

The Discourse Analysis of Conversations in Free Discussion Classes of Iranian Students

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Abstract

Discourse analysis considers both language forms and language functions in social interactions. This field of study provides meaningful insights into how breakdowns in communication are overcome in language acquisition by comparing and analyzing how native speakers and foreign speakers use language socially. The purpose of this paper is to study the discourse analysis in free discussion classes in Iranian students and the methods for improving their conversation skills. This is a quantitative study that 50 teachers were selected randomly. The questionnaire was the instrument to collect the data, so the questionnaires were distributed among the teachers. In discourse analysis of conversations in free discussion classes, we have found three strategies that affect the students' conversation skills. Results suggest that the teachers believe that choosing topics by students, pair work tasks, and finding new methods for expanding the students' vocabulary knowledge by teachers affect the students' fluency and accuracy.

Keywords: Discourse analysis, conversation analysis, free discussion classes, fluency, accuracy

INTRODUCTION

Conversation analysis, as a branch of discourse studies, is a way which enables researchers to investigate the structure and social interaction processes among people. Peräkylä (n.d.) explains that conversation analysis approaches not only focus on talk, but also brings in focus all the nonverbal factors of interaction in its domain. In conversation analysis studies, the data may consist of videos or audio recordings which show a naturally occurring interaction (Peräkylä, n.d.). From conversation analysis perspectives, the social actions of humans are to large extents structured and organized. When interacting, the interlocutors have to obey the rules and conventions that make their speech meaningful to the other party.

The study of discourse analysis therefore provides students with the opportunity to acquire areas of knowledge and understanding which not only enhance intellectual development but which are also relevant for a range of professional careers. Discourse analysis can be divided into five categories as far as method is concerned, and Wu

(2010) specifies these categories as structural analysis, cognitive analysis, social cultural analysis, critical analysis and synthetic analysis (Wu, 2010). Discourse is regarded as an interactional activity by social cultural analysis; also the social function of language is emphasized in this field (ibid.). This method, Wu asserts, besides analyzing word and sentence form and meaning, analyzes social and cultural factors related to discourse; this method is rooted on the conception that an individual within a society wants both to transfer information, express ideologies or thoughts and to engage in specific social activities with other individuals in different social settings. Wu continues that discourse analysis mainly focuses on aspects of form, meaning, interaction and cognition, whereas social cultural analysis highlights the role of context.

The term "conversation analysis" (CA) is by now quite firmly established as the name for a particular paradigm in the study of verbal interaction that was initiated in the 1960s by Harvey Sacks, in collaboration with Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson. In CA the focus is on the procedural analysis of talk-in-interaction, how participants systematically organize their interactions to solve a range of organizational problems, such as the distribution of turns at talking, the collaborative production of particular actions, or problems of understanding. The analysis is always based on audio or visual recordings of interaction, which are carefully transcribed in detail. The research should be "data-driven"—in the sense that concepts and hypotheses should be based on careful consideration of the data, recordings and transcript, rather than drawn from theoretical preconceptions or ideological preferences. While originally conceived from a sociological perspective, CA gained a wide-spread reception in many parts of the world by researchers from a range of disciplinary backgrounds, including: psychology, anthropology, communication studies and a variety of linguistic sub-disciplines. As part of this development, there now are quite a number of introductory texts, both as book chapters and books (such as Psathas, 1995; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008; Mazeland, 2003). In the current volume, Robin Wooffitt has written one which is quite distinctive in its confrontational character.

The term "discourse analysis" is much less clear than "conversation analysis," or rather, it is used in many different ways by different people, in different countries and in different contexts. On the one hand, it can serve as an overall blanket term for any and all efforts to analyze "discourse," texts, talk and so forth. By reviewing the discourse analysis of conversations in free discussion classes, we have found that students are not so fluent and they have made some mistakes in speaking because of stress. The reasons for these mistakes and lack of fluency in students is the stress. In order to solve this problem, we offer three strategies. First, the students should choose the topics because some topics may be boring in their view. Second, pair work tasks should be set by the teacher in order to increase their participation. Third, the teacher should find the new methods for expanding the students' vocabulary knowledge.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Antaki et al (2003) point out, published papers on discourse are frequently flawed by under-analysis of discourse data. Discourse is thus understood as "a form of

collaborative social action" (Jaworski & Coupland, 1999, p. 49). Stubbs (1983) believed that the analysis of discourse - frequently defined as "language use above the level of the sentence" provides students with the opportunity to study the meaningful production and interpretation of texts and talk.

Kramsch (1985) viewed classroom discourse along a continuum extending from pedagogic to natural talk poles. Nunan (1993) maintained that classroom discourse as a distinctive type of discourse has features including unequal relationships in turn taking, nominating topics, etc. Conversation analysis is the study of "talk-in-interaction," and analysts are interested in the sequential organization of discourse including both everyday and institutional talk (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008).

Conversation analysis, as a social science research tradition, has gained much interest and increasing application in the fields of language learning and language teaching over the last ten years (Seedhouse, 2005). There are now a range of publications which explore this area, like teaching languages for specific purposes; language teaching materials design; language proficiency assessment; language classroom interaction; NS-NNS (native/non-native speaker) talk; code-switching; and teacher education (Seedhouse, 2005; Sert & Seedhouse, 2011).

