

USING THE SINCLAIR AND COULTHARD MODEL OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS FOR EXAMINING CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION IN UNIVERSITY LEVEL ELT

Abstract: It would be safe to state that being aware of the type of classroom interaction is necessary for language teachers for the effectiveness of their teaching. Additionally, without stepping back and examining a particular classroom, it is difficult to understand what happens inside of it. One way in which teachers can obtain objective information on the classroom discourse would be the application of a well-established model devised for this purpose – the Sinclair and Coulthard model (1975). By applying such a structured analytical method, teachers can make objective analyses to determine the points for future improvement. This paper initially presents the most important elements of this DA model, following the lesson details along with the process of data collection. This description will be followed by comments regarding the ease and difficulty of fitting the obtained data to correspond the Sinclair and Coulthard model. Finally, the paper examines the application of the model and its usefulness for teachers in determining and evaluating the nature of overall classroom interaction in their own circumstances.

Key words: ELT, discourse analysis, Sinclair and Coulthard, university FL teaching, communication

1. Discourse analysis and the Sinclair and Coulthard model

The model devised by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) is connected with the field of discourse analysis, which refers to the attempts to provide the analysis of 'natural and extended samples of both spoken and written language' (Burns, 2001: 123). Cook (1989: ix) describes discourse analysis as a way to examine 'how stretches of language, considered in their full textual, social, and psychological context, become meaningful and unified for their users' and at the same time, it provides 'insights into the problems and processes of language use and language learning'. As such, this expanding discipline is of particular interest for language teachers in their attempts to achieve successful communication in the classroom.

The Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) model of discourse analysis (in subsequent sections □ the S&C model), as McCarthy (1991: 6) points out, 'has principally followed structural-linguistic criteria, on the basis of the isolation of units, and sets of rules defining well-formed sequences of discourse'. Some of the questions which discourse analysis aims to address, according to Coulthard (1985: 9), are 'how does

one characterize and label the basic unit of interaction; how many different functions are there; how are these functions realized lexico-grammatically and what structures do these basic units combine to form'? In addition to this, Sinclair and Coulthard viewed discourse as a category in its own right, clearly distinct from grammar or phonology (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1992; Burns, 2001).

The S&C model was developed to examine classroom interaction (teacher-pupil talk) of an extensive sample of recorded British primary school lessons. The aim of this discourse study was to prove that when the discourse is analysed 'after the event, there is more order and form in it than it than might at first be apparent' (Cook, 1989: 50). The data from the recorded lessons served as a basis for their rank scale model which will be described in the following section.

1.1. The rank scale – exchanges, moves and acts

The S&C discourse analysis model (1975) was created after a rank scale structure proposed by Halliday (1961). According to Sinclair and Coulthard (1992), the rank scale format was chosen due to its flexibility. In other words, it was easy to adjust the new model by adding new contributions to it as soon as they were discovered because 'no rank has any more importance than any other' (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1992: 2). Additionally, each rank scale unit consists of one or more units below. The rank scale had a lesson as the largest unit of the highest rank, followed by a transaction, then the next unit in line, an exchange, which was followed by a move, and finally, an act as the smallest unit at the bottom of the scale hierarchy. The rank scale components can be represented as follows:

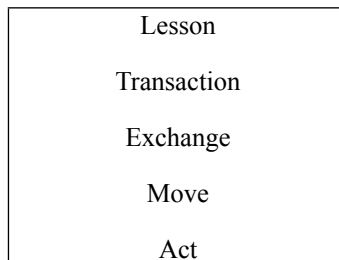


Table 1. The rank scale by Sinclair and Coulthard (1992: 5)

Lessons were not examined in the process of analysis. Moreover, they were considered 'an act of faith' (Coulthard, 1985: 123) and no defined structure regarding their constituent units, *transactions*, followed their placement in the rank scale. Defining *transactions* in detail also 'proved to be difficult' (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1992: 31). However, the purpose and the scope of this paper presuppose the description of the lower units of the rank scale, namely *exchanges*, *moves* and *acts*.

