

TYPES OF TEACHER TALK IN CLASSROOMS AND IMPLICATION FOR LEARNER PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

This article analyses the types of talk employed by the teacher in Setswana and English classroom interactions at Phatsimo junior secondary school in the Tutume Sub-region of Botswana. The study adopts a qualitative case approach involving one class of form 3 students and one English teacher and one Setswana teacher as participants. The Flanders Interaction Analysis Category (FIAC) is used as an underpinning framework. Data was generated from an observation tally sheet and video recordings of four classroom sessions. The results show that content cross was the most dominant type of teacher talk, indicating that most of the teaching and learning time was dominated by the teachers doing most of the talking, with the learners largely passive. This was followed by relatively low score for teacher control where teachers in both subjects exerted little effort in controlling the students. Teacher support came third, evidencing that the talking done by teachers hardly supported the learners. The article concludes that the model of teaching and learning at Phatsimo junior secondary school focused on the teacher or was teacher centred. The study recommends a more learner-centred approach where students are participatory, and a re-evaluation of teacher training programs with a view to incorporate learner-centred teaching strategies.

Keywords: Teacher talk, Setswana, English, Flanders Interaction Analysis Category, Learners, Teachers, Learner-centred teaching, Botswana.

1.0 Introduction

A lot of research has been done on interaction in the classroom setting (Hanum et al., 2017). Several studies (Ariyanti et al., 2016) have revealed that teachers successfully promote learning by employing varied classroom interaction strategies. Other studies have demonstrated that teachers can disengage from learners by failing to promote interaction in the classroom (Kamelia & Riyanda, 2017; Havik & Westergård, 2020). Several studies have been conducted in Botswana on interaction strategies in the classroom (Mungoo & Moorad et al., 2015). Consistent poor performance among learners in the Tutume sub-region indicates that there are yet unidentified factors that need to be unearthed, and yet other possible interventions to be identified. For instance, there is a conspicuous absence of investigation on classroom interaction and its bearing on learner performance. This is a gap which the current study attempts to bridge.

2.0 The objective of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore the types of talk employed by the teacher in Setswana and English classrooms at Phatsimo junior secondary school in the Tutume sub-

region of Botswana and the implication of these talks on the performance of learners using a modified model of Flanders Interactional Analysis as the analytical tool.

3.0 The Theoretical Framework: Flanders' Interaction Analysis Model

Classroom communication is an important element in the teaching and learning process. Interaction between the teacher(s) and the learner(s) is the crucial component of effective classroom teaching. Interaction means an action, reaction or shared effect that may be between the teacher and learner, the learner and learner in the classroom environment, or between materials and a teacher or learner or a group of learners (Singha & Bhatnagar, 2019). According to Amatari (2015) an interaction analysis is a process of encoding and decoding the study patterns of teaching and learning. In the coding process, categories of classifying statements are established, and a code symbol is assigned to each category, and a trained analyst interprets the display of coded data and reconstructs the original events based on the encoded data even though he may not have been present when data were collected. Interaction Analysis is used as a technique capturing qualitative and quantitative dimensions of teachers' verbal behaviour in the classroom. Singh (2008) defines classroom interaction analysis (CIA) as a technique consisting of objectives and systematic observations of the classroom events for the study of the teachers' classroom behaviour and the process of interaction in the classroom.

Flanders interaction analysis (FIA) is, therefore, a tool that helps to identify classroom interaction patterns during the teaching and learning process (Amatari, 2015). It records what teachers and learners say during the teaching and learning process. Besides that, the technique allows the teachers to assess the verbal interaction they use and what kind of response is given by the learners (Sharma & Tiwari, 2021). According to Brow, cited in Sharma and Tiwari, 2021, FIA provides ten categories to classify classroom verbal interaction. These categories are divided into three groups, namely, teacher talk, learner talk, and silence or confusion.

This article modified Flanders' ten categories by subdividing each one of them into subthemes to make them more specific to the teacher-learner interaction. Table 1 presents only the direct talk portion of Flanders' modified system involving interaction between the teacher and the learners as this is the only part relevant for this article.

