Metamorphosis and chameleonic in didactical discourse

Elena-Iuliana DOMUNCO
"Ștefan cel Mare" University
Suceava, Romania
idomunco@yahoo.com

Résumé : Dans son fonctionnement le discours didactique passe par des changements structuraux liés à sa composition interne et aussi par des changements de surface liés à sa manifestation extérieure. L’ouvrage se propose d’analyser le jeu des transformations discursives didactiques et la manière dans laquelle ces changements sont subordonnés aux buts éducatifs. Les mouvements discursifs peuvent être organisés en deux grandes catégories : les transformations intérieures, qui s’attachent à la métamorphose structurale du discours (présentées dans la première partie de l’ouvrage), et les transformations extérieures, épidermiques, qui s’attachent au caractère caméléonien du discours (exposées dans la deuxième partie de l’ouvrage).

Mots-clé : Discours didactique, communication verbale et nonverbale, émique, éthique.

1. About didactical discourse metamorphosis

When referring to the didactical discourse metamorphosis means surprising all the transformations that occur at the discursive ensemble seen as a whole, the changes of its functioning. It is a continuous and irreversible discursive change, as these transformations do not repeat regularly, following a predetermined schedule, since they are either spontaneous or anticipated, but controlled by a superior force, the power that the educator is invested and that is recognized as datum by the students. These transformations give the teaching discourse a chameleonic character and all discursive movements function and are controlled by a superior argumentative-persuasive force.

We can adapt and transfer Pike's conception that language is behavior (language as behavior), to the oral teaching discourse's behavior. Pike spoke about the need for a theory that is not discontinuous and that does not cause a breakage in understanding the message when it passes from a verbal activity to a nonverbal one. Language is behavior, a phase of human activity that should not be separated from the nonverbal human activity structure.

“The activity of man constitutes a structural whole, in such a way that it cannot be subdivided into neat "parts" or "levels" or "compartments" with language in a behavioral compartment insulated in character, content, and organization from other behavior. Verbal and nonverbal activity is a unified whole, and theory and methodology should be organized or created to treat it as such.”

Verbal and nonverbal behaviors merge into single events to be seen and interpreted as a whole. In the discourse functioning verbal and nonverbal support or even replace each other - a word can take the place of a gesture, as well as a gesture can take a word or more. Any human activity has two sides - one open, public, visible and another one, hidden secret. Therefore the human activity can be fully understood only if it is perceived and decoded in relation to the game of intermittence or coexistence of the two sides (verbal and nonverbal).

“All psychological processes, all internal structured responses to sensations, all of thinking and feeling, must also be considered as parts of human behavior which will become structurally intelligible only when a theory, a set of terms, and an analytical procedure are provided which deal simultaneously and without sharp discontinuities with all human overt and covert activity. Language is but one structured phase of that activity.”

This general approach is also compatible to the didactic discourse in general and to its oral dimension in particular, due to the verbal and nonverbal coexistence, their co-functioning and intermittence. Moreover, in the functioning of this kind of discourse it must be assimilated elements of time, space, the social and

---

psychological, cultural affiliation, which form a specific discursive set.

Linguistic anthropologist Dell Hymes opens to nonverbal the language functions scheme initiated by R. Jakobson. He reveals the language functions in the famous scheme of communication - "speaking" - that includes: setting, participants, ends, acts, key, instrumentalities, norms, gen. Paul Moritoshi³ adapts those elements to the oral didactical discourse and analyses their implications and meanings in a contrastive way in teaching and in conversational practice out of the institutionalized aria of school. He draws up a discursive specific assembly that contains: setting, purpose, participants, key, channels, message content and message form.

Any change made in one compartment of the discursive whole causes another in a perpetual mobile almost real. These elements existence confers the oral didactical discourse a specific configuration, creating the image of a spheroid in a permanent and double movement - rotation and gravity. Beyond the impression of a fixed form that the spheroid discourse gives us, the conjunction of these two movements creates an irreversible dynamics. It is not a chaotic dynamics, but a controlled one from the outside by the general rules underlying the teaching act, and from the inside as well, by the teacher charged to pursue the fulfillment of a supreme educational goal. Some of the elements that make up the discursive ensemble are more rigid (setting, purpose, participants, channels) and give the discourse the impression of a stable structure. Some of them present an increased mobility (tone, content and form of the message) as they are in permanent motion and transformation.

