The Influence of Discourse on Language Acquisition

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Introduction

Discourse is a term becoming increasingly common in a wide range of academic and non-academic contexts. Within linguistics, discourse is often described as "language-in-use" or "socially situated text and talk". Discourse analysis is a vast area within linguistics, encompassing as it does the analysis of spoken and written language over and above concerns such as the structure of the clause or sentence (McCarthy 1991:32). Discourse analysis is a process in which the reader and listener's mind is working up on the linguistic features of the utterance to grasp the intended meaning of the writer or speaker. Even if the utterances or sentences are grammatically incorrect, discourse analysis allows us to grasp the intended meaning. It provides the main frame of reference for decision-making in language teaching and learning. Creating suitable contexts for interaction, illustrating speaker/ hearer and reader/ writer exchanges, and providing learners with opportunities to process language within a variety of situations. These are all necessary for developing the learning environment where language acquisition and language development can take place.

McCarthy (1991:5) suggests that "Discourse analysis is concerned with the study of relationships between language and the contexts in which it is used". This branch of linguistics deals with how people construct their ideas in a cohesive and coherent way in order to communicate their message by means of written and spoken texts. Context plays an important part in determining the meaning of the language used. According to Nuyts (1993:3), the appeal that speech act

theory had on linguistics could be primarily attributed to the fact that it did not consider language as a mere "isolated structural phenomenon", but rather, presented it as performing action within contexts.

When we use language, we do not necessarily do so in a random and unstructured way. Both spoken and written texts have various devices to unify the various aspects of utterances into a cohesive whole. Therefore, coherence and cohesion are considered as important elements of discourse analysis.

Coherence

Van Dijk (1985:108) suggests that "a discourse is not just a set of sentences but an ordered sequence, with conventional constraints on the possible orderings if it is to be meaningful and if it is to represent certain fact structures, for example, episodes." In other words, it does not only consist of a series of clauses; it forms a unified, coherent whole. Van Dijk (1985:108) also claims that "A discourse is not only the ordering of propositions in a discourse constrained by rules of meaningfulness; their content, that is, their conceptual meanings and reference, is also subject to certain principles or rules. In general, then, the proposition sequence underlying an acceptable discourse must satisfy various conditions of what is called coherence. McCarthy (1991:26) believes that "coherence is the feeling that a text hangs together, that it makes sense and is not just a jumble of sentences." It minimally requires a sender (writer, speaker), a receiver (reader, listener), and a message that is being communicated. Both the sender and receiver normally have the implicit agreement that the message being communicated is coherent.

Cohesion

Cohesion refers to the ties and connections existing within texts that link different parts of sentences or larger unit of discourse. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976:274) "lexical cohesion is the effect achieved by the selection of vocabulary." The right selection of vocabulary is achieved through shared knowledge of the speaker and the listener, for example:

A: Don't tell me that you're still going there?
B: You should come with me as well, it's really fun.

Lexical cohesion is created by reiteration and collocation. At one end of the scale, reiteration is a form of lexical cohesion that involves the repetition of a lexical item, while at the other end of the scale, the use of a general word refers back to a lexical item, and a number of things in between the use of synonym, near synonym, or superordinate. An instance of reiteration may be the same word, a synonym or a near synonym, a super ordinate or a general word. For example: there is a boy climbing that tree. The boy is going to fall if he doesn't take care.

Collocation is the way in that particular words tend to occur or belong together. Holliday and Hasan define collocation as "Two lexical items sharing the same lexical environment/appearing in similar contexts (Halliday and Hasan, 1976:278)".

For example, we can say "Meals will be served outside on the terrace, weather permitting", however, we can not say "Meals will be served outside on the terrace, weather allowing". In this example, only the word "permit" collocates with the word "weather" and the word "allow" does not. The cohesive effect does not depend so much on any systematic relationship as on their tendency to share the same lexical environment, to occur in "collocation" with one another. In general, any two lexical items having similar patterns of collocation – that is, tending to appear in similar context – will generate a cohesive force if they occur in adjacent sentences (Halliday & Hasan 1976: 286).

Deixis

Understanding the meaning of certain words and phrases in an utterance requires contextual information. Deixis concerns the use of expressions within some utterance to refer to some portion of discourse that contains that utterance (including the utterance itself) (Levinson,1983:85). Carter and McCarthy (1997:13) describe deixis as either pointing backwards and forwards in a text or to a wider "extra textual" context and they claim the latter is especially prevalent in conversations. Words, that have

a fixed semantic meaning, but have a denotational meaning that constantly changes depending on time and/or place, are deictic. The use of person deixis, such as, I, my, you, together with the place deixis, here and there, serve to locate and identify the persons and places being talked about within a particular spatiotemporal context. e.g. "You come here most of the Fridays then do you?"

