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Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Classroom Oral Presentations at Tertiary Level

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Abstract

The study was an investigation of tertiary classroom student presenters' use of language, gesture, positioning and movement in the lesson. Teaching and learning in the classroom is a multi-semiotic experience and the current study provides the insights into their distinct pedagogies. Raised comprehension of semiotization and resemiotization has multiplied the responsibilities of both teachers and students. 12 teachers and 320 student presenters' use of semiotic resources at tertiary level had been investigated quantitatively and qualitatively through thematic analysis. The semiotic resources of language, gesture and the use of space through the positioning and movement of teachers and students have been discussed in relation to the pedagogy they realise, which require insinuations in teaching and learning both.

Keywords: Multimodal discourse, Communicative language teaching, Semiotization.

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Introduction

The ability to communicate is the most important goal that communicative language teaching aims to reach. It is to be able to co-operate effectively in the real world (Hedge, 2000). With increasing globalization and glocalization, fresh graduates need to be more proficient in oral communication skills to function effectively in the professional setting (Živković & Stojković, 2011). Generally, effective oral communication is essential for success and promotion in business (Murphy and Hildebrand, 1997). Scholars have had ample discussions on the base line provided by EAP (English for Academic Purposes) to other courses but truly it is unanswered yet (Currie, 1999; Atkinson, 1997).

Majorly, ESP (English for Specific Purposes) is divided into ESP and EAP (English for Academic Purposes) but out of all EAP branches EST (English for Science & Technology) is the oldest and of high importance due to the raised polarity of different technical and non-technical disciplines (Jordan, 1997). Contrarily, ESAP (English for Specific Academic Purposes) covers professional language functions (Atkinson, 1997; Currie, 1999; Jordan 1997). ESAP courses are "a mixture of direct teaching, managing pair and group work, and assisting students to learn by means of a variety of resources" (Jordan, 1997, p.122). Under this umbrella, oral skills are neglected areas (Penny et al., 2005; Reitmeier & Vrhota, 2009; Fahey & Fingon, 1997; Langan et al., 2008). The explored areas of the oral presentation revolve around peers, assessment, and teachers only (Penny et al., 2005; Reitmeier & Vrhota, 2009; Fahey & Fingon, 1997; Langan et al., 2008). While the teaching of the language for oral presentation has been discussed by Boyle (1996), Zareva (2009); for Murphy (1991; 1992) and others most of the related literature deal with the methodology and the delivery style (Chirnside, 1986; Richards, 1989; Koh, 1988).

In urban areas EAP classes run under mix caliber and mix interests due to the inclusion of rural and foreign students. In such cases, if teachers are not properly trained, students' creativity remains hidden in their self-structured shell of low confidence, anxiety and lack of knowledge/understanding (Ho, 1998; Argungu, 2002; Guzeller, 2005; Mahboob, 2009). This sounds easy to pass class time playing a dummy but researches have shown that such students lack in individualistic approaches and self-direction which are unavoidable to excel in profession (Bankowski, 1999; Flowerdew, 1998; Pierson, 1996).

Theoretical Framework

Focusing all discussed scenarios, last decade observed multimodal approach which has successfully marked a prominent impression on ELT (English Language Teaching) covering lesson materials, latest technologies, semiotization and resemiotization in academic discourses by using latest technologies (Kress, Jewitt, 2002b & 2008; Kress, 2003; Jewitt, Ogborn & Tsatsarelis, 2001; Unsworth, 2001 2008b; Unsworth & Chan, 2009; Daly & Unsworth, 2011). By modernizing the teaching-learning perspectives such approaches have also challenged the conventional teaching pedagogies (Schleppegrell, 2007).

Jewitt (2009a) discussed four theoretical assumptions behind multimodal discourse i.e. 1) different semiotic modes (i.e. gestures, postures, etc.) contribute in making meaning equally with language 2) Each mode carries different communicative language and that will be untrue to consider language as the sole medium to make meaning 3) interaction among these modes is part of language production 4) produced meanings are social which will further be improvised by the context & society. Following this, Kress (2010) explored that social-semiotic theory of multi-modality considers the following points:

• What meaning is being made in a text?
• How is meaning being made in the text?
• What resources have been drawn on to make the meaning in the text?
• In what social environment is the meaning being made?
• Whose interest and agency is at work in the making of the meaning?

