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Critical Insights: A Perspective on Discourse Analysis

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Abstract: ***Discourse is the study of language beyond the sentence level concerning its social and cultural practices in context. This paper 'Language as Discourse' mainly aims to analyze and explore the contribution of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in education and Classroom Discourse Analysis critically to ensure an effective teaching-learning process for better academic achievement. Similarly, it also provides insights on language, discourse, discourse analysis, and Critical Discourse Analysis. This theoretical study reveals that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) contributes a lot to education by providing the lens to the learners to view the outer world through critical eyes and by encouraging them not only to question and criticize the dominations, suppressions and oppressions existed inside the classrooms and society but also to empower them for the emancipation and transformation. It was also found that analyzing the discourses observed inside the classrooms as Classroom Discourse Analysis assumes, facilitates the teachers for active interaction or communication inside the classroom in harmony with Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) chain for the better academic achievement. The study has been concluded with a note that the pedagogy of Nepal should also be guided towards interactive, communicative, emancipatory, and interactive mode where teachers and learners are the responsible change agents for it. This study will provide some insights for those who want more exploration of discourse, discourse analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Classroom Discourse Analysis through the critical and analytical eyes.***

Keywords: Language, Discourse, Discourse Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, Classroom Discourse Analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is a powerful means to express the feelings, thoughts, emotions, powers, and so forth via written, spoken, or sign mode. Crystal (2011) defines language as 'the concrete act of speaking, writing or signing in a given situation – the notion of parole, or performance (p.265).' On the other hand, discourse is the unit of language larger than a sentence and it is linked with

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the ideological and power relations where it is used. However, sometimes even a single word can be a discourse. For, Wodak and Meyer (2009), discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned and it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. Furthermore, they state that discourse is constitutive in nature in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and it also contributes to transforming it. Foucault (1972) argues that discourse is not only a linguistic and structural phenomenon but also the social and cultural practices of language that can influence and shape the world issues and it is about what can be said and thought along with who can speak, when, and with what authority. This article mainly aims to discover the answers to the two research questions; a) How does Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) contribute to education? b) In what ways does the Classroom Discourse Analysis assist teachers in the teaching-learning process? I argue that Critical Discourse Analysis and Classrooms Discourse Analysis contribute a lot to foster communication in classrooms, ensure the effective teaching-learning process, academic improvement, and to make the learners critical thinkers for the emancipation and transformation of their classrooms as well as society. Although many researches have been carried out on language as discourse, discourse analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, and Classroom Discourse Analysis, there seems less exploration regarding their educational implications or contributions in the classrooms and it is more glaring especially in the context of Nepal. This study attempts to bridge the very gap observed in the existing literature.

The following section deals with some theoretical reviews on Discourse Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis in Education, and Classroom Discourse Analysis.

Discourse Analysis

The exploration of the various dimensions of the relationship between language and the context where it is used can be termed as discourse analysis. Moreover, how we make the sense of what we read, how we can recognize the well-constructed text, how we can understand more than merely the literal meaning of the speakers' words has to do with discourse analysis. Sarroub (2004) defines discourse analysis as a process of analyzing the language beyond the sentence level. Therefore, it is the study of language use related to social and psychological factors that influence communication. We can find various dimensions of discourse. The major dimensions of discourse include naturally occurring language, larger units than isolated words and sentences, beyond sentence grammar, non-verbal aspects of interaction and communication, phenomena of text grammar and language use, and contexts of language use (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Discourse analysis is inevitable for the successful communication and effective teaching-learning. In this regard, Alsoraihi (2019) argues that language cannot be learned or taught in isolation, rather the learners are required to be engaged in actual or social context to apply their knowledge and skills for ensuring a successful communication and for the effective teaching-learning. Moreover, he adds that the learners who focus on relating linguistic knowledge to social and cultural contexts will show higher levels of communicative performance and self-confidence. So, it implies that discourse analysis can foster communication via language emphasizing social and cultural contexts.

