



## The Application of Sinclair & Coulthard Verbal and Nonverbal Model Analysis in Teaching Descriptive Text

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**Abstract.** This study aimed to analyze the application of Sinclair and Coulthard's verbal and nonverbal model in teaching descriptive text to 11th-grade students. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this research was conducted through Classroom Discourse Analysis based on a recorded English teaching session at MAS Darul Azhariyun. The data consisted of the teacher's and students' verbal and nonverbal interactions, transcribed and categorized according to Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) framework, including exchange, move, and act. The findings revealed that the classroom interaction was predominantly teacher-centered, structured through the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) sequence. However, despite the teacher's dominant role, interactive moments occurred through group discussions, presentations, and questioning sessions that encouraged student participation. Nonverbal communication such as gestures, facial expressions, and tone were found to reinforce meaning, support comprehension, and maintain engagement. The study identified that while students' responses were often short, the teacher's scaffolding and feedback effectively maintained communicative flow and ensured lesson coherence. These findings suggest that the integration of verbal and nonverbal discourse based on Sinclair and Coulthard's model contributes to clearer instructional structure, improved classroom interaction, and increased student attentiveness. It also highlights the potential of discourse analysis as a reflective tool for teachers to evaluate communication strategies and promote more interactive, meaningful language learning environments.

**Keywords:** Classroom Discourse Analysis; Coulthard Model; Nonverbal Communication; Sinclair; Verbal

### 1. BACKGROUND

In the field of English language teaching, classroom communication plays a crucial role in shaping how knowledge is constructed and shared between teachers and students. The interaction that occurs within the classroom does not merely transmit information but represents an organized exchange of meaning that reflects social roles, relationships, and pedagogical purposes (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). Through both verbal and nonverbal communication, teachers manage classroom discourse, guide learning, and foster meaningful participation. Therefore, analyzing how teachers and students communicate provides valuable insight into how teaching effectiveness and learning engagement are achieved.

Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) introduced one of the most influential frameworks in classroom discourse analysis, which identifies the structured sequence of Initiation, Response, and Feedback (IRF) as the core pattern of classroom interaction. This model emphasizes that classroom talk is systematic rather than spontaneous, allowing teachers to control the direction of lessons while providing opportunities for learners to contribute. Within this structure, exchanges, moves, and acts serve as analytical units that reveal how meaning is negotiated and how pedagogical intentions are realized. The model's clarity and hierarchical organization

make it a powerful tool for examining the dynamics of teacher-student communication and the organization of lessons. However, classroom discourse extends beyond spoken words. Nonverbal communication, including gestures, facial expressions, tone, and body posture, plays an equally important role in supporting understanding and maintaining interaction (Cavarallo, 2004; Tannen, 1990). These elements often serve as cues that reinforce verbal messages, express emotion, or signal shifts in classroom activity. As such, nonverbal behavior can function as a parallel channel of meaning-making that enhances comprehension, manages participation, and sustains engagement, particularly in contexts where students may face linguistic challenges.

Several theorists have highlighted the importance of classroom discourse as a reflection of broader social and pedagogical processes. Barnes (1971) viewed learning as a collaborative activity facilitated through dialogue, where meaning is constructed through interaction. Similarly, Vygotsky (1978) argued that language is the main mediating tool for thought and learning, positioning discourse as central to cognitive and social development. Foucault (2011) offered a critical lens, emphasizing that discourse is tied to power relations and determines who can speak, how knowledge is defined, and whose voices are legitimized in the classroom. Together, these perspectives underscore that communication in educational settings is not only a linguistic exchange but also a form of social practice that constructs authority, identity, and access to knowledge. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, these ideas are particularly relevant. Teaching descriptive text requires not only mastery of language forms but also the ability to organize ideas, describe objects or people, and engage in interactive communication. The teacher's role in initiating, guiding, and providing feedback becomes central to shaping student understanding and participation. Moreover, the integration of nonverbal elements helps clarify instructions, sustain motivation, and create a supportive learning atmosphere.



