

Teacher and students' discourse analysis in a foreign language computer mediated classroom.¹¹⁷

Análisis del discurso de maestros y estudiantes en una clase de lengua extranjera mediada por computador.

Nalyse du discours de l'enseignant et des étudiants en langue étrangère dans une salle de classe médiatisée par un ordinateur

A análise de discurso de professores e alunos em uma sala de aula mediada por computador em um idioma estrangeiro.

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Cómo citar este artículo: Mesa-Vallejo, J.H. y Nitola-Merchán, D.M. & Valdiri-Rojas, C.A. (2018-2). Teacher and students' discourse analysis in a foreign language computer mediated classroom. *quaest.disput*, 11(23), 157-172

117 Recibido: 8/3/2017. Aprobado: 18/07/2018

Este artículo es un artículo de reflexión.

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Quaestiones Disputatae-Temas en Debate (quaest.disput.),
Julio - Diciembre 2018-II, Vol. 11, No. 23, pp. 157 - 172

Resumen

Cuando se analizan hechos conversacionales espontáneos como la interacción en el salón, el discurso del profesor, la superposición, los pares de adyacencia en un ambiente virtual dentro de una institución pública colombiana de formación técnica, encontramos que estos aspectos soportan los objetivos pedagógicos de la clase y al mismo tiempo, éstos dan cuenta sobre la identidad de los profesores y los estudiantes durante la clase de idiomas. Los participantes del análisis fueron un profesor de inglés y seis estudiantes en un ambiente mediado por computador con una herramienta de interacción de doble vía (una barra de chat y un programa para intercambio de audio). Los resultados del análisis del discurso y las interacciones revelaron que los ambientes virtuales tienen dinámicas en común con las clases presenciales y que el modo administrativo ejerce un papel sobresaliente en este tipo de aulas.

Palabras clave: Identidad del profesor, Ciclo IRR, análisis del discurso, ambientes virtuales de aprendizaje, modo administrativo

Abstract

When analyzing conversational spontaneous issues like, classroom interaction, IRF cycle, teacher talk, overlapping, and adjacency pairs inside a virtual environment in a Colombian public technical institution, we found that these aspects support the pedagogic purpose of the class and at the same time, they display the teacher and students' identity while performing a foreign language lesson. The participants of the analysis were an English teacher and his 6 students in a computer mediated-environment with a double way interaction tool (a chat bar and an audio interchange program). The findings from this discourse analysis between the teacher and students' interaction revealed that the virtual environment has some common dynamics to the face to face setting and that managerial mode has an outstanding place in this kind of classroom.

Keywords: Teacher Identity, IRF Cycle, discourse analysis, computer mediated-environment, managerial mode.

Résumé

Lorsque nous analysons des faits de conversation spontanés tels que l'interaction en classe, le discours de l'enseignant, la superposition, les paires d'adjacence dans un environnement virtuel au sein d'une institution publique de formation technique colombienne, nous constatons que ces



aspects soutiennent les objectifs pédagogiques du cours et en même temps, ils rendent compte de l'identité des enseignants et des étudiants pendant le cours de langue. Les participants à l'analyse ont été un professeur d'anglais et six étudiants dans une salle de classe, assistée par ordinateur doté d'un outil d'interaction bidirectionnel (une barre de discussion et un programme d'échange audio). Les résultats de l'analyse du discours et des interactions ont révélé que les environnements virtuels ont une dynamique commune avec les classes présentielles et que le mode administratif joue un rôle remarquable dans ce type de salles de classe.

Mots-clés: identité de l'enseignant, cycle IRR, analyse du discours, salle de classe virtuelle, mode administratif.

Resumo

Quando analisamos fatos conversacionais espontâneos, como interação em sala de aula, discurso do professor, as superposições, os pares de adjacências em um ambiente virtual dentro de uma instituição pública colombiana de formação técnica; constatamos que esses aspectos sustentam os objetivos pedagógicos da aula. E, ao mesmo tempo, dão conta da identidade de professores e alunos durante a aula de idiomas. Os participantes da análise foram um professor de inglês e seis alunos em um ambiente mediado por computador com uma ferramenta de interação bidirecional (uma barra de bate-papo e um programa para troca de áudio). Os resultados da análise do discurso e das interações revelaram que os ambientes virtuais possuem dinâmicas em comum com as aulas presenciais e que o modo administrativo desempenha um papel destacado nesse tipo de sala de aula.

