

Style and Lexical Choices in Teacher-Student Classroom Interaction

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Abstract

Effective linguistic choices and delivery methods are the basic ingredients to success in classroom teaching/learning, yet the language and style of classroom interaction have enjoyed little scholarly attention. The paper, therefore, investigated the styles and lexical choices in teacher-student classroom interactions to establish the role of language as vehicle of the content and style in teaching/learning. The data consist of 10 teacher-student classroom interactions randomly recorded, transposed to writing and subjected to stylistic and quantitative methods of analysis, with insights from relational semantics, text-linguistic and socio-linguistic stylistics. Two styles were observed in the discourse: evaluative style (used by the teachers) and informative style (used by both the students and teachers). Informative style is indexed by such lexical choices as register, synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and colloquialism that enter into paradigmatic relations. Evaluative style is characterised by collocation which keys into syntagmatic relation. While collocation (330: 32.1%) is the most prevalent lexical feature in the data, hyponymy (17: 1.7%) is the least. These stylistic features have proved to be the functional indices for underpinning the styles and lexical choices used in classroom interaction. Thus, they are important for effective assessment of teachers' competence, students' learning progress, and designing of school curricula.

Keywords: Stylistics, Teacher-student interaction, Classroom discourse, Lexical choices

Introduction

The classroom is the practical meeting point of nearly all the educational practices ranging from curriculum planning to implementation (Fagbamiye, 1998). The success or failure of the goal of classroom activities may be affected by the different aspects of educational system, but is primarily dependent on the interaction of the two major participants in the classroom – the teacher and student (Hall & Walsh, 2002). Hence, the participants' interactions – in terms of the linguistic choices and methods utilized in fostering the objectives of classroom teaching/learning – have become veritable sources of research interests. Of particular concern here is how participants make specific choices of lexemes, which fall into specific styles of classroom language.

Problem statement and significance

Classroom research has increased in the last two decades, although a number of important issues are yet to be methodically addressed, especially with respect to classroom interaction. Studies on classroom interactions have, however, been concentrated singly on either the teachers' modifications in talk and feedback (e.g. Dagarin, 2004) or the learners' group work and question types (e.g. Hakansson & Linberg, 1988). Not enough scholarly attention has been paid to the classroom interaction as it involves the two participants – the teacher and student. The few studies (related to the present one) on teacher-student classroom interaction have been unduly focused on the language (e.g. Babatunde & Adedimeji [nd.]; Schleppegrell, 2001) and conversational pattern (e.g. Maroni, 2008; Zhang, 2011). These studies seem to have neglected the peculiar insights that will be offered to understanding classroom discourse and teaching methods, especially in paying attention to how style and linguistic choices interact in the classroom. The truth of the matter is that the language and style of teacher-student classroom interaction have received almost no scholarly attention, as far as the extant literature here is concerned. The present study is therefore aimed at examining the styles used by classroom participants, and identifying the lexical items that they are characterised by.

The study of the teacher-student classroom interaction is pertinent at this time as insight is needed into the kinds of performance that occur in the classroom for effective assessment of teachers' competence, students' learning progress, and even in designing effective curriculum for education in Nigeria. The study is capable of explicitly revealing the unfamiliar functions that language performs in classroom contexts and the levels of technicality that are associated, which are expressed through particular lexical devices. Knowledge of these devices – in turn – is expected to guide teachers' linguistic choices and methods of instruction thereby facilitating learners' access to the content of instruction.

Methodology

The data samples consist of ten (10) full-length teacher-student classroom interactions randomly recorded in Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri, Imo State in Nigeria. The interactions and discussion of the subjects on varied topics in the classroom were recorded; and because the classroom discourse is dominated by the teacher, the areas of dialogue between the teachers and students (not necessarily the entire lecture) were

purposely transposed to writing for convenience of analysis. The study adopts both stylistic and quantitative approach in analysing the data. The analytical framework for the study is linguistic stylistics with insights from Geeraerts' (2010) relational semantics and Sandig & Selting's (1997) text- and socio-linguistic stylistics.

