Research Forum

An Analysis of Discourse Miscues in the Oral Production of Non-native Speakers of English

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When native speakers of English (NSs) listen to non-native speakers' (NNSs) spoken discourse, there is sometimes a perception of incoherence. Tyler and Bro (1992) have suggested that this is often due to miscues. This study examines the unplanned spoken discourse of four NNSs elicited via oral proficiency interviews to see how pervasive such miscues are and what form they take. Miscues in the area of specificity, the verb phrase, and logical connection are investigated. The results suggest that specificity and logical connection play a significant part in creating incoherence in the discourse, but miscues in the verb phrase are less important. The implication is that such miscues need to receive more attention from teachers and students in the classroom.

　英語母語話者が、英語を母語としない者の英語を聞くとき、話に一貫性がないと感じることがある。Tyler and Bro(1992)は、この原因の一つとして、話者間でなされる誤った解釈が度重なることにより、非整合性が生じることを挙げている。本論では、英語を母語としない者4名へのインタビューを通して得られたスピーチデータををもとに、誤解の重大さや、形式を分析した。質的考察を行った結果、非整合性の原因としては、動詞句の誤った解釈よりも、内容の明確化と論理的結合性が強く関係していることが明らかになった。教師・学習者双方が、解釈の誤りへの注意と意識を持つことが必要である。

Most teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) have experienced the situation of listening to a student produce spoken discourse only to feel that there is something about it that "just doesn't seem right." The words and sentences are understandable, but the discourse as a whole lacks coherence. This can be a frustrating experience because, while the student is told that he or she cannot be understood, the teacher is hard pressed to give explicit advice on how the discourse can be improved. In optimal circumstances, the teacher can repair the grammatical errors and try to paraphrase

the student's words, but this rarely enables the student to discover the problem with the original discourse that led to the incoherence. Moreover, the pressure to continue with the lesson means that the cause of such misunderstanding is often overlooked.

This paper examines spoken discourse produced by four Korean non-native speakers (NNSs) of English to identify some of the elements that lead to a lack of coherence. Whereas attention has been paid to NNS grammatical accuracy in this respect, Tyler and Bro (1992) have suggested that the lack of coherence in NNS speech is due in part to "the cumulative result of interacting miscues at the discourse level" (p. 71). These miscues result in information that is presented in an unexpected manner, making it difficult for the native speaker (NS) listener to integrate it into the ongoing discourse.

The research reported here takes this perspective by examining spoken discourse elicited via oral proficiency interviews to see if such miscues are present, how frequent they are and what form they take. However, two caveats must be made. First, coherence is a difficult notion to address since it is a function of many overlapping features, and conducting a multifaceted analysis that simultaneously takes into account all features is complex and lengthy. Inevitably, some readers will point to other features that are potential sources of misunderstanding in the discourse, but this does not mean that limiting the extent of the analysis to a narrowly defined domain, as has been done here, lacks merit. If this were the case, then it would be very difficult to say anything at all about NNS discourse. Second, deciding which features lead to incoherence and to what degree is inherently subjective. A larger study, where coherence is judged by a panel of raters and their coding correlated, would reduce this subjectivity to some degree. However, analyzing such complexity with the need to control for confounding variables is beyond the scope of this study.

With these two caveats in mind, the present study should be viewed as an exploratory examination of miscues in NNS spoken discourse, rather than an attempt to demonstrate statistically that such miscues are the only source of incoherence. Miscues have received scant attention from researchers in the past compared to more traditional error analyses, but in many ways they are more serious because their covert nature prevents students and teachers from seeking ways to overcome them.

Theoretical Framework

Coherence in discourse has been viewed by scholars from two vantage points. One takes the view that coherence is contained wholly

within the discourse (i.e., bottom-up). Halliday and Hasan (1976) present the best-known account from this viewpoint and argue that particular lexico-grammatical cohesive ties act to bind a text and provide "texture," synonymous with coherence (see Brazil, 1985; Hoey, 1983; Phillips, 1985; Winter, 1977 for alternative analyses).

The alternative view (Carrell, 1982; De Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981; Green & Morgan, 1981; McCagg, 1990) argues for the need to consider the reader/listener and the mental schemata that he or she brings to the process of interpretation (i.e. top-down). McCagg (1990), for example, says:

> Coherence . . . is an aspect of comprehension that is established in the mind of the reader as a result of a perception of relatedness among a text's propositions and between the text and the knowledge that the reader possesses of the world (p. 113).

Tyler (1994) has attempted to integrate the two perspectives by suggesting that certain "contextualization cues" contained within the discourse act as signals for the listener, indicating how to interpret it. She writes:

> [C] ertain linguistic forms act as contextualization cues which signal to the listener how to interpret information and integrate it into the ongoing discourse. [These forms] act as meta-markers, guiding the listener through the discourse (p. 244).