Discourse Markers

A discourse marker is a word or phrase that is relatively syntax-independent and does not change the meaning of the sentence, and has a somewhat empty meaning. According to Schiffrin (2001:54) "discourse markers are expressions like *well, but, because, oh, y'know*, which function (as) cognitive, expressive, social and textual domains". Halliday & Hasan (1976:236) suggest that "a set of cohesive devices (reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction) help create a text by indicating semantic relations in an underlying structure of ideas. A range of expressions (including but not limited to conjunctions) conveys conjunctive relations. Whereas most cohesive features establish cohesion through anaphoric or cataphoric to the text, conjunctive items express certain meanings which presuppose the presence of other components" (Shiffrin&Tannen&Hamilton, 2001: 55). For example;

A:Yeh, Let's get back, because she will never get back.

B:But, what if she did?

Turn Taking

When humans want to use language to communicate orally with each other, they are faced with a sort of coordination problem. "Avoidance of collision is one obvious ground for this coordination of actions between the participants. In order to communicate efficiently and successfully, they will therefore have to agree to follow certain rules of interaction"(Oreström & Bengt, 1983, p. 18). One such rule is that no one monopolizes the floor but the participants take turns to speak. This important concept in linguistic interaction is called "turn-taking".

Usually people find it very difficult to talk and to listen simultaneously and therefore there must be some means of allocating turns so that for some limited period one person alone holds the floor and acts primarily as the listener, contributing only briefly to provide support, encouragement, and feedback. However in emotional conversation, one speaker may interrupt another, this interruption is called turn stealing. The right to speak in interaction is referred as 'the floor'. Rules of turn taking tells us how to 'get the floor', to 'hold the floor', and to 'give up the floor'. Getting on the floor holding the floor and giving up the floor, involves a whole series of signals some of which can be rather subtle. The most common signal that someone is ready to give up the floor is pausing.

Generally the person who is speaking has the most rights over the floor. They usually can hold the floor for as long as they want, can select who will speak next and can constrain the next turn by controlling the topic. However, spoken discourse, especially conversation, is possibly the form of discourse that has a rather complicated nature in terms of analysis given its apparently unstructured nature. The number of interlocutors may vary and the use of non-verbal expressions can add to the difficulty of its analysis, given the use of 'talking turns' as McCarthy (1991:69) calls them, and the real possibility of interruptions and interjections, that nonetheless are part of discourse. However, the speaker may also wish to keep the turn or control the turn employ by following certain strategies such as:

• The speaker does not pause at the end of the sentences.

• The speaker makes their sentences run on by using connectors like and, then, but etc.

• The speaker places their pauses at points where the message is clearly incomplete.

Ellipsis

McCarthy (1991: 43) defines ellipsis as "the omission of elements normally required by the grammar which the speaker or writer assumes are obvious from the context and therefore need not be raised.

Ellipsis is distinguished by structure having some missing elements".
Here are some examples of ellipsis:

• Joan bought some carnations and Catherine some sweet peas. (elliptic item: *brought* in second clause).
• Have you been swimming? - Yes I have. (elliptic item: *been swimming* in the second clause).

Context

One of the main goals of using the language is to gather information about our surroundings and to share it with other members of our community. This information is what enables us to actively interact within our community and, thus, what contributes to guiding our social actions. Discourse analysis considers the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used and is concerned with the description and analysis of spoken and written interactions. Context entails the situation within which the communicative interaction takes place and thus, it influences the way we understand the language. Halliday (1991:5) describes context as "the events that are going on around when people speak and write" (Celce-Murcia&Olshtain, 2000:11). Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000:11) analyse the relationship between language and context and suggest that discourse may depend primarily on contextual features found in the immediate environment and be referred to as context-embedded; or it may be relatively independent or context (context-reduced or decontextualised) and depend more on the features of the linguistic code and the forms of discourse itself".

In communicative exchange both parties rely on their prior knowledge that may or may not be shared. Shared knowledge is perhaps most important for everyday communicative interactions to establish meaningful exchange between participants who are familiar with each other. However, we do not only communicate with people whom we share our personal lives. We also need to participate in wider interaction networks that extend from the individual into a complexity of connections with the groups and institutions that constitute the society that we live in. And, in this case, we cannot rely on particular instances of shared knowledge and experience. We need to refer to more general and conventional assumptions and beliefs that define what is accepted as normal or typical in respect of the way reality is structured and to the conduct of social life. For discourse where context is not readily available, those interpreting the discourse have to rely more heavily on the text itself and on their prior knowledge. Relevant prior knowledge can create the appropriate context within which it is possible to understand and properly interpret the discourse (Celce-Murcia and Olshtain, 2000:12). This common knowledge of shared experience and conventionally sanctioned reality can be called "schematic knowledge".

