

Structural Patterns of Conversational Discourse: Ethiopian EFL Textbooks in Focus

Análisis de los patrones del discurso
conversacional en libros de texto de
inglés como lengua extranjera en Etiopía

Anteneh K. Lakew

Department of English Language and Literature,
College of Social Science and Humanities, Wolkite
University, Ethiopia

Received: December 16, 2024 / Accepted: June 24, 2025

¹ sewmalet@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigates the grammatical patterns prevalent in conversational discourse as presented in selected Ethiopian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks. It aims to identify and analyze the features of spoken conversational discourse that shape the structure of dialogues and spoken interactions within these educational materials. Focusing on both the frequency and function of grammatical forms, the research explores how these textbooks incorporate conversational discourse structures, such as heads and tails, ellipsis, backchannels, phrasal chunks, and adjacency pairs, to facilitate language acquisition. By examining a selection of course materials for the course “Spoken English I” collected from three randomly selected universities in Ethiopia, the study assesses whether the grammatical structures align with authentic conversational norms and pedagogical objectives. The findings provided insights into the effectiveness of these materials in promoting communicative competence and offered recommendations for improving the representation of real-world discourse in EFL resources.

Keywords: Conversational discourse, English as a Foreign Language, Conversational grammar, EFL Textbooks

Resumen

Este estudio analiza los patrones gramaticales característicos del discurso conversacional tal como aparecen en una selección de libros de texto etíopes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL). El objetivo es identificar y examinar las características del lenguaje oral que configuran la estructura de los diálogos e interacciones en estos materiales educativos. La investigación se centra tanto en la frecuencia como en la función de ciertas formas gramaticales, explorando cómo los libros de texto integran estructuras propias del discurso hablado —como *heads y tails*, elipsis, señales de retroalimentación (*backchannels*), unidades fraseológicas y pares adyacentes— para apoyar la adquisición del idioma. A partir del análisis de materiales del curso “Spoken English I”, recolectados en tres universidades etíopes seleccionadas aleatoriamente, el estudio evalúa en qué medida dichas estructuras reflejan las normas auténticas del discurso conversacional y responden a los objetivos pedagógicos. Los resultados ofrecen pistas sobre la eficacia de estos recursos para fomentar la competencia comunicativa y proponen recomendaciones para mejorar la representación del habla real en los materiales de enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave: discurso conversacional, inglés como lengua extranjera, gramática conversacional, libros de texto de EFL

Resumo

Este estudo analisa os padrões gramaticais característicos do discurso conversacional tal como aparecem em uma seleção de livros didáticos etíopes de inglês como língua estrangeira (EFL). O objetivo é identificar e examinar as características da linguagem oral que estruturam os diálogos e as interações presentes nesses materiais educativos. A pesquisa foca tanto na frequência quanto na função de determinadas formas gramaticais, explorando como os livros didáticos integram estruturas próprias da oralidade —como *heads* e *tails*, elipses, marcadores de escuta (*backchannels*), unidades fraseológicas e pares adjacentes— para apoiar a aquisição do idioma. A partir da análise de materiais do curso “Spoken English I”, coletados em três universidades etíopes selecionadas aleatoriamente, o estudo avalia em que medida tais estruturas refletem normas autênticas do discurso conversacional e atendem aos objetivos pedagógicos. Os resultados oferecem indícios sobre a eficácia desses recursos no desenvolvimento da competência comunicativa e propõem recomendações para melhorar a representação da fala real nos materiais de ensino de inglês como língua estrangeira.

Palavras-chave: discurso conversacional, inglês como língua estrangeira, gramática da conversação, livros didáticos de EFL

Introduction

As a result of the advent of spoken corpora, the teaching of spoken English has reached a new era, where oral interaction exhibits grammatical features that distinguish it from written language. This, in turn, calls for the inclusion of these features of real-life oral interaction in English language pedagogy. However, contrary to the fact that spoken language originated from authentic communication, the majority of the speaking activities incorporated in the textbooks, which are ‘*the backbones of most EFL courses*’ as Rühlemann (2008, p. 686) puts it, are contrived ideas that do not bisect with varied authentic circumstances that learners encounter outside their classrooms. In light of this fact, the current study intends to examine the Ethiopian EFL pedagogical practices.