While conversation analysis is normally treated as belonging to a category distinct from other discourse analysis approaches because of its theoretical assumptions, traditions, and data sources (Antaki et al., 2003; Wooffitt, 2005), Discourse analysis and conversation analysis share the common goal of attempting to understand and interpret social reality as it is discursively (re)produced by interactants in context. Brown (2003) suggest that communicative language strategies can help learners communicate fluently with whatever proficiency they happen to have and at any given time, including the ability to use speed, pauses, and hesitations efficiently.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Discourse analysis

Since discourse introduction to modern science the term 'discourse' has taken various, sometimes very broad, meanings. In order to specify which of the numerous senses is analyzed in the following thesis it has to be defined. Originally the word 'discourse' comes from Latin '*discursus*' which denoted 'conversation, speech'. Thus understood, however, discourse refers to too wide an area of human life, therefore only discourse from the vantage point of linguistics, and especially applied linguistics, is explained here. There is no agreement among linguists as to the use of the term discourse in that some use it in reference to texts, while others claim it denotes speech which is for instance illustrated by the following definition: "Discourse: a continuous stretch of (especially spoken) language larger than a sentence, often constituting a coherent unit such as a sermon, argument, joke, or narrative". Tarigan (1987, p.2) said that Discourse is the language above level of sentence. In other words, it is larger unit than sentence or clause. He also classifies discourse into some types namely prose, poems, conversation and text.

Discourse analysis is concerned with the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used. It grew out of work in different disciplines in the 1960s, including semiotics, psychology, anthropology and sociology. Discourse analysts study language use in written texts of all kinds and spoken data from conversation to highly institutional forms of talk.

The term discourse analysis is very ambiguous. It can refer to the linguistic analysis of naturally occurring connected spoken or written discourse. Roughly speaking, it refers to the attempts to study about the organization of language above the sentence or above the clause, and to study larger linguistic unit, such as conversational exchanges or written texts. It follows that discourse analysis is also concerned with language use in social contexts and in particular with interaction or dialogue between speakers.

Grammatical forms and phonological forms are examined separately. Both of them are unreliable indicators of function, when they are taken together and looked at in context, so that we can come to some decisions about function. So decision about communicative function solely is the domain of grammar or phonology. Discourse analysis is not entirely separate from the study of grammar and phonology but discourse analysis is interested in a lot more than linguistic forms.

The function of discourse analysis is to interpret grammar appropriately of a sentence or dialogue. It shows more the relationship between the speakers' dialogue and what sort of rules they are following as they converse to one another because every situation will have their own formulas and conventions which we follow; for example interview for job, buying things on shops, conversation in phone, informal discussion in classroom, etc. They will have different ways of opening and closing the encounter, different role of relationships, different purposes and different settings. Discourse analysis is interested in all of these different factors and tries to account for them in a rigorous fashion with a separate set of descriptive labels from those used by conventional grammarians.

Discourse analysis is a primarily linguistic study examining the use of language by its native population whose major concern is investigating language functions along with its forms, produced both orally and in writing. Moreover, identification of linguistic qualities of various genres, vital for their recognition and interpretation, together with cultural and social aspects which support its comprehension, is the domain of discourse analysis. To put it in another way, the branch of applied linguistics dealing with the examination of discourse attempts to find patterns in communicative products as well as and their correlation with the circumstances in which they occur, which are not explainable at the grammatical level (Carter 1993, p. 23).

The first modern linguist who commenced the study of relation of sentences and coined the name 'discourse analysis', which afterwards denoted a branch of applied linguistics, was Zellig Harris (Cook 1990, p. 13). Originally, however, it was not to be treated as a separate branch of study – Harris proposed extension of grammatical examination which reminded syntactic investigations. "The emergence of this study is a result of not only linguistic research, but also of researchers engaged in other fields of inquiry,

particularly sociology, psychology, anthropology and psychotherapy “ (Trappes-Lomax 2004, p. 133). In 1960s and 1970s other scholars that is philosophers of language or those dealing with pragmatics enormously influenced the development of this study as well. Among other contributors to this field the Prague School of Linguists, whose focusing on organization of information in communicative products indicated the connection of grammar and discourse, along with text grammarians are worth mentioning (McCarthy 1991, p. 6).

A significant contribution to the evolution of discourse analysis has been made by British and American scholars. In Britain the examination of discourse turned towards the study of the social functions of language. Research conveyed at the University of Birmingham fruited in creating a thorough account of communication in various situations such as debates, interviews, doctor-patient relations, paying close attention to the intonation of people participating in talks as well as manners particular to circumstances. Analysis of the factors essential for succession of decently made communication products on the grounds of structural-linguistic criteria was another concern of British scholars. Americans, on the other hand, focused on examining small communities of people and their discourse in genuine circumstances. Apart from that, they concentrated on conversation analysis inspecting narratives in addition to talks and the behavior of speakers as well as patterns repeating in given situations. Division and specification of types of discourse along with social limitations of politeness and thorough description of face saving acts in speech is also American scholars' contribution (McCarthy 1991, p. 6).

The range of inquiry of discourse analysis not only covers linguistic issues, but is also concerned with other matters, such as: enabling computers to comprehend and produce intelligible texts, thus contributing to progress in the study of Artificial Intelligence. Out of these investigations a very important concept of schemata emerged. It might be defined as prior knowledge of typical situations which enables people to understand the underlying meaning of words in a given text. This mental framework is thought to be shared by a language community and to be activated by key words or context in order for people to understand the message. To implement schemata to a computer, however, is yet impossible (Cook 1990, p. 69).

Discourse analysts carefully scrutinize universal circumstances of the occurrence of communicative products, particularly within state institutions. Numerous attempts to minimize misunderstandings between bureaucrats and citizens were made, resulting in user-friendly design of documents. The world of politics and features of its peculiar communicative products are also of concern to discourse analysts. Having carefully investigated that area of human activity scholars depicted it as characterized by frequent occurrence of face saving acts and euphemisms. One other sphere of life of particular interest to applied linguists is the judicature and its language which is incomprehensible to most common citizens, especially due to pages-long sentences, as well as peculiar terminology. Moreover, educational institutions, classroom language and the language that ought to be taught to enable learners to successfully comprehend both oral and written texts, as well as participate in real life conversations and produce

native-like communicative products is the domain of discourse analysis. Last but not least, influence of gender on language production and perception is also examined (Renkema 2004, Trappes-Lomax 2004).