Exchanges in the S&C model are defined as either *boundary exchanges* or *teaching exchanges*. The purpose of *boundary exchanges* is to divide and mark the lesson stages by means of two types of moves – *framing* and *focusing*. There are

two main classes of *teaching exchanges*, which deal with the actual lesson content, and these are *free* and *bound teaching exchanges*. *Free teaching exchanges* can occur in isolation whereas *bound teaching exchanges* depend on the former kind. According to Sinclair and Coulthard, 'a typical exchange in the classroom consists of an initiation by the teacher, followed by a response from the pupil, followed by feedback, to the pupil's response to the teacher' (1992: 3). The structure and the function of exchanges are shown in greater detail in Table 2:

I. Boundary Exchanges					
a. Beginning a transaction:			b. Ending a transaction:		
(fr) frame ^ = marker (high falling intonation) followed by a short pause ^			(fo) focus = conclusion (outlines what the class has just done or is about to do)		
(fo) focus = metastatement			(fr) frame ^ = marker followed by a short pause ^		
II. Free Teaching Exchanges I (R) (F)					
1. Teacher eliciting exchanges: (brackets indicate head act)	2. Teacher directing exchange	3. Teacher informing exchange	4. Pupil eliciting exchange	5. Pupil Inform (teachers usually respond with feedback of some type)	6. Check (to discover how well pupils are getting on)
I (elicit)	I (directive)	I (inform)	I (elicit)	I (inform)	I (check)
R (reply)	R (react)	(R) (acknowledge)	R (reply)		R (reply)
F (evaluation)	(F) (evaluation)			F (evaluation)	(F) (not essential)
III. Bound Exchanges= when an exchange reactivates an element in another exchange instead of repeating it or rephrasing it.					



1. Re-initiation (i) = when the teacher does not get a response to an elicitation	2. Re-initiation (ii) = when a teacher gets a wrong answer, i.e. moving to another pupil and letting the question stand.	3. Reinforce = follows a misunderstood teacher direct, who then gives clue or prompt to correct.	4. Listing	5. Reinforce to induce a (correct) response to a previously issued directive	6. Repeat to induce the repetition of a response
I Opening (elicit)	I Opening (elicit)	I Opening (direct)	I Opening (elicit)	I(dir)	I (el)
-- Lack of Response	I Opening (elicit)	(R) Response (missing or incorrect)	R (reply)	R (react)	R(reply)
Ib Bound Initiation (acts such as prompt, nomination, or cue)	R Response (answering - rep)	Ib bound exchange - (reinforce) realized by clue or prompt.	(Ib)	Ib(clue, prompt, nom)	Ib (loop)
R Response (answering - rep)	(F) Feedback (evaluation - note may be withheld)	(R) Response (NV react, but correct)	R (reply)	R	R (reply)
F Feedback	(Ib)		F(accept, no evaluate)	(react)	F (accept and evaluate)
	R Response (answering - rep)		(Ib)		
	F Feedback (accept and evaluate)		R (reply)		
			F Feedback (accept, no evaluate)		
			(Ib)		
			R (reply)		
			F Feedback (accept and evaluate)		

Table 2. Exchange structures adapted from Sinclair and Coulthard (1992: 25□31)

Moves comprise acts as their constituent elements and in turn, 'moves themselves occupy places in the structure of exchanges' (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1992: 21). The S&C model describes five kinds of moves; apart from the above-mentioned *framing* and *focusing* moves, which are associated with *boundary exchanges*, there are also *opening*, *answering* and *follow-up moves*, which are introduced to define *teaching exchanges*. The main function of each *move* is defined by its Head, which is the main *act* in the structure of a *move*. The structure of the five S&C types of *moves* is presented in Table 3 along with their *acts* and their respective functions.