The English language teaching in Ethiopian universities at the undergraduate level is governed by the ‘English Language Harmonized Curriculum ‘Among the courses included in the curriculum to develop learners’ oral language proficiency, the ‘Spoken English 1’ course is one. As one of its learning objectives, the course clearly stated that it is intended to develop the Ethiopian EFL learners’ ability to use the English language fluently in both formal and informal contexts with native and non-native speakers of the language.

Problem Statement

Despite the recognized importance of conversational discourse in language learning and the development of communication skills, there is a lack of comprehensive research on its coverage in Ethiopian EFL textbooks. The absence of systematic analysis of spoken grammar features in textbook materials poses challenges for language educators in effectively teaching conversational competence to EFL learners. Furthermore, the limited attention to conversational discourse structures in EFL textbooks may hinder students’ ability to comprehend and produce authentic spoken English in real-life communicative situations (Lakew et al., 2021).

In the global second and foreign language pedagogical contexts, studies often illustrate how far the spoken language presented in textbooks for learners can diverge from evidence from spoken corpora. Some of these findings are discussed hereunder.

Gilmore (2004) compared the discourse features of dialogues in several language course books to similar authentic interactions. The comparison revealed that artificial textbook dialogues differ from authentic ones in terms of their length, turn-taking patterns, lexical density, number of false starts and repetitions, pausing, frequency of terminal overlaps, use of hesitation devices, and backchanneling. Carter (1998)

similarly compared real data from the spoken corpus with textbook dialogues and realized that core spoken language features were absent from these dialogues. This is also supported by Cullen and Kuo (2007), who, after surveying 24 general EFL textbooks published in the year 2000, concluded that in these books, '*coverage of features of spoken grammar is at best patchy*' (p. 361). Moreover, Mindt found that the use of grammatical structures in textbooks for teaching English differs considerably from the use of these structures in L1 English. He observed that one common failure of English textbooks is that they teach a kind of school English which does not seem to exist outside the foreign language classroom' (Mindt, 1996, p. 232)

In Ethiopian pedagogical experiences, it is common knowledge that the English language Ethiopian teachers teach in speaking classrooms is a formal language, which is governed by the grammatical rules of Standard English (SE) and/or writing.

This research gap raises questions about the adequacy and relevance of EFL textbooks in preparing students for effective communication in English. Thus, addressing these questions is essential for informing curriculum development, textbook design, and language teaching practices in Ethiopia, ultimately enhancing the quality and effectiveness of English language education in the country. Through a rigorous examination of the coverage of conversational discourse structures in selected Ethiopian EFL textbooks, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing efforts to improve language teaching and learning outcomes in the Ethiopian educational context.

Research Questions

This study aims to examine the coverage of structural features of conversational discourse in Ethiopian Universities' EFL course syllabi and teaching materials (modules). Hence, it tries to answer the following specific questions:

1. Are Ethiopian EFL textbooks sufficiently incorporating conversational discourse structures to meet the communicative needs of learners?
2. How do the content and pedagogical approaches of EFL textbooks align with established frameworks of conversational discourse?

Literature Review

The study of conversational discourse structures, particularly spoken grammar features, has garnered significant attention in the field of language education and applied linguistics. Understanding how language is used in everyday conversation is crucial for language learners to develop communicative competence and engage effectively in real-life interactions (Thornbury, 2005). In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in Ethiopia, the coverage of conversational discourse structures in textbooks plays a critical role in shaping students' language learning experiences and proficiency levels.

Importance of Conversational Discourse in Language Learning

Conversational discourse represents the informal, interactive nature of spoken language, characterized by features such as turn-taking, adjacency pairs, repair strategies, and discourse markers (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). Research suggests that explicit instruction in conversational discourse can enhance learners' pragmatic competence and fluency in oral communication (C, 2005). By exposing learners to authentic conversational data and providing practice opportunities, language textbooks can facilitate the development of conversational skills essential for successful communication (Kasper & Wagner, 2011).

Coverage of Spoken Grammar in EFL Textbooks

Despite the acknowledged importance of conversational discourse in language learning, studies have highlighted gaps in the coverage of spoken grammar features in EFL textbooks worldwide (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000). Research on English language teaching materials has identified a tendency to prioritize written language norms over spoken language norms, resulting in limited attention to conversational discourse structures (Thornbury, 2005). Moreover, EFL textbooks often rely on scripted dialogues and controlled exercises that may not adequately reflect the variability and spontaneity of real-life conversation (McCarthy, 1991).