Table 1: Modified categories of the Flanders' Interaction Analysis Model

	Direct talk
1.	Lecturing /Lecture
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factual lecture: The teacher communicates factual information or subject-matter content. • Motivational lecture: The teacher attempts to arouse interest through the use of lecture statements • Code switching - speakers switch to manipulate or influence or define the situation as they wish, and to convey nuances of meaning and personal intention.
2	Giving Directions

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives cognitive directions: The teacher asks children to do a task primarily cognitive such as writing the answer to a problem on the board. • Gives managerial directions. The teacher directs the learner to perform a physical manoeuvre, such as moving chairs.
3	Criticizing or Justifying Authority
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bawling someone out • When the teacher asks the learners not to interrupt with foolish questions • Teachers ask ‘what’ and ‘why’ to the learners • Statements intended to change learner behaviour from unexpected to acceptable pattern Learner Talk
4	Learner Talk Response
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners talk in response to teacher’s talk (discussion and dialogic instruction, Choral responding, response cards, raising hands, guided – note taking) • learners (group work activities, peer teaching, Think-Pair-Share, role play technique)
5	Learner Talk Initiation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk by learners that they initiate. • Expressing own ideas; initiating a new topic; and asking thoughtful questions
6	Silence or Pause or Confusion
	Pauses, short periods of silence and period of confusion in which communication cannot be understood by the observer.

4.0 Methodology

4.1 Qualitative case study

This adopted a qualitative case study which Merriam (2009) defines as ‘an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit’ (p.16). Merriam identified four main features of case study investigation: particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic and inductive. Particularistic case study focuses on a specific phenomenon such as a program, event, process, person, institution, or group (Merriam, 2009). The study was categorized as case study because it focussed on a specific social unit, a classroom, in which teacher talk and interactions in Setswana and English classes in Phatsimo junior secondary school in Tutume were studied.

4.2 Participants and sampling

Participants for the study included one class of form 3 students and one Setswana teacher and one English teacher. These were purposively sampled to participate in the study. Polite and Beck (2012) defined purposive sampling as “a non-probability method in which the researcher selects participants based on personal judgment about which ones will be more informative and as such, it is sometimes called judgmental sampling” (p.739). To ensure protection against COVID-19, person-interaction was minimised by purposively choosing one form 3 class and two female teachers. In addition, the class was chosen because it was the lowest performing form 3 class. The core subject teachers were picked because to determine the overall grade in the final junior certificate examinations, students are first graded on four core subjects which are Setswana, English, Mathematics and Science followed by the best optional subject. Random sampling was used to select two core subjects, Setswana and English,

for the study. According to Thomas (2023), a simple random sample is a randomly selected subset of a population.

4.3 Data collection strategies

4.3.1 Observation tally sheet

Data was collected by means of an observation tally sheet. Observations here solely depend on the observer either directly or indirectly (through camera lens of a video), but the researcher is in the field and the observation totally depends on what s/he observes (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). The researcher sat in the class and recorded and observed teacher talk as guided by the (modified) Flanders interaction analysis categories (FIAC) (See Table 1). Each classroom verbal interaction was coded after a stipulated period to indicate the best category of teacher and learner talk represented by the communication. These categories were put into columns of observational sheet to preserve the original sequence of events.

4.3.2 Video recordings

As mentioned in section 4.3.1 above, data was also generated from video recordings of four meetings of classroom interactions. Each meeting was observed for 40 minutes. The observation was conducted eight times in 6 months from October to December 2022 and from January to March 2023. Observations were focused on teacher talk during class including (1) teacher and several learners, (2) several learners and the teacher, (3) teacher to learner, (4) learner to teacher.

4.4 Data analysis

There were several stages in analysing data. First data from video recordings was transcribed manually to get a comprehensive written record of the lesson. This data was then encoded into the categories of teacher talk based on Flanders Interaction Analysis Coding System (FIACS). It was plotted into different matrices. In a complete matrix, some areas have more tallies than others. A heavier concentration of tallies in a certain area gives information about who is talking and what kind of talking is taking place. Table 2 gives an example.

Table 2: Typical matrix for data analysis

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	TEACHER SUPPORT							LEARNER		
2										
3										
4	CONTENT CROSS									
5										
6						TEACHER CONTROL		PARTICIPATON		
7										
8										
9										
10										

The matrix analysis shows the types of interaction that are dominant during a learning lesson. The types of interaction studied here are Content Cross which indicates that the teacher

is heavily dependent on lecturing and asking questions during class. Content Cross typically shows a heavy concentration in rows 4 and 5 and columns 5, 6 and 7 in the matrix. The second type of interaction is Teacher Control with heavy concentration in rows 6 and 7 and columns 6 and 7 and indicates extensive commands and reprimands by the teacher. The third type of interaction is Teacher Support with a heavy concentration of tallies in columns 1, 2 and 3 and rows 1, 2, and 3 and indicates that the teacher is reinforcing and encouraging learner participation. Learner Participation has a concentration of tallies in column 8 and 9 reflects student responses to the teacher's behaviour.