Rank IV: Move (opening)		
Elements of structure	Structures	Classes of act
signal (s)	(s) (pre-h) h (post-h)	s: marker (IV.1)
pre-head (pre-h)	(sel)	pre-h: starter (IV.2)
head (h)	(sel) (pre-h) h	h: system operating at h; choice of
post-head (post-h)		elicitation, directive, informative, check (IV.3)
select (sel)		post-h: system operating at post-h; choice from prompt and clue (IV.4) sel: ((cue) bid) nomination (IV.5)
Rank IV: Move (answering)		
Elements of structure	Structures	Classes of act
pre-head (pre-h)	(pre-h) h (post-h)	pre-h: acknowledge(IV.6)
head (h)		h: system operating at h; choice of reply,
post-head (post-h)		react, acknowledge (IV.7)
		post-h: comment (IV.8)
Rank IV: Move (follow-up)		
Elements of structure	Structures	Classes of act
pre-head (pre-h)	(pre-h) (h) (post-h)	pre-h: accept (IV.9)
head (h)		h: evaluate(IV.10)
post-head (post-h)		post-h: comment (IV.8)
Rank IV: Move (framing)		
Elements of structure	Structures	Classes of act
head (h)	hq	h: marker (IV.1)
qualifier (q)		q: silent stress (IV.11)
Rank IV: Move (focusing)		
Elements of structure	Structures	Classes of act
signal (s)	(s) (pre-h) h (post-h)	s: marker (IV.1)
pre-head (pre-h)		pre-h: starter (IV.2)
head (h)		h: system operating at h; choice from
post-head (post-h)		metastatement or conclusion (IV.12)
		post-h: comment (IV.8)

Table 3. The main types of move with the classes of acts based on Sinclair and Coulthard (1975: 26□27)



Acts are the smallest units of the S&C model and the lowest rank of the scale. Coulthard sees acts as 'defined principally by their interactive function' (1985: 126), and the definitions are intended to be general in order to encompass a broad range of descriptions. For example, *elicitation* is an act which aims to 'request a linguistic response', *informative* serves to 'provide information', whereas *directive* is an act which leads to 'a non-linguistic response' (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1992: 9).

1.2. Potential model modifications

The application of the S&C model has been praised for its simplicity (McCarthy, 1991). In contrast, when criticism occurred, it was frequently due to the problems encountered in the analysis of discourse in less structured situations. Therefore, modifications were proposed by various authors – Coulthard (1985) mentioned contributions by Berry (1981) and Stubbs (1981). Additionally, there were suggestions by Francis and Hunston (1992), Coulthard and Brazil (1992), and Willis (1992) to cater for different aspects of the perceived problems. For example, Coulthard and Brazil (1992) proposed the introduction of the new Response/Initiation move to the exchange structure.

The following section will describe the process of collecting the sample data for the paper, additional information regarding the lesson, and data preparation prior to the analysis.

2. Data collection

2.1. Lesson details, recording and transcribing

The upper-intermediate level lesson chosen for the S&C analysis was video recorded at the faculty where I work. Permission was obtained from all twelve students prior to the recording as well as the institution consent. The students' names in the lesson transcript and analysis have been changed to numbers (S1 – S12). When used in direct speech, the names have been reduced to first letters in the transcript to protect their anonymity.

The students are all non-native speakers of English. They are of rather mixed ability when it comes to their use of English, aged between 18 and 20, and attend compulsory weekly English lessons as a part of their Pedagogy department program.

The lesson was concerned with preparing the students for an upcoming examination. Although the content was related to the textbook-based tense revision, the students were invited to express personal opinions or provide accounts of their own experience related to the activity topics. Two extracts were transcribed out of the 48-minute recording, so that the transcribed total comprises 24 minutes. The next section deals with the expected data outcome regarding the type and the content of classroom interaction, which is closely related to the attempt to fit the obtained sample to the S&C model.

2.2. Sample expectations

Two extracts from the lesson were chosen in order to verify my expectations about both samples and the consequent analysis. I attempted to compare discourse structures of two seemingly distinct activity types, namely a question-and-answer type grammar review with the students' individual accounts of past experiences. The former part was expected to fit the S&C model easily. In addition, certain features of classroom interaction, such as student-teacher talk, the amount and type of speech of all participants, and their use of L1 were expected to be evident by means of analysis.

As the course is expected to provide strict exam preparation, the transcribed lesson was not seen as a typical model of communicative teaching. Nevertheless, the S&C analysis was expected to determine the occurrence of communicative activities in the overall classroom interaction. As McCarthy points out, by examining the language classroom interaction, we can 'determine whether there is a proper equilibrium or an imbalance between 'real' communication and 'teacher' talk' (1991:18).

The analysed data are presented in table format according to the S&C model. The first column contains the exchange type, whereas the next columns represent the opening, answering, and follow-up moves. In order to ensure the ease of presentation, student (black) and teacher (red) speech is colour coded.

The next section will present the instances of data analysis according to the S&C model and examine the degree of the sample appropriateness for this format.