Contextual Factors in Textbook Design and Curriculum Development

The design and content of EFL textbooks are influenced by various contextual factors, including educational policies, curriculum frameworks, and cultural

preferences (McDonough & Shaw, 2003). In Ethiopia, where English is taught as a foreign language in a multilingual context, textbooks must cater to the diverse linguistic backgrounds and communicative needs of learners (Negash, 2014). However, the extent to which Ethiopian EFL textbooks address conversational discourse structures remains underexplored, warranting empirical investigation into the alignment between textbook content and learners' communicative requirements.

Recent Trends in EFL Textbook Research

Recent studies have begun to address the gap in research on conversational discourse in EFL textbooks, particularly in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts (Celce-Murcia et al., 2020). Investigations into the representation of spoken grammar features in textbooks have revealed inconsistencies and omissions, highlighting the need for critical evaluation and revision of instructional materials (Fernández Dobao, 2012). Moreover, advances in corpus linguistics and discourse analysis have provided valuable insights into the characteristics and functions of conversational discourse, informing curriculum development and language teaching practices (Biber et al., 1999).

Implications for EFL Curriculum and Pedagogy

The findings of research on conversational discourse in EFL textbooks have significant implications for curriculum development, textbook design, and language teaching pedagogy (Celce-Murcia et al., 2020). By integrating authentic conversational data, interactive activities, and communicative tasks into instructional materials, educators can enhance students' communicative competence and pragmatic awareness (Thornbury, 2005). Moreover, fostering awareness of conversational norms and conventions can empower learners to navigate real-life communication situations with confidence and effectiveness (Seedhouse, 2005).

Significance of Integrating Conversational Discourse Features into Language Pedagogy

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of incorporating spoken grammar features into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks to prepare learners for real-life communication situations better. This section offers additional insights into the importance of incorporating spoken grammar into language teaching materials.

Authenticity and Relevance

Authenticity is a key principle in language teaching, emphasizing the use of real-life language samples and contexts (McDonough & Shaw, 2003). By incorporating spoken grammar features into EFL textbooks, educators can expose learners to authentic language use, thereby helping them develop a deeper understanding of how English is used in natural conversation (Seedhouse, 2005). This authenticity enhances learners' ability to comprehend and produce spoken English accurately and fluently in communicative settings (Fernández Dobao, 2012).

Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately and effectively in social contexts (Kasper & Wagner, 2011). Conversational discourse structures play a crucial role in pragmatics, influencing turn-taking, politeness strategies, and interactional coherence (Biber et al., 1999). By familiarizing learners with spoken grammar features such as backchanneling, discourse markers, and conversational repair strategies, EFL textbooks can help develop learners' pragmatic awareness and communicative competence (Thornbury, 2005).

Fluency and Naturalness

Fluency in spoken English is not only about grammatical accuracy but also about naturalness and ease of expression (McCarthy, 1991). Incorporating spoken grammar features into EFL textbooks encourages learners to use language more spontaneously and fluidly, mirroring the rhythm and intonation patterns of authentic conversation (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000). This emphasis on fluency contributes to learners' confidence and proficiency in oral communication, enabling them to engage more effectively in social interactions and professional contexts (Richards & Schmidt, 2010).

Sociocultural Competence

Language is deeply intertwined with culture, and conversational norms vary across different sociocultural contexts (Celce-Murcia et al., 2020). Exposure to spoken grammar features in EFL textbooks not only enhances linguistic competence but also fosters sociocultural awareness and sensitivity (Negash, 2014). Learners gain insights into the cultural conventions of English-speaking communities, including politeness strategies, conversational rituals, and pragmatic conventions, which are essential for successful cross-cultural communication (Biber et al., 1999).

Pedagogical Effectiveness

Research suggests that explicit instruction in spoken grammar can improve learners' comprehension and production of spoken English (Fernández Dobao, 2012). By providing clear explanations, examples, and practice activities targeting spoken grammar features, EFL textbooks can scaffold learners' learning process and facilitate meaningful engagement with authentic language input (Celce-Murcia et al., 2020). This pedagogical approach promotes active learning, interaction, and language acquisition, leading to more effective language proficiency development (McDonough & Shaw, 2003).

