of speeches, is relatively unplanned and unpredictable, and involves frequent turn-taking and the use of interjections. While analyzing spoken discourses, the discourse analysts have to examine the participants, participants' roles, purpose of interaction, topics and switch/ shift of topics, exchanges, moves, turn taking mechanisms, form-function relations, formality, meaning of complex situational features like intonation, non-linguistics cues/ signs, context, relevance, cultural influences and so on.

The interaction proceeds according to certain principles. Linguistics has traditionally been concerned with characterizing well-formed and ill-formed units in terms of grammatical structures within sentences. However, it is also important to realize that grammatical correctness is not sufficient to make one's speech well-formed. It is also important to assure that various formal and contextual links are used in the interaction. Speakers must be able to distinguish coherent from incoherent discourse. To understand what a speaker says, a listener needs to know who is speaking (Rogers, 2011). In the following interaction between two friends A and B for example, A's utterance is heard to be ill-formed by B.

A: I want to have my coat repaired. Do you know a good tailor's around here?

B: Who did you say?

The concept of well-formedness, however, is difficult to apply in spoken discourse. Various scholars have emphasized that a discourse becomes meaningful with the use of cohesive devices such as references, substitution ellipsis, conjunction, collocation, etc. These are the formal links, in addition to these, speakers need to have the knowledge of the context in which language is used.

There are three models of spoken discourse in practice, i.e. Classroom Discourse Analysis, Discourse analysis of Conversation outside the Classroom and Discourse Analysis of Talk as a Social Activity. These three models of discourse analysis are described one by one with example as follow:

### **Classroom discourse analysis**

This model is also known as Sinclair-Coulthard Model, because the model was developed by Sinclair and Coulthard in 1975. It was developed at the University of Birmingham which focused on the structure of discourse in traditional English native speaker school classrooms. This is a simple and powerful model, although it may not be the only authentic one (McCarthy, 2010).

Sinclair and Coulthard found that teachers and pupils interact in a fixed pattern based on their specific roles. The following example illustrates the point.

Teacher: Can you tell me why we should do exercise regularly?

Pupil: To be healthy.

Teacher: To be healthy. Yes To be healthy. Why...?

This is an example of an exchange of teacher-pupil interaction which operates in a fixed pattern. As this example demonstrates, a typical exchange consists of an initiation by the teacher, which is followed by a response from the pupil, and which in turn is followed by a feedback from the teacher again. Initiation, response and feedback (IFR) are termed opening move, response move and follow-up move respectively. The sequence of opening, response and follow up is called exchange. Sinclair and Coulthard discuss two classes of move, i.e. boundary exchange and teaching exchange. The above sequence is an example of a teaching exchange. Teaching exchange has five types. They are teacher-elicited, teacher-inform, teacher direct, pupil-elicited and pupil-inform exchanges. In a teacher-elicited exchange, the teacher gets a pupil to provide some kind of verbal response; in a teacher-inform exchange, the teacher provides an explanation which may or may not be responded by the pupil; in a teacher-direct exchange, the teacher gets the pupil to do an activity. In a pupil-elicited exchange, the pupil asks a question usually to the teacher, and the teacher, if asked, always provides a response. In pupil-inform exchange, the pupil provides an explanation which is usually responded by the teacher. Here, I have tried to analyze a classroom discourse of my own class:

(We students were ready to take class, our CDA teacher (T) entered in the class, we greeted to the teacher and he responded, after it, the teacher started the lesson)

T: Now, we are in discursive structure. Today we are going to discuss on..... Ok, you Arati, what is epistemic break?

Arati: Discontinuous development in the discursive structure is epistemic break to us.

T: Good, Thank you. Can you give a suitable example?

Arati: Sure!

T: Nice, go on.

Arati: Women couldn't get educated in the past because...but they are being educated now.

T: Very good example. Well done! You take your seat.

This is a piece of classroom interaction in the formal setting, so, teacher and a student are the participants talking about the previous lesson 'epistemic break'. Before beginning the interaction, the teacher has initiated the conversation saying "now", Arati

has responded to the teacher's query and teacher has given feedback to her. There is well turn taking mechanism, I mean, there is no any violation in turn taking mechanism. The teacher has used 'now' in the initiation, i.e. framing move. After the framing move, the teacher has used another expression before asking the question (Today we are going to discuss on), that is focusing move in the above example. So, framing and focusing moves together realized a higher discourse unit, i.e. boundary exchange. Thus, opening, response and follow-up moves realize a teaching exchange whereas framing and focusing moves realize a boundary exchange. According to Sinclair and Coulthard, classroom interaction takes place with the use of framing moves. Two framing moves together with question and answer sequences between them make a higher unit called transaction. The highest unit of classroom discourse consists of one or more transactions called lesson. Sinclair and Coulthard tried to analyze classroom discourse in terms of the four units discussed so far: move, exchange, transaction and lesson. However, they felt difficulty in analyzing the structure of move. Later, they realized that moves are structured in terms of smaller units called acts. Sinclair and Coulthard say, "Acts and moves in discourse are very similar to morphemes and words in grammar. This model enables the analysts to study a talk outside the classroom as well.

### **Discourse analysis of conversation outside-classroom**

Classroom is the place where the teachers and students are bounded by some institutionalized forces, so, it is not the real world of conversation. It means, most of the speech behaviors take place outside the classroom. Though, the model for analyzing classroom discourse is useful for analysis of conversation outside the classroom. The conversations inside-class seems to be free and even unstructured to the IRF pattern of classroom talk. In the conversation outside the classroom, the acts of speech, moves of the individual, initiation, response and follow-up exchanges, signal of boundary in talk, starter, etc. are found very interestingly.

