Frequency of Social and Discourse Deictic Expressions in a Teacher’s Discourse Analysis

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Abstract  
The study examined the frequency of social and discourse deictic expressions in a teacher’s discourse. To this aim, the whole process of teaching was tape-recorded to reflect what actually happened in the classroom. Actually, five periods of the classroom talk were recorded and transcribed. After the class, a detailed transcription of the recording was worked out to be analyzed statistically. The results displayed that the use of these expressions was frequent. Knowing the fact would help the teachers to produce more coherent speech to improve language proficiency of EFL learners.

Keywords: Discourse Analysis; Deictic Expressions; Discourse Deixis; Social Deixis; Teacher talk

1. Introduction  
Teacher talk is mainly significant to language teaching. According to pedagogical theory, the language that teachers use in classrooms determines to a larger extent whether a class will succeed or not. In Iran, most people learn a foreign language in classrooms. Classroom language is the main source of foreign language learning and in some places the only source. It is believed that the language that teachers address to L2 learners will to some degree influences language learning, although how and to what degree it influences language learning still remains blurred. Teacher talk is used for different purposes such as communication, giving instructions etc
Therefore, we can say that teacher talk is a kind of communication-based or interaction-based talk. This study tries to analyze the rate of discourse and social deixis in a teacher talk. The reason lies on the fact that deictic expressions are semantic and pragmatic characteristic of discourse. Meanwhile a better understanding of the use of teachers’ language can undoubtedly help students improve their learning, and students can make a better use of teacher talk to learn the target language, it is necessary to do some research on teacher talk.

2. Literature Review

The variety of speech which could be used by teachers in language classrooms is called teachers talk (TT). Ellis (1985) has formulated his own view about teacher talk: “Teacher talk is the special language that teachers use when addressing L2 learners in the classroom” (p. 185). The analysis of teachers talk is very important since teacher is the main source of providing input in EFL classrooms. In this research, it is the oral form of teacher talk instead of written form that is under this investigation. Teacher talk, in this study, is analyzed based on two types of deictic expressions namely discourse and social deixis. So, I will briefly review studies about teacher talk (TT) and theories of deixis.

The teacher, like the learner, brings to language teaching certain characteristics which may have some effects on educational treatment. These may include: age, sex, previous education, and personal qualities (Dewey, 1933). Above all, Stern (1983) believes that “the language teacher brings to it a language background and experience, professional training as a linguist and teacher, previous language teaching experience, and more or less formulated theoretical presuppositions about language, language learning and teaching” (p. 500). Nunan (1991) points out that teacher talk is of vital importance, not only for the organization of the classroom but also for the processes of acquisition. It is important for the organization and management of the classroom because it is through language that teachers either succeed or fail in applying their teaching plans. In terms of acquisition, teacher talk is significant because it is possibly the main source of comprehensible target language input the learner is expected to receive.

Many studies are done in the field of discourse analysis and the domain of teacher talk. Some of these studies include Ellis (1985) and (Stern, 1983). It could be concluded from these studies that there are different features of teacher talk that could be categorized into two main parts formal and functional. The first one refers to the form of teacher talk, such as the
speed, pause, repetition, modifications of teacher talk. The second one, which refers to the features of the language that teachers use to organize and control classes, includes the following aspects: the quality and quantity of teacher talk; the questions teachers use; interactional modifications and teachers’ feedback. Study of social and pragmatic deictic terms mostly deal with functional aspects of teacher talk (Malmsjö, 2004).

2.1. On Deixis

Fillmore (1975, cited in Levinson, 1983) makes distinctions in the uses of deictic terms in three different ways: gestural, symbolic, and anaphoric. The gestural use of a deictic expression is “that use by which it can be properly interpreted only by somebody who is monitoring some physical aspect of the communication situation”; by the symbolic use of a deictic expression it is meant “that use whose interpretation involves merely knowing certain aspects of the speech communication situation, whether this knowledge comes by current perception or not”; and by the anaphoric use of an expression it is meant “that use which can be correctly interpreted by knowing what other portion of the same discourse the expression is correfrential with” (p. 9). Fillmore illustrates the distinction between these three types by examples using the word “there”. In this way, its gestural use can be seen in a sentence like “I want you to put it there.” We have to know where the speaker is pointing to in order to know what place he is indicating.

The symbolic use is exemplified in the telephone’s utterance, “Is Johnny there?” And the anaphoric use in this sentence: “I drove the car to the parking lot and left it there.” In that case the word refers to a place which had been identified earlier in the discourse, namely “the parking lot.”

In the next part Fillmore pays his attention to the categories of discourse and social deixis. Beginning with discourse deixis, he remarks the point that most commonly, the terms of discourse deixis are taken from systems of deictic and non-deictic time semantics, for the very good reason that any point in a discourse can be thought of as a point in time, the time at which that portion of the discourse is encoded or decoded with preceding portions of the discourse conceived as occurring earlier in time, later portion thought of as occurring later in time.