Palavras-Chave: Identidade Do Professor, Ciclo De IRR, Análise Do Discurso, Ambientes Virtuais De Aprendizagem, Modo Administrativo.

Introduction

In this paper, we explored what markers of the teacher identity in a virtual environment are found as well as the occurrence and the characteristics of the IRF cycle shown in this scenario; the Self -Evaluation of Teacher Talk (SETT) will be used to understand this aspect. We will also examine teacher's discourse strategies and determine how effective they are. At first, we are established a literature review that was used as the frame of this paper, starting by our conception of language and its relationship with the discourse analysis.

Language is present in all aspects of our daily life; from the moment we start our daily activities, we are using it to communicate, socialize and express feelings. Language is not only used in a spoken way, through the interaction with someone, but also, it can be used and found in numerous forms as in newspapers, radio, television. Language is everywhere, for example, when driving to school or work the different signs and traffic lights give us a message and according to our knowledge and background, we decide what to do and how to do it. In all these moments, language is displayed in different levels, contexts and functions and we are constantly interacting with them.

According to Schmitt (2001), since discourse is present in our daily social interaction, it has been studied by so many disciplines which are called Discourse Analysis. The discourse analyst studies texts focused mainly on the way in which text is affected by the context, it does not matter whether it is a long or short text, if it is a written or spoken text. Discourse analysts are always devoted on establishing elements such as: the participants in the discourse and aspects such as their relationship and their goals. Thus, discourse analyst examines the meaning of each piece of language and how it affects the discourse.

Taking into account that this analysis took place in a computer-mediated environment, it is important to define it. According to Szécsi (2013:48) our concept of community has been renovated with the use of electronic media that changed the relations that represent the network of several communicative acts. This is why: “Physical communities are based on shared social and physical boundaries, whereas virtual communities are based on shared social practices and interest”.

Poster (2001) quoted by Szécsi, showed that mediated individuals imagine their community as real, this means that the role of communication in virtual spaces is also a base for the construction of real communities. Despite of the interaction through the computer-mediated environment the teacher still has roles imposed in the physical classroom such as the creation of interaction knowledge and behavior with the purpose of using language.

Based on the previous ideas, it is important to establish that the teacher in computer mediated-environments has some features that are present inside the physical environments, for example identity. For years, there have been established the categories of teachers and students as analytically given, this has led to frame their interaction in terms of what a student or a teacher might achieve; however, some traditions of analysis, such as conversation analysis, argue that this categorization imposes potentially distorting constraints to see how categories are products of the interactional work of

participants. About this, Zimmerman (2006:60), proposes three dimensions of identity that are relevant to the analysis of interaction, they are: discourse identity, situated identity and transportable identity. The following analysis reveals how the nature of interaction in an educational context changes significantly when changes are made along each dimension.

First, the default position is branded by orientation to situated identities realized through their characteristic discourse identities and with no evidence of transportable identity; students and teachers' identity is omnipresent; the control of the floor is on the teacher. Besides, teachers exercise their right to insist on the form of the reply provided by pupils and the students address their response to the teacher; the IRF pattern serves to reinforce situated identity and the institutional realities which it represents.

Second, the change in the discourse identity is essentially asymmetrical, it is a characteristic of a talk in many institutional settings; a polar reversal in knowledge asymmetry may or may not affect situated identity, but the absence of transportable identity, defined as the fundamental teacher-learner relationships, remains.

On the third place, there is change in discourse and situated identities, in this variation, the teacher formally accepts that usually he can learn from the students; but still he/she maintains control of the development of the interaction, it would be excessive to claim that this transforms the interaction, but it does mark a shift away from the situated identities of the classroom and the asymmetries associated with them, towards a more equal encounter in which the parties committed explore the meanings and relationships associated in their respective cultures.

Teachers create different ways to get involved in the interaction inside the classroom, they unconsciously use the SETT framework to understand the process carried out in the lessons; Walsh (2013) says that SETT fosters an understanding of the relationship between pedagogic purpose and language use, permitting teachers to identify "recurrent segmental patterns or structures" (Drew, 1994:142), in this way, they improve learning, teaching and assessment processes helped by the interactions among the participants involved in the discourse.

Furthermore, pedagogy and interaction cannot be separated, so the term mode has been created, this term is related to the links that are present inside the language use and the teaching purpose. A mode is just a second language classroom micro-context, it has a clear pedagogic goal and

distinctive interactional features determined by the teacher's use of language. Modes can be divided into 4 families, they are called Managerial, Material, Skills and System, and Classroom contexts, and each one of these modes has its own pedagogical goals and interactional features.

