

Original Paper

Study of Classroom Discourse of English-Major Interns from the Perspective of Functional Linguistics

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Received: March 20, 2023

Accepted: April 5, 2023

Online Published: April 13, 2023

doi:10.22158/elsr.v4n2p37

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/elsr.v4n2p37>

Abstract

Based on the qualitative analysis of classroom discourse of English-major interns, this study investigates the characteristics and causes of classroom discourse of English-major interns in underdeveloped areas in western China from the perspective of functional linguistics, and endeavors to explore the reasons for these characteristics from social context. The results show that the classroom discourse of English-major interns has the following three characteristics: 1) code-switching is common; 2) the types of clauses are mainly imperative sentences, declarative sentences with rising intonation; 3) teachers talk a lot and dominate the conversational turn. Code-switching reflects the shortage of target language input and outdated teaching methods in English class; and the second characteristic just echoes with existing research; teacher's dominance over conversational turn indicates interns' imitation of their instructors' teaching mode, hoping to construct their teacher identity. This paper puts forward relevant suggestions to the above-mentioned problems, including adopting a research-guided teaching in elementary education, reinforcing the supervision of college internship instructors, diversifying the way interns constructing their teacher identities.

Keywords

classroom discourse, English-Major interns, functional linguistics, teacher identity

1. Introduction

Teacher's classroom discourse involves languages used by teachers in classroom teaching activities (Li et al., 2010). Whether based on the teaching concept of "teaching centered" or "student centered", teacher's classroom discourse is the main way to convey information to students, and it is also an important means to regulate students' classroom behavior. For foreign language teachers, classroom

discourse is also an important source of student language input and output (Hu, 2007; Liu & Zhang, 2010). There are significant differences in classroom discourse among novice teachers, proficient teachers, and expert teachers (Li et al., 2010). The study of classroom discourse helps to understand the real situation of classroom teaching, and thereby improve classroom teaching. It has attracted widespread attention in academic community and scholars have conducted in-depth research on classroom discourse in college English class (Hu, 2007; Zhou & Zhou, 2002; Chen, 2019), classroom discourse in middle school English class (Liu & Zhang, 2010), and pre-service teacher's classroom discourse (Liu, 2006), with the methods like corpus linguistics (Liu & Zhang, 2010), discourse analysis (Li, 2007) and pragmatic identity construction analysis (Chen, 2019).

However, previous studies have mostly focused on the classroom discourse of college English teachers, and a few have focused on the classroom discourse of English normal students, in which the research objects also come from normal universities in developed regions of China. In view of this, this study focuses on the classroom discourse of English normal students during their educational internship in rural primary and secondary schools in underdeveloped regions of western China. Using a synchronic approach, it explores the characteristics and causes of classroom discourse of English major interns, with a view to providing useful reference for the cultivation of English major normal students.

2. Theoretical Background

Unlike formal linguistics, which focuses on describing linguistic forms, functional linguistics starts from the study of meaning. Humans use language to talk about experiences, or to facilitate the generation and occurrence of experiences. According to functional linguistics, the most basic purpose of any communication is to "give" and "demand" a certain "commodity" or "service". Therefore, language has four basic functions, namely, giving information, demanding information, giving goods and services, and demanding goods and services. These four functions do not have a one-to-one relationship with declarative clauses, interrogative clauses, and imperative clauses in the clause system (Chang, 2001). For example, in addition to providing information, declarative clauses may also express a tone such as commanding, demanding information or services. The study of language functions cannot be separated from the language context. Discourse is constrained by context, and it also constructs context and the identity of the speaker. Teachers often use different mood and voice expressions to implement the same discourse function in classroom. In the teaching process, normal school students not only need to use classroom discourse to implement teaching activities, but also construct and strengthen their own teacher identity by imitating the classroom discourse of guidance teachers in internship schools. Analyzing classroom discourse of normal school students from the perspective of functional linguistics can help us more clearly observe the process of teacher identity construction of normal school students, understand the role of language in teacher identity construction, and enable normal school students to grow up better and faster.