Conversation analysis

The examination of oral discourse is mainly the domain of linguists gathered at the University of Birmingham, who at first concentrated on the language used during teacher – learner communication, afterwards altering their sphere of interest to more general issues. However, patterns of producing speech characteristic of communities, or members of various social classes within one population were also of ethnomethodologists' interest. A result of such inquiries was discovering how turn taking differs from culture to culture as well as how standards of politeness vary. In addition, manners of beginning discussions on new topics were described (McCarthy 1991, p. 24).

What is more, it was said that certain characteristics are common to all societies, for instance, indicating the end of thought or end of utterance. The words that are to point the beginning or the closing stages of a phrase are called 'frames'. McCarthy (1991:13) claims that it is thanks to them that people know when they can take their turn to speak in a conversation. However, in spite of the fact that frames can be noticed in every society, their use might differ, which is why knowledge of patterns of their usage may be essential for conducting a fluent and natural dialogue with a native speaker. Moreover, these differences are not only characteristic of cultures, but also of circumstances in which the conversation occurs, and are also dependent on the rights (or, rank') of the participants (McCarthy 1991, p. 13).

Apart from that, it was pointed out that some utterances are invariably interrelated, which can enable teachers of foreign languages to prepare learners adequately to react as a native speaker would. Among the phrases whose successors are easy to anticipate there are for instance: greeting, where the response is also greeting; apology with the response in the form of acceptance or informing – and acknowledging as a response. Such pairs of statements are known as adjacency pairs. While the function of the reply is frequently determined by the former expression its very form is not, as it depends on circumstances in which the conversation occurs.

The primary focus of research in Conversation Analysis is talk rather than language. Talk is understood to be an occasion when people act out their sociality (Schegloff, 1968). The emphasis within CA on the social can be traced historically to its emergence within the discipline of sociology in the 1960s. In the decades since, it has become cross-disciplinary. CA scholars can now be found working not only within sociology, but also within anthropology, social psychology, communication studies, linguistics, and applied linguistics. Within these disciplines CA has always remained a minority, if not marginal, interest. The reason for this can be seen partly in the nature of the object of enquiry. Talk is a complex activity, where language (and other paralinguistic and visual semiotic systems), cognition, and sociality meet. Its study can thus be seen as being located somewhere in the no man's land between the disciplines of linguistics,

psychology, and sociology/anthropology. Despite, or perhaps because of, this position, its importance and influence has gradually grown over recent decades as the isolation of the various social sciences has, at least in part, been eroded.

What makes talk a worthy focus of study for social scientists from such a diversity of backgrounds? Talk is, first, “what appears to be the primordial site of sociality” (Schegloff, 1968, p. 112). This is an important notion with its implication that it is talk above all else that allows us to transcend isolation and to share our lives with others. Talk is a crucial activity at the center of world-changing events: summit meetings between world leaders, policy decisions in board rooms of multinational companies, international conferences on environmental policies. It is also a means we use to do the mundane and routine in life: the exchange of greetings with a neighbor, polite chit-chat with workmates during a break, ordering a snack at lunch time. At the more personal level, the important life events of courtship, divorce, and death are pivotally talked through. Indeed they would not exist as specifically human activities without talk. Life’s experiences – the ordinary and the everyday, the profound and the momentous – are first and foremost experiences that are shared socially through the activity of talk.

It might be argued that talk is but one of a number of modes of communication and interaction available to humans, and so why privilege talk above, for example, writing or electronic modes? After all, virtually no complex modern activity – in politics, law, education, commerce, the electronic media, defense, finance, medicine, sport – can take place without written documents or computerized communication. The main question, however, is about which of these modes is most fundamentally human. Of these modes, only talk exists in all human social groups. Historically, and almost certainly phylogenetically, talk came first. And last but not least, talk is ontogenetically primary: children learn talk by mere exposure to their caregivers, whereas literate and electronic forms of communication need to be actively taught.

Whilst it can be argued that talk is the basic site of human sociality, this does not say why it may be of particular interest to applied linguists. Obviously language is a central and essential component of talk. This is made plain by talk on the telephone, which lacks the visual and the full audial channel, and is particularly heavily reliant on language. Also complex communication is impossible without language, even though, as all travelers know, certain basic needs can be met without language. One of the central concerns of applied linguists has been to understand how language is used for communication, therefore it follows that an understanding of how language is used in talk must be a central foundation for the discipline.

CA is one of a number of approaches to the study of spoken language. It differs from other approaches in respect to certain theoretical assumptions, methodological principles, and analytic techniques. In terms of the object of the enquiry, there are certain aspects of talk that have, from the beginning, been central to CA to a greater extent than for other approaches. The first of these is the notion of interaction. Whilst most approaches to discourse tend to focus on the speaker, in CA talk is seen as a jointly accomplished activity, with the listener and the speaker given equal status as co-

constructors of the emerging talk. Speakers design their contributions specifically for the recipients of the talk, and listeners in turn influence the speaker by the responses they give.

Each unit of talk builds upon the prior talk, and is understood by participants in light of their understanding of that prior talk. To take a simple example, if an utterance is understood by a listener to be a first greeting, then there are expectations that the most likely next utterance will be another greeting. It is in this way that talk is seen as co-constructed by listeners and speakers. The second and related aspect of talk that CA pays particular attention to is temporality. One outcome of this is a focus on two sides of the “time” coin: silence and simultaneous talk in conversation. Thus a silence can profoundly affect how some talk that precedes or follows it is understood, and simultaneous talk may be indicative of how speakers are understanding or feeling about each other. A consideration of time also opens up questions relating to how talk emerges moment by moment, is highly locally organized, with participants showing split-second sensitivities to others’ contributions. These are evident in, for example, the onset of a speaker’s turn, or a mid-utterance change in the formulation of an emerging turn.

These features of talk work together in complex ways. One of the major objectives of CA is to describe how the various sub-systems of talk combine, and to provide an account of the mechanics of talk. Such an account will then provide a focus not only on how speakers’ utterances are constructed prosodically, grammatically, and lexically – turn design – but also on how speakers overwhelmingly cooperate in an orderly taking of turns, and how these turns are sequenced into sets of actions, as adjacent pairs and more extended sequences.