On the other hand, Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), stated that the three main components and the unit of analysis in classroom interaction are initiation-response-feedback (IRF). This pattern suggests that the teacher is the initiator of the linguistic interaction, the selected learner gives an answer or response, and finally the teacher assesses the answer by providing a feedback. At the same time, Richards (2006) argues that Initiation-Response-Follow-up pattern has been evolving to determine the communication in the classroom, and it recognizes that the teacher controls the steps and the features of the discourse. Nonetheless, it is an instrument with pedagogic purpose intentionally done for students to enhance reflective skills and interaction. However, this pattern is criticized because, if followed rigidly, it could become a "monologic recitation script" (Tharp and Gallimore, 1988), giving fewer opportunities for learners to think critically and express their ideas freely, that is why it is important to open the door to alternative and negotiated ways to promote interaction and learning in the classrooms.

A good way to do this would be to take advantages of all the technological tools and apps that learners have at hand and that provide them with a wide access to all kinds of information, here is when the teacher promotes scenarios to develop and apply critical thinking skills by using their backgrounds and their own realities for establishing a position towards the knowledge they are exposed to.

Another aspect that is present in the conversation is the exchange between the speaker and interlocutor, and this occurs by the variation of the speech in the participants. Constructing a conversation may include several aspects, such as the intentionality of the acts of the speech, but the transition takes an essential role in this point. According to Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) turn-taking refers to a "speech exchange system". Turn taking is the interpretation of the speaker about those transitional exchanges in order to fulfill the desire to communicate with peers, and in the same way, social behavior is being constructed by establishing rules for turn-taking. However, those rules are not established at all, they are mediated by the intention of the speaker to change its turn, an example could be a pause, or a question, but this must be complemented and understood by the interlocutor.

Research design Setting and participants

This study was conducted in a public Colombian educational institution that develops vocational and technical training programs in several areas of knowledge; in these programs, English is the only subject that is taught using virtual environments. Learners must take three English levels to accomplish the requirements for obtaining their degree. It is important to mention that these courses are also open to any person interested in learning English even if they are not enrolled in the training programs offered by this institution.

The institution uses a platform called “Blackboard Collaborate”, which is used to promote new scenarios for teaching. In this platform, teachers can interact through chat, online cam and audio conversation, simultaneously. The teacher can have 80 students online at the same time. The students are from different ages (from 14 to 60 years old) and from different cities of the country (not only big cities, but also towns around the departments).

The students need a computer, headphones, camera (optional) and a high-speed Internet connection to be part of the conversation. The sessions can be done in Spanish or in English, which depends on the teacher's methodology and the pedagogic purpose of the lesson. Through this tool, students can solve doubts about the activities and practice speaking in real time. In the recording, just 6 students logged in to the session, so they became the participants of this study. For this particular session, the topic chosen was the family members.

Methodology

The length of the sessions is about one hour, but the teacher decides whether it takes more time to accomplish the purpose of the lesson. The recording that was selected had a length of 1 hour and 25 minutes, but for the purpose of this study only the last 20 minutes of the lesson were analyzed because the interactions were more meaningful. Those extracts were transcribed and analyzed using the discourse analysis framework and the theory mentioned previously. During this analysis, the pedagogical implications and the teacher's identity features were kept in mind.

The researchers used the Conversational Analysis approach as the research methodology for analyzing and interpreting the data. Negretti (1999) points out that the Conversational Analysis approach “focuses on how individuals in social setting engage in meaningful acts through language and make sense of the world around them” (p. 76). Based on the objectives of this study and the

researchers' interest, this methodology was meant to be applied into a virtual environment to unveil what teacher identity features are displayed in this setting.

Research question

The labor of a researcher is to extend his knowledge area, to understand how the world works and to solve issues in different fields. However, to achieve this it is necessary to question himself first about the problematics that are present around. Taking into account the context and the literature review stated before, we came up with a research question stated as follows:

WHAT DISCOURSE MARKERS DETERMINE THE LANGUAGE TEACHER IDENTITY IN A VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT?

Considering the methodology and the research field where this study was born, we have stated the following objective that is intended to guide this study: to identify what aspects related to teacher identity are displayed in the interactions in a virtual language learning environment. The question and objective guided us into some aspects that will be presented as follows:

Extract 1: (The first extract starts with line 1 and ends at line 20. This extract is a monologue of the teacher in which he tries to explain the features of the required task to his students.)

