

Generic Structure Potential Analysis of Classroom Interactions in a Nigerian University

Omotosho Moses Melefa,
Oluwasegun Matthew Amoniyen &
Maryjoy Ilora Adike
Department of English & Literary Studies,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract

This paper examines the generic structure potential of selected classroom interactions at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN). Tape-recorded live classroom interactions from the Department of English and Literary Studies and Department of Linguistics and other Nigerian Languages serve as the data for the study. Analysis of the data was based on Halliday and Hassan's theory of Generic Structure Potential (GSP) and Sinclair and Coulthard's concept of Classroom Discourse (CD). The data analysis shows that classroom discourse has two elements, that is, obligatory and optional elements. The obligatory elements include Previous Knowledge (PK), Entry Behaviour (EB), Introduction of Lesson (IL), Focus (F), Prompt (Prm), Explanation (Ex), Evaluation (Eva), Conclusion (Con) and the optional elements are Greeting (Gr), Repetition (Rpt), Response (R), Complimentary (Comp) [as it was catalogued in Initiation Response Follow-up]. The data yielded the GSP of the interactions as: **[[Gr]. >^ EB^ IL^] [(Rpt) . Prm ^ R . Ex ^ Eva] [<[Con]> ^ (Comp)]**. The study, therefore, concludes that the structure of classroom interaction at this level is essentially different from what obtains at the lower levels of education, where the structures are well known and routinized.

Introduction

Language use in various areas of human endeavour has contextual characteristics that make it unique. This uniqueness is indicative of Halliday and Hassan's (1985) and Hassan's (1996) concept of genre and generic structure potential analysis. Contextual features of discourse form the criteria for characterizing its genre. From this kind of characterization, the features that define a genre is identified and discussed. Classroom Discourse (hereafter CD) has enjoyed a lot of scholarly attention. The scholarly development of this area of discourse is popularly traced to Sinclair and Coulthard (1975). These scholars consider classroom discourse in three perspectives including IRF as Initiation, Response and Feedback in the early 1975. CD has its progression as thus:

Lesson → Transaction → Exchange → Move and Act

The approach considers the nuances of natural conversations in the classroom, which vary from class to class in order to discuss what the linguistic characteristics of classroom conversations are and how the conversations are used to disseminate tutor's intention (learning objectives). It emphasizes the basic forms of classroom culture and manner in which teacher (+HIGHER ROLE) and learner (-HIGHER ROLE) exchange information and maintain social interactions.

From the submissions in the literature, teachers usually initiate the discourse (though sometimes students can initiate the lesson by asking questions that border them during the previous class) and ensure that it follows a particular course, which he/she has pre-arranged.

Several philosophies of education including essentialism, progressivism, humanism, existentialism, social reconstruction and perennialism have extensively contributed to the roles of effective and efficient teachers in order to ensure that knowledge is disseminated. This approach to discourse considers how lessons are introduced and taught through language (Schiffrin, 1994).

Several studies have been conducted on classroom discourse, especially those that seek to discuss the structure and organization of discourse in the classroom setting. For example, Sinclair and Coulthard (1974) discuss the progression of teaching-learning procedure in order to enhance effective teaching, which often commences with initiation and ends with feedback. Within the Nigerian context, Olateju (1998, 2004) explores the patterns of interaction in an ESL context like Nigeria. However, not much is available on the generic structure potential of classroom discourse within the context of Nigerian university system. This current study investigates the generic structure potential of classroom interactions collected from a Nigerian university as a way of providing insights into what constitutes the generic structure potential of classroom interactions in a second language situation like Nigeria.

The teaching and learning process takes place within and beyond the walls of the classroom setting. The term classroom discourse refers to interactions between teachers and students using language as the medium of communication. Talking, or conversation, is the medium through which most teaching takes place; so, the study of classroom discourse is the study of the process of face-to-face classroom teaching. A classroom is a learning space,

a room in which both children and adults learn. Classrooms are found in educational institutions of all kinds, from pre-schools to universities, and may also be found in other places where education or training is provided, such as corporations, religious and humanitarian organizations (formal or non-formal). The classroom provides a space where learning can take place uninterrupted by outside distractions (Brown 2000; Harmer, 2001; Cahoun et al, 2003; Phelps, 2008; Richards, 2014).