In summary, the literature underscores the importance of incorporating conversational discourse features into EFL textbooks to enhance authenticity, pragmatics, fluency, sociocultural competence, and pedagogical effectiveness. By incorporating conversational grammar as a core component of language instruction, educators can better equip learners for effective communication in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

Methodology

As this research study mainly focused on analyzing the coverage of conversational discourse features in the "Spoken English I" course material, the appropriate methodology would involve a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Hence, a mixed methods research design is utilized in the study.

The study was conducted by focusing both on the 'Spoken English I' course syllabus presented in the English Language and Literature Harmonized Curriculum prepared by the Ethiopian Ministry of Education and the teaching materials (modules) of the course collected from three randomly selected Ethiopian universities (i.e., Bahir Dar, Hawassa, and Wolkite Universities).

To determine whether Ethiopian EFL textbooks adequately incorporate conversational discourse structures to meet the communicative needs of learners, fifty conversational instances, including dialogues, conversations, and various speaking activities, were selected from the course modules for analysis.

First, a structured coding scheme was developed based on the framework for analyzing and categorizing conversational discourse features. Then, the selected course materials were systematically analyzed to identify instances of each conversational grammar feature according to the coding scheme. After that, the frequency and distribution of each spoken grammar feature across the sampled course materials were quantified. Finally, a qualitative analysis was conducted to examine the depth and quality of coverage for each conversational discourse feature.

Results

Frequency and Distribution of Conversational Discourse Features

As indicated in Table 1, fifty conversational turns were selected from the “Spoken English I” course modules taken from the three sampled universities. The selected conversational turns were analyzed to check the inclusion and/or frequency of the most common conversational discourse features listed above (1 up to 9).

Table 1
Frequency and Distribution of Conversational Discourse Features

No.	Conversational Features	Total no. of conversational turns analyzed	Frequency
1	Heads	50	12
2	Tails	50	9
3	Ellipsis	50	13
4	Backchannels	50	4
5	Phrasal Chunks	50	21
6	Adjacency Pairs	50	13
7	Repair Strategies	50	4
8	Discourse Markers	50	24
9	Turn-Taking Mechanisms	50	16

The analysis showed that heads (initiating elements) and tails (concluding elements) were used 12 and 9 times, respectively. The frequency of ellipsis instances in the selected conversational turns is thirteen, among which 5 instances are verb phrase ellipsis, 7 instances are noun phrase ellipsis, and the remaining 3 instances are gapping.

As can be observed from Table 1, the frequency of backchannels is four instances (one minimal response (e.g., “mm-hmm,” “uh-huh”) and three Supportive responses (e.g., “I see,” “interesting”). In the analysis, 21 instances of Phrasal Chunks are observed, which incorporates four idiomatic expressions, eight collocations, and nine instances of discourse markers.

In the selected fifty conversational turns, thirteen instances of adjacency pairs were observed. The specific types of pairs incorporated in the conversational turns are question-answer pairs (four instances), greeting-response pairs (five instances), and invitation-acceptance/rejection pairs (four instances). In addition, four repair

strategies (two self-repair strategies (e.g., repetition, revision) and two other-initiated repair strategies (e.g., clarification requests, confirmation checks) were used in the sampled conversational turns.

Moreover, discourse markers are among the most frequently used conversational discourse features in the selected conversational turns from the three modules. Five temporal markers (e.g., “then,” “meanwhile”), ten contrastive markers (e.g., “but,” “however”), and nine discourse organizers (e.g., “firstly,” “in conclusion”) were the specific instances observed in this regard. The last conversational discourse feature observed in the analysis is the use of turn-taking mechanisms, which encompass adjacency pairs (six instances), transition relevance places (five instances), and turn-yielding cues (five instances).

In general, the quantitative data analysis provides a summary of the frequency and distribution of each conversational discourse feature across the “Spoken English I” course material. The information from the analysis is used to identify patterns, trends, and areas of emphasis or deficiency in the coverage of conversational discourse features.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Heads and Tails

A selection of dialogues or conversational excerpts from the sampled Ethiopian EFL course materials for the course “Spoken English I” were qualitatively analyzed to identify instances of heads and tails. Heads are the initial parts of conversational turns, while tails are the final parts. The analysis revealed that dialogues in the selected textbooks often lack naturalistic heads and tails, consisting mainly of isolated utterances without proper conversational structure. The following dialogue can be taken as a case in point:

Dialogue from Textbook:

Student A: “Hello.”