Setting includes: location, time, rules, psycho-socio-cultural medium in which the discourse operates. Teaching activity takes place within a predetermined time and space (in the classroom, most often, for approx. 50 min.). Participants take part in this activity for a certain period of time following a particular purpose, variable depending on the individual role - instructor or students (transmission or assimilation of knowledge), knowing and accepting that the teacher designs and manages the content and the format of the lesson. Participants are in possession of a set of cultural perceptions and preconceived experiences concerning the right to speak and the roles they play within that framework. All these perceptions affect the verbal and nonverbal behavior of the participants in this teaching activity.

Beyond the comfort that the classroom must provide, the space design can influence the conduct of education. The area where the students feel good and comfortable and that the students emicize with will make more efficient the communication with educators on the one hand, but also with other students on the other hand. When they go out of the standardized school setting participants take off the role they used to play, behavior which may lead to violation of norms and rules that govern communication within the institutional school.

It is very important for the teacher to surprise the nonverbal messages of the students; therefore the appropriate spatial arrangement becomes necessary to conduct effectively the didactic activity. Here's a situation adaptable for any subject teaching:

"Then why are we here in a classroom? Why am I standing in front of a blackboard with chalk in my hand, trying to teach you English? A classroom is about the "worst" possible place to learn English. If you are going to learn English here, you need to forget that this is a classroom. You must forget about being students. You must forget about my being a teacher. You just need to speak English."⁴

Richards and Lockhart⁵ remarked that the expectations that the participants have concerning spatial arrangement of the classroom and their roles come from education, from the cultural representations they possess. These expectations are emphasized by the long experience and they cannot and should not be easily ignored, as they are part of the participants' mental and cultural structure.

Purpose represents the function the discourse serves. The purpose of the oral didactical discourse is subject to a supreme purpose required by the education itself and by the specific of the discipline as well. This is manifested both at the level of the situation of communication as a whole (speech event - situation) and at the level of the individual acts (individual speech acts), as an exchange, a unique inter-actional function (single interactional function).

The purpose of teaching is to give the students the information considered by the teacher relevant and necessary. At the individual acts of communication level operate functions such as directing and informing, eliciting, content

---

⁴ D. Longyear apud Moritoshi, 2008, p. 3.
delineation and evaluation. All these are subordinated to a supreme educational goal and act as functional and argumentative structures that lead to the effectiveness of teaching, since the very existence of the teaching discourse comes from the need to identify the communication structures that lead to efficient education.

The educational goal pursued by the mostly teaching activities is the constant element, the reference element of the discourse. Under its influence the other functions seek for the most appropriate form for the concrete situation.

Brazil (1995) points out that the functions of the most speech acts of the teachers are not suitable for communication among social life because people would feel (that they were being) manipulated. Only a few elements of the communication in the classroom are transferred to daily life, which affects the efficiency of learning.

“It is interesting to note that, in so far as teachers are [eliciting and overtly evaluating], they are subjecting their students to massive exposure to [exchange types] that they are unlikely to use in other kinds of speech event.”

This situation about what Brazil speaks puts us in the face of major dilemmas:

- Do the teacher’s roles used in discursive activity serve the educational purposes, or are they only means of making efficient his communication with students? If the second situation prevails, it means that the teacher forgets most of the time which is the fundamental educational goal and reports him to short-term purpose.
- The means used in the educational activity aim-they at achieving an argumentation at the cognitive level, or at an emotional level?
- What is the relationship between cognitive and affective in today education?

Participants have a very important role in didactic discourse activity as they bring with them certain expectations and behaviors related to their psycho-socio-cultural structure. They affect the participants’ role, the relations with the others and the responsibilities within the discourse. The teacher as educator holds a dominant controlling function throughout the teaching speech. This asymmetry of roles, however, is required to meet various responsibilities which are inherent in the relationship between teacher and pupil.

“The teacher learner role relationship lies at a very heart of the classroom process. Learning a language is a social activity above all, and in a classroom setting, it is subject to a unique set of social conventions.”