3. Data analysis

3.1. Straightforward categorizing

After the transcription process, the extracts were applied to the S&C rank scale. A typical IRF exchange structure was noted in the first part, although with occasional problems in categorizing, confirming the belief that these extracts were teacher-led, with the whole class or individual responses, and some sort of a follow-up. Typical *directing* exchanges, to name but a few, occur in 1, 3, 15; *informing* exchanges (23) are not frequent, whereas *elicitations* (for example, 8, 24, and 43) outnumber the rest. There were also instances of *pupil-inform* (53, 54, 55, 58) in the second extract, as expected. Still, the second extract also demonstrates examples of an IRF format, despite being different in content.

Since the data analysis contains all examples of straightforward categorizing, and typical structures have been provided in Tables 2 – 3, the next section will deal with the instances of problem categorizing which were difficult to describe according to the S&C model. All exchanges mentioned in the comments will be marked (*).

3.2. Problem categorizing – difficulties and analysis

Several instances of discourse sample occurred that were difficult to place according to the S&C format, ranging from those related to individual act descriptions

to the ones involving two or more exchanges and their interdependent descriptions. The following sections will deal with particular examples in more detail.

Finding appropriate act labels for particular elements in the recorded sample has proved to be a challenging task, given the majority of act definitions provided and my own unfamiliarity with the model. For example, the opening slot in exchange 2 was a problem to define due to the length of T's turn and the choice between act labels. I finally decided on the following:

2. Direct *	<p>I</p> <p>T. I see you all have your textbooks now, but you don't have to read or write at the moment. (s)</p> <p>We begin by just listening – to one short piece of news. (ms) First, we just listen. No writing, nothing. And then we'll have some talk. (d) Ready? (ch)</p>	<p>R</p> <p>Ss close their books. (NV)</p> <p>(rea)</p>	<p>F</p>
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The first part has been labelled as a *starter* due to its function, despite its resemblance to the *direct* content below.

A boundary exchange such as exchange 11 below was also re-classified after consideration. Although Sinclair and Coulthard allow for 'possible ambiguities' with focusing moves, the *starter* has been changed here to *metastatement* in the focusing slot, since it has to be a 'compulsory head' of the move (1992: 22).

11. Boundary*			
Frame	Now...(m)		
Focus	We'll get to the details.(ms)		

However, there were several examples of single acts in follow-up slots which were difficult to interpret as anything but *acknowledge* due to their function. Consequently, these exchanges (26, 28, 29, 42, 45, and 47) were explained using an alternative model, namely the modification by Willis (1992), which proposes this particular solution – *acknowledge* as head in a follow-up slot – in case of an eliciting exchange. Such modification was introduced in order to distinguish between display and referential question types which start such eliciting exchanges.

26. Elicit *	<p>I</p> <p>Um, was the story a little surprising for you? (s) Did you expect all that to happen to the girl? (el)</p>	<p>R</p> <p>S6. Oh, I didn't expect that but I wasn't surprised. (rep)</p>	<p>F</p> <p>OK (ack)</p>
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Similarly, exchange 26 above appears to start with a referential question to which the teacher does not have an answer in advance, since the content of this part refers to expressing opinion.

The next section will specify some of the problems which occurred during the data analysis on the level of exchanges and moves, namely it will describe the examples which proved the most difficult to describe.

Several difficulties occurred while describing all units of the exchange 41 below. The first problem of marking the I slot as R/I takes into account the extension of the three-part exchange (Coulthard, 1985; Coulthard and Brazil, 1992) and it occurred because the new R/I move was the end of a rather extended reply in exchange 40. Nevertheless, the exchange was marked 'pupil-elicited' due to a pause which occurred before this request for translation. The additional problem of two replies occupying the same R slot was solved by including both responses due to their almost simultaneous production, which was checked again in the recording. Moreover, the second *reply* was changed to *acknowledge*.

41. Pupil elicit *	R/I S10. A lot of...um... <i>perut</i> ? (L1 for dandruff) (el)	R Dandruff? On his shoulders? (rep) S10. (points) Yes, on his shoulders (ack)	F
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Another student contribution in exchange 37 which asks a question as a *reply* differs from a similar example quoted by Coulthard (1985: 135) as she does so after a lengthy group *react* in 36. Initially, this example seemed to call for a greater format flexibility of adopting an 'I (R/I) R (F)' exchange structure (Coulthard and Brazil, 1992: 72). In subsequent analysis, exchange 37 was labelled as *pupil-elicited* since the student here asked for additional information. Moreover, the previous exchange 36 was initiated by an imperative, but it was also a question near the end. As a result, how the students understood this move was in the form of the question being the imperative, that is, they responded non-verbally through an act labelled *react*.