- 1 T lo que me van a hacer es hablar acerca de los miembros de su familia
what you are going to do is to talk about your family members
- 2 (14) lo que me van a hacer
What you are going to do for me
- 3 Describe the closest relative to you! ((In the chat window))
- 4 Me van a describir al familiar más cercano a ustedes
You are going to describe the closest relative to you
- 5 o pues con el cual ustedes tengan cercanía
or the one which you are closer
- 6 (2) listo?



- # OK? #**
- 7 (3) qué me van a hablar de este personaje?
- # What are you going to talk about this character? #**
- 8 me van a hablar name
- # you are going to talk about name #**
- 9 Name ((In the chat window))
- 10 Age
- 11 Age ((In the chat window))
- 12 Profession
- 13 Profession ((In the chat window))
- 14 Place of living
- 15 Place of living ((In the chat window))
- 16 y likes and dislikes
- 17 Likes & Dislikes! ((In the chat window))
- 18 me van a hablar de esos ítems
- # you are going to talk about those items #**
- 19 (4) recuerden es en inglés listo?
- # Remember it is in English ok? #**
- 20 me van a hablar de de name age profession place of living likes and dislikes
- # you are going to talk about name age profession place of living likes and dislikes #**
- 21 (6) listo? fácil o difícil? Easy or difficult?
- # Ok? easy or difficult? Easy or difficult? #**

In this extract, the teacher uses managerial mode because he is giving directions in order to set the pedagogical goal and located learners in time and space. In this extended turn, there is no intervention from the learners. In line 1, we can perceive a particular kind of identity in the teacher, there is an empowerment from the teacher in order to show that there is a clear and specific order with mainly pedagogic purposes. He emphasizes in pointing the importance of using a specific topic for the development of the task; this

topic is family members, and there is not another option for students to choose a different topic in order to perform the activity.

Teacher uses students' Mother language (Spanish) in order to provide clear and specific instructions and for avoiding misunderstandings. Besides, as we can see in lines 1, 2, 6, 7, 18 and 20, the teacher reiterates the information making use of the repetition of the task, performing utterances and display questions, those are used in order to clarify for the students the characteristics of the task. Taking advantage of the platform features, the teacher also reinforces the information speaking in the second language, writing the characteristics of the activity as seen on line 3, in this case students are receiving the orders using two simultaneous codes, the written and the spoken one.

The teacher's pedagogical purpose starts from a general topic that is the family members while the instruction is given and at the same time, it becomes more specific because the teacher decides that students will talk about only one family member, and the teacher also specifies that students must describe certain topics such as name, age, profession, likes and dislikes, this can be noticed from lines 7 to 18. Another key aspect is the teacher's language switching and the changes in the semantic load, this can be noticed when the teacher uses the foreign language in a written and spoken way. The control of the class is lower because language is not very direct and he tries to use more polite expressions than when he is using Spanish.

Extract 2. (The second extract takes place when the first student started doing the assigned task by the teacher, at the beginning of the extract we can see how the teacher nominates the student who is going to talk as we can see from the line 59.)

- 59 T iniciamos de una vez Cecilia you can start now?
 # Let's begin right now Cecilia you can start now? #
- 60 S good night
- 61 I will speak of my husband (2) her name is José Pablo
- 62 she is fifty seven years old
- 63 her profession is biologist
- 64 er she lives with me in eee in Bogotá
- 65 er she loves em ciclismo (2) ok



- 66 T (2) OK te puedo molestar otra vez te puedo pedir un favor?
OK may I bother you again may I ask you a favor?
- 67 S si yess
- 68 T vuelve e inicia
start again
- 69 S eee I will speak of my husband her name is José Pablo
- 70 she is fifty seven years old
- 71 her profession is biologist
- 72 er she is er she lives with me in eee in Bogotá
- 73 er she loves em ciclismo
- 74 T ah ok thank you very much
- 75 (2) ok Cecilia entonces para cerrar el micrófono vuelves y
Ok Cecilia so to close the microphone you one more time#
- 76 le das click en hablar listo?
Click on speak ok?
- 77 S er repeat me please
- 78 T para cerrar el micrófono por fa vuelves y le das clic en hablar
to close the microphone you one more time click on speak please
- 79 listo Cecilia?
Ok Cecilia
- 80 S ahhh ok ok
- 81 T Thank you very much

On the one hand, from line 60 to 65 the student starts to report the task, in these lines the student uses pet words reflecting the lack of confidence while using the second language but this is seen in the same way from line 69 to 73 because the teacher asks for a repetition of the task. This request is made because there were some technical issues that did let the teacher listen in a clear way.