These assumptions highlight the underlying complex nature of multi-modal discourse which is extremely complicated and technical to construe. This seems that multi-modal discourse makes more meaning than the original oral discourse. Multimodal approach not only sees visuals to make meaning but it also facilitates speech act theory i.e. Illocutionary (what the meaning is about) and perlocutionary (how it will affect the surroundings) (Van Leeuwen, 2005a, 2005b). For instance, powerful content of lecture (illocutionary) can positively motivate students to follow and learn more (perlocutionary) and a good business presentation (illocutionary) will integer audience to get convinced (perlocutionary).

The study has been organized around multimodal approach to discourse to assess its usefulness and effectiveness on enhancing on oral academic performance. These genres are conveniently ignored under the influence of written genres although they are not less in importance. 1980s shed light on the multimodal angle of oral discourse but still this genre hasn't get relatable explorations to understand that how visuals make meaning? (Dubois, 1982; Hood & Forey, 2005; Querol & Julián, 2011; Rowley-Jolivet, 1999 & 2002; Räisanen & Fortanet, 2008)

Methodology

The study adopted the Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA) approach (O'Halloran, 2007 & 2008) to investigate semiotic discourse and its application in language classroom. The co-deployment of these resources in a multimodal ensemble by the teacher constructs a unique classroom experience for the students (O'Halloran, 2007 & 2008). This study attempted to examine the theoretical understanding of the nature (functional specializations and affordances) of such modalities as well as their effective combinational deployment in teaching and learning.

Cohen et al. (1989) conducted similar study. This was an attempt to find the causes of ineffective presentations to provide fruitful suggestion for improvements. Language, gesture and positioning are notable pedagogies both for teachers and students (Jewitt, 2009a) but mostly do not turn positive which creates a gap among cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of Bloom's Taxonomy (1956). Following to it both teachers and students had been selected as the audience.

The study had been designed on quanto-qualitative measures. The data was collected through convenience sampling (Cohen et al., 2013) at tertiary level which was chosen focusing smooth reach. The data collection was performed in two phases; in first phase 12 teachers' lectures on Effective Presentation Skills and Ethics were recorded using observations, in second phase, 320 students' performances after teachers' lectures were documented using observation sheet. For three weeks nine credit hours were observed to examine teaching and learning of presentation skills following ethical consideration (Cohen et al., 2013). Research tools were designed by the researchers considering Systematic Functional Discourse. Results were analysed quantitatively through SPSS.20 and qualitatively through thematic analysis (Cohen et al., 2013).

Findings

Facts and figure had been collected on three viewpoints elaborated by Halliday (2009a) i.e. ideational (what the text is about), interpersonal (relations between participants) and textual meanings (how the message is organized). Datum showed clear differences between the high-low performance of teachers and students (respectively) which is purely justified (rooted on maturity, qualification and experience) but simultaneously it also indicates poor teaching/learning pedagogies. Following graph shows collected data by performing ANOVA statistical measures:

Teachers		
Population	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**
Ideational	6.483	0.691
Interpersonal	6.501	0.583
Textual	5.836	0.553
Students		
Ideational	8.323	0.756
Interpersonal	6.752	0.710

Textual	6.653	0.623

Graphic description is as follows:
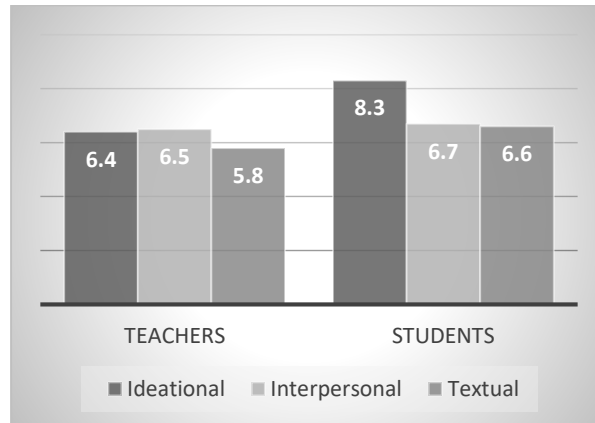
Teachers

Lectures of twelve teachers were recorded and analysed on the topic of Effective Presentation Skills and Ethics. These lectures were analysed under three areas i.e. ideational, interpersonal and textual (Halliday, 2009a). The delivered lectures were recorded as average on all three areas.

