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Analysis of Discourse at a Place of Work*

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Analysis of office discourse between adult role-equals has not been attempted to date in Croato-Serbian. We suggest a possible coding system for such a discourse situation and analyse the varied ways in which people get others to do things; the role of non-linguistic utterances; the incidence and kinds of ellipticality; discourse cohesion; the incidence and kinds of regulatives of person-to-person and person-to-world relations. This research is planned as a basis for future contrastive work in this field.

We were originally led to an analysis of conversation through a fascination with the intricate way in which language intention, formal and phonetic dimensions and social consequences are intermeshed. The various ways in which this intermeshing takes place continue to provide the basis of our preoccupation with language as communication and the present analysis of discourse at a place of work is one manifestation of it.

1 Coding principles

The material for our analysis was a forty-five minute recording of conversation in an office in Zagreb in which an ordinary Phillips tape-recorder was inadvertently left on. The recording thus has the virtue of complete authenticity but is difficult (sometimes impossible) to transcribe. It consists of a series of interchanges between adult, role-equals who have

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known each other and been working together for a long time. Unity is given to the recording by the fact that it all takes place in the same office during a single morning, two of the participants are the same throughout and a latent frame of reference for many individual episodes is provided by a move of office premises that took place the day before the recording happened.

1 i Episodes and sequences

The tape very clearly breaks down into a number of episodes (39) of very varied length, discourse pattern and function. Although in our analysis of the recording we sometimes had differences of opinion over the coding of speech-acts, we never had any difficulty in agreeing on the division into episodes. These were always clearly marked by a different combination of participants, a different topic or action or by different intentions, often by more than one of these at the same time.

Episode was the first and least controversial division of the recorded material and from episode it, at first, seemed possible to go straight on to speech-act. However, it soon became apparent that all episodes went through several stages of interchange, each being a number of speech-acts related to each other (growing out of each other) by topic, by activity being performed, or by illocutionary intent. These stages within episodes formed *sequences*, and the variation of sequences within episodes varied from three to almost forty and could theoretically have been more. The transition from stage to stage (sequence to sequence) within a single episode was also usually well marked and seldom gave rise to disagreement.¹

1 ii Turns

The basic discourse *turns* are initiation and response. However, as our conversations are between adult, role-equals, and as the sequences frequently last for as much as a minute and often longer, we found a whole array of initiation proce-

¹ In our coding we have relied heavily on the work of other conversational analysts: Coulthard, Sinclair, Brazil (1978); Dore (1978); Garfinkel (1972); Labov, Fanshel (1977); Quastoff (1978); Shields (1978); Wells et al (1979). Our coding system owes something to all of these but is not identical with any of them since none of the above authors was coding an exactly similar situation, i.e. exchanges between adult, role-equals at their place of work.

dures. We retained *initiate* for the primary initiation of topic/action/illocutionary-set, but found it to be ramified by *re-initiate*, *sub-initiate*, and *counter-initiate*. All these gave rise to the responding turns of *response* (linguistic) or *feedback* (often non-linguistic). We also found it necessary to introduce the turn *monologue*, which occurred more often than we had expected and which was a freely occurring turn not necessarily involving a response.² Thus within a sequence turns are:

<i>first part turns</i>	<i>second part turns</i>
initiate	
re-initiate	respond
sub-initiate	
counter-initiate	feedback
<i>freely occurring turn</i>	
monologue	

1 iii Speech-acts

The most delicate part of the coding is the speech-act and especially the intonational dimensions of such acts. We coded these minimal units in the transmission of meaning according to: intonation and other paralinguistic characteristics, speech function and discourse turn. In some episodes we extended the coding to include grammatical form and reference (cataphoric, anaphoric and exophoric). We have not included these extended codings here although we see reference as being one of the most important elements in conversational cohesion.

Speech-acts have been divided into three groups according to whether they are *initiating acts*, *responding acts* or *free acts*. Most frequently occurring on our tape are the acts of *assertion*, and of *requesting information, goods and services*. These are matched by the corresponding acts of *acknowledge with agreement with disagreement, extension or query* and by *giving on request information, goods and services*. The hypothetical alternative of refusing to give information, goods or services was not found on our tape, there were no instances of blank refusal, but rather of counter or sub-initiation with

² Turns have been coded in short as follows: initiate — i; re-initiate — ri; sub-initiate — si; counter-initiate — ci; respond — r; feedback — f; monologue — m.

some new assertion or request. The prolongation of an original assertion by disagreement, extension or query accounts for most of the long sequences on the tape.