While the student carries out her presentation, the teacher allows her to make mistakes in order to encourage her in the reaching the pedagogic purpose of the activity. This is also used for increasing the confidence of the student while producing a discourse, and for creating a new conscious about how to construct the grammar of the foreign language.

On the other hand, in line 78 the teacher returned to the managerial mode because he gave directions for the use of the technological platform, that in this case, mediates the learning of the second language; by means of this utterance the teacher demonstrates the familiarity that he has about the use of the technology and the implications that its misuse could have for further development of the class. To end the managerial mode the teacher makes sure that the student understands the order by switching to L1 and making a display question.

Extract 3. (The main purpose of this paper is to analyze how the IRF cycle is carried out in a virtual environment, for this reason, now we are going to analyze the subsequent feedback provided by the teacher after the response given by the students, for this, we decided to select the next extracts)

- 82 T (2) primera she or he?
First she or he?
- 83 [she?]
 ((In the chat window))
- 84 S [mailed to you I do not have audio jhon.tisch@misena.edu.co]
 ((In the chat window))
- 85 T He
 ((In the chat window))
- 86 (5) porque tú mencionaste que es tu esposo
because you mention that he is your husband
- 87 pero tú me decías siempre she she she
but you were always saying she she she
- 88 entonces yo quede como hmmm listo?
So I was like hmmm ok?

- 98 como se saluda cuando -
 # like to say Hi when #
- 99 S OK
 ((In the chat window))
- 100 T Cuando estamos saludando de buenas noches es good evening
 # When we are talking about good evening is good evening #
- 101 [good evening!]
 ((In the chat window))
- 102 listo?
 # Ok? #
- 103 Es para que lo tengas en cuenta
 # that's what you keep it in mind #

In this extract we can notice that the teacher moves his feedback from grammar to communicative, this time teacher is trying to explain the semantic difference while using the expression “good night”. With this, the student not only clarifies the grammar issues but also the communicative one. For doing this, the teacher situates this expression in different contexts with the purpose of refining the use of the foreign language in the student. This is expressed in lines 97.

In line 99, the student accepts the suggestion done by the teacher about the correct use of the expression “good night” because she recognizes the hierarchical superiority of the teacher since he possess deeper knowledge of the language mainly in the use of farewell expressions. This phenomenon was also noticed by Fajardo (2013) who found that “The category “Teacher”/”Student” is implicitly dominant in the social relationship, although they are occasionally uttered in classroom talk”; taking this into account, it can be said that both virtual and non-virtual classroom environments are framed under similar social behaviors where the teacher is under control of the interaction and students follow directions as part of the learning process.

Conclusions

VLEs provide unique affordances and challenges for identity work, primarily due to the absence of physical presence and embodiment (Gee, 2003;



Dall'Alba & Barnacle, 2005). After doing this discourse analysis of a class mediated by a virtual environment, we conclude that it is important to recognize that clear aspects such as identity and IRF cycle are in the discourse, not only in the teacher, but in all the participants in order to reach the pedagogic purpose. IRF cycle is used not only to make corrections about grammar but to teach new linguistic expressions, and its correct use in the language. Also, it is important to remark that the IRF cycle has a remarkable role inside the second language classroom and in this case virtual tools help teacher to reinforce the feedback phase.

Although this class was developed in a virtual environment, managerial mode is the main characteristic presented by the teacher through the discourse, also using referential questions repeatedly to get the pedagogic purpose straight. We found that the situated identity is important in this kind of setting, because students negotiate their identity in order to accomplish the pedagogic purpose.

In this particular setting, teachers exercise their right to insist on the form of the reply provided by pupils and the students address their response to the teacher; the IRF pattern serves to reinforce situated identity and the institutional realities which it represents. This was noticed in other studies carried out in face to face settings like the one developed by Fajardo (2013) where he points out that “The teacher gains the right to decide which person will speak” in both cases the teacher is displaying his/her identity by managing and taking control of the class.

However, we can also say that in classrooms and virtual learning environments there are elements such as the teacher's agenda, the purpose of the class and even some emotional aspects framed in the interaction that determine the type of identity that the participants decide to assume. According to Giles (2016) “the development of teacher identities are mixed”, there is not just one identity presented, and they vary according to the situation. Virtual Environments allow having this because “Virtual Learning Environments can pose unique challenges in relation to the portrayal of identity and the development of a sense of belonging, partly because they rely primarily on discursive resources for communication” (Giles, 2016).

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