



Socio Discourse Analysis of Oral Communication Among Undergraduate Students Of Selected Tertiary Institutions In Nasarawa State

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Date of Submission: 03-07-2024

Date of Acceptance: 15-07-2024

Abstract

This study delves into the socio discourse analysis of oral communication among undergraduate students, focusing on the influence of social and cultural factors on student interactions. By examining discourse patterns, social relationships, power dynamics, and social identities, the research sheds light on the complexities of student communication. Methodologically, participant observation, audio recordings, transcription, and coding were employed to analyze the data. Findings reveal insights into discourse competence, power dynamics, and social identities, offering recommendations for further research and practical implications for enhancing student communication skills and relationships.

Keywords: Socio Discourse, Oral Communication, Tertiary Institutions, Power Dynamics, Discourse Patterns.

I. Introduction

A socio discourse analysis of oral communication among students would examine how social and cultural factors influence the way students interact with each other through spoken language. Linguistics concerns itself with the fundamental questions of what language is and how it is related to the other human faculties. In answering these questions, linguistics considers language as a cultural, social and psychological phenomenon and seeks to determine what is unique in language, what is universal, how language is acquired, and how it changes. Linguistics is

therefore one of the cognitive sciences; it provides a link between the humanities and the social sciences as well as education and hearing and speech sciences.

Man has been referred to as the talking animal. He lives in a society and, for his daily existence, needs at least three primary activities, namely: eating, sleeping and talking (Ghosh: 72). Talking presupposes the use of language which is purely a human means of communication. Man communicates, interacts and socialises with other people in the society primarily through the medium of language. His thoughts and ideas find expressions in language, thus language has become an indispensable tool for his existence and survival.

Fromkin and Rodman (8) assert that, "The possession of language more than any other attribute distinguishes humans from other mammals." Afolayan (3) points that:

Language is the unique property of the human being. The development of man, be it intellectual, moral, political, social or economic depends very largely on the instrumentality of language. It is with language that man recognises himself and socialises with others; understands, masters and utilises the environment around him. Man is incapable of sustained thinking without the instrumentality of language.

In an attempt to define the concept, language is found to be such a complex phenomenon that defies a monolithic definition. It is better described than defined. However, some scholars have attempted some definitions. Sweet,



for instance, defines Language as ‘the expression of ideas by means of sounds combined into words (4). Words, he says, are combined into sentences and this combination answering to that of ideas into thoughts. Sweet’s definition limits language to verbal communication but this can be elaborated to include both verbal and non-verbal expressions. Human beings do communicate through such verbal cues as a nod of the head, a wink of the eye, facial expressions, gestures and other body movements.

Bloch and Trager (5) define language as ‘a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group co-operates. This definition highlights the fact that language is a vocal as well as a social activity and that linguistic symbols or words are arbitrarily though conventionally fixed. Sapir (6) defines language as ‘a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. These organs, he further states, are in the first instance and they are produced by ‘the so-called organs of speech’.

II. Statement of the Problem

Nigerian students of diverse sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds appear to be commonly guilty of certain grammatical errors (or deviations) steaming from an infelicitous use of some cohesive features in their spoken or written English.

In making the above assumptions, however, the researcher is conscious of and guided by Barnteins’ summation of Whorf’s hypothesis about Language and reality, “(Whorf) particularly where he refers to the fashions of speaking, frames of consistency, alerted me to the selective of grammar together with the patterns of semantics and thus cognitive significance (4).”

Gumperz and Hymes (1964), all closely studied the relationship between the linguistic repertoire of social groups and the socio-cultural variables that influence their performance in concrete speech act situations. Kaplan (1960) further demonstrates through a study of written discourse how patterns of text development are related to the cultural patterns of thought.

III. Research Questions

Based on the aim and objectives above, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

- i. What are the dominant discourse patterns among students in informal conversation?
- ii. How do social relationships and group dynamics influence oral communication among students?