The context and discourse of classroom interaction

The context of classroom interaction requires that teachers introduce or present information in conventionally structured ways, while learners respond or react to the information, especially when invited to do so. This is largely achieved through one important aspect of classroom interaction, namely, teachers' questions. Teachers' questions, according to Fakaye (2007, p. 127), "may serve different functions, including focusing attention, exercising disciplinary control in the course of an instruction, encouraging students' participation and moving the lesson forward among others." Generally, the value of classroom discourse is of great importance because it sets a right atmosphere for learning and transmitting teachers' expectations for their pupils' response (Nystrand, 1997, p. 28).

Empirically, the quest for improved teaching and learning has motivated researchers into paying attention to what goes on in the classroom, especially the interaction between teachers and students. This has generated interest not only from language scholars (e.g. Babatunde & Adedimeji [nd.]; Schleppegrell, 2001; Maroni, 2008; Zhang, 2011) but also from those in education (e.g. Fakaye, 2007) and the social sciences (e.g. Nystrand, 1997; Zhang, 2008). Particularly, the linguistic work on classroom discourse bifurcates into studies of the traditional approach, and those of the modern approach. Within the traditional approach, there has been a predominant focus on the structure and patterns of classroom interaction (e.g. Maroni, 2008; Zhang, 2011). These 'traditional' studies largely utilise the conversation analytical perspectives. Studies of the modern approach are related to the present study in that they de-emphasize the 'traditional' attention to the conversational patterns on classroom interaction. Very little scholarly work has however utilised this modern approach (e.g. Schleppegrell, 2001; Babatunde & Adedimeji [nd.]).

Schleppegrell (2001) is a pure linguistic analysis of the language of schooling in general, with focus on primary school classroom interaction, spanning across several topics. The study is limited to the lexical and grammatical levels of manifestation. Unlike the present study, Schleppegrell (2001) is not based on stylistic framework, nor employed the quantitative method of analysis to instantiate the linguistic patterns, nor focused on a particular subject area, as in the present case, English language. Babatunde & Adedimeji (nd.), on the other hand, is a pragmatic study, focusing on the context of classroom interaction, particularly the politeness phenomena that come into play in the university classroom situation. Unlike the present study, the authors reviewed above, apart from not employing the stylistic and quantitative methods of analysis, did not consider the insights that will be gained in the link between style and lexical choices. This, however, is the specific gap that the present study is set to fill.

Theoretical perspectives

Style and stylistics

Being a peculiar way of doing something, style is a concept that runs across virtually all aspects of human behaviour, such as dressing, eating, rulership, etc. In linguistics however, style has been described as the “consistent occurrence in the text of certain items and structures, or types of items and structures, among those offered by the language as a whole” (Malmkjaer, 2002, p. 510). The concept has received varied definitions from many scholars, albeit largely associated with *uniqueness* in language use. A number of approaches to the study of style have been proposed. Three broad perspectives – modified from Osundare’s (2003[1982]) classification – can however be condensed from all the concepts of style in the literature; namely, the choice perspective, the individualist perspective, and the difference perspective. The choice perspective, as author-oriented, is the most popular view of style. In fact, almost all the stylistic theorists subscribe to this idea of style. The view provides an answer to the dichotomy between stylistic and non-stylistic choices (Enkvist *et al.*, 1971, p. 19). It is anchored on the simple notion that a language user makes choices from the linguistic possibilities in his/her repertoire, the most appropriate items that will suit his/her message, medium, situation and purpose. The individualist perspective, according to Malmkar & Carter (2002, quoted in Olaniyan & Oyekola, 2007, p. 30), relates to the idea of style as consistency, agreeing that a good style is “a consistent occurrence in the text of certain items and structures, or types of items and structures among those offered by the language as a whole”. Put in another way, style is seen as a set of recurrent linguistic habits by which an author’s style can be predicted. This frequent linguistic habit in an author, according to Osundare (2003, p. 30), can manifest in phonological, syntactic and rhetorical forms, which can be quantified in frequencies.