One of the basic precepts of CA is that ordinary everyday conversation is most basic to human interaction and sociality. Other forms of talk, such as interviews in work or media settings, medical consultations, courtroom interaction, classroom talk, and any other forms of institutional talk, derive from and are a simplification of ordinary conversation in terms of the organization of the speech exchange system, and of the types of actions sanctioned. This is based on an observation that turn-taking, for example, is at its most complex in ordinary conversation, even though the basic rules of conversation are relatively simple. In institutional talk in media, educational, legal, medical settings, in contrast, there are usually constraints on who talks at what point, and who has rights to select next speakers. There are also usually constraints on what kinds of actions a particular participant may undertake, such as who asks the questions and who provides the answers. In the early years of CA there was therefore a focus on what was considered the more basic form of talk, namely conversation, deriving from an assumption that in order to understand how something works, the best place to start is with the most fundamental form of that thing. It was not until the 1980s that CA scholars began to turn their attention extensively to non-conversational forms of talk.

The prevailing belief was that it was necessary first to lay a certain descriptive foundation, before turning analytic attention to the derived forms of talk that are its institutional forms.

It can thus be seen that a basic claim in CA is that ordinary conversation is the default version of talk (and by implication perhaps of language too), and that all other forms of talk-in-interaction are derived from ordinary conversation, and are thus culturally and socially restricted. For example, modes of talk in education, in law, in the media, in medicine, are likely to be derived from local (cultural) needs and contingencies, and adaptations of talk will encompass these. The corollary of this is that ordinary conversation is likely, at least in many of its practices, to be universal. This latter claim remains to be demonstrated empirically, but on the basis of research so far, there are no compelling grounds to suspect that this view is wrong.

The problems with ethnomethodology as a rationale for CA can be highlighted by comparing it with phenomenology. One problem concerns the nature of the data CA employs. The slogan of phenomenology was 'Back to the Phenomena!'. And what was meant by 'phenomena' here were the mundane appearances of things as they are 'given' in our experience. These were the data from which investigation was to start. It is less clear, however, what the phenomena or data are in the case of CA. There are four possibilities: the features of the *particular conversational interactions* under study; *audio- or video-recordings* of those interactions; *transcripts* of those recordings; or the analyst-as-member's *interpretations* of the transcripts and/or recordings.

If the first position is taken, a problem that arises – at least in terms of the parallel with phenomenology – is that the details of conversational interactions are not directly accessible to us in the way that it might be claimed experiential phenomena are. Furthermore, Sacks and other conversation analysts specifically reject any reliance on intuitive or remembered data, insisting on the use of recording and transcription; because these provide for detailed, extended study, and the presentation of the data as evidence for readers of research reports.

If the second answer is given, we must note that recordings are not the same as the social interaction they record. They are selective. Much went on before they started and after they stopped. Furthermore, what is 'picked up' or 'in shot' is only part of a much wider realm of happenings. Sacks recognizes this, but claims that 'other things, to be sure, happened, but at least what was on the tape had happened' (Sacks, 1984: 26). But this is to assume that what is on the tape is analytically separable from what is not; an assumption that would be difficult to justify. Moreover, we do not relate to recordings in the same way that we orient to social interaction when we are participants in it. In analyzing recordings, we listen or watch as spectators (or, at most, in vicarious participation). This is heightened by the fact that we can slow down the recording, stop and replay it.

Next, if it is the transcripts that are treated as the data (and we should remember that the recordings are not usually available to readers of CA research reports), this neglects the fact that transcripts are themselves constructions (Atkinson, 1992; J.A. Edwards and Lampert, 1993; Lapadat, 2000; Ochs, 1979). Decisions have to be made about what to include and how to represent the talk; and these can affect readers' interpretations. Specific issues are: how to identify speakers (are they given numbers or names; and if names, real names, pseudonyms or role names; titles and surnames, or just first names;

is gender indicated; is any other information provided about speakers?); how is the speech to be represented (so as to match the sound or so as to capture as clearly as possible what is taken to be the message?); and how is the talk to be laid out on the page (in the form of a playscript, in separate columns for each speaker, or in some other manner)? In specific respects, different decisions about these and other matters will produce different data.

Finally, if the data are the analyst-as-member's interpretations of what was going on in the interaction, questions arise about the status of those interpretations.

On what grounds can we take them to be *members'* interpretations? And this links to the deeper problem of what a 'member' is a member of. The very nature of ethnomethodology appears to prevent any analytic specification of the boundaries of membership (Moerman, 1968; Sharrock, 1974), and thereby of what would (and would not) count as a member's interpretation of a recording or transcript. To try to specify this would be to rely on commonsense understandings as a resource, and to attribute substantive and distinctive psychosocial characteristics to members. After all, membership is itself an everyday practice (Payne, 1976). Furthermore, treating analysts-as-members' interpretations as the data involves a reliance on intuitions, not unlike that of some conventional linguists – even though these are interpretations of careful and detailed transcriptions.

A related problem concerns the very possibility of an analytic approach that is without presuppositions; in ethnomethodological terms, an approach that does not trade on unexplicated common sense assumptions and methods as resources.

Husserl never managed to solve this problem. What he proposes in his later writings is that, although there can be no presupposition less starting point, the outcome of phenomenological analysis will be a full explication of the presuppositions of the phenomenological project: a demonstration of their apodictic character (Elveton, 1970). And a presupposition less starting point looks no more possible in the case of ethnomethodology and CA than it was with phenomenology.

If they did not do this, then there would be no order to find. So, the fact that they do this not only makes society possible, it simultaneously makes a *science* of society possible. But the question that arises is: by whom are the constitutive practices that generate order observable? Or alternatively, though it probably amounts to the same thing, *how* are they observable? Is what is observable only observable to 'members'; in other words does it rely on 'members' methods'? Or is it observable in some more direct sense, so that analysts (and readers) can see the evidence without relying on those methods? If the first answer is given, it is clear that there cannot be a presupposition less starting point. If the second answer is given, some justification needs to be provided for what is an implausible claim in the light of twentieth-century philosophical criticism of direct perception, and of foundationalism more generally.