Various kinds of *phatic* acts are also initiating and are matched by corresponding phatic responses. A special form of initiation is the *challenge*. This is often not directly responded to in the next turn but may give rise to special kinds of challenging assertives or demands later on in the discourse.

Free acts which do not necessarily demand responses are *expressives*, *speech-for-self* and *regulatives*. In expressives the main force of the act is not to request information nor is it to make an assertion but to vent the speaker's feelings (expletives, not infrequent in our discourse, come under this head). Speech-for-self was an act which turned out to be more common in office discourse than might have been expected. It often accompanies actions being performed with or without another person being present in the office.

A class of free acts of particular interest are the *regulatives*. We see regulatives as falling into two groups: 1. regulative speech-acts which control, or seek to control, the mechanics of the exchange, in particular various kinds of nomination and paralinguistic devices easing the flow of the conversation (*eh, ma, pa*); 2. acts which control, or seek to control the state of interpersonal relations. In this second group we distinguish two different kinds of regulative acts. In the first place are those acts which we have called *regulatives of common knowledge*, in the second *regulatives of collective understanding*.

Regulatives of common knowledge are those acts which, to use Garfinkel's (1972) definition, are those which convey mutual knowledge holding good only for the communicative partners in the face-to-face interaction. This is the knowledge which cannot be taken for granted but must be accomplished by the interaction, its characteristic feature being that:

- i The knowledge either refers to the mutually perceptible objective conditions of a speech situation, or
- ii The knowledge has been established in previously performed discourse within the same encounter, or
- iii The knowledge has its origin in the common/communicative interactive history of the participants.

Regulatives of collective understanding (Bellert 1970, Quasthoff 1978) are those discourse acts which rely upon shared cultural understanding, on "knowledge of the world" which means "our" world as the interacting participants suppose it to be. This understanding can be expected to be shared by

members of a social group even though they have not engaged in personal interaction. Utterances occurring in conversation and calling upon collective understanding are not expected to be challenged or denied. If they are a special situation arises. They are usually expressed in verbal stereotypes or in unfinished utterances that imply that agreement is taken for granted. The "Branko mine" episode below shows a very marked example of such a regulative of collective understanding.

In some episodes we marked two other kinds of regulatives which we called *mitigators* and *aggravators* and coded them in a different way. These are not discourse-acts in their own right but affect the way in which other acts are formulated and we denoted them by single or double slashes round such acts. Thus, RI is a simple request for information, /RI/ would be a mitigated request, a polite, a diplomatic or a wary request. //RI// would denote an aggravated, an abrasive or a quarrelsome request for information. These acts are not the same as *challenge*, though aggravators are often found preceding challenge or may belatedly follow challenge. In the episodes below there are examples of aggravators in "meeting". In summary form the acts we have used are:³

<i>initiating acts</i>	<i>responding acts</i>
assertion	acknowledge with agreement,
requesting information,	disagreement, extension or
	query
goods or services	giving on request information,
phatic	goods or services
	phatic
challenge	
<i>acts not necessarily involving responses</i>	
expressives	
speech-for-self	
discourse regulative	
regulative of common knowledge	
regulative of collective understanding	

³ Speech-acts have been coded thus: assertion — A; requesting information, goods or services — RI RG RS; phatic — PH; challenge — CH; acknowledge with agreement, disagreement, extension, query — AK AK_a AK. AK?; giving on request information, goods or services — G_rI G_rG G_rS; expressive — E; speech-for-self — SS; discourse regulative — R; regulative of common knowledge — R_{cm}; regulative of collective understanding — R_{cl}. When discourse act are mitigated they are marked with single slashes /A/; when they are aggravated with double slashes //A//.

The area of our coding with which we are least satisfied is that of intonation and paralinguistic cue. The description of anything like Halliday's basic intonation tunes has only recently begun in Croatian,⁴ and it would be misleading to use Halliday's 1-5 notation. In addition on this tape the phonetic dimension was the most difficult to decode with any certainty.