The difference perspective encompasses the deviationist and variationist views of style. Style as a deviation from the norm “is hinged on the notion that language is both a rule-governed behaviour and an accumulation of norms” (Lawal, 2003, p. 28). A writer’s style in this regard is measured against the choices made in violation or tinkering of language rules without loss of meaning. Variation, in Lyons’s (1995, p. 340) view, is one of the major characteristic features of language, considering its (language’s) heterogeneous nature. Style as variation, therefore, proves “the status of language as a tool which owes its utility and survival to its variability” (Osunadre, 2003, p. 19). Two types of variation have been identified (namely: code-oriented variation and subject-oriented variation), which are all relevant – as our analysis will show – in considering language in an institutionalised context like that of the classroom. Code-oriented variation is shaped from the view of style as the difference between two ways of saying the same thing, while subject-oriented variation is affected by the degree of familiarity with the subject-matter between each text-producer and the audience expressed through the choice of words. Subject-oriented variation is significant in linguistic stylistics because it helps in the classification of registers and the linguistic features associated with them (Ononye, 2012). It is commonly applied for the systemic variations in linguistic features common to particular non-literary situations, e.g. advertising, classroom interaction, etc.

Stylistics can be seen as a field of study, which seeks to uncover and discuss the effective uses of certain language features and styles in a text to create certain effects to a particular audience, with close consideration of the aspects of genre, context and purpose of the text (Ononye, 2008, p. 39). Right from the classical period, there have been continued 'debates' among scholars over what stylistics does and does not entail. These have produced different schools and movements with conflicting or complementary claims; and a whole lot of useful concepts and approaches to style have resulted from these debates, which are still in use today (for details, see Miššiková, 2003). Clearly, the multiplicity of claims in stylistics is due to the main influences of linguistics and literary criticism, which "has generated such distinctive terms as "linguistic stylistics" and "literary stylistics" (Akinbiyi, 2007, p. 221). While literary stylistics makes intuitive and impressionistic judgements about the way formal features are manipulated in a literary text, it is linguistic stylistics that feeds this study, for the reason that it attempts to bring certain scientific characteristics of language into the analysis of literary and/or non-literary texts. In view of this, scholars (e.g. Sandig & Selting, 1997) have discussed five classes of manifestation of linguistic stylistics; namely, traditional stylistics (concerned with the structure of literary language), pragmatic stylistics (studies certain pragmatic features and their situation of use), text-linguistic stylistics (involves a descriptive and comparative study of stylistic conventions of text types), sociolinguistic stylistics (studies styles in registers and the factors determining the use in cultural situations), and interactional stylistics (explores the choices made of those aspects of language use that are under the control of interactants). The choice of linguistic stylistic approach in this paper particularly utilises aspects of text-linguistic and sociolinguistic stylistics. These are intended to enable us identify and discuss the various uses of language features and methods in the data, with close regard to aspects of the genre, context and purpose of teacher-student interaction.

Relational semantics

One principal approach of which the lexicon is both internally structured and extra-linguistically represented is through sense relation: the sense of a word is the sum total of its conceptual senses in relation to other phenomena in the real world (Cruse, 2000, p. 163). Sense relations, adopted in this study, bifurcate into the Saussurean distinction between paradigmaticism and syntagmatism.

Paradigmatic relations hold between items which can occupy the same position in a grammatical structure. They are concerned with different associations of relatedness, where the words involved stand in complementary distribution (Geeraerts, 2010, p. 58). Paradigmatic sense relations commonly manifest in terms of synonymy, hyponymy, meronymy, and different kinds of opposition. Synonymy, according to Saeed (2004, p. 65), is the lexical relation involving different phonological words with similar meaning, which are derived from a number of parameters, viz. different dialects (e.g. *tap* and *faucet*), different registers (e.g. *wife* and *spouse*), collocational restriction (e.g. *boy* and *lad*), and portraying positive/negative attitude of the user (e.g. *activist* and *militant*). Hyponymy (derived from Greek: *hypo-* meaning 'under') is the lexical relation of class-inclusion described in English by the phrase 'kind / type / sort of'. "A chain of hyponyms defines a hierarchy of elements" (Riemer, 2010, p. 142), where for example *hibiscus*, *tulip*, and *rose* are co-hyponyms of *flower*, which is their hyperonym. Meronymy (Greek *meros*: 'part') is the relation of part to