Identity could influence, restrict or mould discourse, and discourse reflects identity; there is a close relationship between the two (Chen, 2018). In the process of daily communication, people often speak in terms of people, things, and the environment (He, 2015). Systemic Functional Linguistics summarizes these various aspects that affect people's discourse as registers, including three aspects: field, tenor, and mode. Field refers to an event that is occurring or being discussed, tenor refers to the social and role relationships between participants, and mode refers to the communication channels and language functions of a language. These three aspects have an important impact on meaning and are the specific content of the concept of register in Systemic Functional Linguistics. Discourse can construct identity, which in turn affects discourse. This two-way process of influence enables us to understand the construction process of interns' teacher identity by observing the characteristics of teachers' classroom discourse.

3. Methodology

This study mainly focuses on the classroom discourse of English normal students during their educational internship. Using the theories of interpersonal function and textual function in Systemic Functional Linguistics, it analyzes the modality and mood system of English-major interns' classroom discourse, as well as the corresponding relationship between mood use and discourse function in English-major interns' classroom discourse.

The study begins with an analysis of video recordings of English normal students during the school trial lecture stage, which generally conforms to the content requirements of teacher education courses. During their school studies, the normal students participating in the research systematically took courses on the Teacher Education Platform of their departments, such as pedagogy, psychology, and teacher education skills. Among the professional platform teacher education courses, optional courses include English subject curriculum and teaching design, middle school English textbook research, and educational internships. After entering the internship school, the students received about a week of pre-internship training. About four weeks after the students entered the internship teaching, the interns recorded the English class after obtaining the permission of the original class teacher, informing and obtaining the consent of the entire class. This study uses a corpus based qualitative research method to record five English classes of three English major normal students from a western normal university in an internship school in China, collects and transcribes the classroom language of the interns a total duration of 3 hours, 15 minutes, and 24 seconds, and builds a corpus to analyze and annotate the interpersonal and textual systems of the interns' classroom discourse. The failure to adopt the method of video recording is due to the fact that some internship schools do not have the hardware for video recording. The second reason is that audio format can reduce the impact on interns' classroom teaching and maximize the restoration of the real classroom. Researchers are not allowed to enter the interns' classroom for recording, and the recording work is completed by the interns themselves.

Based on the annotating results, qualitative analysis was conducted using identity construction theory. For some ambiguous language, the subjects would be contacted to identify. The main problem to be solved is to analyze the characteristics of normal school students' classroom discourse, especially interpersonal functional characteristics, so that we can understand and describe the characteristics of normal school students' classroom discourse and analyze the discourse construction process of normal school students' teacher identity in the classroom.

4. Characteristics of English-major Interns' Classroom Discourse

After data collection, the author annotated and analyzed the material. For special situations such as unrecognizable classroom discourse fragments, the author conducted open interviews with the interns. Through the sorting and analysis of classroom discourse of English-major interns, the following research findings are obtained from this study.

4.1 Code Switching Is Common

There are different definitions of code switching in linguistics. Mackay Hornberger believes that when there are two or more languages in a speech community, the phenomenon that speakers often switch from one language to another is code switching. Code switching and code mixing have little significance in distinguishing between clauses (Wang & Huang, 2004). Therefore, the code-switching phenomenon pointed out in this study is different from intra sentence code mixing, they are not differentiated above clauses. English-major interns frequently switch languages in classroom teaching based on students' academic level and teaching content. As a target language, the frequency of use of English in the teaching process varies greatly due to different students and their personal habits. As shown in Example 1.

(1) 复习一下昨天的内容啊, 不然就(忘了). One two start !

(Review yesterday's content, otherwise (you will forget it). One two start !)