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Critical Discourse Analysis

One of the most important and highly discussed notions related to language as discourse is the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA analyzes the use of language concerning the context, power, and politics. Van Dijk (2001) defines Critical Discourse Analysis as 'a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context.' Analyzing the ways or modes of talking about various aspects of life and producing a set of statements about that area or aspect that will define, describe, delimit, and circumscribe what it is possible and impossible and how it is to be talked about from the critical and emancipatory eyes or lens has to do with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In other words, Critical Discourse Analysis is an approach that offers the socio-political interpretation of a discourse and shows the relationships between language, power, and politics. Critical Discourse Analysis has been viewed and analyzed from various perspectives and dimensions by various scholars (Fairclough, 2012, 2013; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Van Dijk, 2001; Weiss & Wodak, 2007). Fairclough (2012) presented one specific version of Critical Discourse Analysis, characterized by a realist and dialectical-relational theory of discourse, a methodology that is oriented towards the construction of objects of research topics in dialogue with other areas of social theory and research and by selecting methods and depending upon the particular object of research. Likewise, Van Dijk (1993) discussed the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis as an explicit socio-political stance of discourse analysis, and a focus on dominance relations by elite groups and institutions as they are enacted, legitimated, or otherwise reproduced by the text and talk. Moreover, CDA is concerned with a study of the relations between discourse, power, dominance, social inequality, and the position of the discourse analyst in such social relationships (Van Dijk, 1993). It means to say that texts and talks are such discourses which can influence the social issues such as inequality, power abuse, and also people's mental representation (schema) and general knowledge about the various world issues. Likewise, Wodak (2011) perceives Critical Discourse Analysis as being chiefly interested in analyzing opaque as well as clear structural relations of dominance, discrimination, power, and control when these are expressed in language. Moreover, he added that Critical Discourse Analysis targets to explore social disparity analytically as it is conveyed, formed, legitimized by language use or in discourse. The above literature suggests that language is powerful means not only to dominate, oppress and suppress people, most importantly but also to raise the questions to the domination, discrimination, suppression and oppression for empowerment and transformation.

Critical Discourse Analysis in Education

Although CDA may not be an approach directly related to language pedagogy, we can find its pedagogical implications in teaching-learning purposes, especially in language teaching. CDA encourages the language teachers who emphasize classroom interactions to minimize their limitations and it also encourages them to engage their students in the social discourses, both in written or spoken mode. Concerning the role of CDA in education, Rogers et al. (2005) reported that educational issues are constructed and represented at micro and macro levels through public documents, speeches, interactions in classrooms, informal sites of learning, and across the lifespan. Similarly, CDA helps the learners view the outer world by providing the

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lens. Defining CDA as the process of analyzing the language beyond the sentence for meaning concerning power, Sarroub (2004) argues that CDA offers the insights to the educators into learning by providing them a lens or frame from which they can view the change at the personal and institutional levels. CDA helps the learners for their deeper understanding and insights on the process of learning. CDA is not only the critical but also the transformative in nature. It suggests that it helps the learners not only to criticize on dominance, suppression, oppressions existed in the classrooms and various walks of their lives but also to transform their thoughts, institutions and their societies. Rogers (2004) argued that CDA adds an understanding of learning in two ways in educational research; first, it facilitates to evaluate the discourse from a critical view that permits learners to understand the process of learning in more complex ways and for the deeper insights into the learning. Secondly, during the process of conducting the CDA, the researchers' and participants' learning is shaped to offer the possibilities not only for the critique, but also for the social transformation that rises from the critique (Rogers, 2004).
Moreover, CDA helps to explore and understand the use of language beyond the layers of language and cultural models of teaching and learning. Regarding the possibilities of CDA to enhance learning, Stevens (2011) claimed that CDA encourages educators to push beyond the surface layers of language and note the ideological work completed through language. Moreover, he added that researchers and teachers can understand how certain cultural models of teaching and learning are reproduced and reinforced. Analyzing the cultural aspects of the discourse which is beyond the surface level of language by educators, learners and researchers is one of the major classroom implications of CDA. The power that underlie in text and speech can be understood by the Critical Discourse Analysis. Therefore, the teachers, students, curriculum developers, textbook writers, educators, and policymakers need to consider the cultural and socio-political ideologies and issues at national or global levels while studying the language in relation to context, power, and politics.

Classroom Discourse Analysis

Analyzing the discourse existed in the classroom has to do with Classroom Discourse Analysis and it seems significant to language pedagogy. Christie (2005) claims that an institution as schooling requires some serious reflection and discussion, the better to understand and interpret language as a social phenomenon, and the better to provide for enhanced educational practices in the future. Analysis and reflection of the discourse are inevitable in recent days since the pedagogy has experienced the paradigm shift from the banking model (Freire, 2018) to transformative and emancipatory mode. The Classroom Discourse Analysis framework is based on the patterns of teacher-student interaction observed in the language classroom. In this regard, Si Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) provide a framework of teacher-student feedback as Initiation, Response and Feedback (IRF) chain where the teacher initiates the interaction (possibly with a query) and the student responds the query and finally, the teacher gives the feedback to the response of the student. For example;

T: What's is the capital of Nepal?
S: Kathmandu
T: Correct.