The argument that the process of conversation analysis can be self-explicating is no more convincing. Here, in doing the analysis, the researcher is simultaneously engaged in constituting the social order that he or she is claiming to document.

The threat of circularity looms. At best, CA could only be self-explicating if there were a finite and fixed set of members' methods. But it is not clear whether conversation analysts believe this, or what grounds they could have for doing so.

Furthermore, CA is not directed towards explicating its own rationale in the way that phenomenological philosophy is: it is intended to be a science rather than a philosophy; though, as will become clear in the next paragraphs, there are questions about its status in this respect.

A third issue is the question of the nature of the methods which ethnomethodology and CA claim to document. There have been attempts to clarify this, but these raise more problems than they solve (Coulter, 1983; Heap, 1979). For example, Coulter claims that some of the sequential structures that conversation analysts have identified, such as adjacency pairs, are synthetic *a priori* in epistemological status. He notes that no amount of evidence of unanswered questions could reasonably persuade us that answers do not follow questions, or that they follow some other kind of speech act. Rather than treating as counter-evidence cases that do not display this structure, at least those that are clearly not intended as snubs, we rightly judge them to be the product of incompetence on the part of participants, or the result of interactional accident or misunderstanding.

However, Coulter argues that while these structures are *a priori* – not susceptible to disproof by empirical evidence – this does not mean that they are immediately intuitable; and on this basis he claims that empirical data can play a role in their discovery. Coulter uses parallels with chess and mathematics to try to establish this point. He cites Vendler (1971, p. 255–6), who points out that when, in a game of chess, we see two pawns of the same color standing in the same column we can conclude that one of them must have taken an opposing piece in a previous move. And we know this not inductively, on the basis of observing what happens in many chess games, but because (given the rules of chess, and the assumption that these have been followed in this particular game) this is the only way in which this arrangement of pieces could have happened. However, while the empirical evidence cannot confirm this conclusion, since it is true *a priori*, the evidence may bring it to our attention. Without observing a game in which this arrangement of pieces occurred we might never have recognized the possibility. Vendler also offers an example from mathematics. There is a theorem that, for any n , the sum of the first n odd integers is equal to n squared. However, recognition of this fact, and the logical proof of it, were stimulated by a great deal of study of integers and their properties, rather than being deduced from the premisses of mathematics.

Now, the existence of *a priori* synthetic truths has been a controversial matter ever since Kant formulated the distinctions between *a priori* and *a posteriori*, and between analytic and synthetic, knowledge. Furthermore, Coulter's position has some important implications for the practice of CA. As he makes clear, it runs against the notion of proof employed by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974).

Discourse analysis and conversation analysis, differences and similarities

Let me turn now to Potter and Wetherell's approach to discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). This draws considerably on conversation analysis, and ethnomethodology. From these sources are derived a primary reliance on transcribed audio-recordings as data and a central concern with discourse as action. However, other influences have also been important, including the ethnography of communication, the philosophy of language, semiology and post-structuralism (Potter, 1996; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). And these have contributed to the adoption of a 'constructionist' orientation which is significantly different from the ethnomethodological approach of conversation analysis.

Like conversation analysts, Potter and Wetherell are particularly impressed by the fact that language-use is a form of action, and on this basis they specifically reject the representational model of language, whereby statements are held to correspond to phenomena that exist independently of them. However, whereas ethnomethodologists and conversation analysts adopt the Husserlian position that the objects to which language-use refers exist in correlation with it, constructionists place most emphasis on the generative power of discursive acts. In other words, the constructed character of social phenomena is taken to indicate that those phenomena do not have the kind of objective reality normally ascribed to them by everyday social actors and by most social scientists. In other words, a distinction is drawn between how social phenomena appear to people, as objective things existing in the world, and their true nature, which is that they are discursively constructed – and constructed precisely in such a way as to appear to be objective features of the world. Central here, then, is the notion of reification: the question of how social phenomena are discursively constructed to appear as non-discursively *given*.

Also distinctive is that discourse analysts see their approach as opening up a new way of studying issues that have long preoccupied social psychologists and sociologists, one which avoids the problems that other approaches face; rather than as radically respecifying the very focus of inquiry in the way that ethnomethodology does. A clear indication of this is discourse analytic work on racism and sexism (for example, Edley & Wetherell, 1995, 1997; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). However, it is also true of a more recent development out of DA: 'discursive social psychology' (see, for example, D. Edwards, 1997). Potter and Edwards describe this as 'an approach to social psychology that takes the action-orientated and reality-constructing features of discourse as fundamental', rather than being 'a social psychology of language' (Potter & Edwards, 2001, p. 2). Thus, attitudes are treated not as 'inner entities that drive behavior', but as evaluations that are part of discourse practices; in other words, they are seen as constituted in and through participants' ways of talking. What is involved here is a change in view about the ontological status of social phenomena: they are now to be treated as discursive products, and the focus of inquiry becomes how and why they are constructed in the way they are.

Moreover, in some DA, this is done against the background of a view of social life in which individuals and groups employ discursive strategies in pursuit of various

interests, and this is held to explain why the world is currently constructed in the ways that it is. Here the discursive constitution of the world comes to be located within a wider social philosophy or social theory, often largely implicit that provides the background in terms of which discursive strategies gain their significance. Following on from this, there is a concern with how reifying accounts can be undermined; and this forms a link with 'critical' approaches to social research. It is argued that the world can always be constructed differently. Thus, the mission of some discourse analysts is constantly to remind readers of this fact, and thereby to facilitate the process of change. At this point, DA comes close to critical discourse analysis DA also differs from CA in placing less emphasis on the distinction between an analytic and a practical orientation; in other words, they disagree about what is involved in a commitment to science. Whereas CA can be seen as relying on phenomenology in this respect, as in many others, or even on a form of 'primitive empiricism' (Lynch, 1993; Lynch & Bogen, 1994), Potter and Wetherell (1987) appeal to recent developments in the philosophy and sociology of science to justify their approach. These developments question not only older views about scientific method, but also any claim that there is a fundamental difference in orientation between science and other social activities.¹⁶ This move is reinforced by the influence of post-structuralism, which is taken to undermine any claim to scientific authority; such authority being treated as a strategy used in the exercise of power, one that is of especial significance in contemporary societies.