While analyzing conversation outside the classroom, we need to look at the areas as: how pairs of utterances relate to one another, how turn-taking is managed, how conversational openings and closings are effected, how topics enter and disappear from conversation, and how speakers engage in strategic act of politeness, face-preservation, and so on.

Let's observe the following examples:

Prabhu (P) is in his New Year holiday in Kathmandu. He has very good friendship with his friend Tanka (T). He goes to Tanka's room.)

T: Hello Prabhu.

P: Hello Tanka ... could you do me a great favor?

T: Umm.

P: I am going to watch a movie today, but I forgot my wallet right in my room

T: Ah.

P: I phoned my brother to bring but he has already been

T: out of room.

P: Yes will return your money back soon.

T: Yes....sure no problem at all.

P: Yes.

T: Mm... How much do you need?

P: Only one thousand.

T: Rs. 1000 is enough?

P: That's right...that's all...you are here.

T: Yes...and I can settle it.

P: Yes and bring it back very soon.

T: Right...okay.

P: Thanks Tanka.

T: Cheers! (Prabhu leaves the room).

This is not like the classroom interaction. Prabhu and Tanka are more or less equal in this piece of interaction, therefore each has enjoyed the right to initiate, respond and follow up in their exchanges. It is not merely a question and answer session; sometimes they inform each other and acknowledge information. But their talk is not disorganized; there are patterns we can observe. The sequence begins and ends with framing mechanisms of the classroom: after the initial greeting, Prabhu paused and his voice moved to a higher pitch:

Could you do me...

P: Hello Tanka....

Topic is initiated with saying 'hello' by Tanka, but Prabhu also can initiate in instead. While Prabhu was speaking, Tanka interrupted, so, there is violation of turn taking mechanism. They are paused times and again while interacting. Grammatical forms also seem to be ill organized. So, there is is not a formal like conversation.

Hence, loosely organized outside-class conversations are not merely in the

form of question-answer session, sometimes the participants inform each other and acknowledge the information, their talk may not be organized, the sequences may not be with the framing moves, 'right' and 'now then' as like in classroom interaction. Though, we can observe initiation-response-follow-up sequences of classroom talk in outside-conversations. In outside-classroom conversations, more than two can talk at a time, frequent degree of interruption and interfere, violation of turn-taking mechanisms, frequent pauses and overlapping, switch and shift of topics, etc. which are the major features of outside-classroom talk.

### **Discourse analysis of talk as a social activity**

It is the third model in the spoken discourse analysis in a sense which talks about the function to lubricate the social wheels and helps to establish a sense of socialization and harmony in the society. Unlike the interactions between teacher and student or doctor and patient or boss and Clark, talk as a social activity does not seem to follow rigid pattern, i.e. IFR pattern of interaction, because such talks are relatively easy to predict who will speak when, who will ask and who will answer, who will interrupt, who will open and close the talk and so forth.

So, IRF model is somehow considered to be inadequate to analyze social talk and ethno-methodology is required to analyze social talk which studies real conversations in real setting. The pre-occupation of the ethno-methodologists is to observe conversational behaviors who have adopted the conversation analysis (CA) approach in the study of social talk focusing on the interest in some components like, opening and turn-taking in interaction, topics and topic shift, pauses or gaps in talk, overlaps and back-channels, adjacency pairs, sequences and repair and closing. Ethno-methodologists examine large amount of data and focus to the underlying norms or rules of conversation. Let's see an example of social talk:

(University lecturer (L) at a tea shop where he has just ordered tea for a group of students (S1, S2, etc.). The tea shopkeeper (T) is attending to the order and the group are standing in shop.)

L: This is quite hot today, so, it would be better to have something cold.

S1: It would be quite cheap actually.

L: (laughs)

L: Tea please. (to the shopkeeper).

S2: Umm.. Umm.. How do you spend your holiday sir?

L: I enjoy with my family. I become busy, usually. Yes I am married, we do have a boy.

S2: Oh !! Family? Are you married?

(After 5 minutes)

T: Tea is ready, here you are.

L, S1, S2... : Thanks !

In the above example, more than two people have talked at a time where, exchange and transaction boundaries are not fixed in pattern and the interaction is not more or less tightly structured. One of the student has interrupted to the teacher, because one has right to speak at any time in social talk. Lecturer has initiated the conversation but he has not given feedback. It means, anyone can initiate, response or follow-up in social talk. Again, the topic is changed soon. So, the topic also can be changed accordance of the situation at any time in social talk.

### **Conclusion and findings**

Discourse analysis is a vast subject area within linguistics and social science, which includes the analysis of spoken and written discourse. It means, it aims to study and analyze texts and talks. Discourse analysis is a linguistic, cognitive, textual, social and holistic approach. In my analysis of three different discourses in different settings, I found that classroom discourse occurs in fixed pattern as in Sinclair and Coulthard's model, i.e. in IRF pattern. On the other hand, discourse outside the classroom is not found to be in fixed pattern because the participants are in natural setting but the IRF pattern can sometimes be found in it. In the similar vein, spoken discourse in social talk found to be free of fixed pattern; it means, in the social talk, participants are free from some sort of authority and they do have right to initiate, response and follow-up. Moreover, in social talk, follow-up can be absent.

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