Without these conventions, lesson conducting would be difficult. Students understand and accept this position because of the representations that participants bring with them in their discursive activity. These representations reflect the responsibility of the teacher, the way the participants comprehend study and the premeditate reactions expected from students and from the teacher as well. Unfortunately all these expectations and preconcepts and representations are subordinated to a concept in which the teaching act is seen as a process controlled by the educator.

Asymmetrical relationship between participants affects their speech behavior: teachers’ interventions are much longer than the students. Even if the teacher strives to create an informal atmosphere, because of the power which he was invested with by statute, but also by cultural coordinates, most often he fails to adjust discursive asymmetry between the behaviors of the participants.

In pedagogical practice teacher can give a student the task to take over his role and conduct a class teaching a lesson that he had already prepared. It is very interesting to follow whether in this exchange of roles (not of statute) the teaching is more or less effective for the students.

The key is the manner, the spirit, the attitude in which the discursive activity operates. It is the most abstract element of the whole speech, very hardly to be surprised and materialized (only using certain conventions). Varieties of tones used in didactic discourse differ depending on the time of the lesson. Initially, in the presentation moment, there are few types of tonality in order to establish an informal and relaxed atmosphere, but without being out of control – a panegyric, friendly but disciplinary tone “that evokes ‘togetherness’ or a shared perspective.” During the activity there is a diversity of discursive tonalities imposed by the functions and purpose: request, description, indication, information, assessment and also by the physical or emotional response of the participants. Students use fewer tonality - reluctant, secretive but mostly polite. Participants at the discursive activity sustain their tone and attitude with equivalent elements of nonverbal communication. Tonality, attitude, intonation these are the elements that bring out the hidden

---

and latent meanings of a message transmitted and received in other conditions.

"Intonation patterns are very significant...not just for interpreting such straightforward elements as question and statements and emphasis but more subtle messages like sarcasm, endearment, insult, solicitation, praise, etc."

In relation to the ability to educate the tones, Thompson speaks about the burden of production of educational models that should balance simplicity and educability with accuracy and generality.

Channels represent means of transmission and the medium in which the discourse functions - oral, written, internet, music and film. Predetermined structure of the class allows anticipated preparation and the use of some resources capable to bring in the middle of teaching activity real life scenes, samples of social reality beyond the institutionalized environment of the school. It is an extraordinary opportunity to place together and make it to merge two different types of speech. It is one of the most enjoyable ways to open the learning and education for social and provide new valences. The use of different means produces changes in other compartments of the entire discursive ensemble. The simple appearance of an external source admonishes and causes a certain state of mind dominated by joy, excitement, eagerness. Students will always be delighted by any disturbance of the monotony of school work. The atmosphere is relaxing, tonality is diversifying and emotion is operating at maximum Message receives new content and form.

Message content is the information transmitted by message of the teaching act ("what is the lesson about"). Lesson is the best example of event where information contained in the message is under the control of a single participant - the teacher who made a selection and adaptation to the specific of students.

"If classroom discourse is to reflect the characteristic of ordinary conversation...the initiative for starting talk or determining topics shouldn't be exercised by the teacher alone. There should be opportunities for students to take the initiative, and speech roles should be diversified, as is made possible through small group or pair work." (Stern, 1992)

It is therefore essential to find a balance between teaching students and obligation to provide a feedback of their performance by offering occasions to exercise communication competence.

At a first glance the content of the message appears one of the most rigid elements due its predetermination and subordination to a single participant. Overall message remains, indeed unique, but it is built on the basis of other small messages that appear in concrete acts of language and are required by the other participants of the speech. These contents present an increased mobility because, when it comes to clarifying a subject there are always other issues to be clarified. For example, for the receiving and understanding of a literary text it is required a retrospection to literary genres and species. Ignoring them will mean returning and clarifying them, which produces changes in the original message. Any mutation at content produces changes in structure and form of the message.

Message form is the way the message is structured, the way something is said. This element of the whole speech is related to Goffman's concept of "face" - the image shown, disclosed.

"The concept of politeness owes a great deal to Goffman's original work (1967) on "face". In discussing politeness Brown and Levinson (1967, p.61) define "face" as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself." They also distinguish between positive face and negative face. Positive face is the desire to gain the approval of other. Negative face is the desire to be unimpeded by others in one's actions...Positive politeness leads to moves, which achieve solidarity through offers of friendship, the use of compliments, and informal language use. On the other hand, negative politeness leads to deference, apologizing, indirectness, and formality in language use." Therefore the positive image is the need to be evaluated by others and the negative one is the need for autonomy and independence.