Example 1 is the intern T1's classroom discourse at the beginning of class, leading students to review what they have learned in the previous lesson. “复习一下昨天的内容” is an imperative sentence that explains the purpose of the next teaching activity, using its native Chinese language. However, after this Chinese sentence, the teaching instruction uses the target language English. Similar examples of such code mixing frequently occur in the classroom of interns. It is worth noting that interns begin to issue English teaching instructions after the second half of a Chinese sentence, which is an incomplete sentence. After transcribing all the teaching recordings, the study found that the low frequency of using the target language is a relatively common problem. There are three main reasons for this problem: 1) interns lack confidence in the classroom language they master and have anxiety about using the target language; 2) students have limited receptivity and cannot understand commonly used classroom language; 3) the interns are imitating the teaching mode of their instructors in the internship school. Through interviews with interns, the study found that the reasons for using mother tongue rather than target language in large numbers are the latter two. Teachers in the internship school do not often use full English in their daily teaching, and they do not often use English except for specific situations such as reading words, texts,

and reviewing grammar examples. Teachers' choice of teaching language is largely due to their belief that students have a poor foundation and cannot understand. The less teachers use the target language for teaching, the less students are willing to listen to the target language, and over time, a vicious circle has formed.

During the process of learning the teaching methods of the local teachers in the internship school, interns also attempt to make some changes, such as using target language teaching, increasing students' classroom interaction, and so on. However, it was found that the effect was not satisfactory. For example, an intern once tried to use the task-based teaching method with higher student participation. In an interview after class, he summarized as follows:

When I was about to leave, I had a lesson in the recording room. At that time, I used the task-based teaching method. After the entire lesson, the students were all confused, and they felt that what they really needed was grammar knowledge. However, I spent the entire lesson on a few activities telling the six elements of a story. I used the phrases in the article to retell the story, and they also cooperated, but they just didn't adapt to this kind of classroom content and were a bit confused, I also felt a bit confused after class. (Interview T2)

It can also be seen from this that students in internship schools are not familiar with the already widely used task-based teaching method and are accustomed to the grammar translation teaching method of their teachers. However, this situation is not an isolated case according to the collected materials. The reason why students feel that grammar is more important than language use is related to the teaching focus in middle school, as well as to the assessment and evaluation of English subjects in the basic education stage.

4.2 The Main Types of Clauses Are Imperative Sentences, Declarative Sentences + Rising Tones, but There Are Significant Personal Differences

One of the important aspects of interpersonal meaning is the speaker's judgment on the success and validity of the proposition he or she is speaking about, or the obligations he or she demands from the other party in the command, or the personal will he or she wishes to express in the proposal. This part of interpersonal meaning is realized by the grammatical system of mood and modality. Under the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics, people believe that the communication objects can be divided into two categories: goods/services and information; there are only two basic tasks in verbal communication, namely, giving and demanding. The intersection and combination of these two communicative variables form the four most important speech functions: statement, question, command, and offer. Generally, "offer" can be embodied in multiple moods, including declarative mood, interrogative mood, and imperative mood. This common manifestation is known as the consistency of speech function (Halliday, 2004). However, there is not a simple one-to-one correspondence between speech function and mood system. A speech function can be embodied by different moods, and a mood can also embody more than one speech function. For example, declarative mood can also embody "questioning" or "commanding"

functions in different contexts (Chang, 2001), which is called a metaphorical expression of speech function.

In classroom teaching, interns generally use declarative and interrogative mood in teaching instructions and classroom directives, which are manifested in declarative, imperative, and interrogative sentences in discourse. English major interns often use imperative sentences to express the verbal function of commands or questions in the classroom. At the same time, in terms of modality, high modal verbs are used to demonstrate the authority of teachers. As shown in Example 2.

(2) Let's watch and learn, 再不要说话.

(Let's watch and learn, don't talk anymore.)

"Let's do" in English often means that the speaker and the listener do something together. Using this sentence pattern when teachers assign teaching activities to students can weaken the mandatory imperative tone and alleviate the unequal power relationship between teachers and students. However, in Example 2, the Chinese sentence "再不要说话", which follows the English deixis, uses strong imperative mood to express the verbal function of command, while highlighting the dominant position of teachers over students in the classroom.