Generally, discourse in classroom encompasses different types of written and spoken communication that happen in the classroom (formal education). In the contemporary period, the definition goes even deeper to include representing, thinking, interpreting, expressing, reflecting, agreeing and disagreeing, and even debating and arguing in the course of the teaching and learning process. As teachers recognize the importance of constructive discussion and interaction in the learning situation, this model of classroom discourse is shown more and more in classrooms across different learning spaces (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975, 1992; Olateju, 1998; Taiwo & Salami, 2007).

The language of classroom is a professional language and classroom is well coordinated and recognised across the world. In the field of teaching, learners in the classroom and tutors are required to be highly competent in language use for teaching since instruction about topic/sub-topic requires a vivid representation and explanation of the topic to the learners. Furthermore, learners in the classroom have emotional, psychological and mental alertness which pre/determine

the learning of the subject-matter in the class. There is need to look at the language that is used and the values and association which come with the language. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975, 1992) have researched on the language and interaction in the classroom from the opening to the closing and have considered the movement in levels. Sinclair and Coulthard argue that the interaction in the classroom is beyond the language use, but includes effective teaching and learning and the achievement of the learning objectives.

Methodology and theoretical foundation

Several classroom interactions involving postgraduate and undergraduate students of the Department of English and Literary Studies and the Department of Linguistics, Igbo and other Nigerian Languages, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria, which were audio-recorded from 1st March-30th March, 2019, form the data for the study. Recording was done at this period, because it was a period of intense lectures and classroom interactions in the University. From the data collected, five learning episodes were purposively selected and analysed using insights from Generic Structure Potential (GSP, hereafter) of Hassan (1985).

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which encompasses GSP, is a perspective of language that embraces a sociological and functional approach to language study. Bearing in mind this sociological and functional interest of systemic grammar, its major concerns, as perceived by Berry (1977), are perhaps language behaviour, function, and context (language use). Systemic functional grammar reflects language as a form of behaviour which is functional, as something that one

does with a purpose or more. This implies that language use is goal-directed (Halliday, 1978; Eggins, 2004). Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) comprises various areas, namely the concept of language, meta-function, text and context, genre analysis and generic structure potential analysis. For the purpose of analysis of data in this present study, we shall focus on generic structure potential (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, 1985; Halliday, 1994 & Martin, 1984, 1992).

The Generic Structure Potential (GSP) approach has Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as its theoretical base. The interest in the generic (or schematic) structure of texts has been greatly influenced by Halliday & Hasan (1985); Hasan (1978, 1984, 1996); and Martin (1992) and the concepts, privileged text and context. Generic Structure Potential (GSP) of a text refers to the total range of obligatory and optional elements of the text and their orderliness (Halliday & Hasan 1991, p. 64). Two or more texts that share the same set of obligatory and optional elements and are embedded in the same contextual configuration (CC) belong to the same genre (classification) or are texts of the same genre (Halliday and Hasan, 1985). When two texts are closely related to the degree that code/language is doing the same kind of job in both texts, they are embedded in the same Contextual Configuration (CC). However, the two or more texts that are embedded in the same Contextual Configuration (CC) and belong to the same genre may have some differences (Olagunju, 2014). Moore and Tuckwell (2006) state that Generic Structure theory is a theory of the dynamic, bidirectional relationship between a text's structure and the relevant features of the context in which that text occurs.

The analysis of data in this study is based on the GSP catalogue below:

[[Gr]. >^ EB] ^] [[IL]. ^ (Rpt) . Prm ^ R . Ex ^ Eva^] [<[Con]> ^ (Comp)].

The key to the symbols

Gr	=	Greetings by the learners	-	Optional
EB	=	Entry Behaviour	-	Obligatory
IL	=	Introduction of the Lesson	-	Obligatory
Rpt	=	Repetition	-	Optional
Prm	=	Prompt	-	Obligatory
R	=	Response	-	Optional
Ex	=	Explanation	-	Obligatory
Eva	=	Evaluation	-	Obligatory
Con	=	Conclusion	-	Obligatory
Comp	=	Complimentary	-	Optional