- iii. How do power dynamics and social identity in shaping students interaction?
- iv. What are pedagogical implications of the students’ discourse on the standard of English in a multilingual society

IV. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The major aim of the study is to undertake a discourse analysis of oral communication among students of selected tertiary institutions in Nasarawa state. The study thus seeks to:

- i. Investigate the speech patterns of the undergraduates of selected tertiary institutions in Nasarawa state, with a view to finding out whether their speech patterns follow this observed trend.
- ii. Analyse how social relations (e.g. friendship, cliques) and group dynamics (e.g. peer pressure, social norms) influence communication.
- iii. Examine power dynamics (e.g. dominance, subordination) and social identity (e.g. gender, ethnicity in shaping students’ interaction.
- iv. Examine the pedagogical implication of the students’ discourse on the standard of English in Nigeria

V. Significance of the Study

According to Sweet (14), "our strongest and most direct associations ought to be with the spoken language; for in speaking we must have all our associations between ideas and words in perfect working order." He further asserts that if we first get a good knowledge of the spoken form of a foreign language and proceed to learn its literacy form, "we shall be in exactly the same position as regards relative strengths of associations as natives themselves...we shall think in the spoken language because our associations are directly with it."

VI. Scope of the Study

This study concerns discourse analysis, and it is restricted to the Nigerian speakers of English, mainly undergraduates. More specifically, the Nasarawa State community of undergraduates defines the extent to which the study is carried out. Particular areas within the campuses of tertiary institutions were marked out for the designed interviews and recording of the students’ conversations.

VII. Literature Review

7.1 The Concept of Discourse Analysis

There is an indication from the introduction that the study of language goes beyond



studying the sentence. By analyzing these, a socio discourse analysis can uncover the complex social dynamics and cultural influences that underlie oral communication among students, providing insights into how language use reflects and shapes social relationships and identities. As much as a sentence can be studied, an entire discussion comprising a number of sentences can be exposed to some form of analysis, and this presents the idea of **Discourse Analysis**; which may be defined as a method for analyzing how particular features of language help in the interpretation of texts in their contexts. Discourse Analysis looks at a picture wider than the sentence, which makes it different from other kinds of grammatical analysis, which tend to concentrate on smaller units like phrases and sentences.

According to Barton (2), Discourse Analysis investigates features of language at a lower and specific level of the sentence structure and can investigate those features of texts and contexts as large and diffuse as genres and socio-cultural world views. The analysis can be practiced with emphasis on either the linguistic structure or contextual function, though some analysis make use of a combined design of structure-functional methods. In any case, discourse is the study of units of language and language use consisting of more than a single sentence, but connected by some system of related topics.

The study of discourse is found very important in the discipline of linguistics. Its importance, as some authors would say, "Stem from the fact that individual sentences commonly include elements whose interpretation can only be determined with the help of information in preceding utterances" (O' Grady & Katamba, 197). The authors provide for us an example in the following text:

A little girl went for a walk in the park. While *there*, *she* saw a rabbit. Since *it* was injured, *she* took *it* home.
In that particular passage, each of the italicized words depends on information encoded in a preceding sentence for its interpretation.

There are a great many approaches to Discourse Analysis from many researchers practicing it in different areas of study. Even in the area of language studies, a number of traditions exist, from where Discourse Analysis was developed. Most of these were concerned primarily with linguistic use, which defines language in function. In Anthropological Linguistics, for instance, Dell Hymes (1972) is noted to have worked on the Ethnography of Communication in

which he suggested that Discourse Analysis look at the ways language in different communicative events functions to create and reflect aspects of culture, including world view. In another example, Barton (2004) writing on oral narratives by young African-American speakers cites an early work in sociolinguistics by William Labov. According to him, Labov suggested that Discourse Analysis should look at the ways oral language is structured within units that are larger than a sentence.

7.2 The Nature of Oral Communication

Communication involves talking to somebody or, generally, to let one know what one or another has on the mind. To communicate is to exchange information, news, ideas, etc, with somebody or to make your ideas, feelings, thoughts, etc, known to other people so that they understand them. It is the process of doing so that is referred to as communication; the giving and/or seeking of information within and among individuals or groups. In the words of Crystal, communication is "the transmission and reception of information (a message) between a source and a receiver using a signaling system" (89). It is more popularly observed to be all about one person or group of persons sending a message or information to another person or group.

