



## The Structure of Classroom Talk: Applying the Sinclair & Coulthard Model in Teaching Descriptive Text

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**Abstract.** This study aims to explore the use of classroom talk in Indonesian EFL classrooms, specifically when teaching descriptive texts. Utilizing Sinclair & Coulthard's (1975) discourse analysis theory, the study focuses on the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) model, which offers a framework for analyzing classroom interactions. By applying this model, classroom discourse can be broken down into a hierarchical structure that includes Exchanges, Moves, and Acts. This structure allows for a detailed examination of teacher-student communication, making its subtle nuances more explicit and accessible for analysis. The IRF model is widely recognized for its applicability and effectiveness in identifying the functional roles of utterances in classroom talk. One key observation from this study is that teacher-led initiation and questioning often dominate the discourse, with students primarily responding to the teacher's prompts. The study suggests that the implications of the IRF model can help teachers reflect on their communication patterns and improve their teaching methods. By transforming teacher-centered scaffolding into a more student-centered approach, teachers can foster more effective interactions that enhance student engagement and learning. The study also highlights the importance of using the IRF model as a diagnostic tool for improving classroom communication practices and encouraging more dynamic and student-oriented teaching methods.

**Keywords:** Classroom Talk; Discourse Analysis; EFL Teaching; IRF Model; Teacher-Student Interaction.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Language learning not only focuses on vocabulary and grammar mastery but also emphasizes classroom interaction that encourages active student communication. In the EFL context in Indonesia, the classroom is the primary source of language practice due to students' limited access to native speakers outside of school. Therefore, classroom talk plays a crucial role in providing linguistic input, building motivation, and developing communicative skills.

One influential model in classroom interaction analysis is the Sinclair & Coulthard (1975) framework, which outlines discourse structure through the IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback) pattern. This model helps assess teacher communication strategies, student participation, and the quality of feedback. However, research on the application of this model in Indonesia is still limited, particularly in the context of teaching descriptive text in high schools. Descriptive text is a core competency for 11th grade, requiring students to be able to express descriptions using appropriate vocabulary, correct grammatical structure, and coherent paragraphs.

The problem that arises is that many students struggle to compose descriptive texts independently due to limited ideas, vocabulary, and structure. Furthermore, classroom interaction is often minimal, so writing is considered an individual activity. In fact, classroom talk can be an important tool for generating ideas, understanding text structure, and correcting language errors through scaffolding.

Based on this research gap, this study analyzes teacher-student interactions in teaching descriptive texts using the Sinclair & Coulthard model. This analysis is expected to enrich understanding of classroom discourse structure and provide practical implications for improving the quality of English language learning in secondary schools.

## **2. METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to analyze classroom discourse in a Grade 11 English class at MAS Darul Qur'an, Indonesia. The focus was on teacher student interactions during the teaching of descriptive texts, using the Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) Exchange–Move–Act model as the primary analytical framework. This model allows discourse to be broken down into exchanges, moves, and acts, thereby providing a systematic way to examine how classroom talk is structured.

The data consisted of transcribed utterances from classroom interactions, including teacher questions, student responses, and feedback. The source of data was naturally occurring communication in one Grade 11 class, recorded during regular lessons to ensure authenticity. Video recording, transcription, and coding sheets were used as instruments to capture and organize the discourse.

For data analysis, the study applied the model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which involves data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Through this process, the analysis identified patterns of interaction, the structure of exchanges, and communicative strategies employed by the teacher to support student learning.

## **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **The Structure of Classroom Talk in Teaching Descriptive Text**

When applied to the observed classroom interaction, the Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) model provides a clear portrayal of the classroom's complex structure. Despite its seemingly chaotic nature, the discourse was, in fact, a highly organized, hierarchical system, progressing from the broadest unit of interaction down to the most specific communicative function.

Consequently, the structure was found to be unmistakably teacher-centered, which was consistently demonstrated across all levels of the data analysis.

As indicated in Table 1, the majority of observed interactions were characterized by question-answer sequences, with these sequences accounting for 68.3% of all exchanges.

**Table 1.** Distribution of the Exchange Types.

<b>Exchange Type</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Question-Answer (QnA)	127	68.3%
Directive (Dir)	35	18.8%
Informative (Inf)	24	12.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>100%</b>

These data suggest that the pedagogical dialogue was primarily directed by the teacher's questions. Examining the remaining interactions, it was found that Directive exchanges constituted 18.8% of the sample, while Informative exchanges totalled 12.9%. Notably, Directive exchanges fulfilled the function of managing classroom procedure, while Informative exchanges served the purpose of providing content explanations. Thus, the teacher's questions set the classroom rhythm, and students were expected to answer them.

Delving into deeper layers of analysis, it was determined among the observed behaviours, initiation moves constituted the most prevalent category, accounting for 42.1% of the total. However, it is noteworthy that these initiation moves were dominantly initiated by the teacher.

**Table 2.** Distribution of Move Types.

<b>Move Type</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Initiation (I)	98	42.1%
Response (R)	89	38.2%
Feedback (F)	46	19.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>100%</b>

This high frequency highlights the teacher's role in setting the lesson's pace and content. Furthermore, the response moves made up 38.2% of the total, thereby representing student participation. Additionally, feedback moves at 19.7%, completing the tripartite IRF sequence, reinforcing the teacher's role as the authoritative evaluator of student contributions and the facilitator of knowledge.