Fillmore (1975, cited in Levinson, 1983) suggests that the issue of discourse deixis can lead naturally to discourse analysis and that, in turn, can lead naturally to the next topic, social deixis (p. 72).

The domain of social deixis includes the various items such as the set of pronouns in a language, or greeting patterns, speech function like attention
calling, thanking, apologizing, and so on. Terms of address and kinship terms are other items included in this domain (p. 77).

Lyons (1977) defines some expressions such as: deictic context, zero-point, locutionary deixis and cognitive deixis. By deictic context he means: “Every act of utterance—every locutionary act—occurs in a spatio-temporal context whose center, or zero-point, can be referred to as the here-and-now” (p. 304).

He also believes in the place and time of utterance as locutionary deixis and the place and time of a mental act of more or less conscious awareness or reflection as cognitive deixis (p. 304). He also shows that the deictic context is egocentric which means that it is centered upon the speaker’s here-and-now (p. 305). Sometimes these here-and-nows are not explicitly mentioned in an utterance. So, it is worth noting that in languages like English one can imply this, because of the tense. But in languages without tense like Chinese or Malay, this is not being possible (example: “It is raining”. Because of the tense we can imply the here-and-now of the utterance. So in meaning it is equal to “It is raining here-and-now” (p. 306).

Levinson (1995) remarks about the importance of deixis as “the single most obvious way in which the relationship between language and context is reflected in the structure of languages themselves, is through the phenomenon of deixis” (p. 54).

He considers the use of demonstratives, first and second person pronouns, tense, specific time and place adverbs as examples of deixis. He also mentions that we can understand the importance of deixis for the interpretation of utterances when they are lacking (Fillmore, 1975, cited in Levinson, 1995):

**Example:** “I'll be back in an hour.”

The explanation is that generally because we don’t know when the note was written, consequently we cannot know when the writer will return (Levinson, 1983, p. 54).

Following the work of Fillmore (1975, cited in Levinson, 1995) and Lyons (1977), Levinson defines discourse/text deixis, as “it has to do with the encoding of reference to portions of the unfolding discourse in which the utterance is located” (p. 73).

And, finally, social deixis concerns “the encoding of social distinctions that are relative to participant roles, particularly, aspects of the social relationship holding between speaker and addressees or speaker and some referent” (p. 63). In many languages, distinctions of the fine gradation between the relative ranks of speaker and addressee are systematically
encoded throughout, for example, the morphological system, in which case we talk of honorifics; but such distinctions are also regularly encoded in choices between pronouns, summons forms or vocatives, and titles of address in familiar languages (Levinson, 1995, p. 63). Levinson restricts social deixis to those aspects of language structure that encode the social identities of participants, or the social relationship between them. Obvious examples of such grammaticalizations, as he considers, are polite “pronouns” and “titles of address” (1983, p. 89).

As it was mentioned, there are different ideas concerning discourse and social deixis. This study limits their definitions to the following concepts:

1. Social deixis: “concerns the encoding of social distinctions that are relative to participant roles, particularly aspects of the social relationship holding between speaker and addressee (s) or speaker and some referent” (Levinson, 1995, p. 63).

2. Discourse deixis: “has to do with the encoding of reference to portions of the unfolding discourse in which the utterance (which includes the text referring expression) is located” (Levinson, 1995, p. 62).

Considering the review of related literature, we can conclude that many scholars especially in the field of linguistics, have worked on deixis and more specifically on discourse and social deixis. Therefore, the current study is an attempt to show the occurrence of these deixis in a teacher discourse analysis. It is hoped that the results of this study would shed more light in distinguishing the amount of the use of deictic expressions by teachers and their significance role on the quality of language teaching in EFL contexts.

3. Research Questions

1. What’s the frequency of social deixis used by the teacher?
2. What’s the frequency of discourse deixis used by the teacher?

4. Method

This study deals with the case study of a teacher’s discourse. It is done in order to investigate what is really going on in a foreign language classroom.

4.1. Participants

The participant in this study was a university instructor. She was teaching in Mashhad Azad University and Tabaran Nongovernmental Institution of
Higher Education. She got her M.A. in TEFL. She had teaching experience of more than 8 years in teaching English as a foreign language.

4.2. Corpus

The corpus collected for this study consisted of a teacher’s discourse in an English language classroom. The teacher’s discourse was audiotaped for five sessions (each session for about 45 min). Then the teachers’ discourse was transcribed. Words articulated were used as the corpus in order to investigate the types and amounts of deictic expressions used in the teachers discourse. It is worth remembering that different types of classrooms would display different results. Depending on the course subject the result of teachers’ discourse analysis would vary.

4.3. Instrument

The instrument which was significantly used in this study was a voice recorder. The voice recorder was used to audiotaped the teacher’s talk during the sessions. Meanwhile, transcriptions were used in order to compare and contrast the occurrence of social and discourse deictic expressions.