Thus as native speakers listen to discourse, there are certain cues that meet the expectations of the listener, allowing the new information to be integrated into the ongoing discourse. Examples of cues used in English are lexical discourse markers, patterns of repetition, prosody, anaphora, and the use of syntactic incorporation (Tyler, 1992, p. 714). Furthermore, these cues are language specific, according to Tyler, and thus are a potential source of cross-cultural miscommunication. Tyler & Bro (1992, 1993) have shown that when NNSs use these cues in an unexpected manner, NSs find that the discourse lacks coherence. They suggest that the perception of incoherence is created by the "cumulative result of interacting miscues at the discourse level" (Tyler & Bro, 1992, p. 71), in particular in the areas of logical connection, tense/aspect, and specificity.

In addition, qualitative studies by Tyler (1992, 1994) have investigated the discourse structure of planned lectures given by NS and

NNS teaching assistants at American universities. She found clear differences in the amount and type of hypotaxis and parataxis, lexical specificity and tense cueing devices that made the non-native discourse seem difficult to follow. In a similar study Williams (1992) found that allowing planning time for NNS lectures led to more "explicit marking of discourse structure" (p. 693) compared to no planning time, and concluded that this marking is a crucial element in the comprehensibility of the NNSs' production. She notes:

> [NNSs] need to use more explicit discourse markers in order to overcome other comprehensibility difficulties that may be the result of more local problems, such as pronunciation. This also means, insofar as the use of discourse markers is concerned, that [NNSs] should not necessarily be targeting NS behavior. In this instance, they may need to go beyond it in order to achieve the same result as the [NS] in terms of comprehensibility (p. 707).

Here Williams is suggesting that NNSs should be overly explicit in their use of discourse markers, more than would be considered native-like, a point that will be considered again below.

The following exploratory analysis considers coherence only from the textual aspect (i.e. bottom-up). There are two reasons for this. First, there is the need to limit the domain of the study. Arguing from a top-down perspective is complex and needs to take into account many pragmatic factors. Second, teachers have some control over the bottom-up process since they can encourage students to produce discourse that is coherent, but they do not have much control over the top-down process (i.e., the background knowledge and schemata that the listener brings to the process of interpretation). Therefore the analysis presented here can only be partial and different interpretations could be reached by other listeners.

Discourse Miscues

Three major categories of cueing devices have been investigated by Tyler and Bro (1992, 1993): specificity, tense/aspect, and logical connection. The authors use the term "discourse miscues" (as opposed to "errors") when these devices are used in a non-native like way. Under the heading of specificity, the use of articles, pronominalization, and lexical specificity (which includes certain aspects of adjectival modification and appropriate lexical choice) is included. Tyler and Bro (1992) note:

> The overarching notion [of this category] is that the referent
> in the discourse should be sufficiently identified to avoid
> undue ambiguity or confusion for the audience (p. 75).

In the second category, tense and aspect miscues of the verb phrase
are considered. Bardovi-Harlig (1995) suggests that tense is used to sig-
nal foreground and background information as well as showing chro-
nology, and thus acts as a discourse structuring device.

The third category, logical connection, looks at how the informa-
tion in discourse is packaged through discourse markers and how
prominence relations are brought about through the use of hypotaxis
and parataxis. Hypotactic constructions are complex sentential con-
structions which involve two or more clauses, (e.g., *The woman who
lives next door is pregnant*) whereas parataxis constructions involve
single clauses juxtaposed or linked by coordinate conjunctions, (e.g.,
The woman lives next door. She is pregnant). Studies have shown
(Chafe, 1982; Danielewicz, 1984; Lakoff, 1984) that English speakers
make use of hypotactic structures (relative, complement and subordi-
nate clauses) in conjunction with paratactic structures as important
discourse structuring devices to signal prominence relations amongst
the various ideas and information, although their use is greater for
planned speech than unplanned speech (Danielewicz, 1984). Tyler
(1992) has argued that:

> [H]eavy reliance on coordinate conjunction and juxtaposi-
> tion in lieu of syntactic incorporation [i.e., hypotaxis] essen-
> tially strips the discourse of important sources of informa-
> tion regarding prominence and logical relationships (p. 721).

In addition, Flowerdew and Tauroza (1995) suggest that the use of
discourse markers, both macro and micro, serves to bring out the rela-
tionships among different pieces of information.

The Present Study

This study is similar to Tyler's work in that it considers the three cat-
egories discussed above (specificity, verb tense/aspect and logical con-
nection), but there are several differences. First, aside from the 1992
study with Bro (Tyler & Bro, 1992), Tyler's work considered planned
speech (lectures) whereas this study looks at unplanned speech. A
number of studies (e.g., Danielewicz, 1984; Biber, 1988) have shown
that planning affects the discourse produced. The discourse analyzed

here is unplanned, yet consists of formal interviews to elicit speech so it is suggested to lie somewhere between unplanned narrative and planned speech in terms of the discourse features being investigated. Second, Tyler (1992) only considered four turns (monologues). This study attempts to take a wider view by looking at a larger number of turns to see how pervasive miscues are. Finally, this study includes turns from four NNSs at different language proficiency levels, thus enabling some consideration of variation according to proficiency.