He elements that constitute the GSP in the classroom discourse for this research include Greeting Gr, Entry Behaviour EB, Introduction of Lesson IL, Repetition Rpt. Prompt Prm. Frame Frm. Response R, Lesson in Full LF, Explanation Ex. Evaluation Eva. Conclusion Con. Complimentary Comp. The keys of the symbols are obligatory and optional. Therefore, it was discovered in the data that EB, IL, Prm, LF, Ex, Eva and Con are obligatory while Gr, Rpt, and R are optional. The use of the dot (.) between some elements indicates the level of interaction between the elements in a sequence. Therefore, sequence IL. Ex. is only one option, as the sequence could be: Ex. IL (reversibility). The square brackets [] restrain the sequence and limit the place of occurrence of the elements within, which implies, for instance, that [EB^IL] can only occur at the beginning of a Classroom discourse text and nowhere else. The same explanation holds for [Con] which can only occur at the final slot. Finally, the caret sign (^) stands for sequence; it shows how Classroom discourse texts progress from Gr^^^^^^Comp, from the

commencement of the classroom teaching to the conclusion of the lesson. What comes next is a detailed description of each element with excerpts from the texts to illustrate. Keys for understanding the abbreviations are presented below: **L** – Lecturer; **S**- Students; **FS** – Female Student; **MS** – Male Student

Data analysis and discussion

Following the catalogue provided above, the first element of classroom interaction in the data is **Entry Behaviour (EB)**: This element is obligatory in classroom discourse. It involves how the lecturer commences the lesson in the class; however, it may begin with a question, illustration or rebuke and the primary aim of the entry behaviour is to prepare the learners to learn the set objectives for the lesson. It can also be achieved via elicitation or directive. In a situation where the present (new) topic has a direct link with the last topic, the facilitator commences the new topic by making allusion to previous knowledge in order to motivate the learners for the learning of the new topic. Also, it is for the teacher to know what the students already know. Examples of EB in the data are presented below:

- L: So, in the last class, we were talking about implicature. I think we stopped at implicature?
S: Yes
L: Ehen, where did we stop last time? Or we didn't do anything last week? (*phone rings*) or...where, where did we stop?
S: Implicature! Implicature!
L: Ehh?
S: On implicature
L: Let's check it please. So, after everything you just dump (the students laugh)
FS: NO ma!
MS: The old ones are...

- L: Hmm, you have to be serious o, because is all about practical. You do something and you forget about it (sound). You don't even understand ehh (pauses) implicature is even ehh a strange word. Where is your course rep?

(Lecture one)

- L: What can we add to what is already in place; so this set seeks to add to the existing body of knowledge. When you have productive research, your primary aim is to add to the existing body of knowledge. Research is not conducted for the fun of it. You're not expected to come, just research because you just want to graduate, I don't have it in this class (hits his hand on the table). So it will cost something for example, when you require practical definition and not just, I want to graduate, I want to graduate. I don't allow my project students to just graduate. No! They must do research. In other words, there is working to generate new forms of knowledge to be added to existing body of knowledge....

(Lecture two)

- L: We established an argument and we're trying to justify how we can use the excerpt or the poem, not necessarily an excerpt... so we got to use it to justify what we are saying. We are moving on, so we take it one after the other understand it with the locus where we have situated it for now and what is it? Remember we started by telling you... we posited an argument about the literary connectivity, the ability of literature to go into other areas, borrow materials in order to construct what?

(Lecture three)

The Lectures: 1, 2, and 3 show that the facilitators have previously taught Implicature, Purpose of Research which serves as an entry behaviour/set induction leveraging on the previous knowledge for the new lesson. The connection between the entry behaviour and the new topic stimulates teaching progression, sustaining it from the known to the unknown or the simple to the complex. This creates learners' mental alertness and readiness for learning, though the teachers need to be dynamic and logically

constructive to achieve the set goal(s). However, a tutor may have cause to remind the learners of the previous knowledge as long as whatever he/she explains can be substantiated when reference is made to the previous lesson. This will clear grey areas and shed light on what *previous knowledge* entails. Also, it can be used to emphasise or clarify what might have been said during the previous lesson.

FS: Ma, you introduced *em* pragmatics to us, telling us it has to do with *em* it's a branch of *em* an aspect of linguistics that studies how meaning contributes to context, context contributes to meaning and you also mentioned some theories. You mentioned Deixis and you mentioned Implicature...