When two or more individuals converse as against written communication, a specific type of communication is identified as oral. An analysis of the communication of this kind is more specifically described as conversational. Considering the original meaning of the word 'conversational', Conversational Analysis would be regarded as an analysis or a study of interaction or a talk-exchange, involving two or more persons. It is concerned with trying to make sense out of an activity where two or more individuals take turns at speech. Much of the sociolinguistic research conducted on the Nigerian linguistic situation has been limited to isolated features of grammar, phonology and semantics which is far too inadequate to warrant a fair conclusion on the communicative competence or proficiency level of the Nigerian Speakers of English. Test materials often used do not reflect genuine realities concerning the way Nigerian users of English connect their thoughts and propositions across sentences and sequences in a consistent and logical manner within a discourse that is capable of being interpreted coherently. Accordingly, the researcher observes that many students in the tertiary institutions appear to 'lack' the ability to create coherent discourse. This is because they lack



knowledge of the cohesive devices that allow for information focusing, organising, relating, developing, contrasting, emphasising and concluding ideas in a cogent, logical and coherent manner in spoken or written discourse. The study thus seeks to investigate the degree of discourse competence of the second language users of English. It is hoped that this study will of both theoretical and sociolinguistic significance to our understanding of English as a second language in Nigeria which previous studies have consistently stressed.

Apart from facilitating intra and inter-ethnic communication among the literate population of Nigeria, English is an official language; the language of government and administration; the language of education. Since, it is the dominant language of modern technology, it is accordingly the language through which Nigeria participates in scientific and technological development in the world. As an international language, indeed, a world language, English affords Nigerians the opportunity to transact business with the rest of the world. Considering the undeniably important role English plays in Nigeria, it is, therefore, no longer a foreign language, in the technical sense of the word, in the Nigerian environment. It is a second language. It is, as Ikara (8) puts it, "the common heritage of the British and Nigeria since 1900."

VIII. Methodology

The population for this study was the over twelve (12) thousand undergraduate students of Nasarawa State University, Keffi; nine (9) thousand undergraduate students of Federal University of Lafia and eight (8) thousand students of the College of Education, Akwanga for the 2023/2024 academic session. A sample size of 477 respondents formed the basis of study. The respondents were randomly selected reflecting the departments, and faculties in the institution were made up of 186 students from Nasarawa State University, 171 from Federal University, Lafia and 120 students from College of Education, Akwanga resulting in 39.0 percent, 35.8 and 25.2 percent respectively.

1. Participant Observation: Observe student interactions in naturalistic settings (e.g., cafeteria, hallways, student lounges) for 2 hours a day, 3 times a week, over 4 weeks.
2. Audio Recordings: Record 10 focus groups of 4-5 students each, discussing topics like

academic experiences, social events, and current events.

3. Transcription and Coding: Transcribe recordings verbatim, then code using sociodiscourse analysis frameworks (e.g., Critical Discourse Analysis, Conversation Analysis).

Students from the selected departments who were willing to participate in the study were randomly selected as the sample. The data collected were analyzed through the use of mean standard deviation.



IX. Results and Discussion of Findings

Findings in table 1 shows that the respondents have limited Knowledge in the area of functional vanities of English Language. The results show close addresses (x = 2.92), Reaction signals (x=2.90), acronyms (x=2.79)

9.1 Table 1: Discourse patterns among students in informal conversation

S/N	Discourse Patterns	Anticipated	Actual	Not Aware	Mean	SD
1	Discourse markers	165(34.6)	214(44.9)	98(20.5)	2.15	0.23
2	Contrast forms	343(71.9)	119(24.9)	15(3.1)	2.68	0.532
3	Phrasal verbs	105(81.9)	281(58.9)	91(19.1)	2.03	0.673
4	Acronyms	195(40.9)	77(16.1)	9(1.9)	2.79	0.450
5	Ellipsis	183(38.4)	239(50.1)	43(9.0)	2.33	0.643
6	Code-switching	438(91.8)	259(54.3)	35(7.3)	2.33	0.614
7	Reaction signals	152(31.9)	31(6.5)	8(1.7)	2.90	0.354
8	Close addresses	441(92.4)	286(60.0)	39(8.2)	2.26	0.608
9	Tenses	286(59.9)	35(7.3)	1(0.2)	2.92	0.278
10	Subject verb agreement	284(59.5)	176(36.9)	15(3.1)	2.53	0.561