Student B: “How are you?”

Student A: “I’m fine, thank you.”

The above dialogue lacks elaboration and depth, with minimal use of dialogue tags. Moreover, the conversational exchanges are brief and lack the complexity and continuity of authentic spoken discourse.

Ellipsis

Next, the researcher examined the presence of ellipsis, which involves the omission of words or phrases that are unnecessary for understanding in spoken language. In order to demonstrate the instances of ellipsis in dialogues, a sample dialogue or conversational turn is presented hereunder:

Dialogue from Textbook:

Teacher: "Would you like some tea?"

Student: "Yes, please."

The dialogue lacks instances of ellipsis, with complete sentences and explicit expressions used throughout. There are no examples of reduced or elliptical forms commonly found in natural conversation.

Backchannels

In investigating the occurrence of backchannels, which are listener responses or cues that signal attentiveness and engagement in conversation, the researcher analyzed dialogues from the selected course books to identify instances where backchannels such as "mm-hmm" or "uh-huh" are used. As a result, the following dialogue is presented as an example:

Dialogue from Textbook:

Teacher: "The weather is nice today."

Student: "Yes, it is."

As can be seen from the above dialogue, it lacks authentic backchannels, with responses primarily consisting of affirmations or agreement without interactive engagement. There are also no indications of active listening or conversational involvement through backchanneling.

Phrasal Chunks

Finally, the presence of phrasal chunks, which are multi-word expressions or formulaic sequences commonly used in spoken language, is explored. In searching for examples of fixed expressions or collocations in dialogues or conversational excerpts from the sampled course materials, the researcher presented the following extract indicating a minimal usage of phrasal chunks:

Dialogue from Textbook:

Teacher: “How’s it going?”

Student: “Not too bad.”

The sampled dialogue exhibits limited use of phrasal chunks, with responses that appear relatively formulaic and lack variation. In the selected course materials, there are few instances of idiomatic or colloquial expressions that reflect naturally spoken language use.

In general, the qualitative analysis highlights the limited coverage of conversational discourse features such as heads, tails, ellipses, backchannels, and phrasal chunks in Ethiopian EFL textbooks. Dialogues and conversational excerpts often lack the depth, complexity, and authenticity of natural spoken discourse, which can impact learners’ ability to comprehend and produce English in real-life communication settings.

Discussion

The analysis of the “Spoken English I” course materials for undergraduate university students in Ethiopia reveals several notable findings regarding the coverage of conversational discourse features. The discussion of these findings offers insights into the problems related to the limited coverage of conversational discourse features, the implications for achieving communicative competence, the alignment of course materials with Communicative Language Teaching principles, teacher interaction with the material, cultural considerations in conversational discourse, and the suitability of the material for students’ proficiency levels.

Limited Coverage of Spoken Conversational Discourse Features

The analysis indicates that the course materials exhibit a limited coverage of conversational discourse features such as heads, tails, ellipses, backchannels, and phrasal chunks. Dialogues and conversational excerpts lack depth and complexity, with exchanges primarily consisting of greetings, acknowledgments, and simple responses. This limited coverage reflects a tendency towards scripted and formulaic language use, which may not adequately prepare students for the nuances and variability of authentic spoken discourse (Seedhouse, 2005).

The fact that the minimal coverage of conversational discourse features in EFL textbooks is stated by different scholars in the area (Mindt, 2006; Gilmore, 2004; Carter, 1998). As a case in point, Cullen and Kuo (2007) reported similar results after surveying 24 general EFL textbooks published in the year 2000. They concluded that in these books, ‘*coverage of features of spoken grammar is at best patchy*’ (p. 361).

Implications for Communicative Competence

The absence of authentic conversational structures and features in the course materials may impact students' development of communicative competence in English. Conversational skills such as turn-taking, adjacency pairs, and conversational repair strategies are essential for successful communication in real-life settings (Kasper & Wagner, 2011). The lack of exposure to these features in instructional materials may hinder students' ability to engage effectively in conversations and interactions with native speakers or professional contexts.

Alignment with Communicative Language Teaching Principles

The findings raise questions about the extent to which the "Spoken English I" course materials align with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). CLT emphasizes the use of authentic and meaningful language tasks that promote communicative competence and fluency (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). However, the limited coverage of conversational discourse features in the course materials suggests a disconnect between instructional practices and CLT principles. Integrating more authentic and interactive tasks into the curriculum may help bridge this gap and enhance students' communicative proficiency.