There were four matrices for Setswana and four for English. Following Chambliss and Schutt (2013) the percentage of each category was calculated—the frequency of cases in a particular category is divided by the total number of cases and then multiplied by 100. The formula or equation is as follows:

$$P = \frac{f}{n} \times 100$$

Where p = percentage of the category being computed, f = the frequency of the category being computed and n = the total number of cases.

5.0 Findings

5.1 Teacher talk in the Setswana class

Table 3. Teacher talk in the Setswana classroom

	Profile	First Meeting	Second Meeting	Third Meeting	Fourth Meeting	Total Meeting
1	Content Cross	79.37%	96.2%	94.1%	73.2%	85.2%
2	Teacher Control	3.1%	5.8%	3.9%	9.8%	5.65%
3	Teacher Support	1.59%	1.9%	1.9%	4.9%	2.57%

Table 3 presents results for the types of teacher talk in the Setswana class. The percentage of each pattern were calculated using the Flanders Interaction Analysis Systems formula. For example, in the first Setswana lesson the proportion of content cross was 50 utterances from the total of 63 utterances. Therefore, Content Cross was $\frac{50}{63} \times 100 = 79.37$.

i. Content Cross

According to Flanders (1970) Content Cross profile indicates teacher dependence on lectures and questions. It can be observed from Table 3 that the average teacher talk (content cross) was 85.2%. In the first Setswana lesson the proportion of content cross was 50 utterances from the total of 63 utterances. Therefore, the Content Cross was 79.37%. The proportion of content cross was 50 utterances from a total of 52 utterances found in the second Setswana meeting and the percentage for Content Cross was 96.2%. In the third Setswana meeting the proportion of content cross was 48 utterances from a total of 51 utterance and the Content Cross was 94.1%. Lastly, in the fourth meeting, Content Cross was 30 utterances from a total of 41 utterances meaning that the percentage for Content Cross was 73.2%.

The second meeting (96.2%) had a higher percentage than the first meeting (79.37%), third meeting (94.1%) and fourth meeting (73.2%). How much the teacher talked had a great influence on how high or low the percentage would be.

ii. Teacher control

Teacher control profile indicates extensive commands and reprimands by the teacher. The average of teacher talk for teacher control was 5.65%. In the first Setswana meeting the proportion of teacher control was 2 utterances from the total of 63 utterances, meaning that the percentage of teacher control was 3.1%. The proportion of teacher control was 50 utterances from a total of 52 utterances in the second Setswana meeting and the percentage of teacher control for this meeting was 5.8%. The proportion of the teacher control was 2 utterances from a total of 51 utterances in the third Setswana meeting, and the percentage of teacher control was 3.9%. The proportion of teacher control was 4 utterances from a total of 41 utterances in the fourth Setswana meeting meaning that percentage of teacher control was 9.8%.

For teacher control, the fourth meeting (9.8%) was higher than the first meeting (3.1%), second meeting (5.8%) and third meeting (3.9%). How much the teacher gave directions and criticized the students' behaviour during observation had great influence on how high or low the percentage is.

iii Teacher support

According to Flanders (1970) Teacher Support profile indicates encouragement and reinforcement received by learners from the teacher. The average obtained for teacher support was 2.57%. Out of a total of 63 utterances found in the first Setswana meeting the teacher used 1(one) utterance supporting the students and the percentage of teacher support was 1.59%. In the second meeting, the teacher used 1(one) utterance from a total of 52 utterances, meaning that the percentage of teacher support was 1.9%. In the third Setswana meeting the teacher used 1(one) utterance from a total of 51 utterances, meaning that percentage of teacher support was 1.9%. The teacher support in the fourth Setswana meeting was 2 utterances from a total of 41 utterances and percentage of teacher support was 4.9%.

For teacher support, the second meeting (1.9%) had the same percentage of teacher control with the third meeting (1.9%). The fourth meeting (4.9%) is higher than the first meeting (1.59%), the second (1.9%) and the third (1.9%) meetings. The percentage of the teacher support was influenced by how much the teacher accepted the students' feelings, praised them, and accepted their ideas.