A schema is a mental representation of a typical instance. Schema theory suggests that people understand new experiences by activating relevant schemas (also called 'schemata') in their minds. They then assume, unless there is evidence to the contrary, the new experience conform to their schematic representation. Schematic processing allows people to interpret new experiences quickly and economically, making intelligent guesses as to what is likely, even before they have explicit evidence (Cook, 1997:86). For instance, in an international language classroom students are all expected to know that when the bell goes off, they can take a break despite coming from different backgrounds.

However, a lack of shared schemata can sometimes make comprehension difficult or lead to misunderstanding. This problem arises when there is a sociocultural difference between the listener and the speaker. A classroom environment that mainly consists of teachers and students from different backgrounds may sometimes lead to communication difficulties. For instance, students from a country where lateness is occasionally tolerated may develop a tendency to be late for their classes. This behavior may not be tolerated in certain other cultures and thus, may lead to communication problems between the teacher and students. Being sensitive to the sociocultural behaviors and skillfully combining linguistic knowledge and pragmatic knowledge can help to overcome this problem. Ability to

activate relevant schemata for the context will contribute towards better comprehension especially in situations where information is not easily comprehensible due to factors that could create a communication barrier, such as cultural relativity or the cognitive inaccessibility of information.

Discourse Analysis of Course Book Data

Course book materials used in classrooms are based on structured forms of the language to provide learners with a clear framework and explicit learning activities. They are generally comprised of ready-made texts and tasks that are graded to match the level of students. The created activities are designed to improve learners' cultural and contextual understanding to help them cope with difficulties they may encounter in real life situations.

However, those ready-made texts and activities may demonstrate different discourse features than that of a real conversation. We may expect to see an absence of hesitations, repetitions and other normal non-fluency features. Syntactically, a created dialogue would be much more regular and lexically it would be likely to be more varied.

Below is an extract of a created dialogue from the new edition of the New Headway Intermediate course book;

<S01> Alan, How long have you lived in London?

<S02> Ah, fifteen years.

<S01> And do you like it here?

<S02> Sure I like it..but London is one of those cities that you love and hate at the same time.

<S01> So, first..what do you hate?

<S02> Oh, the usual big city things..the crowds, the dirt..the traffic, and of course the underground..it's so expensive compared with the subway in New York.

Alan, an American actor, who lives and works in London is interviewed about life in London. The created dialogue above mainly consists of meaningful ordered sequences that represent structural facts and create coherence in the text. It does not contain any overlaps or interruptions and it is mainly based on a structured turn-taking pattern that does not allow non-fluency features and structural errors. The dialogue takes place in a context that both speakers are familiar with. This prior knowledge allows them to exchange information smoothly and helps the speakers to establish a coherent dialogue, e.g. "<S01> So, first.. What do you hate?/ <S02> Oh, the usual big city things".

Coherence is achieved through syntactical features such as the use of deictic, anaphoric and cataphoric elements or a logical tense structure, as well as presuppositions and implications connected to general world knowledge. The example below demonstrates how deictic elements are applied to a daily conversation:

<S01> And do you like it here?

<S02> Sure I like it.

It is also possible to identify other discourse features in the text that allow the speakers to achieve coherence. Those are references, substitutions, lexical cohesion, ellipsis and discourse markers. The following is an example of ellipsis, that is defined as a mark or series of marks that usually indicate an intentional omission of a word in the original text. Instead of saying "I have lived in London for fifteen years", the speaker says "fifteen years" and omits the beginning part of the sentence and conveys his message.

"<S01> How long have you lived in London?

 <S02>Ah, fifteen years".

The following is an example of endophoric reference that is defined as the language inside of the text in which the reference is found. The word "it" refers to "London" that is already mentioned in the text;

"<S01> Do you like it here?

 <S02> Sure I like it".

In the following example, we can see exophoric reference that

contrasts with endophoric reference. The word "those" refers to shared knowledge outside of the text. Both speakers activate their relevant schemata and interpret what the other speaker might have said.

"<S02> but London is one of those cities that you love and hate at the same time".

As it can be seen from the aforementioned discourse analysis, course book activities are designed to provide learners with well-formed and explicit structures. However, this may pose difficulties for learners to achieve sufficient understanding of genuine conversations. One of the main complexities of language learning through course books is that learners lack the exposure to natural conversational discourse features. Real conversations appear to be more chaotic, less structured and more spontaneous. As a result, this may lead to non-fluency features and false starts. Turn taking procedures may reveal spontaneity-interruptions, overlaps, increases in speed and volume by the person as they attempt to keep on "holding the floor". Equally the listener may attempt to interrupt by first grunting "mm" with an intonation which suggests doubt, disagreement or approval before entering the conversation at the first pause". Therefore, when learners are unexpectedly exposed to a genuine conversation between two English speakers, they may experience linguistic difficulties with the authentic discourse.