**Figure 1.** Teaching Activity in the 11<sup>th</sup> Grade of MAS Darul Azhariyun

This study was conducted at MAS Darul Azhariyun with 23 students in the 11th grade,

focusing on how the teacher applied Sinclair and Coulthard's verbal and nonverbal discourse model in teaching descriptive text. By examining authentic classroom interactions, this research aims to reveal how verbal and nonverbal communication function together to organize discourse, negotiate meaning, and support student engagement. Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how structured communication patterns can enhance teaching effectiveness and promote active learning in EFL classrooms.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Classroom Discourse Analysis**

Classroom discourse analysis (CDA) is a systematic study of how language is used in classroom interactions to facilitate teaching and learning. It focuses on the ways teachers and students use verbal and nonverbal communication to construct meaning, negotiate understanding, and organize participation during lessons. According to Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), classroom talk follows a structured and predictable pattern known as the Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) sequence, in which teachers typically initiate a question or instruction, students respond, and the teacher provides evaluative feedback. This model provides a clear framework for analyzing how meaning is co-constructed through spoken exchanges and how the flow of communication supports the learning process. Barnes (1971) viewed classroom discourse as a social activity where learning occurs through dialogue. In his perspective, talk is not only a means of transmitting information but also a process of constructing knowledge collaboratively. Vygotsky (1978) further emphasized that language serves as a mediating tool for thought and social development, making interaction central to learning. Similarly, Halliday (1993) proposed that language in classrooms serves multiple functions; ideational, interpersonal, and textual, each contributing to how meaning is expressed and understood. Together, these views highlight that classroom discourse is not a random exchange but an organized and socially meaningful process that reflects both cognitive and relational dimensions of education.

Cavarallo (2004) expanded this idea by noting that classroom discourse also involves the negotiation of power and identity. Communication in the classroom reflects not only linguistic structures but also social roles and authority relations between teachers and students. Foucault (2011) reinforced this critical perspective, suggesting that discourse determines who is authorized to speak, how knowledge is defined, and what is considered valid within educational contexts. From this viewpoint, classroom discourse becomes a site where knowledge, power, and identity intersect, shaping students' opportunities for participation and

learning. Taken together, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive understanding of classroom discourse as both a pedagogical and social phenomenon. They underscore the need for teachers to be aware of their communicative practices, as these not only affect knowledge transmission but also influence classroom dynamics, inclusion, and student engagement.

### **Sinclair and Coulthard Model**

The model developed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) remains one of the most influential frameworks in analyzing classroom interaction. It introduced a hierarchical system of discourse organization composed of five levels: lesson, transaction, exchange, move, and act. Each level reflects a different scale of interaction, from the overall structure of the lesson to the smallest functional speech act. Central to the model is the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) pattern, which demonstrates how teachers manage the sequence of classroom talk and control the pedagogical flow.

The IRF model emphasizes that classroom communication follows structured routines. Teachers typically begin an exchange with an initiation, prompting students through questions or instructions. Students then produce a response, which the teacher evaluates or elaborates through feedback. This interactional sequence allows lessons to proceed systematically and provides opportunities for teachers to monitor comprehension, reinforce learning, and maintain engagement (Cazden, 2001). In addition to IRF, Sinclair and Coulthard distinguished between two types of exchanges: boundary exchanges, which signal transitions between activities or topics, and teaching exchanges, which focus on instructional content. Teaching exchanges are further divided into subtypes such as elicitation (asking for information), informing (providing explanation), and checking (verifying understanding). These distinctions make the model applicable to a wide range of classroom contexts, allowing researchers and teachers to identify how discourse serves different instructional and managerial functions (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Li, 2010).

The model's analytical clarity has made it widely used in discourse and education research. However, it has also been critiqued for its rigidity, as it tends to prioritize teacher-led talk and overlook spontaneous or student-initiated exchanges (McCarthy, 2002). Despite these limitations, the model remains a foundational tool for understanding the structure and purpose of classroom communication. Its systematic nature makes it useful not only for researchers but also for teachers seeking to reflect on and improve their communicative practices.

### **3. RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design within the framework of Classroom Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how verbal and nonverbal communication was applied during the teaching of descriptive text. Using Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) model as the analytical foundation, this research focused on identifying the structure of teacher-student interaction through the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) sequence. The qualitative approach was selected to capture authentic discourse and interpret how communication patterns shaped classroom meaning and participation (Cazden, 2001; McCarthy, 2002).