The above-mentioned example suggests that Classroom Discourse Analysis facilitates the teachers to make the classroom more interactive or communicative and the teaching-learning

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process more effective. Moreover, analyzing the talks or discourses of the classrooms seems to be important because of some more reasons. Rymes (2015) claims the importance or benefits of analyzing the talks or discourses of the classroom by providing four reasons; mutual understanding between teachers and students has been enhanced after getting the insights from Classroom Discourse Analysis and teachers have been able to understand the local differences in the classroom talk, the teachers have been beyond the stereotypes or other cultural generalizations by analyzing the classroom discourse themselves. Moreover, academic achievement improves after teachers analyze discourse in their classrooms and an intrinsic and lifelong love for the practice of teaching can be fostered by Classroom Discourse Analysis (Rymes, 2015). Similarly, Rymes (2010) claims that Classroom Discourse Analysis develops the teachers and students' meta-discursive reflections that are considered as critical in multilingual education in current globalized systems and the discourse engaged in the classroom appears to be a model mechanism for understanding the collections mingling in a classroom. However, it has also been found that even the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) chain seems to be less communicative if teachers always initiate the conversation and led to their questions. From a Malaysian study, Noor et al. (2010) revealed that evaluative type feedback was the most frequent type of verbal feedback used by the teachers and teacher-initiated exchanges dominated more than 65% of the discourse in the English language classrooms and made the classroom less communicative. Although, there might be some aspects, needed to be considered, the majority of the above-mentioned studies suggest that Classroom Discourse Analysis assists the teachers to enhance the classroom interaction, address the individual and cultural differences of the learners, ensure effective teaching-learning process, improve learners' academic achievement and to understand the repertoires circulating in classrooms.

2. METHODOLOGY

The present study is a qualitative in nature. Since the study is theoretical and descriptive in nature, it makes the use of secondary resources like books, journals, articles, theses, library and websites chiefly from various search engines such as Google, Google scholar, joster, and other online websites. These documents facilitated me to explore in-depth concerning language as a discourse. As I interpreted the various themes, it is thematic and interpretive study. As the central endeavour in the context of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience (Cohen et al., 2013), this study emphaisized to explore how Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) contributes to education and in what ways the Classroom Discourse Analysis assists teachers in the teaching-learning process.

3. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Discourse is the study of language beyond the sentence level in relation to its social and cultural practices in the context that can influence and shape the various issues. Similarly, the exploration of the relationship between language and the context of language where it is used is known as discourse analysis. Since language is a context-sensitive phenomenon, it cannot be studied in isolation. The socio-political interpretation of language which shows the relationship

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between language, power, and politics is the central idea of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It is emancipatory and transformative in the sense that it not only studies and analyzes the relationship between context, power, politics, dominance, and social inequality existed in the classrooms and societies critically but also empowers the learners for the emancipation and transformation in their classrooms and societies. Since CDA provides the learners to view the outer world, it is very important to make our learners critical and transformative in the field of education.

Classroom discourse analysis analyzes the talks or discourses of the classroom. It mainly emphasizes on the patterns of interaction in inside the classroom. Well initiation by the teacher, genuine response by the students, and constructive feedback by the teacher play crucial role for an effective teaching-learning process, academic improvement and achievement, and mutual understanding between teachers and students.

The contribution of Critical Discourse Analysis and Classroom Discourse Analysis in relation to education in cannot be denied or underestimated in the context of Nepal. The teacher fronted classrooms, the transmission mode of education, domination, sole authority of teachers, oppression, and suppression of the teachers towards the students without respecting their ideas seem to be the common practices in Nepalese pedagogy which should be critically questioned with sincere note. Not only this, the teachers and learners should be critical thinkers or educators and there should be a dialogical relationship between them and knowledge should be created, not be transmitted. The Nepalese teachers, learners, and educators should contribute to the emancipation and transformation of the society. Since teachers, learners and educators are the change agents, analyzing the relationship between language, power, and politics critically and contributing to the prosperity of society and country via education comes to be their great responsibility as the need and call of the day in the context of Nepal.

Author Introduction

Mr. Bijaya Kumar Ranabhat is an emerging English Language Teaching (ELT) practitioner having great owe and reverence in ELT. He is an M.Phil scholar of Nepal Open University. He is a life member of Nepal English Language Teachers Association (NELTA) and also an executive member of NELTA, Tanahun chapter. His areas of interests include literature, motivation and contemporary issues on ELT and beyond too.

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