whole, where the part (e.g. *eye*) is referred to as a meronym of *face*, while the whole (e.g. *face*) is known as the holonym of *eye* (Riemer, 2010, p. 140). The notion of oppositeness embraces several different types of relation, the most common of which is antonymy. Antonymy is characterised by a relationship of incompatibility between two items with respect to some given dimensions of contrast. Some words, for example, may be associated with more than one antonym, with respect to the dimension of contrast involved (e.g. *girl* has both *boy* and *woman*, depending on whether the dimension of contrast is sex or age; *sweet* has both *bitter* and *sour*: Murphy, 2003, p. 173).

Syntagmatic sense relations hold between items in the same grammatical structure. There is the possibility of a lexical element in a text to co-occur in larger wholes with other elements of the language in terms of, for example, compounds and derivations in the morphological realm, and constituents and sentences in syntax (Geeraerts, 2010, p. 57). Here, relations between individual items are not usually given names on the lines of hyponymy, antonymy, and so forth, but certain effects of putting meanings together are recognised, such as anomaly (e.g. *a light green illness*), pleonasm (e.g. *dental toothache*), and meaning extension, such as metaphor (e.g. *move mountain*) and metonymy (e.g. *nice wheels*). The requirements for a 'normal' combination are described as selectional restrictions or selectional preferences. For instance, it is by virtue of syntagmatic sense relations, in this case between verb and noun, that *Fred ran across the field* is normal, whereas *The field crawled across Fred* is odd. As opposed to paradigmatic relations, syntagmatic relations constitute "on-line co-occurrence" (Lyons, 1968, p. 431). For Cruse (2000, p. 149), syntagmatic sense relations are "an expression of coherence constraints" while paradigmatic relations are "an expression of such structuring." One relevant insight from this review to our study is that paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations function concurrently, syntagmatic relations delimiting the space within which paradigmatic relations operate.

Findings and discussion

Two styles have been identified as used by the interactants in the classroom discourse, *viz.* informative style and evaluative style. While the evaluative style is associated with the teachers, the informative style affects both the students and teachers; hence, informative style is found dominant in the data. The styles are found to be indexed by specific lexical choices (made by the interactants), which are considered with regard to the way they enter into paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations in the data. The informative style, therefore, is indexed by such lexical choices as register, synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and colloquialism that enter into paradigmatic relations. The evaluative style, equally, is characterised by collocation which keys into syntagmatic relation. The distribution of these features are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1 reveals that, on the whole, the lexical features that enter into paradigmatic relations (697: 67.9%) dominate those of syntagmatic relations (330: 32.1%). This corroborates the dominance of the informative style considering the interactants' (especially, the teachers) focus on choosing the most suitable lexemes (among the available options) that will allow them provide adequate information on their subject matters. The table further shows that, on the General Average column, collocation (330: 32.1%) is the most prevalent lexical item found in the data. This is followed by register (267: 26.0%) and synonymy (237:

23.1%), while hyponymy (17: 1.7%), antonymy (27: 2.6%) and colloquialism (149: 14.5%), respectively, take the least proportion. The styles will be discussed in turn.

| /n | Styles/Lexical choices | | T eacher | S tudent | G eneral Average | Examples |
|---|-----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---|----------|
| Infor mative style Paradigmatic 697 (67.9%) | Hypony my | 1 6 (2.2%) | 0 1 (0.3%) | 1 7 (1.7%) | meetings (class, tutorial), etc. | |
| | Antony my | 2 3 (3.2%) | 0 4 (1.3%) | 2 7 (2.6%) | not critics, but writers, etc | |
| | Colloqu ialism | 4 4 (6.2%) | 1 05 (33.4%) | 1 49 (14.5%) | my brother, the stuff, etc. | |
| | Synony my or near- synonymy | 1 81 (25.4%) | 5 6 (17.8%) | 2 37 (23.1%) | understand-know; answer-respond, etc. | |
| | Register | 2 19 (30.7%) | 4 8 (15.3%) | 2 67 (26.0%) | concept, define, etc. | |
| Eval uative style Synta gmatic 330 (32.1%) | Collocat ion | 2 30 (32.3%) | 1 00 (31.8%) | 3 30 (32.1%) | serious student, teaching practice, etc. | |
| | | 7 13 | 3 14 | 1 027 | | |