2 Contextual dimensions

In an office such as the one in which this recording was made, and over a longer stretch of time such as our thirty-five episodes represent, at least four dimensions are present: negotiation of interpersonal relations; discussion of temporary events or topics; consideration of office affairs; registration of relations with the outside world. Only in rare and fleeting episodes is one of these dimensions present alone. Sometimes all four are inwoven, usually at least two with one being dominant.⁵

The order here is not random. The dimension most often present, either pure or intermixed, is that of interpersonal relations. Second in order of frequency comes temporary event or topic, this may be a broken telephone, problems of winter heating, a romance, a scandal, the drama of someone's son in the army, the quickest way home from work, or exchanges of office rooms — all present on our tape. Since our recording is concerned with office discourse it may be surprising to find work in third place. This is not a reflection on the offices of Zagreb, nor upon this particular office. We are concerned only with language exchange and much of the work of an office goes on, or we suppose goes on, without any linguistic exchange.

An awareness of the world outside the office, of the state and values of that world, is pervasive in many episodes. Some-

⁴ One of the first serious studies made is the unpublished M. A. dissertation by Anuška Nakić *Kontrastivna analiza intonacije engleskog i hrvatskog ili srpskog jezika*, 1981. It is however confined to sentence intonation.

⁵ In coding the contextual dimensions of an episode we have used lower case and capitals to denote the relative importance of the different dimensions. Thus work + event + WORLD shows that all three dimensions are present but that the state and values of the world seem most important. Similarly in INTERPERSONAL + event it is the negotiation of interpersonal relations that seem to be more important or to become more important that the event with which the episode may have begun.

times it surfaces as a distinct topic, often it is implicit in those speech-acts which we have called regulatives of common knowledge and of collective understanding and which reflect an inexplicitly expressed background of the understanding that is "taken for granted".

3 Three work episodes

The three episodes below give an idea of the discourse patterns and varied dimensional mixes found throughout the recording.⁶ The first episode entitled **morning** was in fact the first episode on the tape, the second **Branko mine** immediately followed it, **meeting** came much later in the recording.

3.1 "Morning" episode — EVENT + interpersonal

This first episode took place between Branko, who has a senior position in the office and is one of the main actors throughout, and Marija, an office secretary. The first initiation, response and feedback (utterances 1—3) are concerned with the change of office premises in which Branko has lost a room. Appeal to common office understanding is part of utterance 2 and surfaces in *ma* and *you know*. Utterances 4—7 are purely phatic and part of the morning ritual of most offices. At the end of the episode Branko returns to the topic of office rooms with a soliloquy on the excellence of his new room which Marija, probably being occupied with work, half hears and does not hear. An interesting feature of this, as of many episodes, in the meaning within the discourse of non-linguistic utterances such as *ma*, *aha*, *a*. Whereas *a* (utterance 6) is purely phatic, *a* (utterance 9) is a request for information, that is for some kind of proposition which the preceding expressive does not supply. This request function of the second *a* is given by the rising intonation. Had

⁶ The Croato-Serbian text is the tapescript of the original recording. The English text that runs parallel to it is not supposed to be a translation but a transliteration which follows the original as nearly as possible. Thus many of the expressions are "unEnglish". We have left all non-linguistic utterances as they were in the original. *Ma*, *pa*, *a*, *eh*, are the most common in the recording and have various functions in the discourse.

the intonation been falling one could have considered it to be feedback.

sq	ut				
1	1 M: Što su vam uzeli?	What have they taken from you?	RI	i	
	2 B: ma	ma	R _{cm}	r	
	onu sobu	that room	G,I		
	ne	you know	R _{cm}		
	gdje sam uvijek dolazio	where I always came	G,I		
	3 M: aha	aha	AK	f	
2	4 B: Kako si mi drugarice?	How you doing comrade?	PH	i	
	5 M: ja odlično	me fine	PH	r	
	6 B: ah?	a?	PH	ri	
	7 M: odlično	fine	PH	r	
3	8 B: da ova je lijepa soba	yes this is a nice room	E	m	
	ova je soba odlična	an excellent room			
	miran život	quiet life			
	9 M: ah?	a?	RI	r	