L: Are they theories?

FS: No, you mentioned some approaches to the study of pragmatics and you mentioned deixis which refers to or pointer to. Where you have person deixis, time deixis and the rest of them. Then, you also mentioned presupposition, you mentioned speech act and you talked about Austin's

Introduction of the Lesson (IL)

This element is central in the classroom discourse and it is achieved (always) immediately after the entry behaviour/set induction; meanwhile, other discussions may serve as interjection between the entry behaviour and introduction of the lesson, which may serve to sufficiently prepare the learners to understand the learning objectives. This is clearly different from teaching in the primary and secondary schools where the tutors make it clear to the learners what the new topic is, sometimes, the teacher writes the new topic when he/she wants to introduce the topic, for the purpose of securing the learners' attention. IL may not seem to have a link with the entry behaviour;

however, the two terms are closely related. This involves where the tutor mentions the topic of the lesson:

L: ...But you can't have deixis without content. What I'm trying to say is that just have it at the back of your mind every time that once you say pragmatics, think about context...

MS: Language in use

L: Language in use, user of language per say, user of language. When it is more tied to user of language than the language in use. In fact, that's actually the difference between semantics and pragmatics.

...at semantic level, meaning is on the surface but linguist find it difficult to interpret meaning that stop meaning at that surface level and tried to go beyond that...

(Lecture one)

L: That must be your focus, that must be your aim, that must be your interest, that must be what you set out to achieve. It is not just for the fun of it. So, bear in mind that if you're conducting research or why you will require to conduct research in order to graduate, ...to graduate but in order to graduate, you must add new or fresh knowledge to existing body of knowledge. Alright? For example, what are we talking about? It is possible. For example, because how many planets do we have?

S: Nine

L: ... 9 planets. That is what we were told. But there is new information from research now that we have more than 9, alright? Planets has its research was 9 but new researchers have discovered additional.

If you talk aboutIf you look at it again, you'll discover something new because research is when you look again, look again someone has looked before. That is why for example, there is a; no moment where you're not expected to review existing body of literature.

L: Now we have established that the consciousness that was flowing through this period cut across. We have used one poem to establish it. Now we are going to use one poem to justify that in spite of the fact that this poem-the linguistic features, belong to the poet, but look at the consciousness that characterizes the poem-sense of an ending. Now we're

going to get into another poem. 'Naked is the earth'. Let's see also what this poem, written the same period and let see how also he tries to captures the spirit of the age, tries to justify the fact we had already established. Somebody should go through that.

L: Naked is the earth...now read

FS: Naked is the earth...

(Lecture three)

Repetition (Rpt)

The teaching-learning process requires teachers and learners to avoid boredom. Sometimes, it is optional especially when the teacher constantly employs it in the course of learning. However, it becomes monotonous and negatively affects effective teaching and learning process when it is not properly utilized by the teacher. This element is obligatory for the teaching and learning of the pre-primary, primary and secondary school level owing to their age brackets and their peculiarities, but particularly for the higher institutions of learning (undergraduate and postgraduate), it may not be effective due to the learners' level of exposure.

Prompt (Prm)

This element is obligatory because of its role in the teaching-learning process. It functions to reinforce a directive or elicitation by suggesting that the teacher is no longer requesting a response but expecting or demanding from the learners:

MS: He's about to come or yet to come rather.

L: Okay! Because I was even thinking is uncle B

MS: No, no, no can't be...

L: So, how many of you have gone to the level of ehh trying to do somethings that you think pragmatics? Something practical, after the class? (pause). Did you do anything, you know, in search of anything maybe do some utterance

interpretation. Were you able to do anything? At least among yourselves somebody will say something. Even if you don't tell the person. You do some analysis with something that matters. Has anybody done that kind of thing to share with us?

(Lecture one)

From the scene in the class, it is indicated that there is need for constant interaction in the classroom between the tutor and the learners to ensure and ascertain effective learning process as every activity that facilitates effective teaching in the classroom is significant. From the excerpt, the lecturer (L) and the male student (MS) engaged in ***prompting***.