At the act level, the data indicated that the most prevalent behaviours were questioning (30.9%) and explaining (29.2%).

**Table 3.** Distribution of Act Types.

<b>Act Type</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Questioning (Q)	72	30.9%
Explaining (E)	68	29.2%
Agreeing (Ag)	31	13.3%
Directing (D)	28	12.0%
Apprising (Ap)	22	9.4%
Revising (Rv)	12	5.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>100%</b>

As illustrated in Table 3, these elements collectively comprise more than 60% of all communicative functions. Thus, the teacher plays dual roles: initiator and clarifier. While the students' communication was limited to answering and agreeing, matching their reactive role in the move analysis.

Furthermore, while this pattern remained consistent, its manifestation underwent minor alterations across the lesson's phases. The opening phase was marked by a strict, almost rigid, implementation of the IRF structure, with the teacher initiating nearly all exchanges. During the instructional phase of the lesson, a shift in the dominant IRF pattern was noticeable; while the IRF pattern maintained its dominance (76% complete sequences), the teacher's feedback became more thorough, and a limited number of student-initiated inquiries emerged, suggesting instances of heightened student engagement. Then, presentation phase entailed the implementation of a modified IRF structure, wherein students assumed the initiation role by delivering their descriptive texts. Nonetheless, this shift proved to be only temporary. Shortly thereafter, the teacher swiftly re-established authority by intervening in the ensuing interaction through the formulation of subsequent inquiries and the provision of evaluative feedback. Consequently, this intervention effectively brought an end to the ongoing peer-to-peer discourse.

As seen in table 4 bellow, the teacher was responsible for 61.8% of all moves and 67.8% of communicative acts.

**Table 4.** Classroom Talk Time.

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Moves</b>		<b>Acts</b>	
	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Teacher	144	61.8%	158	67.8%
Students	89	38.2%	75	32.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>100%</b>

Therefore, the data confirms the hypothesis that teacher-directed learning environments are indeed effective. This finding aligns with Cazden's (2001) conceptualization of classroom discourse as a dual-purpose tool. That is, it functions as a tool to serve both instructional aims, by providing a framework for the learning of descriptive text features, and regulative functions, by maintaining a predictable and manageable social order within the classroom.

### **The Effectiveness of the Sinclair & Coulthard Model in Analyzing Classroom Talk**

In the context of this study, the implementation of the Sinclair and Coulthard model proved to be a highly effective approach. This model offered a systematic and detailed framework for the analysis of classroom interactions, which are considered to be a complex field of study. The effectiveness of the model is manifest in two fundamental areas: its descriptive power and its practical utility.

Firstly, the model's organizational structure, which subdivides discourse into Lessons, Transactions, Exchanges, Moves, and Acts, made possible a specific characterization of not only the subjects of discourse but also the objectives they sought to achieve through their use of language. By expanding the analysis beyond a traditional measurement of teacher-student talk time, it was possible to determine that, in this case, the teacher's dominance was manifested through Initiation moves and Questioning acts, while student participation was primarily limited to Response moves. Elaborating on this finding, the analysis revealed that teacher feedback frequently functioned as a scaffolding mechanism, such as by elaborating on student responses 41% of the time. Therefore, this nuance would be overlooked in a less structured analysis.

Secondly, the model has been demonstrated to be particularly effective in the context of teaching genre-based writing, such as descriptive text, because it highlights the role of language as an instrument for instruction. Moreover, the IRF pattern functions as the foundational framework for scaffolding. Guided by the teacher's Initiations, which encompass questions concerning descriptive features and vocabulary, students are prompted to engage in critical thinking. As students respond, they have the opportunity to develop and convey their comprehension. So, structured interaction establishes a supportive environment for learning, allowing students to engage with the features of a descriptive text, such as the use of adjectives, simple present tense, etc.

Consequently, the Sinclair and Coulthard model has been demonstrated to provide more than a descriptive framework, but rather a diagnostic instrument. It reveals the balance of influence and participation in the classroom, showing a teacher-centred discourse that can

provides clear scaffolding for descriptive text skills. So, this model could be enhanced by fostering greater student initiation and peer dialogue, as suggested by Alexander (2018).

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

This study analyzes the structure of classroom discourse in the teaching of descriptive texts at MAS Darul Qur'an using the Sinclair and Coulthard model. The results indicate that classroom interactions follow a hierarchical framework of exchange–move–act. The most dominant exchange was Question and Answer (68.3%), with the teacher exerting greater control over the interaction through Initiation (42.1%). At the action level, Questioning (30.9%) and Explaining (29.2%) were most frequent. The IRF (Initiation–Response–Feedback) pattern was evident, although the discourse remained teacher centered, with teacher talk being more significant than student talk.

The Sinclair and Coulthard model proved effective in describing the function of teacher student interactions and demonstrating the balance between teacher control and student participation. This analysis provides insight into how classroom communication supports genre-based writing learning, particularly descriptive and recount texts. Thus, classroom discourse plays a significant role in learning outcomes, and this model can be a practical tool for evaluating and improving English language teaching practices.

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