3 ii "Branko mine" episode + work + event + WORLD

This episode begins with Anka coming into the office. She is head of the office, Branko being her deputy. Her initiating turn *Branko secretary* has two strongly falling intonations on the two separate words which, to use Brazil's terminology, are proclaiming tones indicating that the speaker is about to say something that is new. In terms of function these are regulative acts since, by opening the channel and nominating the respondent, they control the flow of discourse. Anka's discourse is broken into by Branko's *morning*. She continues with another regulative *listen* which would probably not have been used had she not been phatically interrupted. She then automatically returns his phatic greeting and passes on to

speech-for-self ending the sequence with the assertion which, for her, constitutes the true purpose of the exchange — **work** — *and now Branko I'll give you that agreement*. The final speech act that ends this sequence is part of the re-initiation which began with *listen* at the start of utterance 3.

An initiation being the first part of an adjacency pair demands, and usually gets, a response be this only the feedback of *a*. In this case the re-initiation concerning the agreement is left hanging for Branko rejects the topic "work" and introduces his own topic "event" — initiating it with the regulative *listen* and thus beginning the second sequence of the episode (utterance 4—7). With this firmly rising *listen* Branko fends off work and introduces the topic — "new rooms". Anka now abandons work and goes along with new rooms through utterances 4, 5, 6 and the first part of utterance 7. The seventh utterance of the episode is one of the most interesting utterances of the whole recording and demanded special coding.

The single Croatian word *direktorica* (here translated as *directoress* — but involving an idea that might better be caught by *big boss*) becomes multifunctional through an infusion of irony. Thus it is both a response to Branko's observation on the splendid new office, and at the same time the initiating act of a new sequence. Multifunctionality is provided by the special intonation pattern with an exaggerated rise and fall so that the first part of the word *dinec* supplies a response to Branko while the last part *toress* is the initiating act of the third sequence of the episode. This whole sequence is drenched in the ironic implications of its initiating utterance (7) and is concerned with the general social attitude to authority as typified by directoresses or bosses. It is thus a registration of the outside world. To achieve this it relies heavily on regulatives of cultural understanding all of them elliptical, one overtly ironical — the classical way of calling upon understanding other than that overtly expressed by an utterance. The collective understanding utterances (8, 10 and 19) are both stereotypes *you know what that means* (*what do you think what that means*) and *ah listen*. Utterance 19 is especially typical of regulatives of collective understanding in that, though ostensibly an initiation, it does not really expect a response (and does not get one), but conveys the idea — well, we both know what people think today about bosses and all that their attitude means.

sq	ut				
1	1 A:	Branko tajničē	Branko secretary	R	i
	2 B:	dobro jutro	good morning	Ph	i
	3 A:	ćujete	listen	R	ri
		dobro jutro	good morning	PH	
tu se preselila Paula i ova . . . i ja ću sada dati Branko ovaj sporazum		here moved in Paula and . . . and now I'll give you Branko that agreement	E A	m ri	
2	4 B:	Ćuj	listen	R	ci
		pa to je divno ovo	but this is splendid this is	A	
	5 A:	što ne da je divno	isn't it splendid	AK _a	r
	6 B:	selite pa to je	moving but its	A	si
3	7 A:	direk	direc	AK _a	r
		TOrice	TOress	R _{ci}	i
	8 B:	bogati	Christ	E	
		šta <i>misliš</i>	what do you <i>think</i>	R _{ci}	r
	9 A:	<i>a?</i>	<i>a?</i>		f
	10 B:	<i>što to znači</i>	<i>what it means</i>	R _{ci}	r
		nema tu tu se sedni i drhti se ovako vidiš he he he	there's nothing for it but sit here and quake like this	A	si
	11 A:	ko od koga	who before whom	RI	si
	12 B:	juu ko je kriv	juu whoever's wrong	G,I	r
	13 A:	<i>a?</i>	<i>a?</i>		f
14 B:	onaj ko je kriv	whoever's in the wrong	G,I	r	
15 A:	<i>misliš da ima takvih danas koji drhti?</i>	do you think there's still anyone today who quakes	RI	si	
16 B:	aa	aa	R		
	ja mislim da ipak ima	I think there really still is	G,I	r	
17 A:	Ima ima ima ljudi koji imaju svoj jedan	there are still people who have their	A	si	
18 B:	znam znam	I know I know	AK _a	r	
19 A:	ah ćuj Branko moj	ah listen Branko mine	R _{ci}	si	

3 iii "Meeting" episode — WORK + INTERPERSONAL

The episode that we have called **meeting** records the opening of the fifty-first meeting of an executive council that is taking place in the office. The main actors are once again Anka and Branko, but several other persons are present in the office attending the meeting, and just after the meeting has begun comrade Tane arrives late which swerves the episode off work into interpersonal.