A further difference from CA is that sometimes discourse analysts' arguments for their focus on discourse are ethical or political in character. For constructionists, the attribution of substantive psychosocial characteristics to people must be avoided because those characteristics are discursive products rather than ontologically given properties of the people concerned. To ignore this, it is suggested, is to collude in essentialism: to take as fixed and beyond human control what is actually a product of human activity. Similarly, constructionists believe that reliance on people's accounts about themselves, or about social situations they have experienced, ignores the fact that these accounts are themselves constructs; and that quite different versions could have been provided. Behind this is a commitment to recognizing, and perhaps even celebrating, the diversity or creativity of interpretation.¹⁷ So, from the constructionist point of view, discourse analysis not only captures something important about the social world, but also plays a key ethical and political role in showing how social phenomena are discursively constituted: it demonstrates *how* things come to be as they are, that they could be *different*, and thereby that they can be *changed*.

DA, like CA, involves a reflective turning back on our experience of the world; but in the case of DA this is not done from a separate analytic standpoint, it is done as a participant rather than as a spectator.¹⁸ Implicit here is a notion of ethical or political authenticity: we must always remain aware that the world is a discursive construction, that we are ourselves constantly engaged in constituting it, and of the ethical obligations which are held to follow from this. In some ways, we might say that constructionism is existentialism to ethnomethodology's phenomenology.

THE AIM OF FREE DISCUSSION

Discussion is one of the most efficient and beneficial ways of practicing oral communications freely with the major purpose of cooperation and relationship improvement among the learners. Whenever learners talk in the classroom and use the language individually, purposefully, and creatively, they are participating in a discussion (Ur, 1981).

Dunbar (1996, cited in Fay, Garrod, & Carletta, 2000) highlights the importance of discussion and claims that it is through discussion that the most important decisions are made. According to Richards, Platt, and Weber (1985), there are four different kinds of discussions, mainly based on the teachers' amount of control. The first type is recitation which is totally structured, arranged, and completely controlled by the teachers. Guided discussion is less structured in comparison to recitation, and reflective discussion, in which the participants have reflective and critical thinking, is the least structured one. Finally, it is in small group discussion that the learners have the most autonomy and responsibility. According to Ur (1981), the most advantageous and successful types of discussions are those that lead to the most possible amount of learners' participation. They are widely motivating and appealing with interesting topics and have both a challenging and success-oriented nature. Fay et al. (2000) refer to group discussions as unstructured conversation made of different numbers of participants. Depending on the purpose of discussions, different group sizes are appropriate. Small groups are more advantageous when all the learners' opinions are important and have an influential role; however, if the aim of discussions is to inform all the learners about a particular opinion, the large groups are more preferable.

In addition to group size, topic is an important and effective issue in the progress of the discussions. Certainly, if the participants have some knowledge about the topic, they can handle the language better (Zuengler, 1993). It is recommended that the topics and materials be tangible, i.e. close to the life of the learners. In this case, they will help the learners to use and activate their background information and experiences appropriately (Ur, 1996). According to Jamshidnejad (2010), lack of a safe topic for discussion can be an obstacle in L2 speaking. He mentions that unfamiliarity with the topic is harmful for both speakers and listeners. He recommends free topic discussions which will be beneficial for the learners. However, Hatch (1978) believes that although at the beginning the learners are only comfortable with known topics, they can gradually go beyond this boundary through some practice. In fact, all the learners need to become familiar with different topics in order to be successful speakers.

Considering discussion as an activity, Oradee (2012) conducted a study on the effects of three different communicative activities, i.e. discussion, problem-solving, and role-playing on the learners' oral proficiency and their perception of these three activities. Forty-nine students at a secondary school in Thailand took part in this study. They were categorized in small groups which according to the researcher increased their self-confidence, enjoyment, self-monitoring, support, help, and consequently, the participation among the learners and, on the other hand, decreased their fear of making

mistakes while speaking. The results of his study indicated that these activities were effective in oral proficiency improvement, and the learners' had positive attitudes toward them.

The results of another study conducted by Katchen (1995) about group discussions revealed that since one student or one group was not the focus of the teacher's attention for a long time in a discussion activity, the pressure to speak was not high; however, this kind of activity required spontaneous speaking so that those who were brave enough spoke, while others spoke little or remained silent.

Clearly, the significant role of both discussion and oral presentation activities (Thornbury, 2005) requires the teachers' attention to the learners' perception of the two activities (Gentry et al., 2002). Moreover, these two focused activities, i.e. oral presentation and free discussion, which are two problematic and difficult activities and seem to have a lot of opposite features (Jordan, 1997; Thornbury, 2005), are not analyzed comparatively which is the purpose of this study.

SPEAKING SKILLS

One of the most important goals of teachers is that to enable learners to use English for communication. According to many theories speaking skill can be improved by games, role play, etc. which evidence shows that speaking should happen in activities and in a group (Oradee, 2012). Students have a lot of problems at their primary level they want to speak but when they go to class as they do not feel learn thing (Chastain, 1988). Students are able to convert their thought and their speaking. Every learner could not understand none native speaker not at all. For improving second language skill, you should practice more. First students improve their general vocabulary and after that they should listen to simple sentence to complex sentences. Students should read simple story ad sometimes memorize it. With listening and speaking student should be more confident (Chastain, 1988).