4.4. Procedure

The whole process of teaching was tape-recorded to reflect what actually happens in classroom. Actually, five periods of the classroom talk were recorded and transcribed. After the class, a detailed transcription of the recording was worked out to be analyzed statistically. After the data were transcribed, the teacher talk was located and analyzed with regard to the research questions which the study set out to concentrate on.

Transcription was done word by word in order to identify and locate the two types of deictic expressions. The major difficulty during the process of data collection was the fact that distinguishing different types of deixis was not an easy task, since there weren’t any sources which categorize different examples of these expressions. Most of the literature has just mentioned two or three examples for each type and no more. Therefore, according to the definition of each type, I tried to find them by myself.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme of the Types and the SUBTYPES of Deixis in the Present Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Deixis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honorific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics were used in order to find the occurrence of social and discourse deictic expressions. In fact, the frequency of each deictic expression would display their role in the teachers’ talk analysis. Examples of analysis are as follows:

Some examples of discourse deixis: this, that (/in/, /an/, /a'min/, /a'man/…).

Some examples of social deixis: Honorifics: Sir, Miss & Kinship terms: Father, Mother...

Table 2
The Frequency of Social and Discourse Deixis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Social Deixis</th>
<th>Honorifics</th>
<th>Kinship Terms</th>
<th>Discourse Deixis</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st &amp; 2nd session</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>1919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd session</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>1215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th session</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>2307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th session</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 1</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>4226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 2</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>2181</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As it is indicated Table 2, the use of social and discourse deictic expression in the teacher’s discourse is frequent. Therefore, it is worth concentrating on social and discourse deictic expressions since we have discussed the amount of teacher talk influences learners’ L2 acquisition or learning (van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983). Teachers usually apply their control over students by using their talk (Spolsky, 2004).

6. Conclusion

This study was an attempt to investigate and analyze the deictic expressions (i.e., social and discourse deictic expressions) Levinson’s (1995) categorization of deixis was used to find the different categorizations of deixis and their sub types. The aim of this study was to find out whether the use of deictic expressions is frequent in the teacher talk or not. According to Levinson’s model Social deixis, which “concerns the encoding of social distinctions that are relative to participant-roles, particularly aspects of the social relationship holding between speaker and addressee (s) or speaker and some referent” (p. 63).
And discourse deixis, which “concerns the encoding of reference to portions of the unfolding discourse in which the utterance is located” (p. 62) Also according to Levinson, there are some sub-types for each of these major types. Social deixis; honorifics and kinship terms (two major types); and discourse deixis (which is related to some other subtypes which is out of the domain of this study, so in this research just the sub type of demonstratives is taken into account).

The analysis of the corpus of the present study of deictic expressions and their sub types indicated that the use of these two types of deixis is prominent in the teacher talk. The use of theses expressions would improve the coherence of the speech; therefore, it would improve students’ comprehension ability of EFL learners in the classroom. Meanwhile, I believe that the use of these two types of deixis influence learners’ feelings. They would feel more relaxed to comprehend the input and produce the output.

Generally speaking, two types of deixis, i.e. social, and discourse deixis, were used significantly. Regarding the use of sub types of social deixis, in some sessions (depending on the subject of the lesson) the teacher used more honorifics. In other sessions, she used more kinship terms. Finally, using discourse deixis was frequent; therefore, it would improve comprehension ability of EFL learners (Riley, 1985).

7. Pedagogical Implications

The results of the present study have obvious importance in increasing students’ awareness of the way English teachers organize their expressions by using deixis as a kind of cohesive device (Halliday & Hassan, 1976). Thompson (2001) indicates, activities aimed at increasing language awareness can strengthen writers/speakers’ acquisition of proficiency.

Also, it would improve teachers’ sensitivity to the significant role of their discourse in the classrooms. They would know that the use of deixis would improve the listening comprehension ability of EFL learners in the classroom. Therefore, teachers can handle their utterances in order to improve EFL learner’s language proficiency.

8. Suggestions for Further Research

This study was an attempt to find the amounts and frequencies of deictic expressions in a teacher discourse. The present study was just limited to one teacher. The study could be done by including more teachers. In this case,
we would be able to find whether there are significant differences between the teachers in the use of deictic expressions.

Meanwhile, the present research can be extended to other types of deictic expressions such as person, place, etc.

Furthermore, the current study did not consider gender factor which can be an interesting issue for other researchers.

Also according to Levinson (1995) “deictic reference is ontogenetically prior to other kinds of reference, and provides the basis for their acquisition” (p. 60). Therefore, the acquisition of deixis in children can be a subject for further studying.

Finally, it should be mentioned that since in addition to Levinson (1995), there are also other definitions and categorizations of deictic expressions by other scholars like Lyons, Fillmore, and Yule (1996) so these other categorizations can also be taken into consideration in further research.

References