Table 1: Styles and lexical choices in teacher-student classroom interaction

Evaluative style

By evaluative style is meant a way in which language users utilise value-laden words to express an opinion or point of view. This is a prominent style observed to be extensively used in the data, where the classroom teachers employ different choices of lexeme that show their assessment of the entities in the discourse. Collocation is the only significant syntagmatic lexical feature that informs the evaluative style in the data. One common fact can be observed in the use of collocation here: it comes handy for use both by the teachers and the students. Three broad manifestations of collocation have been observed; namely, collocations assessing teaching/learning activities (152: 46.1%), the participants involved (35: 10.6%), and the participants' roles (143: 43.3%). That the activity category dominates in the data is not surprising considering the emphasis on the achievement of teaching/learning objectives in the classroom. The activity category is further reduced into two; namely: collocations assessing the processes involved in the activities (e.g. semester examination, etc) and collocations assessing the outcome of the activities (e.g. change of behaviour, etc). The role category is the next-dominant probably because of the all-important roles of the participants with regard to

classroom discourse. Like the participant category, the role category is further divided into two, *viz.* collocations assessing the teachers' role (e.g. expose you, etc) and those expressing the students' role (e.g. get the idea, etc). Some more examples of these collocation items are examined in the text below:

Extract 1:

Teacher ... our work here is to give you the various framework [*sic*] through which you view the texts, I mean literary texts. And the least you can do is for you to key into what we are doing and learn something from it. [Lines 16—19]

Extract 2:

Teacher ... a hard working student starts right from the first day to get the right materials for the courses he has, and begins to read them and getting prepared for various forms of semester seminars, quizzes, term papers, and even final exams, and what you have at the end of the day is a successful semester.... Of course the sensitive teacher will know when the students are hard working and ready for work.... [Lines 58—64]

Extracts 1 and 2 above, as earlier hinted, are dominated by the teacher, and some of the recurrent collocation items in the data have been underlined. Such collocations as “semester seminars”, “[semester] quizzes”, “term papers”, “final exams”, and “successful semester” (in Extract 2) cover the teaching/learning activities. However, all the items listed here are means through which the teaching/learning activities are evaluated, except “successful semester”, which assesses the outcome of the activities. Other sets of collocations as “hardworking student” and “sensitive teacher” (in Extract 2) contain pre-modifying adjectives (“hardworking” and “sensitive”), which assess the participants involved. In a similar vein, “give you”, “learn something” (in Extract 1), “read them”, and “getting prepared” (in Extract 2) consider the teachers' and students' roles in their various contexts.

Informative style

By informative style is meant a manner of language use in which the primary goal is to enlighten the audience. The classroom interactants (both the teachers and students) are found to make paradigmatic lexical choices (e.g. register, synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy and colloquialism) aimed at providing their audience with new knowledge. Register takes the highest portion among the lexical features making up the informative style. This reflects the classroom discourse and the language associated with the subject being discussed. Register items abound which inform on the activities of the various participants involved in the classroom discourse. In this regard, three types of register have been observed in the data; namely, subject-oriented (117: 43.8%), activity-oriented (99: 37.1%), and participant-oriented (51: 19.1%) register items. The subject-oriented type, being the most preponderant, covers the vocabulary items that derive from the different topics treated in the class sessions. Two of this type can further be identified from data, *viz.* items revealing the subject matters handled in the classrooms (e.g. phrase structure rule, etc), and items showing the meta-language used in treating the subject matters (e.g. concept, etc). The activity-oriented type includes the vocabulary items describing the activities in the discourse, while the participant-

oriented category involves vocabulary items describing the participants involved in the activities. Both the activity and participant-oriented register items bifurcate into items describing the teacher (e.g. evaluation, resource person, etc) and the learner (e.g. tutorial, pupil, etc). Some examples from the data can be considered:

Extract 3:

Teacher ... the idea of gender is socially constructed; it emanates from the societal divides we make in our societies, in our everyday lives....