The episode provides interesting insight into the discourse-act challenge. Although it is a long episode there is only one regulative of common knowledge and not one of collective understanding which is probably due to the fact that it is a formal occasion with outsiders present who do not belong to the narrower office group. The most interesting section of this episode is the charge-filled interchange between Tane, who is late, and Anka. When Anka makes her challenge (utterance 9) and Tane tries to justify himself tension builds up and this exchange alters the tone of the discourse. It may be supposed that had the meeting continued in the formal atmosphere in which it began there would have been more regulatives of common knowledge whose primary function is often to promote smooth functioning and good-will. The only example of such a regulator is to be found in utterance 6 when the atmosphere is still congenial or even joking. Branko is obviously referring to Tane's being late as something that is common knowledge and he seems to be trying to forestall the uncomfortable interchange that follows. As soon as Anka starts her attack on Tane the only regulatives used are those which control the mechanics of the interchange. In this part of the episode neither actor is trying to build up an atmosphere of good-will, and the utterances of both are aggravated.

Even when listening to a recording of this exchange one is aware of the importance of the other participants present, although they do not speak. It is most likely because of the presence of others that an overt quarrel between Anka and Tane is avoided, and finally Anka resorts to speech-for-self to vent her opinion of people who are late which leads to everyone just waiting and nobody doing anything. By thus directly addressing neither Tane nor the other people present (though in a way it is addressed to all of them) she avoids further discussion and still manages to get her thoughts heard. In this case the monologue speech-for-self serves a double purpose — it allows the participant to voice an opinion without eliciting a response thus serving to avoid direct confrontation, and it makes further conversation possible in

an atmosphere which does not lead to a breakdown of communication. Tane and more especially Anka are aware that the meeting must go on, no matter what their personal differences may be. But speech-for-self is obviously also here part of a struggle for supremacy, especially after Anka rejects Tane's excuses for his lateness. Neither wants to be the loser in the upmanship game but at the same time both know that they must avoid overt rift for the reasons mentioned above. It would be safe to assume that had this interchange taken place without other people present and without the context of an executive meeting both participants would have managed the conversation differently and there would have been less reason for covert strategies. Thus, though the participant may have at his disposal various strategies the situation dictates which he actualizes.

sq	ut				
1	1 B: otvaram 51. sednicu poslovnog odbora	I open the 51st meeting of the executive council	A	i	
	2 A: ti boga 51.	good God the 51st	E	f	
	3 B: da 51. sa dnevnim redom ...	yes the 51st with the following agenda ...	AK _a	r	
	ima li neko primedbe	any comments	A	ri	
			R		
2	4 T: ovo je poslovni odbor jel	this is the executive committee isn't it	RI	i	
	5 B: da, da poslovni odbor	yes yes this is the executive committee			
	A: da, da poslovni odbor	yes yes this is the executive committee	AK _a	r	
	6 B: evo ga evo ga stiže	he's made it he's made it	R _{cm}	i	
	joj opet kasni	late again	E		
	7 A: mislim ja čujte drug Tane	look here listen comrade Tane	//R//	si	
	ja vam sada ovde stvarno moram reći od deset sati vas ko budale čekamo	I really must say we've been wanting here like idiots since ten o'clock	//A//		
	8 T: (sound of acute discomfort)	(sound of acute discomfort)			f
	9 A: znate u deset sati je brate što ipak malo pređe meru	you know ten o'clock its really going a bit too far	//R//	CH	i