When you read a book, story and magazines aloud, it can help you more. When you practice, your fluency would be better too. According to Hedge the term fluency has two meanings: the first which is the ability to link unit of speech together with facility and without strain or in opportunities slowness undue hesitation and purpose a second, more holistic sense of fluency that of natural language use which is likely to take place when speaking activities focus on meaning and its negotiation when speaking strategies are used and when over correction is minimized (Hedge, as cited in Celce-Murica, 2001, p. 104). We should encourage students to take responsibility of their own learning. We do not encounter learner with heavy enforcement, they should encounter with simple enforcement and then do complex. In this article a learner mean children and adult. Another important factor is that the learner better to participate in group and setting up a conversation, then student should participate in discussion in a group (Celce-Murica, 2001). The conversation between students and the teacher should be based on classroom observation data (Wenli, 2005).

Some teachers have problems with students that do not participate in classroom and are always silent, in countries like China and Japan, in this situation teacher should

encourage student to participate in for example use pictures, role play, etc. (Wenli, 2005). Others said the teacher should prepare good environment for students for example classrooms should be in low anxiety and high motivation (Wenli, 2005, p. 48). Evidence shows that teacher should correct student grammatical errors and avoid any bad habit formation. Grammatical knowledge is necessary and facilitates acquiring speaking skill, but somebody says meanings are more important than grammar. According to them communication is based on meaning (Chastain, 1988). Some teachers encourage student to interact with others and student can communicate in real situation, also learner should know the purpose of speaking, what is speaking, where to speak, and how to speak (Oradee, 2012).

Learning any foreign language has to do with the four skills that have to be mastered. The four skills are listening, speaking and listening (oral skills) are said to relate to language expressed through the aural medium. Reading and writing are said to relate to language expressed through the visual medium (written symbol).

Another way of representing these skills is by reference not to the medium but the activity of the language user. Therefore, speaking and writing are said to be active or productive skills, whereas listening and reading are said to be passive or receptive skills.

Harris (1969, p. 81) says that comprehension is the ability to speech a foreign language is the most pressed skill. Because someone who can speech a language will also be able to understand it. Lado (1961, p. 239-240) defines speaking ability as: "The ability to use in essentially normal communication, stress, intonation, grammatical structure and vocabulary of the foreign language at normal rate delivery for native speakers of the language."

Speaking skill is a matter which needs special attention. No matter how great an idea is, if it is not communicated properly, it cannot be effective. Oral language or speaking is an essential tool for communicating, thinking, and learning powerful learning tool. It shapes modifies, extends, and organizes thought. Oral language is a foundation of all language development and, therefore, the foundation of all learning. Through speaking and listening, student learns concepts, develop vocabulary and perceive the structure of the English language essential components of learning. Students who have a strong oral language base have an academic advantage. School achievement depends on students' ability to display knowledge in a clear and acceptable form in speaking as well as writing.

In communicating with other people, it is important to know whether the situation is formal or informal. Besides, it is also important to know that the language, in this case English, can be standard or non-standard so that they are able to communicate effectively. In speaking English as a foreign language the speaker obviously has to try to speak it in the way the native, speakers do. In order to be able to speak English better, it is important for him to learn all of the four skills in English and matter English phonetic as well, because it is very helpful to learn the language quickly and successfully. The use of language or speaking skill is a matter of habit formation.

In speaking, he must implant the habit of fusing it for communication until it becomes deeply establishes. In conclusion, the definition of speaking skill lexically is the ability to utter words or sounds with the ordinary voice or the ability to communicate vocally or to have conversation through practice, training, or talent. In addition to that, Lado (1961, p. 240) points out that speaking ability /skill is described as the ability to report acts or situation, or the ability to report acts or situations in precise words, or the ability to converse, or the express a sequence of ideas fluently. The writer can conclude that someone who wants to speak a foreign language has to know the rules of that language, like grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and word-formation, and to apply them properly in communication.

ACCURACY AND FREQUENCY

Language immersion programs, in which all or part of subjects in school is taught in the target language, are recognized as one of the most successful language methodologies. However, a weak point in terms of accuracy has been reported in that immersion students become quite fluent but their spoken language is often far from accurate (Swain & Lapkin 1995, Hammerly 1987, 1991). Additionally, the two aspects, fluency and accuracy, are important criteria in foreign language proficiency tests such as ACTFL or SST. It shows that language teachers should foster their learners' ability while being mindful of fluency and accuracy.

In order to decide the fluency level of a learner's English, the following five factors were analyzed in the research. The factors were decided based on the criteria for fluency in some standardized tests such as ACTFL (Breiner-Sanders et al. 2000) and SST, and recommendations from a previous research (Nakano et al. 2001).

Though the criteria for defining accuracy in most standardized tests include factors such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, sociolinguistic competence or pragmatic competence, grammatical errors were the main factors in deciding the level of accuracy for this research. Considering the fact that grammatical instruction has been the mainstream in English education in Japan, it is important to investigate the learners' accuracy under the instruction of communication based lessons. The word usage and sentence structure were considered as grammatical understanding, but pronunciation was excluded because it is quite difficult to sort out correct pronunciation due to the variety of accents. The frequency and kinds of errors were also investigated to know the learners' situation.

As far as accuracy and fluency are concerned, different scholars have given different definitions. For example, Ellis (2009) holds that —fluency|| means —the capacity to use language in real time, to emphasize meanings, possibly drawing on more lexicalized systems,|| and —accuracy|| means —the ability to avoid error in performance, possibly reflecting higher levels of control in the language as well as a conservative orientation, that is, avoidance of challenging structures that might provoke error.|| Crystal (1977), Bryne (1986), and Nation (1991) define —fluency|| as —the ability to get across communicative intent without too much hesitation and too many pauses to cause barriers or a breakdown in communication|| (qtd. in Lan, 1994). Bryne (1988) defines

—accuracy|| as —the use of correct forms where utterances do not contain errors affecting the phonological, syntactic, semantic or discourse features of a language|| (qtd. in Lan, 1994).