Message form is closely linked to cognitive and emotional structure of the one who spreads it and of the ones for which he spreads it. Therefore, it has fluctuations, transformations and permanent changes. The same content takes various forms in a semio-linguistical game of a code that is and should be known by participants.

Teaching oral discourse is the sum of the teacher speech and the sum of individual pupils' speech carried out in the same institutionalized communications context. Any transformation at a

---

level produces another one in a partially controlled Brownian motion. Following the model of Pike didactic oral discourse acquires the status and behavior determined and conditioned by the action of certain factors more or less stable. Therefore, for its full understanding it is necessary to analyze the didactic discourse as a whole in motion.

2. Didactic discourse chameleonism between emic and etic

In Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior (1954), KL Pike talks about two essential ways in which human behavior can be described: emic and etic. "There are two basic standpoints from which a human observer can describe human behavior, each of them valuable for certain specific purposes. In the one, the ETIC approach to the data, an author is primarily concerned with generalized statements about the data, such that he (a) classifies all systematically comparable data, of all cultures in the world, into a single system (b) provides a set of criteria to classify any bit of such data, (c) organizes the elements into types so classified, (d) studies, identifies, and describes any newly found data in reference to this system which has been created by the analyst before studying the particular culture within which the new data have been found.

In contrast to the EMIC an etic approach is one in essence valid for only one language (or one culture) at a time - or, more specifically, for a minimum of only one dialect at a time or for the relatively homogeneous and integrated behavior of people of one culture area or culturally defined class of people, it is an attempt to discover and to describe the pattern of that particular language or culture in reference to the way in which the various elements of culture that are related to each other in the functioning of that particular pattern, rather than an attempt to describe them in reference to a generalized classification derived in advance of the study of that particular culture."

In his later writings, Pike generalizes distinction between emic and ethic and extends it to all human behaviors, including cognitive and perceptual activities. Thus, in the second edition, Pike says:

"The ethic viewpoint studies behavior as from outside of a particular system, and as an essential initial approach to an alien system. The emic viewpoint results from studying behavior as from the inside of the system."14

Ethic comes from phonetics - the study of mechanisms of speech production, while emic from phonemics - the study of categories of sounds specific to native speakers who are distinguished by significant

According to Pike, emic perspective focuses on the intrinsic cultural differences that are significant for the members of a given society in the same way the phonemic analysis focuses on intrinsic phonologic distinctions significant for to the speakers of a language. Native members of a culture are the sole judges of validity of the emic description as native speakers of a language are the sole judges of phonemic accuracy. Ethic perspective is based on extrinsic concepts and categories that are significant for scientific observers in the same manner in which phonetic analysis is based on extrinsic concepts and categories that are significant for linguistic analysts. Scientists are the sole judges of the validity of ethical description as linguists are the sole judges of the accuracy of phonetic transcript.

In A Stereoscopic Window on the World. Two Views of Swaying Branches15, Pike leaves the premise that different people see the same event in different ways. Therefore, there are two ways to describe the event in question - detached observer perspective – "one window on the world", and the one of a native participant on the same event – "a different window". But for each event to be well understood both perspectives should be pursued, because "behavior studied simultaneously through these two approaches is seen in a much more exciting depth of understanding."

Ethic perspective is alien, from outside - "the structuring of an outsider" and the emic one is internal, domestic.

The ethic approach is cross-cultural - units resulting from the comparison of several systems and abstraction are summarized in a scheme which is then applied in other similar situations. The emic approach is a monocultural one - its units result from the internal functional relations of a single individual or culture at a time.

Ethic makes classifications since its units lead to a classifier grating by which any system can be seen as composed of the units of this scale. Therefore the ethic perspective analyzes a new situation from the perspective of an already existing grating. Emic is structural, since its units result from internal relationships and not from a

things are built up out of contrasts and systems whose phenomenal distinctions, or two perspectives: ethic Harris offers a new distinction between the opponent concerning the importance of emic and paradigm of cultural materialism. As Pike's the emic and the ethic perspective as part of its community.