... so when criticising any feminist text, the student should try ... to take his mind off the trivial issues of our everyday lives and get the idea being portrayed by the author who are [*sic*] incidentally members of the same society.... Now let us revise the functions of the writer to the society we treated in our last class [Lines 116—123]

Student 1 you said that the writer is a prophet; he predicts and announce [*sic*] what could happen in the society...

Teacher ...that's right!

Student 2 the writer is a teacher; he educates and reminds the members of the society on the ills, values and prospects of the society....

Teacher Good! [Lines 139—145]

In the texts above, such register items as “gender”, “feminist”, “socially constructed”, “prophet” and “teacher” give adequate information on the subject discussed or being discussed. However, while “gender” and “feminist” belong to the subject matter category, “socially constructed”, “prophet” and “teacher” represent the meta-language employed to discuss the subject matter. Other register items like “criticising”, “revise” and “treated” make up the activity-oriented register; they give insight into the on-going activities in a literature classroom. However, while the activity of “criticising” relates to both the teachers and students, the teachers exclusively deal more with “revis[ing]” and “treat[ing]” a subject matter in the classroom. “Student” is the only participant-oriented register in Extract 3 above; and it belongs to the student sub-category of participant.

Synonymy has been observed to fall into two patterns; namely, clustered synonyms (129: 54.4%) and distant synonyms (108: 45.6%). Operationally, clustered synonyms are synonyms which occur together in form of lexical sets while distant synonyms are those that are interchanged with each other in the data, but are not brought together. Generally, two forms of synonymy appear in the classroom discourse; first, as process indicators, which includes actions (e.g. read/go-through) and activities (e.g. test/quiz, etc); and second, as reference indicators, which covers animate (e.g. learner/student, etc) and inanimate entities (e.g. text/materials, etc). Synonymy of both patterns is prevalent in the data some examples of which are as follows:

Extract 4:

Teacher In our previous meetings, we've actually been talking about stylistics and specifically in the last class, we discussed the origins of stylistics ... what then is style?

What can you think in your own view to be style, and how many concepts of style can you say you know? [a little pause]

Student 1 Style is a particular way or manner of doing something or behaving or writing.

Teacher Ok...

Student 2 style relate [*sic*] to the way a group of people or generation of people use language or...

Teacher Ok, as you can see, one particular thing you know that run [*sic*] across these definitions by the students here is "the way"; that is the same as "the manner", the way or manner something is done or the way a language user (be it writer or speaker) uses language. What this means to us is that the way something is done is different from the thing itself.... [Lines 71—85]

While the lexical sets underlined in the first exchange ("meetings/class" and "think/say") are cases of distant synonymy, the others ("way/manner" and "group/generation") in the extract are clustered. However, whereas "meetings/class" indicate particular activities in the discourse, "think/say" point to the stimulated actions proper. The clustered synonyms, on the other hand, are all reference indicators. For instance, "way/manner" refers to an inanimate entity, while "group/generation" refers to an animate entity. All of these synonymous sets are used to provide information on the domain of language use and participants involved.

The use of colloquialism in the data, as earlier stated, is dominated by the students. Two major types of colloquialism have been identified: Popular Nigerian English words (PNE – following Jowitt, 1991) (138: 92.6%) and group mannerisms (GM) (11: 7.4%). The PNE words further bifurcate into those of Non-Standard Nigerian English (NSNE) and those of Nigerian Pidgin (NPg). More instances of the NSNE are however found (86.1% against 13.9%). However, among the entire colloquial words, the NSNE (e.g. my brother, etc) and GM (e.g. as in, etc) items are found to feature more in the exchanges of the students. Hence, the dominance they have over the other types of colloquial words. Some examples will be relevant here:

Extract 5:

Teacher Ok from what we've been talking about, you know, what and what would now qualify as African Literature and who is an African Writer and African Critic? As in, what qualifies a person to be an African Writer or African Critic? [a little pause]

Student 1 African Literature is the literature written in Africa by African writers; as in, when Africans write about African situation, but not in all cases sha.