Explanation (Ex)

It is the detail(s) or reason(s) that someone gives to make something clear or easy to understand. This element shows that the teacher gives practical illustration of what he or she presents to the students:

- L: Some theories came up from the aspects that we are studying...
Implicature is basically on Grice's theory of conversation implicature.
From J. Austin...
The major theories of pragmatics are:
Grice's theory of conversation Implicature
- J. Austin's speech act theory
Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory

(Lecture one)

- L: ...Of course, you can be sure that those... (more instances were given) it is not good to be a researcher in Nigeria because societies that are developing are societies that have developed, not developing on the platter of research. Those who have invested so much resources in concluding... who still investing... if you want to make cool money now, in Germany different kinds of funding is available for

conducting research now even in America. So, societies are developed on the platter of research. Research is very crucial. Societies well researched is not for granted, they cannot grow, there can't be growth, there can't be development. If no new idea is discovered, societies will remain where they are, they will continue to be backwards. That is why... and if every step is followed, you are like by going to get new ideas that will help to think about growth and development.

(Lecture two)

- L: Another reason is Edmond... the classes of European sciences and...phenomenology, that is, text. He also tries to tell us why it was the case and what did he say? According to Edmond... during the period, there were transformations in the body of knowledge from the sciences to the humanities to politics, to commerce, to history, to series of transformations. Because of what? Many things become problematic; many things become problematic. And people couldn't just phantom actually what was happening and what is referred to as literature. Literature at this time didn't only reflect what was happening...

(Lecture three)

From the above examples, explanation is an obligatory part of any effective teaching and learning process in the classroom. Without this segment, effective learning may not take place and the level of the students (in age and exposure to knowledge) determines the depth and the extent of the explanation.

Evaluation (Eva): Evaluation is a process of testing the learners on what they must have been taught or on what the teacher assumed that the learners must have known. Evaluation can occur at the beginning, middle or at the end of the lesson to foster learning and to carry the learners along. However, its primary target is to ensure that the learning objectives are understood:

- L: So, how many of you have gone to the level of ehh trying to do somethings that you think pragmatics?

L: something like what? And you're looking at it. Can't you say anything about pragmatics?

L: Are they theory?

(Lecture one)

L: You have heard turn taking, it's your turn now to speak. It's your turn to speak. Have you heard about qualitative research and quantitative research? ...nobody has heard about these two concepts before?

L: ...most of the work you do in undergraduate levels are usually what?

(Lecture two)

L: Now, I want you also to take note of the linguistic features used by the poet. Let's see the similarity between them...yea, continue.

FS: Like a hungry she wolve...

L: Did you understand it?

S: No

L: SO another person should read, a second reader

FS: Naked is the earth...

L: So what did you get out of it? Bo, are we in a drama section? What tickles your fancy? I asked what did you get out of it, you sat down laughing. So, what's tickling your fancy?

MS: Nothing.

L: So what did you get out of it?

(Lecture three)

From the data, it was discovered that the tutors made good use of the evaluation tools to sustain the teaching-learning process. However, it is evident that drillings can feature either at the beginning, during or at the end of the lesson. Evaluation helps to know whether the learners understand the learning objectives or not. If the learning objectives are not understood, the teaching becomes a waste of time, energy.

Conclusion (Con): Every lesson has conclusion which could end as planned or abruptly, depending on the

teacher's adequate planning and preparation for the class. It can end with the overview of the topic of the day or assignment or commendation of the students based on their comportment. This component is demonstrated in the excerpts below:

L: ...pragmatics is interested in the process of producing language and its producers; not just in the end product which is language.

L: So, if you read this thing very well, you'll see the... what we have before and the new thing that we want to do. Do I still have time here?

(Lecture one)

L: So you should be treated as individuals who are already to go, alright? Do you understand this? Are we together. You are already quite?

(Lecture two)

L: Next class, definitely we will get into this...

Michael – tells us that the history of language or the history of literary language cannot be explained outside the history of evolution of thought. For him, the history of literary language is intertwined to the history of what? Evolution of thought...He classifies this history of thought into three stages...the renaissance... the classical age...the modern period...

And now what we're going to do next, we're going to see...how this history of evolution of thought is intertwined with the history of literary language.

(Lecture three)

Complimentary exchange (Comp. exch.): Greeting at the end of the teaching was optional as observed in the data gathered. It is an optional element because its absence does not affect the comprehension of the learning objectives.