36. Direct*	I Think about that for a couple of minutes (d) and discuss with your pair first, just the way you sit here – two and two, two and two (n) – and compare your stories first. Compare your stories and decide which story is more unusual, and you will tell us all about it later, in 5 minutes, during our discussion. (d) Can we do that? (ch)	R Ss (prepare for the task, NV) (rea) (10 sec pause)	F
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37.Pupil elicit*	I S10. So, our story - does it have to be about clothes shopping? (el)	R No, any kind of shopping will be OK (rep) (Ss giggle, laugh) (rep)	F
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Similar problems in relation to dual move functions occurred in exchanges 49 – 51, 56 and 59 – 60. For example, in exchanges 50 and 51 the teacher provides feedback with a question, which belongs to the F slot, but it also represents a new opening, since it aims to initiate and obtain more information from the student. Therefore, the dual function which does not fit the original model led to a difficulty to define these exchanges in accordance with the basic interpretation and understanding of the format.

50. Elicit *	F/ I * And it was easy for you to tease, right? (el)	R S6. Yes! (laughter) (rep)	F
51. Elicit *	F/ I * And she never went back to that shop again? (el)	R S6. No, I don't think so. (rep)	F OK, thank you, N. (acc)

In contrast, exchanges 29 – 30 below which initially drew attention to the problem turned out to differ from exchanges 50 – 51 in description. There is a teacher's question after a student *reply* again, but there is also *acknowledge* in the follow-up slot and a pause in between.

29.Elicit*	I Do you still think that there is a place - a shop, a restaurant, anywhere... where something like that could happen? (s) If you have torn jeans, you can't come in? (el)	R S7. No ... I have some torn jeans I can go everywhere! (chuckle) (rep)	F Oh! (ack)
30.Elicit*	I Have you been everywhere ? (smiling to S7) (el)	R S7. Yes! (laughter) Mine's not so torn (points to the picture), but it was OK. (rep)	F

Further problems which were similar in nature were encountered while describing exchanges 6, 10, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, and 27. For example, exchanges 10 and 27 were initially labelled *listing*, but re-classified as *eliciting* due to the lack of fit to the listing description. There are multiple student replies which occur without *nominations* because the teacher allowed for sufficient wait-time for all. Moreover, withheld evaluations were apparent except for the follow-up after the final reply which seemed to encompass all answers.

10. Elicit *	I What was good about that? (el) The main point? (cl)	R S1 They (climbers) are safe. (rep) S5 They are alive. (rep) S6 They are back home.(rep)	F Good, so we're all clear on the main point. (e)
27. Elicit *	I Is it common... in some shops, to send people out for such reasons? (el)	R S10. No, not in our country. (rep) (Ss take turns) S6.I agree with her (rep)	F So, the rules are a little different. (com)

Exchange 6 below also contains multiple replies occurring almost simultaneously as it shows the teacher asking for a more precise student response. Such *opening* would propose one of the alternatives in exchange labelling – *elicit* or *re-initiate*.

5. Elicit	I Generally speaking, the piece of news – was it good or bad? (el)	R S2,4,7. Good! (rep) S8,3. Bad! (laughter) (rep)	F
6. Re-initiate (ii) *	I T. Well, what was it? (el)	R S1 It started... (rep) S2 It started bad ... like a bad...(rep) S3 In the beginning, it was all bad, but then it was good in the end. (rep)	F T. OK, it was bad, at first, but then better in the end. (acc)

With an *elicit* in exchange 5, the next exchange was finally labelled *re-initiate* (ii), although not satisfactorily due to the partial correspondence to the description.

Previous replies were neither wrong nor missing, as opposed to *re-initiate (i)* and *(ii)*, but rather inconclusive due to the obvious contrast. Additionally, there were no *nominations, prompts* or *clues*. Still, *re-initiate (ii)* seemed to suit best since the students interpreted it as another attempt to elicit more detailed verbal responses. Similar points could be made about exchange 18, which was re-classified from *repeat* to another imperfect *re-initiate (ii)* because the student provided an extended answer to it and not mere repetition.