Teacher My sister...so you're saying that non-Africans or Africans abroad that write about African experiences are not African writers; I mean, their work do [*sic*] not qualify for African literature? Is that what you mean?

Student 1 Anyway sha, it also includes Africans abroad....

Student 2 I think African Literature or African writer or critic does not have anything to do with non-Africans or Whites. [Lines 182—184]

In Extract 5, such lexical item as “my sister” (or “my brother” running through the data) belongs to the NSNE type of the PNE. This is found to be used mostly by the teachers. There is a case of semantic extension here that the NSNE item is characterised by, which informs us (on the interpersonal connection between the interactants) beyond the English dictionary meanings of ‘my’ and ‘sister’. In this (Nigerian) classroom context, the items are used together in the strict Nigeria English sense of ‘one-Nigeria’ or ‘being your brother’s keeper’; that is, regarding every Nigerian citizen as brothers (for males) and sisters (for females). Another stylistic meaning may also be given to such items as used to reward or encourage students’ responses to questions asked in classrooms. There are several other instances of NSNE items found elsewhere in the data, some notable examples of which include: “light” to mean ‘electricity’ (Line 196), “big men” to mean ‘high-profile government officials’ (Line 211), etc. Also recurrent in the data, as exemplified in Extract 5, are such mannerisms as “as in”, “*sha*”, and “*you know*”, mainly used by the students. These belong to the GM word stock. That such vocabulary items are found principally in the language of classroom interaction underscores the potency and currency of the variety of group communication amongst students.

Antonymy and hyponymy are also relevant lexical stock of the informative style used in the classroom discourse, though – considering their low occurrences (23 and 17 instances, respectively) – they do not hold much promise of stylistic relevance in the data. However, like collocation, register and synonymy, instances of antonymy and hyponymy in the data are dominated by the teachers. The antonymous items in the data are observed to represent both the activities and actions involved in the discourse (cf. Process Category of synonymy above). Generally, two patterns have been discovered of the antonymy; they are: contrastive opposites (e.g. not White or Coloured, but hybrid) and negated opposites (e.g. socially-constructed, not biological phenomenon). More instances of the latter are however found. Let us examine the demonstration of these features in the data:

Extract 6:

Teacher Phonetics is concerned about speech sounds of languages in general, not in particular languages. Phonology relate [*sic*] to particular language.... Phoneme is not a sound, it is a class of phonetically similar sounds.... By the way, what did I say is the technical name for a family of sounds?

Student 1 ... phoneme is the name of a family of sounds....

In the extract above, the teacher has demonstrated an effective use of lexical opposites in enlightening the students on the state of affairs on the subject being discussed. For instance, the lexemes “general” and “particular” are in negated opposite on, while “sound” and “class” are in contrastive opposition. In the first instance, the negated opposites are related in the sense that “particular” is a logical antonym for “general”. A negative/positive pair of structure is set up with a negation “not” to link the opposition. However, in the second case, the contrastives do not have any logical antonymous relation. Here, a two-part structure is used here to set up a contrastive opposition between two apparently unrelated entities – “sound” and “class”.

Conclusion

Two styles were observed in the classroom discourse, namely, evaluative style (used by the teachers) and informative style (by both the teachers and students). While the informative style is indexed by register, synonymous, antonymous, hyponymous and colloquial lexical items that enter into paradigmatic relations, the evaluative style is characterised by collocations, which key into syntagmatic relations in the data. The teachers are found to dominate the use of all the lexical features but colloquialism. Statistics revealed collocation (330: 32.1%) as the most prevalent lexical feature found in the data while hyponymy (17: 1.7%) takes the least proportion. These stylistic features are functional indices for underpinning the styles and lexical choices used in teacher-student classroom interaction.

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