L: So next Wednesday

(Lecture one)

- L: And now what we're going to do next, we're going to see...how this history of evolution of thought is intertwined with the history of literary language. I may not be here on Wednesday, so see you next time.

(Lecture three)

Optional elements

Greeting (Gr): Every discourse has initiation point, which refers to the first scenario that plays out in the classroom discourse when the students meet and greet their teachers (vice versa) as soon as they enter the classroom. However, this element is optional because sometimes, there can be a transfer of aggression and the teacher may not need greeting before s/he commences the lesson. Also, if the students had previously offended the teacher, such a teacher could shun the students' greetings to express his/her grievances so that the students would know that he/she is not happy with them. Greetings have several cues depending on the situation, event, and action. In the data collected, the lecturers rarely greet their learners unlike in the primary and secondary schools. This element is optional because its absence does not seem to affect the teaching-learning process.

However, the population of the learners in the Nigerian universities make it challenging for the lecturers to greet their students first before the commencement of lecture. Should one consider the rowdiness, indiscriminate sitting arrangement and others which make courtesy difficult? However, the best thing to do as a lecturer may be to commence the lesson as soon as he/she enters the lecture room. This may be possible since greeting does not really affect the teaching-learning process.

Complimentary close: Most interactions end with farewell bid or the act of saying parting words, whether brief or extensive. This depicts good conduct and character, especially within the sociocultural context. Complimentary close is an optional element because its absence does not affect the understanding of the learning content/objectives. Its cues include: bye for now, we shall meet next time:

L: So, next Wednesday
(*Lecture one*)

From the data collected, it was only *lecture one* that has complimentary close while others ended their lectures with the agenda for another class.

Digression: It is a section of a speech in the course of teaching that marks a temporary shift from the subject of the discourse; the digression ends when the writer or speaker returns to the main topic. Digressions can be used intentionally as a stylistic or rhetorical device. Digression could be positive or negative depending on its effect on the listeners.

Suggestion: This is the psychological process by which one person guides the thoughts, feelings, or behaviour of another person. The words 'suggest' and 'suggestion' work within the context of a particular idea which was said to suggest another when it brings the other idea to mind. It may include a lecturer warning students as a result of misbehaviour, discussion on societal issues and others which may not be part of the learning objectives for the period.

L: me, I don't understand you people...

MS: no, let's understand ourselves.

L: this class is supposed to be 8 to 10.

S: Yes....

MS: We're done with him now, so...we wouldn't mind if you can change it a little bit so that those people from Enugu and other places may also join us. Let's say 3, 10 – 12... (little pause) or 9-11.

L: Uhhh on Wednesday?

L: If that is your ihe-a (thing), it's okay by me. I don't have any problem.

S: 9 O'clock

(Lecture one)

Generally, the data yielded the GSP of the selected interactions as:
[[Gr]. >^ EB^ IL^] [(Rpt) . Prm ^ R . Ex ^ Eva^] [<[Con]> ^ (Comp)].

Conclusion

This study investigates the GSP of selected classroom interactions in a Nigerian university and argues that the various elements of classroom interaction work together to achieve cohesion in the discourse and effective learning. The commencement of every learning activity has a lot of significance in facilitating the understanding of the lesson/topic; that is, if the entry behaviour is not outlined, it may affect the learners' readiness, stimulation and achievement in the learning process. Thus, there is need for a logical presentation to sustain the attention of the learners, while appropriate use of interactions, illustrations and explanation complement the teaching procedure.

Evaluation plays vital roles in the enhancement of the teaching-learning process. This explains why the competent teachers do not joke with evaluation, which could occur at the various stages of the classroom

discourse. It can be achieved through various means such as polar questions, wh-questions, subjective, objective test or assignment (take home drills). The teacher observes and measures the changes in the behaviour of his students through testing. This step adds an interesting dimension to the evaluation process. While testing, he will keep in mind three things– objectives, teaching points and learning activities; but his focus will be on the attainment of objectives. This he cannot do without enlisting the teaching points and planning learning activities of his pupils. Today's mass failure at several level of education may be tied to numerous reasons including overcrowding of the classroom which pose threat to evaluation, marking and correction. From the data, evaluation as a tool in the classroom discourse, contrary to the submission of Sinclair and Coulthard, was not used by all the lecturers.

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