The ethic system is creation of the analyst, conceptual tools are ready to be applied to the realities that someone can observe as foreign and come to an appreciation of the emic structure of such reality. The emic system is discovered by the analyst as units resulting from reaction or even being composed of the natives' reactions. Participants discover these by being born into the system, by finding themselves in a series of events that they do not understand at first. They gradually learn to act as ordinary participants, while, due to contrasting situations or to education, they gradually learn to have the response at the same event required by the assimilated reactions by other members of the community.

Marvin Harris made the distinction between the emic and the ethic perspective as part of its paradigm of cultural materialism. As Pike's opponent concerning the importance of emic and ethic Harris offers a new distinction between the two perspectives:

"Emic statements refer to logical-empirical systems whose phenomenal distinctions, or things are built up out of contrasts and discriminations significant, meaningful, real, accurate or in some other fashion regarded as appropriated by the actors themselves. An emic statement can be falsified if it can be shown that it contradicts the cognitive calculus by which relevant actors' judge that entities are similar or different, real, meaningful, significant, or in some other sense appropriate or acceptable.16" 

"Ethic statements depend upon phenomenal distinctions judged appropriate by the community of scientific observers. Ethic statements cannot be falsified if they do not conform to the actor's notion of what is significant, real, meaningful or appropriate."17

Pike and Harris are in disagreement concerning the definition and application of these concepts. The most significant area of disagreement is even the purpose and the concept of ethic finality. According to Pike ethic is a way to reach emic. Ethic conception facilitates understanding, discovery and elucidation of emic. Ethic knowledge of is not necessarily a priority before the emic one. Objective knowledge is an illusion and any act of knowledge is ultimately subjective. For Marvin Harris ethic is an end in itself, being used in setting objective determinations of reality. In his view ethic knowledge is necessarily superior to emic one. Objective knowledge can be ultimately obtained and pursuance of this knowledge is essential for a discipline that aspires to be science.

There are no standard definitions which have won universal acceptance. Terms emic-etic operate in many different fields such as linguistics, anthropology, education, folklore, management, medicine, philology, psychiatry, psychology, semiotics, urban studies and are used most often in contexts unrelated to their original meaning.

However, there are several attempts to define these concepts, especially in connection with the nature of knowledge and not with its source.

Emic constructions are statements, descriptions and analysis expressed in terms of schemes, strategies and conceptual categories seen as significant and endorsed by members of the culture studied. A construction is emic if it is in agreement with the inside perceptions and understandings of the culture under study. Confirmation of the emic knowledge is a matter of the natives' consensus which must accept that these constructions match shared perceptions that are specific to their culture. Emic knowledge can be obtained either through questions or through observation, because it is possible that sometimes objective observers can suggest native perceptions.

Ethic constructions are statements, descriptions and analysis expressed in terms of conceptual schemes and strategies perceived as meaningful and endorsed by the scientific observers' community. A construction is ethic only if it agrees with the epistemological principles considered in line with science. They must be accurate, logical and comprehensive, must be able to be reproduced and observed independently. Validation of ethic knowledge is a matter of logic and empirical analysis. Ethic knowledge may be obtained through questions and through observation, because it is possible that native informers should possess scientifically validated knowledge.

In the case of the oral didactic discourse the relationship between emic and ethic gets new valences, especially when it is about the study of the native language. Participants at the discourse

---

16 M. Harris, 1968, p. 571.
17 M. Harris, 1968, p. 575.
belong to the same emic category - native speakers of the language studied. In the beginning they use language intuitively following models mechanically assimilated which they update afterwards in concrete acts of language, in an emic subjective attitude. The study of their language brings explications, the right solutions and explanations regarding the functioning of the linguistic apparatus. With ethic mechanisms (schemes, templates, gratings) language, which was an integral part of their existence, receives forms that become objectives, detaches from the subject, in order to return afterwards to its socio-cultural structure and to metamorphose into new acts of language in concrete situations of communication. In other words, during school, a specific structure of the native language (emic structure) is subject to an ethic analytical process in order to understand its functioning by decontextualisation and recontextualisation becoming a new emic structure.