The study was conducted at MAS Darul Azhariyun with 23 students in the 11th grade during an English lesson facilitated by Zahara Marhamah Siregar, S.Pd., M.Li. The data were obtained from a recorded classroom video that documented the entire interaction between the teacher and students. Both verbal exchanges; such as instructions, questions, and responses and nonverbal cues, such as gestures, facial expressions, and tone, were analyzed as integral components of meaning-making (Tannen, 1990; Cavarallo, 2004).

The researcher served as the main instrument of the study, assisted by transcription sheets and Sinclair and Coulthard's discourse framework. The classroom interaction was transcribed and segmented into exchanges, moves, and acts, allowing systematic identification of discourse patterns. The data were analyzed qualitatively by describing how the IRF structure appeared across various classroom moments and how nonverbal signals supported verbal communication. This approach made it possible to interpret how the teacher organized discourse, guided understanding, and fostered student participation through structured and interactive communication.

### **4. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS**

#### **Findings**

The analysis of the classroom interaction based on Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) model revealed that communication in the English class at MAS Darul Azhariyun followed a structured pattern dominated by the teacher's control of discourse. The data were drawn from a transcribed video of an English lesson on descriptive text, which included both verbal and nonverbal interaction between the teacher and 23 students. The discourse was categorized into three major types of exchanges: Informative, Question & Answer, and Directive, each consisting of a series of Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) sequences. The summarized results are presented in the following chart:

**Table 1.** Distribution of discourse moves based on Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) model.

Classroom Activity	Main Discourse Type (Exchange)	Dominant Move Structure	Common Identified Acts	Description of Interaction
Opening & Greeting	Informative / Directive	Initiation → Response → Feedback (IRF)	Questioning, Greeting, Acknowledging	Teacher initiated greetings and questions to build rapport and start the lesson. Students gave short responses, showing attentiveness.
Checking Attendance	Elicitation / Directive	IRF	Questioning, Responding, Appreciating	Teacher called names with creative prompts (e.g., English words starting with their initials). Students responded enthusiastically, creating engagement.
Ice Breaking Activity	Directive / Informative	IRF	Explaining, Responding, Agreeing	Teacher used commands and humor to increase focus. Students actively followed verbal and nonverbal cues, promoting positive atmosphere.
Material Explanation (Descriptive Text)	Informative / Elicitation	IRF	Explaining, Questioning, Responding, Reinforcing	Teacher delivered content about descriptive text through both English and Indonesian. Students responded briefly but attentively.
Group Discussion (LKPD Task)	Elicitation / Informative	Initiation → Response	Questioning, Explaining, Collaborating	Students worked in groups to classify vocabulary and describe pictures. Teacher monitored and guided using supportive feedback.
Student Presentations	Informative / Elicitation	Initiation → Response → Feedback	Presenting, Questioning, Praising	Groups presented descriptive texts (e.g., on Durian, Ronaldo, Lisa). Teacher provided positive feedback and guided reflection.
Review and Recap	Informative	Initiation → Feedback	Summarizing, Reinforcing, Clarifying	Teacher reviewed key points about descriptive text structure, purpose, and tense. Students listened and confirmed understanding.

Closing	Directive Evaluative	/	Initiation Response	→	Appreciating, Advising, Thanking	Teacher concluded the lesson, gave reminders, and led a closing prayer. Nonverbal cues showed warmth and encouragement.
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As shown in the chart, teacher initiation had the highest frequency across all exchange types, particularly in informative and elicitation exchanges, where the teacher provided explanations or asked questions to check understanding. Student responses were slightly lower in frequency, often brief or limited to short answers such as “Yes, Miss,” “Ronaldo,” or “Present.” Despite their brevity, these responses demonstrated attentiveness and participation. Teacher feedback followed most responses, functioning as an evaluative and supportive move that maintained communication flow and encouraged students’ confidence. Nonverbal communication was also prominent throughout the lesson. The teacher used gestures, facial expressions, and tone modulation to emphasize instructions, signal transitions, and express encouragement. These behaviors served as visual and emotional reinforcement of the verbal message, making the classroom interaction more engaging and comprehensible. The findings demonstrate that the English lesson was organized around structured, teacher-led interaction, where both verbal and nonverbal elements contributed to creating a coherent and interactive learning environment.