But in this paper, —accuracy|| refers to the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences while —fluency|| refers to the quality or condition of being able to speak or write a language or perform an action smoothly, accurately and easily, which includes the ability to produce written and/or spoken language with ease, the ability to speak with a good but not necessarily perfect command of intonation, vocabulary, and grammar, the ability to communicate ideas effectively, and the ability to produce continuous speech without causing comprehension difficulties or a breakdown of communication. In other words, accuracy emphasizes precision or exactness and is often emphasized in formal instruction, language acquisition, grammar competence and grammar-translation method, while fluency describes a level of proficiency in communication and is frequently stressed in procedural skill, expression proficiency, lexical phrases, social interaction, necessary topics and discourse. Accuracy is the basis of fluency while fluency is a further improvement of a person's linguistic competence and a better revelation of his/her communicative competence. They two are so closely related that they are inseparable.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

In discourse analysis of free discussion classes, three hypotheses are considered:

1. Choosing topics by students affects their fluency and accuracy.
2. Pair work tasks affect the students' fluency and accuracy.
3. Finding new methods for expanding the students' vocabulary knowledge by teachers affects the students' fluency and accuracy.

METHOD

This is a quantitative study that 50 teachers were selected randomly. The questionnaire was the instrument to collect the data, so the questionnaires were distributed among the teachers. The validity of questionnaire was confirmed by the professors, and the reliability was confirmed by Cronbach's alpha that was equaled more than 0.70.

FINDINGS

The first hypothesis: Choosing topics by students affects their fluency and accuracy.

The null hypothesis: Choosing topics by students does not affect their fluency and accuracy.

Table 1. Results of a single sample T-test on the effect of choosing topics by students on their fluency and accuracy

The effect of choosing topics by students on their fluency and accuracy	Mean	SD	Standard error	t-value	Df	Sig.
	4.0733	0.54311	0.07681	53.033	49	0.00

Using a single-sample t test in relation to confirmation or rejection of assumptions, it is observed that taking into account the significant level (0.000) is less than the error rate (0.01), which in a probability of 99%, it be claimed that the hypothesis is accepted. Accordingly, the teachers believe that choosing topics by students affects their fluency and accuracy.

The second hypothesis: Pair work tasks affect the students' fluency and accuracy.

The null hypothesis: Pair work tasks do not affect the students' fluency and accuracy.

Table 2. Results of a single sample T-test on the effect of pair work tasks on the students' fluency and accuracy

The effect of pair work tasks on the students' fluency and accuracy	Mean	SD	Standard error	t-value	Df	Sig.
	3.9388	0.92214	0.13173	29.899	49	0.00

Using a single-sample t test in relation to confirmation or rejection of assumptions, it is observed that taking into account the significant level (0.000) is less than the error rate (0.01), which in a probability of 99%, it be claimed that the hypothesis is accepted. Accordingly, the teachers believe that pair work tasks affect the students' fluency and accuracy.

The third hypothesis: Finding new methods for expanding the students' vocabulary knowledge by teachers affects the students' fluency and accuracy.

The null hypothesis: Finding new methods for expanding the students' vocabulary knowledge by teachers does not affect the students' fluency and accuracy.

Table 3. Results of a single sample T-test on the effect of finding new methods for expanding the students' vocabulary knowledge by teachers

The effect of finding new methods for expanding the students' vocabulary knowledge by teachers	Mean	SD	Standard error	t-value	Df	Sig.
	3.7500	.74402	0.10522	35.639	49	0.00

Using a single-sample t test in relation to confirmation or rejection of assumptions, it is observed that taking into account the significant level (0.000) is less than the error rate (0.01), which in a probability of 99%, it be claimed that the hypothesis is accepted. Accordingly, the teachers believe that finding new methods for expanding the students' vocabulary knowledge by teachers does not affect the students' fluency and accuracy.

CONCLUSION

Conversation is one of the basic means of oral interaction; therefore, being able to participate actively and appropriately in a conversation is a skill that many language learners would like to and need to acquire. Oral language teaching demands a variety of concerns, such as the features of spoken language compared with written language. People learn language primarily for communication with others. The participants in communication involve speakers and hearers. Therefore, we cannot speak without the

consideration of the hearers. Moreover, communication happens in social life and it takes place in a certain situation, like coffee bar, office or classroom, and inside a certain culture. Therefore, we cannot speak without the consideration of the social and cultural context. Then, how should oral language skills be taught with regard to the social and cultural context? In contrast to traditional way of teaching oral English, discourse analysis provides a new window on teaching and learning oral language.

Successful language learning depends on classroom communication, i.e. interaction learners engage in with their teacher and other learners. The discourse among students and the teacher and among students themselves is central for foreign language learning as it contextualizes learning experiences while active participation in classroom discourse engages learners in the learning process.

Teachers play a key role in promoting interactions among students and engaging them in the learning process, and cooperative learning is widely recognized as a pedagogical practice that can be employed in classrooms to stimulate students' interest in learning through their involvement with their peers. When students work cooperatively, they learn to give and receive information and develop new ideas and perspectives on how others think and communicate in socially appropriate ways. It is through interacting with others in reciprocal dialogues that students learn to use language differently to explain new ideas and realities and, in so doing, to construct new ways of thinking and feeling.

Speaking is the production skill that is included in two main categories: accuracy and fluency. Learners can boost speaking fluency through pair work tasks. Pair work tasks encourage students to stay in English while taping improves greater fluency and achieves extra practice outside of class and develop students' responsibility for their learning. It also suggests simple practical "low tech" method of getting to improve more fluency in a foreign language and take responsibility for their language practice. It is for teacher to apply additional work in order to expand students' English speaking ability. The teacher can find new methods for expanding the students' vocabulary knowledge in order to help the students' fluency. Moreover, the students should be free to select the topics for discussion.

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