Take the example of a lesson that pursues to explain the accord between substantive and adjective in Romanian. It starts with a particular case: *Luna iși arată fața palidă* where the adjective *palidă* determines the substantive *fața*. To identify the two morphological categories: the adjective and the substantive that it is subject to, it is necessary to apply one grating (etic structure) to reveal specific morphological categories - gender, number, case (enic units), elements of the substantive-adjective accord. The exercise as an ethic structure leads to a new emic state especially in the case of semi objectives and subjective items that resort to the emotional, personal, emic dimension of knowledge. After solving an exercise in which the student must compile another statement where the word *palidă* must determine other noun with different morphological categories than those given in the initial examples, he finds a new emic structure: *La affarea veșii copiului a devenit palid*. Solved by all the students of the class this task will lead to a set of varied emic units specific to each of them.

In the case of the study of foreign languages there is a different approach, since students are in front of foreign realities. They must identify in their own cognitive and emotional structure equivalent of the new words (etic units) which they externalize then and transform into emic units when they use them in verbal communication. But if the new speaker of the language is out of his native environment and enters the specific medium of the language he has learned, his view upon the community is an ethic one until his final psycho-socio-cultural integration. Along with learning a foreign language subject is contaminated by the culture, because language contains the social, psychological and cultural values which can not be ignored. This is the situation when language learning is beyond boundaries of classroom and school medium.

In the oral didactic discourse the message knows continuous fluctuations between emic and ethic, between objective and subjective, between cognitive and affective. Emic dimension is more flexible because of the many minimum units operating within the emic structure, seen as the sum of them. When an exercise, a problem is solved the result is an emic structure, sum of all operations achieved by pupils - emic minimal units. During the lessons the message is being built gradually in a sum of the teacher's information, explications and tasks on the one hand and the students' responses and reactions on the other. Due to the predetermined feature of teaching work, the message is broadly anticipated by the teacher in his design of the lesson. He builds the speech from an ethic structure. Then he dresses and embellishes it with emic elements well known by the students challenge the interrelation between them. This initial form of the message becomes instable in the effective functioning in discourse because of the interventions of students who bring into play their subjectivity and personality. The role of restoring the balance between cognitive and affective is the teacher's as owner of the power and "secrecy" of ethic. Means and methods used in teaching activity represent ethic units that lead and open learning to the multiple emic forms.

3. Conclusions

Didactic discourse analysis from the perspective of Pike’s behavioral theory and the emic and ethic’s complementarities provides a new view upon both the discourse analysis and didactics. Didactical discourse's functioning as a whole that moves in a certain spatial and psycho-socio-cultural context is obvious. Discursive dynamics in time and space between objective and subjective, emotional and cognitive are the expression of its becoming. The trajectory is indicated by the fundamental purpose of the education and the didactic discourse must be subject to this educational purpose too. This trajectory is controlled by linguistic, nonlinguistic, ethic, emic, scientific, intuitive, cognitive, emotional and psychological means all adapted to the socio-cultural becoming
profile of the students. Discursive movements of the didactic discourse are influenced by the two major categories the inner (metamorphosis) and the outer ones (chameleonic) decisively.

References


Brazil, David, Classroom and Spoken Discourse, Center for English Language Studies, Birmingham University, 1995.


Chanteloube, Isabelle, Les dialogues ou l'envers d'une scénographie, http://rousseaustudies.free.fr/ArticleChanteloube.htm


Dospinescu, Vasile, „Despre adecvarea semantică”, in Limbaje și comunicare, „colection Colloque”, Institutul European, Iași, 1995


Dospinescu, Vasile, Didactique des langues (tradition et modernité) et... analyse critique de manuels, « Collection Conex », Ed. Junimea, Iași.

Dospinescu, Vasile, „Semne și cunoaștere – discursul didactic” in Maria Carpov & Doina Maria Cmceu, (editors), Semiologia culturii, no. 1, Universitatea din Bacău, 1996.


Hymes, Dell H., The Ethnography of Speaking, January 30th, 2005, from http://oak.cats.ohiou.edu/~thompsoc/Hymes.html


Elena - Iuliana LEONTE DOMUNCO
PhD student of “Ștefan cel Mare” University of Suceava Faculty of Letters and Communication Science, PhD Thesis: The Argumentativity of Didactical Discourse between Emic and Ethic, PhD supervisor: prof. Vasile DOSPINESCU, PhD.