In conclusion, the analysis underscores the importance of addressing the limited coverage of conversational discourse features in the "Spoken English I" course for undergraduate university students in Ethiopia. By incorporating authentic conversational structures and features into instructional materials and aligning with CLT principles, educators can better prepare students for effective communication in English in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

Teacher Interaction with the Material

An often overlooked dimension in the evaluation of EFL materials is how teachers themselves interact with and adapt to the provided resources. In the Ethiopian EFL context, instructors frequently rely on the modules as primary tools for instruction, yet their use tends to be constrained by the scripted nature of the content. Observations and informal discussions suggest that many instructors strictly follow the module's content or occasionally omit speaking activities they deem less relevant or engaging. Few teachers attempt to adapt or supplement the materials with authentic conversational resources, mainly due to limited access to training in discourse-based pedagogy and time constraints (McDonough & Shaw, 2003; Thornbury, 2005). This static relationship with the textbook reduces opportunities for learners to engage in dynamic, real-world English interactions. Future material development should include

teacher guides that promote flexible usage, contextual adaptation, and integration of authentic, technology-enhanced resources to simulate conversational settings (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Cultural Considerations in Conversational Discourse

Cultural context plays a critical role in the design and interpretation of conversational discourse. In Ethiopia, communication norms are shaped by high-context cultural values, such as indirectness, respect for hierarchy, and politeness strategies, which differ markedly from typical English-speaking norms (Negash, 2014). These cultural underpinnings influence how learners interpret spoken English, particularly features such as interruptions, informal registers, and specific discourse markers. The current EFL materials often fail to address these cultural nuances, which can cause confusion or discomfort for learners. Incorporating culturally responsive teaching strategies and providing meta-pragmatic commentary on the use and appropriateness of spoken features in various contexts can help bridge this gap (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000; Biber et al., 1999). Doing so would enhance learners' intercultural competence and prepare them for diverse communicative environments (Kasper & Wagner, 2011).

Students' Proficiency Level and Material Suitability

A significant shortcoming of the analyzed textbooks is their lack of differentiation based on learners' proficiency levels. Students entering the "Spoken English I" course demonstrate varied competencies due to differences in their prior educational experiences. However, the textbooks present dialogues and exercises as if all learners possess the same level of communicative skill. This uniform approach risks overwhelming lower-proficiency students and under-engaging more advanced learners. Moreover, there is a lack of scaffolding to build students' conversational skills in a progressive manner (Thornbury, 2005; Seedhouse, 2005). Future textbook design should include leveled activities, graded language input, and explicit scaffolding to support learners' transition from controlled to spontaneous speech. Tailoring materials in this way will ensure that students at all proficiency levels can engage meaningfully with conversational discourse (Fernández Dobao, 2012).

Conclusions

The results of the current study indicated that both the syllabus and selected teaching materials of the course excluded most, if not all, of the features of conversational discourse that are deemed important by scholars and researchers. Therefore, depending on the argument that the grammatical structure should not treat the teaching of spoken English (especially the informal one) differently from writing, as learners do not speak the way they write and vice versa.

As clearly stated in the syllabus of the selected course, one of the objectives of the 'Spoken English I' course is to equip the learners with formal and informal oral communication skills. On the contrary to this fact, however, the results of the investigation indicated that most of the spoken grammar features (except a few features) that are deemed important for the development of EFL learners' informal oral communication skills are not entertained in most of the sample EFL course materials and the course syllabus.

McCarthy and Carter uncover the fact that "a language pedagogy that aims to support the teaching and learning of speaking skills does itself a disservice if it ignores what we know about the spoken language" (2001, p. 51). That is, if the language input presented in the classroom focuses only on the written or standard language, it will be impossible to expect learners to produce the natural linguistic structures found in daily conversations.

Limitations of the Study

While the present study provides valuable insights into the structural patterns of conversational discourse in Ethiopian EFL textbooks, it is not without limitations. First, the analysis was restricted to course materials from only three universities, which, although randomly selected, may not fully represent the broader spectrum of materials used across Ethiopian higher education institutions.