## Discussion

The findings highlight how Sinclair and Coulthard’s (1975) model provides an effective framework for understanding the structure of classroom discourse and the teacher’s role in managing interaction. The consistent use of the IRF pattern ensured that communication remained coherent and pedagogically purposeful. The teacher’s dominance in initiating exchanges reflects a common feature of EFL classrooms, where structured control helps maintain focus and supports comprehension for learners still developing language proficiency (Cazden, 2001). However, despite the teacher-centered pattern, the study found that the classroom was not passive. Interactive elements such as group work, questioning, and student presentations introduced moments of student participation, transforming a structured lesson into an engaging communicative process. The teacher’s use of nonverbal communication played a vital complementary role in supporting verbal discourse. Gestures and expressions helped maintain students’ attention, signaled transitions, and conveyed encouragement, aligning with Tannen’s (1990) argument that meaning is transmitted through multimodal

channels rather than words alone. In this classroom, such multimodal cues bridged potential comprehension gaps caused by linguistic limitations, reinforcing the message visually and emotionally. This confirms Cavarallo's (2004) view that nonverbal interaction enhances meaning-making and supports the relational aspect of classroom discourse.

From a broader perspective, the study illustrates how effective communication in EFL contexts depends not only on linguistic accuracy but also on the teacher's ability to orchestrate interaction through verbal and nonverbal means. The teacher at MAS Darul Azhariyun successfully balanced authority with approachability maintaining lesson structure while creating a supportive and inclusive environment. This aligns with Barnes's (1971) notion of learning as a dialogic process, where talk enables knowledge construction, and with Vygotsky's (1978) theory that language and interaction are central to cognitive development. Furthermore, the findings provide practical implications for teachers and researchers. For teachers, applying discourse analysis models like Sinclair and Coulthard's can serve as a reflective tool to evaluate questioning techniques, feedback strategies, and classroom management. Understanding how discourse patterns operate can help teachers shift gradually from rigid IRF cycles to more student-centered and dialogic exchanges. For researchers, the inclusion of nonverbal communication in discourse studies opens a more comprehensive avenue for exploring multimodal meaning-making in classroom settings, enriching our understanding of teaching effectiveness. The discussion demonstrates that the integration of Sinclair and Coulthard's verbal model with nonverbal communication analysis offers a complete picture of classroom interaction. The model reveals how discourse structure organizes learning, while nonverbal cues sustain engagement and meaning. Together, they highlight that successful teaching of descriptive text requires not only structured talk but also the teacher's sensitivity to gesture, tone, and affect the elements that collectively shape an effective and interactive EFL learning environment.

## **5. CONCLUSION & SUGGESTION**

### **Conclusion**

The results of this study demonstrate that the application of Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) model effectively revealed how verbal and nonverbal communication structured the classroom discourse during the teaching of descriptive text. The analysis found that teacher–student interaction at MAS Darul Azhariyun predominantly followed the Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) pattern, where the teacher initiated most exchanges and guided the flow of the

lesson through questions, prompts, and feedback. Although student responses were often brief, they showed consistent participation and engagement throughout the learning process.

Nonverbal communication played a crucial role in complementing the verbal discourse. The teacher's gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice supported understanding, maintained students' attention, and created a positive classroom atmosphere. These findings suggest that effective teaching is achieved not only through structured verbal interaction but also through the teacher's ability to convey meaning and encouragement nonverbally. The integration of both forms of communication enabled a more interactive and supportive learning environment, even within a teacher-centered classroom. In conclusion, this study confirms that Sinclair and Coulthard's framework remains a valuable analytical tool for examining EFL classroom discourse, particularly when combined with attention to nonverbal elements. It provides teachers with a deeper understanding of how communication patterns influence participation, comprehension, and engagement. Future teachers are encouraged to apply discourse analysis to reflect on their communicative practices, develop more student-centered questioning techniques, and incorporate nonverbal strategies that enhance clarity and motivation. Further research could explore how adapting the IRF model into more dialogic patterns may foster greater learner autonomy and interaction in EFL contexts.

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