Systemic Functional Linguistics believes that there is a predictive relationship between context and language use (Wang & Huang, 2004). On the one hand, we can infer the roles of both parties in communication and their intention to regulate interpersonal relationships from language use; and on the other hand, we can explain some language phenomena, including the use of code switching, based on the tone analysis of situational context. This is the dialectical relationship between context and discourse that Hasan talked about, that is, context is reflected in the linguistic choice of discourse, and the linguistic choice of discourse constructs context. There are significant differences in the classroom discourse of interns in the context of trial lectures in colleges and in the actual classroom teaching in internship schools. The first reason is that the context in which classroom discourse is used has changed. Halliday's discussion of the three variables of register is relatively abstract, and some systemic functional linguists have attempted to further describe the tone through precision scales (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Hasan, 1985). Hasan once talked about social distance between people, and also divided the roles of communicators into discourse roles, social roles, and participant roles. Later, in a more systematic discussion of register, Hasan proposed that tone can be described in three aspects: role, control or power, and social distance (Halliday & Hasan, 1985). The relationship between teachers and students is not entirely consistent with the relationship between interns and students. Teachers have considerable authority in front of students, especially in the elementary education stage. Specifically, it is manifested in the control and domination of teachers over the classroom, and the use of classroom language by teachers. As far as interns are concerned, they assume the role of teachers in the classroom, but they do not have the same authority over teaching activities as formal teachers in terms of control or power. Compared to teachers, the social distance between interns and students is closer than that between teachers and students. Interns are more willing to demonstrate their affinity and willingness to negotiate.

However, from the perspective of research results, interns have quite strictly applied the discourse characteristics and methods of instructors in internship schools and have not made any adjustments based on their interns' identity and roles.

The results have shown that interns' standardized instruction frequency and language for classroom teaching discipline are significantly prominent in teaching activities, and they use imperative sentences to express commands and to perform other functions, while consolidating their role as classroom managers. For example, in a teaching recording of about 35 minutes in T3, the classroom discourse that asking students “不要吵” reaches seven times, and all of them use imperative or interrogative sentences.

(3) T:再不要说话

(Don't talk anymore.)

T:再不要说话

(Don't talk anymore.)

T:先别吵

(Don't make any noise.)

T:别吵

(Don't make any noise.)

T:嘘----, 再别吵

(Shhh, don't make any noise anymore.)

T:别吵!

(Don't make any noise!)

T:说够了没?

(Is that enough?)

(T3)

The reasons for this phenomenon are various. One is that the fluidity and instability of interns' identities make students believe that interns are not real teachers, and they do not gain recognition from students in the construction of their teacher identities; the second is that students in the basic education stage are more active in thinking and relatively active in the classroom; third, interns lack corresponding experience in controlling the teaching process. However, there is no doubt that this high frequency of classroom discourse due to classroom discipline is far from what we have observed in demonstration or observation classes. This also indicates that interns using classroom discourse like that of internship school instructors cannot necessarily construct their teacher identity.

4.3 Teachers Have a Large Amount of Discourse and Control Turns, with IRF as the Main Turn Structure

The characteristic of teachers' large amount of speech also exists in pre-training before internships, but the proportion is significantly higher in the classroom teaching practice of interns. Due to the lack of students' communicative and interactive activities, students' speaking time is significantly lower. Hu (2007) used the method of classroom recording to conduct a descriptive study of the discourse characteristics of excellent English teachers in their English classroom, these characteristics includes: 1) classroom speaking time is not entirely at the disposal of the teacher, while there is also time for students