5.2 Teacher talk in the English class

Table 4. The Summary Results of English teacher Characteristics

No	Profile	First Meeting	Second Meeting	Third Meeting	Fourth Meeting	Total Meeting
1	Content Cross	64%	79.4%	96.9%	77.3%	79.4%
2	Teacher Control	2%	6.3%	3.1%	4.5%	3.97%
3	Teacher Support	0%	4.8%	1.6%	2.3%	2.2%

Table 4 presents results for the types of teacher talk in the English class.

i. Content Cross

It can be observed from Table 4 that the average for Content Cross was 79.4%. The first meeting scored 64%, the second meeting scored 79.4%, the third meeting scored 96.9%, and the fourth meeting scored 77.3%. The third meeting 96.9% had a higher percentage than the first meeting (64%), the second meeting (79.4%) and the fourth meeting (77.3%). How much the teacher asked questions had great influence on how high or low percentage would be?

ii. Teacher control

The average score for Teacher Control was 3.97%. The first meeting was 2%, the second meeting was 6.3%, the third meeting was 3.1% and the fourth meeting was 4.5%. Interaction in the second meeting (6.3%) was higher than in the first meeting (2%), the third meeting (3.1%) and the fourth meeting (4.5%). The results indicate that the teacher spent little time giving directions and criticizing or justifying activities.

ii. Teacher support

The average score for Teacher Support was 2.2% indicating that the teacher hardly supported learners in the first meeting. The second meeting was the highest with 4.8% followed by the fourth meeting (2.3%) and lastly the third meeting (1.6%). This meant that the teacher spent little time accepting students feeling and praising and encouraging them.

6.0 Discussion

Results of analysis of data from the observation are revealing in regard to teacher talk in the classroom and its implication for learner performance. Results of the four Setswana and English meetings show that Content Cross was the most dominant type of teacher talk: 85.2% for Setswana and 79.4% for English. This means that the teacher devoted most of the teaching-learning time to lecturing and asking questions. The teacher asked questions about content or procedure and the learners were expected to respond as they had been taught. Lecturing means giving facts or opinion about content or procedure. Teacher dominance in the classroom with no or little participation from learners was also observed by Mpho (2018). Nandler-Tushman (1990) avers that a classroom is a social system which must receive input from both the teachers and the students, as well as from the environment (school) to produce good academic performance. A one-way input from the teacher (or, rather inconceivably, even from the learners) would not produce the much-desired good performance.

Teacher control came second in both Setswana and English classroom interaction. It showed that the teachers in both subjects exerted little effort in controlling the students. Little time was spent giving directions, commands, or orders for learners to follow. Teachers gave directions only when they wanted the students to do assignments or tasks and to answer the questions. It also meant that the teacher rarely gave statements intended to change students' behaviour from non-acceptable to acceptable pattern. This showed that these teachers either lacked classroom management skills or their classroom management skills were poor.

Teacher support was the least used by the teacher in both English and Setswana lessons. Evidently, the teachers spent little time encouraging or praising the students or even using their ideas. The teachers in both Setswana and English rarely clarified, built, or developed ideas suggested by a student. This showed that the teachers were not motivating students during teaching and learning time (Bergmark & Westman, 2018).

Overall, the results concur with the findings of other researchers (Bergmark and Estman et al., 2018) which indicates that teachers tend to dominate the lesson and are authoritarian, and that the learners generally tend to be passive, and confined largely to recalling what was taught by the teacher. Clearly, the model of teaching and learning process was focused on the teacher or teacher centred. Considering that the form 3 class selected for this research was a generally low-performing class, teacher-dominance in class interaction could, partly, be responsible for this.

7.0 Conclusion

It can be concluded that teachers dominate the learning and teaching sessions at Phatsimo junior secondary school, and this has negative implication for the academic performance of learners. This research could also be expanded to the rest of the teachers and classes, and the school could probably mount a school-based workshop to assist the teachers. A needs assessment could be conducted to help determine what needs to be accomplished to solve the problem. The need assessment could inform the School Management to identify targeted strategies and workshop teachers on the areas they need assistance in.

Results obtained in this study also have practical implications for pre-service and in-service teacher education programs. Teaching strategies that pre-service teachers are exposed to during training appear to be tilted toward teacher dominance in the classroom. Teacher trainees are not challenged to effectively apply the latest interactive teaching methods in their classrooms. There may be a need to re-evaluate teacher training programmes to encompass diversity in instructional strategies. Findings of the current study may provide some insights which could be useful in the evaluation of teacher-training programmes.

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