	10 T:	je al s kolima sam imao u devet sati	Well yes I had car problems at nine	AK.	r
	11 A:	jeste al onda bar telefonirajte nećete doći ili nešto nego vidite koliko ih ima	yes but then at least telephone not coming or something look how many there are	R //AK _d // E	r
	12 T:	bio sam na pregledu	I was at the mechanics	A	i
	13 A:	lepo čekamo i niko niš ne dela	just waiting and nobody doing anything	SS	m
	14 T:	pa možete bez nas pripremit tri zadnjih bez nas se može radit	pa you could deal with the three last you could do that without us	R A	ci
	15 B:	eeeeee	eeeeee	R	i
	16 A:	kakav je to radni	what kind of work . . .	SS	m
3	17 B:	dobro znate dnevni red ima li nekih primedbi	OK you know the agenda Any comments	R A	ri

(now follows a long work sequence)

4 Concluding notes

The purpose of our coding has been to devise an adequate scheme to record office discourse. Already we have gained useful insights in several areas for example: the varied ways in which people get others to do things; the role of non-linguistic utterances; discourse cohesion; the incidence and kinds of ellipticality; the incidence and kinds of regulatives of person-to-person and person-to-world relations. When an analysis of all the episodes in the recording is presented there is fuller understanding of all of these.

A number of discourse tendencies are already clear. The ways of getting other people to do things are governed by a mixture of influences: the personality and status of the interlocutors, complexity of cultural level, personal and professional closeness of the participants, the kind of service being required. Various modes of oblique requests are more common in certain situations, more common among close associates than among those that come in from outside. In

our recording examples of direct and grammatically fully formed requests are usually a feature of interaction with visitors from outside the office. There is a parallel case in the incidence of ellipticality. Taking the recording as a whole the incidence of ellipticality is surprisingly preponderant. Sometimes quite long episodes are consistently elliptical — the closer the participants the greater the ellipticality. However, it is also interesting to note the variation within an episode of ellipticality and full formation of utterances. The latter seems often to have rhetorical significance as a marker of importance. For instance, in an exchange which is mainly elliptical the occurrence of a complete, grammatically well formed sentence seems intended to make special impact, to give weight to what the speaker is saying.

Another important element in discourse analysis is study of what makes for the multifunctionality of utterances. Some elements contributing to multifunctionality can be seen in the episode given above. An example in the "morning" episode is Branko's first utterance with its mixture of information plus shared office experience. More interesting is the ironic utterance of the "Branko mine" episode. Both these illustrate what was a constant feature of the recording, that is, that short utterance, may be more multifunctional than long utterances. Some of the very long asservite or information utterances which went on for as much as half a minute were monofunctional while quite short (one word even, in the case of utterance 7 of "Branko mine") utterances could be multifunctional. The part played by intonation and non-linguistic elements in the achievement of multifunctionality is also of special interest.

The range and variety of non-linguistic utterances or parts of utterances has already been mentioned, sometimes they are feedbacks, but even feedbacks have varying functions — support, query, retention of contact.

Of special interest is the form and function of the various regulatives especially those which control, or seek to control, interpersonal relations. These above all are linked to the contrastive analysis project. One of its extensions must be comparative. We need to ask ourselves to what extent the discourse functions that we have isolated are cross-cultural and what extent they are culture specific. Such a comparison can only be made by matching our recording with a similar recording in another language culture. When this is done it will be possible to see which elements of discourse are most

likely to cause communicative interference. That such interference takes place is a common experience of anyone conducting a conversation or having an interview with someone in a "foreign" language.

Elements of language interference on the formal level have been much researched, but elements causing discourse interference and leading to the blocking or misdirection of communication on the level of Communicative pragmatics are still not far advanced. Yet in analysis of communication failure, on any but the elementary level, of discourse infelicities or of mal-reception are at least as important as are formal grammatical infelicities.

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ANALIZA DISKURSA NA RADNOM MJESTU

Analiza diskursa između odraslih ljudi podjednagog društvenog statusa na radnom mjestu nije dosad provedena na hrvatskom ili srpskom jeziku. Autori predlažu jedan sustav kodiranja za takvu vrst diskursa i pružaju uvid u različite načine kojima se ljudi služe kako bi postigli da drugi nešto učine za njih; uloga nejezičnih izričaja; kohezija diskursa; učestalost i vrste eliptičnosti; učestalost i vrste regulativa u odnosima: čovjek — čovjek i čovjek — svijet. Ovo istraživanje treba poslužiti kao polazište za planirani rad na kontrastiranju engleskog i hrvatskog ili srpskog diskursa.