In summary, the perceived problems in analysis did not outnumber the exchanges that were easy to analyse, but a more detail-oriented lesson analysis would probably include the majority of model modifications, depending on the particular problem in the discourse sample. The advantages of the S&C model will be examined in the next section as well as its importance for evaluating classroom interaction.

4. An overview of findings

After analysing the transcribed lesson according to the S&C model, several points became evident in the process. The first extract analysis differed from the second, in keeping with the initial expectations, as it was mainly teacher-led, with the majority of teacher turns (teacher/ student word count – 540: 313) and display questions leading to evaluative F moves.

The second extract analysis was much more – but not entirely – in favour of student initiated openings, with a greater amount of student talk in the first two slots (teacher/student word count – 350: 673), although only contributed in single extended turns, without group activity interaction.

The need for clarification in the first language occurred only twice in the entire lesson transcript analysis, contrary to the previous expectations and impressions based on non-recorded lessons; this example only strengthens the belief that no teacher should rely on memory alone when deciding upon the quality of classroom communication.

The outcomes of a variety of F-moves became distinguished in the analysis, namely the discursive role of the second extract examples which include students' contributions in the classroom discourse 'in order to sustain and develop a dialogue between the teacher and the class' (Cullen, 2002: 120). As a rule, the use of varied F-moves shows the ability of the teacher to respond appropriately, whether their purpose is to provide correction or promote further student turns, thus creating opportunities for extended classroom communication.

However, two types of difficulties were noted in the overall process, which could influence similar future analyses. The S&C model appears difficult to apply on a regular basis in an average, full-time teaching context due to its time-consuming process. Conversely, it would be difficult to deny the benefit of extensive data obtained through such a well-established matrix. Moreover, any type of classroom performance evaluation conducted without a clearly defined format would be based predominantly on teacher intuition, memory or impressions.

Finally, although it is difficult to obtain objective data on classroom interaction on a day-to-day basis, it is essential to monitor classroom performance with the aim of improving and adjusting accordingly. Therefore, potential usage of the S&C model could initially be found in examining smaller discourse samples, trying similar activities in different groups, or in piloting new teaching activities.

5. Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to examine the usefulness of the Sinclair-Coulthard model of discourse analysis by applying it to one of the EFL lessons in my context. Generally speaking, the lesson transcript has been incorporated into the S&C model and explained in accordance with its guidelines, apart from the noted exceptions where adaptations have been considered. After analysing the transcription and commenting on the difficulties, the importance of such analysis for successful classroom interaction has been examined.

As opposed to the single lesson sample used for this analysis, prospective model usage could involve data obtained from multiple recordings, preferably through a form of peer-cooperation within the teaching setting.

In conclusion, it appears limiting to use this discourse analysis model solely as a warning sign for insufficient portion of communicative work (McCarthy, 1991) since it provides accurate descriptions of the actual classroom interaction which would be difficult to determine otherwise. In turn, such descriptions could reveal the details of overall classroom performance of all participants and determine the points for future improvement.

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Marija Stojković

ANALIZA DISKURSA (SINKLEROV I KULTARDOV MODEL) U NASTAVI JEZIKA NA UNIVERZITETSKOM NIVOU

Rezime

Sa sigurnošću možemo reći da je interakcija u učionici od izuzetnog značaja za nastavni proces. Pored toga, ukoliko ne proučimo tip interakcije teško je sa sigurnošću oceniti kako se nastavni proces odvija. Jedna od metoda kojom se mogu dobiti precizne informacije je primena modela analize diskursa u nastavi koji predlažu Sinkler i Koltard (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). Uz pomoć ovakvog analitičkog modela moguće je izvršiti objektivne analize i utvrditi koje nastavne elemente je neophodno poboljšati. Ovaj rad stoga predstavlja ukratko dati model analize diskursa, kao i segment nastavnog procesa koji je predmet istraživanja. Rad zatim daje tumačenje i usklađivanje dobijenih podataka sa modelom analize diskursa. Na kraju, rad ispituje primenu ovog modela analize diskursa za evaluaciju interakcije u nastavnom procesu u zavisnosti od datog konteksta.

e-mail: marija.stojkovic@filfak.ni.ac.rs