to participate in conversations; 2) reference questioning is generally more than presentation questioning; the so-called demonstrative question refers to a question where the questioner already knows the answer, while the reference question refers to a question where the questioner does not know the answer. 3) most conversation structures are relatively complex, but IRF structures still account for a certain proportion; the so-called IRF conversation structure refers to the introduction of a topic by a teacher, followed by a response of a student, and then feedback from the teacher. 4) the proportion of verbal feedback is slightly higher than that of evaluative feedback; evaluative feedback refers to teachers' feedback that indicates whether students' answers are correct or not, focusing only on language forms and playing an evaluative role. In discourse feedback, teachers are concerned with the content of the answer, not the language itself. By comparing the discourse characteristics of excellent English teachers summarized and described by Hu (2007), the study found that the interns' English classroom discourse has some characteristics in terms of classroom speaking time, questioning methods, conversational structure, and feedback methods. In the interns' classroom in this study, the amount of discourse of interns is far greater than that of students. Moreover, more specifically, students rarely use English in the classroom, except for the procedural discourse or teaching content given by the teacher, which uses the teaching target language to answer. The reason is that the interns also use the target language less frequently in English classes. The IRF based turn structure also shows that interns' classroom discourse is dominated by evaluative feedback, which does not inspire or induce students' discourse feedback, or only exists at a smaller level. Such as the following example:

(3) Good morning class, sit down please. Last class we have learned certain structures about asking people's physical appearance. 那上节课呢我们已经学了关于询问人的相貌的一些句型。那我们首先来复习一下, 比如说问男的他或是女的她长什么样, 应该怎么问? **what** 开头的句型, 那比如说我们说, 男他或女她长的很高, 怎么说? **he** 或者 **she is tall**. 那矮呢? 那中等身材呢? **of medium...height...** (Interview T1)

(Good morning class, sit down please. Last class we have learned certain structures about asking people's physical appearance. Last lesson, we have learned some sentence patterns about asking people about their appearance. Let's first review, for example, asking a man what he or she looks like, and how should we ask? For example, when we say that a man or woman is very tall, how do we say? He or she is tall. What about being short? What about medium height? Of medium... height...)

This is T1's speech at the beginning of classroom teaching. After the end of the English greeting, he uses the target language to briefly review the content learned in the previous lesson. However, in the specific review session, the interns all use Chinese to express teaching instructions, and occasionally the English language appears as fragmented words or phrases. In addition, feedback from the intern is achieved by repeating student responses ("he or she is tall"). IRF turn frequently appears in the interns' classroom discourse.

5. Conclusion

Through the analysis of classroom discourse of English normal students during their educational internship, this study reveals the characteristics and causes of classroom discourse of English-major interns in underdeveloped areas in western China. It has the following characteristics: 1) code switching is relatively common; 2) the main types of clauses are imperative sentences, declarative sentences + rising tone; 3) the interns have a large amount of discourse, and the turn structure is mainly IRF. Some of these features exhibit strong regional characteristics, such as widespread code switching and low frequency of target language use. The reason is that students' English proficiency is relatively low, and teachers' teaching methods differ from those of developed regions. Other characteristics, such as declarative sentences expressing teaching instructions, teacher's controlling turns, and the frequency of IRF mode, are similar to classroom discourse of normal school students in other regions of China.

In economically underdeveloped areas, the level of education development is like that of local economic development, and there is considerable room for improvement. Normal students majoring in English, as teachers who have mastered certain advanced teaching methods and advanced teaching concepts, have not been able to influence or to help English classroom teaching in underdeveloped areas. Instead, they have been rapidly transformed to adapt to the educational and teaching methods of internship schools, hoping to construct their own teacher identity through mechanical imitation of teaching in internship schools.

For the classroom discourse of English-major interns in underdeveloped areas, the priority is to increase the proportion of target language in classroom discourse, and the second is to reform the teaching model of English in elementary education, so that advanced and efficient teaching methods in teaching research can be implemented and developed in the English classroom of primary and secondary schools in underdeveloped areas. In the teaching guidance of interns, it is necessary to improve the dual tutor system. Professional teachers in normal universities should also shoulder the responsibility of gatekeeper of internship quality, reform teaching models and methods, and thus help interns with their professional development and professional identity construction.

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