Source: field survey 2024; SD = Standard Deviation

9.2 Table 2: Social relationship that can shape students' oral communicating with one another and group dynamics

S/N	Social Relationship	Major	Minor	Not a Factor	Mean	SD
1	Trust and comfort	332(69.6)	116(24.3)	29(6.9)	2.63	0.60
2	Peer group dynamics	303(63.5)	160(33.5)	14(2.9)	2.59	0.55
3	Social status	270(63.5)	176(36.9)	31(6.5)	2.49	0.62
4	Emotional support	147(30.8)	246(31.6)	84(17.6)	2.14	0.692
5	Conflict resolution	137(28.7)	234(49.1)	106(22.2)	2.07	0.725
6	Language and slang	142(29.9)	202(42.3)	133(29.9)	2.02	0.770
7	Cultural exchange	178(37.3)	220(46.2)	79(16.6)	2.21	0.716
8	Body Language	140 (29.4)	230 (48.3)	107 (22.4)	2.07	0.729
9	Negotiation strategies	118 (24.7)	217 (45.5)	142 (29.8)	1.95	0.750
10	Interrupting pallerms	97 (20.3)	279 (58.5)	101 (21.2)	1.99	0.762

Source: field survey 2024; SD = Standard Deviation

9.3 Table 3: Power dynamics and social identities in shaping students interaction

S/N	Power Dynamics	Always	Occasionally	Seldom	Never	Mean	SD
1	Gender	344(70.0)	126(26.4)	12(2.5)	5(1.0)	3.64	0.558
2	Ethnicity	301(63.1)	135(28.3)	35(7.3)	6(1.3)	3.51	0.695
3	Social identity	290(61.6)	133(27.9)	35(7.3)	15(3.1)	3.46	0.774
4	Dominance	61(54.7)	148(31.0)	55(11.5)	13(2.7)	3.45	0.800
5	Subordination	230(48.2)	159(33.3)	62(13.0)	26(5.5)	3.35	0.884
6	Peer group	228(47.8)	161(33.8)	55(11.5)	33(6.9)	3.20	0.912
7	Linguistic diversity	268(56.1)	140(29.4)	51(10.7)	18(3.8)	3.19	0.832
8	Class room settings	267(55.9)	142(29.8)	42(8.8)	26(5.5)	3.35	0.808
9	Teaching styles	237(49.7)	143(30.0)	68(14.3)	29(6.1)	3.33	0.916
10	Technology	276 (57.8)	149 (31.2)	33 (6.9)	19 (4.0)	3.40	0.798
11	Langrage styles & codes	275 (57.6)	146 (30.6)	39 (8.2)	17 93.6)	3.40	0.800

Source: field survey 2024; SD = Standard Deviation

9.4 Table 4: Pedagogical implication of students' discourse on the standard of English in amultilingual and multicultural society like Nigeria (n=239)

S/N	Pedagogical implications	Regularly	Sometimes	Never	Mean	SD
1	Code –switching	120 (25.2)	145 (30.4)	212 (44.5)	1.86	0.811
2	Pidgin	158 (33.1)	178 (34.4)	141 (29.9)	2.04	0.805
3	Subject verb agreement	88 (18.4)	158 (33.1)	231 (48.5)	1.74	0.764
4	Pronunciation	198 (41.5)	164 (34.4)	115 (24.1)	2.14	0.790



5	Mother tongue interference	98 (20.5)	149 (31.2)	230 (48.2)	2.05	0.985
6	Phrasal verbs	196 (41.1)	116 (24.3)	150 (31.4)	2.31	0.843
7	Wrong articles	260 (54.5)	110 (23.1)	101 (21.2)	1.98	0.809
8	Gender	156 (32.7)	132 (27.7)	193 (40.5)	2.53	0.846
9	Informal	315 (66.1)	120 (25.2)	52 (10.9)	2.08	0.690
10	Grammatical errors	204 (42.8)	132 (27.7)	141 (29.6)	2.31	0.838

Source: field survey 2024; SD = Standard Deviation

X.

XI. Conclusion

This study contributes to our understanding of how students communicate in everyday interactions, shedding light on the social and cultural factors that shape their discourse. Findings can inform strategies for improving communication skills, promoting inclusive learning environments, and enhancing student relationships.

Indeed, it could be observed that Nigerian undergraduates as second language users of English do not seem to use the appropriate and correct stylistic varieties of the language when they engage in communicative interactions. They seem to be oblivious of the functional variations and varieties inherent in the language; consequently, they tend to use formal varieties in informal situations and vice versa. The English they speak has been variously described as 'bookish', 'stilted' and having an 'archaic written flavour'.

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