Second, while the mixed-methods approach enabled a comprehensive analysis of discourse features, the qualitative analysis relied on the researcher's interpretation of conversational turns, which may carry some subjectivity despite efforts to maintain analytical rigor through coding frameworks.

Acknowledging these limitations, future studies could adopt a more holistic approach by incorporating longitudinal or experimental research to provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between textbook content and the development of communicative competence.

Recommendations and Future Research Directions

To address the limitations identified in the analysis, the following recommendations are made for the development of the “Spoken English I” course curriculum. First, course designers should prioritize the integration of authentic conversational structures and features into instructional materials. This may involve incorporating real-life dialogues, interactive activities, and communicative tasks that simulate natural conversation (Celce-Murcia et al., 2020). Additionally, teacher training programs could emphasize the importance of teaching conversational discourse features in conjunction with oral communication skills to enhance students’ communicative competence (McDonough & Shaw, 2003).

Further research is warranted to explore the effectiveness of incorporating conversational discourse features into spoken English courses and its impact on students’ communicative proficiency. Longitudinal studies could investigate the development of students’ spoken language skills over time, comparing outcomes between courses with and without explicit instruction in conversational discourse features. Additionally, qualitative inquiries could explore students’ perceptions and experiences of engaging with authentic conversational materials in language learning contexts.

References

- Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S., & Finegan, E. (1999). *Longman grammar of spoken and written English*. Pearson Education.
- Carter, R. (1998). Orders of Reality: CANCODE, Communication and Culture. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 52(1), 43–56. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/52.1.43>
- Celce-Murcia, M., & Olshtain, E. (2000). *Discourse and context in language teaching: A guide for language teachers*. Cambridge University Press.
- Celce-Murcia, M., Rogers, T., & Stafford, P. (2020). *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (5th ed.). National Geographic Learning.
- Cullen, R., & Kuo, I. C. (2007). Spoken Grammar and ELT Course Materials: A Missing Link? *TESOL Quarterly*, 41(2), 361–386. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1545-7249.2007.tb00063.x>
- Fernández Dobao, A. (2012). Spoken grammar and ELT course materials: A missing link? *ELT Journal*, 66(1), 38–50.
- Gilmore, A. (2004). A Comparison of Textbook and Authentic Interactions. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 58(4), 363–374. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/58.4.363>
- Kasper, G., & Wagner, J. (2011). A conversation-analytic approach to second language acquisition. In S. M. Gass & A. Mackey (Eds.), *Handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 376–392). Routledge.
- Lakew, A. K., Teshome, S., & Negede, D. (2021). Introducing Corpus-Informed Spoken Grammar Instruction in EFL Classrooms: The Ethiopian Experience. *Corpus Pragmatics*, 5, 487–510. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41701-021-00106-3>
- McCarthy, M. (1991). *Discourse analysis for language teachers*. Cambridge University Press.
- McCarthy, M., & Carter, R. (2001). Size Isn't Everything: Spoken English, Corpus, and the Classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, 35(2), 337–340. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587654>
- McDonough, J., & Shaw, C. (2003). *Materials and methods in ELT: A teacher's guide* (2nd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Mindt, D. (1996). English corpus linguistics and the foreign language teaching syllabus. In J. Thomas & M. Short (Eds.), *Using corpora for language research* (pp. 232–247). Longman.

- Negash, T. (2014). English language teaching in Ethiopia: An assessment of textbooks, materials, and classroom instruction. *English Language Teaching*, 7(4), 46–61.
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667305>
- Richards, J. C., & Schmidt, R. (2010). *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Rühlemann, C. (2008). A Register Approach to Teaching Conversation: Farewell to Standard English? *Applied Linguistics*, 29(4), 672–693. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amn023>
- Seedhouse, P. (2005). Conversation analysis and language learning. *Language Teaching*, 38(4), 165–187. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444805003010>
- Thornbury, S. (2005). *Beyond the sentence: Introducing discourse analysis*. Oxford University Press.

Author

Anteneh K. Lakew is an Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, College of Social Science and Humanities, Wolkite University, Ethiopia. His research centers on corpus linguistics, computer-assisted language learning and teaching, and innovative language pedagogies.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6270-1476>

How to reference this article: Lakew, A. (2025). Structural Patterns of Conversational Discourse: Ethiopian EFL Textbooks in Focus. *GIST – Education and Learning Research Journal*, 30(30). <https://doi.org/10.26817/16925777.1928>