During the process of foreign language acquisition in the classroom, the teacher is likely to control the language used since the language available is restricted (provided by the course book and the teacher). This may also cause certain communication difficulties since some students may not possess the necessary prior knowledge to effectively respond to their teachers. Au (1998) suggests that giving students the ownership of the curriculum and valuing the experiences they bring with them may help teachers to overcome this problem. According to Au "knowing students and getting acquainted with their culture should allow teachers to modify their academic discourse to more appropriately address and respect the primary discourse of their own students".

As a result, students will be given more opportunities to share family and community experiences and develop a sense of belonging to their new community. Expressing and defending their beliefs and opinions and questioning others' ideas helps learners to recognize, clarify, and repair inconsistencies in their own thinking that will eventually allow them to establish more effective communication within and outside of their own community.

Discourse Analysis of Authentic Data

The transcript below is an extract from a real conversation between two English teachers. Speaker one starts the conversation with a question, which involves a few hesitations and pauses. He takes the floor again in the third line by repeating what speaker two has said in the second line. In the fifth line, he does not give up the floor for a while and gets interrupted by the speaker two. During this dialogue, it is possible to see a number of attempts to take or keep the floor by the two speakers. The dialogue also involves a number of repetitions, hesitations, overlaps, interruptions, non-verbal cues which we did not see in the scripted dialogue above. In fact, these are the elements that tell a genuine conversation from a scripted dialogue. As we mentioned above, natural conversations are spontaneous, less organized and contains grammatical and structural errors.

Although, we may come across several non-fluency features, both speakers have the implicit agreement that the message being communicated is coherent throughout the text. Discourse markers are relatively syntax-independent and do not change the meaning of the sentence; "It was like a shock, y'know, like everybody was". In the following example, we can see how the speaker one uses linguistic references such as "deixis, endophora and exophora" to form semantic links in the dialogue simply by referring to what the speaker two has said; "<S02>I like the customer service, Mm.. <S01>That was one of my, That was one of my culture shocks, actually, like, when I came here, like, it was like a shock, y'know, like everybody was.[<S02> It is, It's a huge shock,] I think so, yeah". In order to form such semantic links in

conversation, speakers need to invoke their prior knowledge to create the appropriate context within which it is possible to understand and properly interpret the discourse. In both dialogues we can see speakers invoke their prior knowledge that allows them to establish a meaningful utterance.

Transcript of a Real Conversation

<S01>So, Mm...How long have you been living in er Japan?

<S02>Ah, For about six years.

<S01>For about six years? [<S02>yeah] So, yeah, mm. Wow, six years, it's quite a long time.[<S02>yeah] yeah, isn't it. So...Mm...So, what do you like..about er...this country?

<S02>Ah, I like the food..definitely.[<S01>huh huh] I like the customer service, Mm...

<S01>Customer service, right?(laughter)..yeah...That was one of my, That was one of my culture shocks, actually, like, when I came here, like, it was like a shock, y'know, like everybody was.[<S02> It is, It's a huge shock,] I think so, yeah.

Conclusion

In this paper, I presented a thorough analysis of various discourse features and their application to a course book material and authentic text. Following the analysis, I emphasized the implications of both materials on learners' language acquisition. I believe that in order to achieve the desired outcome in language acquisition, some level of authenticity should be involved in the materials used in language classrooms. This will allow learners to build sufficient understanding of the authentic discourse features of the language acquired. However, structure is also needed to establish a well-rounded path for learners. Finally, the teacher, who is the ultimate provider of information in the

classroom, should also obtain a profound understanding of the needs and expectations of the learners. This will not only help learners to study in a more relaxed environment but also minimize the linguistic difficulties they face and prevent potential cultural misunderstandings.

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言語習得上の言説の影響

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論文要旨

　本研究の目的は、実際にネイティブスピーカーが行う対話とレベル別テキストに教材として掲載されている対話を検証し、談話機能の妥当性という観点から相違を明らかにすることにある。

　本論ではこの2つにかんし、詳細な談話分析を行った。とりわけ今回は、談話に見られる言語学的関連性とその効果に重点を置いている。

　この研究の結果、教材にとりあげられている言い回しは、時として学習者が「生の英語」に触れる機会を提供しそびれてしまい、一方で実際に「生の英語」を用いた教材を使用すると学習者の言語習得に複雑さを加味しうることが明らかとなった。

　よって学習者の言語習得力を伸ばすためには、この両方をバランスよく活用させていくことが推奨される。