Ideational: Five lectures were planned to cover the content. Teachers delivered topics more theoretically and less practically. Major topic contents were included in the power point presentations but were given less importance in lecture discussion. Four teachers delivered lectures using white board and board marker i.e. without multimedia presentation and were comparatively better in terms of deliverance and content. Three teachers wasted 30-35 minutes of class time in getting multimedia arranged and then completed the remaining session with less fervor.

Interpersonal: Effective relations were found lacking in managing good relations between teachers and students. Seven sessions were purely teacher-centered lecture based i.e. teacher neither initiated nor welcomed student response at any point of time. Remaining five managed student-teacher interaction but that was not up-to-the-mark i.e. ideational/logical purpose of the session was purely missing, learning was not at all the purpose of inquiring rather facilitation in job seeking only the matter of concern was.

Textual: Eight teachers ran slides and four gave lecture without them. Contents of their lectures were similar to each other covering major points i.e. relevance, validity, coherence, authentic language, effective style, decent dressing and peaceful pace. Lectures were not strengthened with proper references and citations at all. 80% Urdu language was used and English was used about 20%. Main terminologies of the lecture were in English and student-teacher interaction was bilingual with maximum of Urdu. Kinesics was middling in gestures, postures, eye/hand/feet

movements. Two teachers were found confused on researcher's presence. Lecture slides were fair.

Students

Students' presentations were analysed on the similar areas of teachers i.e. ideational, interpersonal & textual. Students were asked to prepare and present on the topic: 'Launching a New Business Plan' with all possible fields of interest and they were given a time of fortnight for preparations.

Ideational:85% presentations were rejected due to plagiarized work and 15% were accepted. Content of accepted presentations lacked in topic completion too. These presentations were of 6-7 slides with incomplete ideas of internet copied pictures.

Interpersonal: With the majority of plagiarized work interpersonal relations were weak too. Students were unable to convey the context-based meaning. Presentations were observed one-sided lecture based, no serious effort was made to connect with the audience.

Textual: Students were restricted to use English language only so they followed. 10% of them used accurate language and rest 90% used inaccurate language. Body language was observed in the ratio of 80:240 i.e. less were composed and prepared and majority was confused and hesitant. 40% followed less styling in preparing slides and 60% styled their presentations using sharp colours, animations and fancy fonts i.e. Comic Sans MS.

Discussion

Multimodal discourse provides the understanding of elements supporting actual content i.e. gestures, postures, sound, framing and positioning so does was expected for the current study as discussed by O'Halloran (2011). It revealed many flaws in teaching-learning processes and both participants were found ineffective.

The observations showed that teachers were not fully prepared to deliver lectures and used outdated strategies. In engineering universities language courses are considered non-core and that was quite obvious in their conduct. Ideational, interpersonal and textual all had genuine flaws but slightly enough to inform students about how to stand in front of audience and plan your ideas. Support of authentic resources could make the picture clear and comprehensible for students. This lack is also stressed by Van Leeuwen (2015) who has talked about the fact that communication merely not relies on spoken discourse rather body language and hidden meanings also utter meaning.

Contrary to this, students depict the exact on-going educational standards by completely relying on internet as every homework remedy. They prefer ready-made knowledge rather working hard to grasp the basic logic of the course material. They were found commenting on teachers' lectures as boring and slide game but did not realize that they were no different.

Discourse was observed average on both sides apart from some exceptional cases who possessed good language skills by themselves i.e. sound family background and good previous education. Poor presentation content disclosed lazy nature and less interest in improving the knowledge. Inauthentic and broken language divulged poor language skills and hesitant body language exhibited confused state of mind

Conclusion

Multimodal discourse provides in-depth understanding of the visible and hidden data. Its top-down & bottom-up orientation deserves to be handled with extra care to attain positive results. Both of these techniques are complementary to each other and meaningful oral discourse is incomplete without them. Research in multimodality has repercussions on education, curriculum design and pedagogy. More planning and careful execution is required to overcome mismatches as multi-modal discourse is repeatedly becoming of challenge by making silent objects (i.e. Posture, gesture, etc.) oral. However, *needs analysis* is and will be the sensitized pillar of whole ELT to initiate, diagnose and restructure.

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