Method

Data Collection

The NNS discourse studied was elicited via oral proficiency interviews (OPI) that were conducted in the first week of an intensive 8-week English language program for employees at a large corporation in Korea. The OPI had been used for several years and all interviewers were skilled in elicitation techniques and subsequent rating. An interview setup was used because it was felt that extraneous variables could be held relatively constant compared to more spontaneous data. The OPI used was that published by the Educational Testing Service (ETS, 1982) and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 1986). This consists of a 20 to 30 minute relatively unstructured interview with a candidate over a range of topics. The general format is for the interviewer to ask a question and then allow the candidate to respond with minimum interruption. When the candidate has finished answering, the next question is posed. The interviewer will normally ask a number of probing questions to find out the candidate's sustained level (the level at which the candidate's discourse is relatively fluent and accurate) and breakdown level (the level at which the discourse becomes markedly less fluent and/or accurate).

Participants

Four male participants were chosen for the study and constituted a convenience sample. All were adult native speakers of Korean and had been employed by their company for between three to six years after graduation from university. Subject A was rated at level 1 (intermediate-low), subject B at 1+ (intermediate-high), and subjects C and D were rated at level 2 (advanced) according to the OPI rating scale.

Procedure

Subjects A and B were interviewed twice and subjects C and D once.

Subjects A, B, and D were interviewed by the author and subject C by a colleague. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed by the author, and particular turns were selected for analysis. The criterion for selection was chiefly length, with anything between 30 seconds and 2 minutes being considered. Shorter turns were judged to be too brief for suitable discourse patterns to emerge and very few turns of more than two minutes were found. In addition, turns that were deemed to be very incoherent were omitted.

In total, 40 turns were selected for analysis, 13 from subject A, 14 from subject B, 6 from subject C, and 7 from subject D. Fewer turns were available for subjects C and D since they were only interviewed once. This gave a total of 2,063 words in just under 47 minutes, representing about half of the total production from the subjects in the interviews. Table 1 summarizes each participant's turns.

Table 1: Number and Length of Turns for Each Subject

Subject	A	B	C	D	Total /Ave.
No. of turns analyzed	13	14	6	7	40
Total no. words[1]	589	698	397	379	2063
Ave. length per turn (words)	45	50	66	54	52
Total length (mins.)	17m 30s	13m	7m48s	8m22s	46m 40s
Ave. length per turn (secs)	80	56	77	72	70

[1] After removal of hesitation phenomena

Data Analysis

After a small pausology study, it was decided to remove certain hesitation phenomena, or what Clark (1996) terms "disruptions" (p. 258), in order to facilitate analysis. These included fillers (e.g., *um, er*), repeated items (e.g., there were *there were. . .*), some false starts (e.g., *there are* there must be. . .), and repairs (e.g., like at *the school* at school. . .). While some researchers may object to removing parts of the utterance, the technique facilitates analysis, and only items that were deemed not to significantly interfere with comprehension were removed.

Next the turns were divided into idea-units. According to Chafe (1980), an idea unit is a brief "spurt of language" (p. 13) that is typical of spoken language and can be identified by intonational contours, pauses, and syntactic boundaries. Pausing and intonational contours were far from native-like in the discourse studied here, especially at the low and intermediate proficiency levels. Since sophisticated equipment was not available for intonation measurements, more emphasis was placed on syntactic boundaries for idea-unit segmentation.

Finally, the main part of the research, the discourse miscue analysis, was conducted by the author. Each turn was analyzed for the presence of major discourse miscues and minor discourse miscues in the area of specificity, the verb phrase, and logical connection. A major discourse miscue was one considered to significantly interfere with the coherence of a turn on a global level, a miscue that affects listener understanding of the whole or a major part of the turn. A minor discourse miscue occurs on a local level and leads to misunderstanding of a relatively smaller part of the turn (i.e., at the level of one or two idea-units). The next section will exemplify how major miscues are identified.

There is obviously a degree of subjectivity that is difficult to avoid in deciding what counts as a miscue and whether it is major or minor. Unlike an error analysis, where errors can usually be identified on formal grounds (although this is by no means clear), a discourse miscue analysis conducted within Tyler's framework is inherently subjective since it attempts to take into account both the text and the listener and, in particular, how the two interact. Future research should therefore make use of a panel of raters to obtain inter-rater reliability estimates for miscue coding.

Results and Discussion

Table 2 presents the average number of miscues per turn for each subject. Generally, subjects A and B (the intermediate proficiency students) produced more miscues per turn (2 or more) than subjects C and D (the advanced proficiency students).

Table 2: Average Miscue Per Turn for Each Subject

Subject	A	B	C	D	Average
Miscues per turn	2.08	2.21	1.00	0.71	1.73
Major miscues per turn	1.08	0.57	0.17	0.43	0.65
Minor miscues per turn	1.00	1.64	0.83	0.29	1.08

Table 3 gives the number of miscues for each category (specificity, logical connection and verb tense/aspect) and sub-category for each student. Overall, the category of specificity had the greatest number of miscues (33) while logical connection was second (24) and verb phrase third (12). Most of the miscues in the verb phrase tense/aspect were minor miscues. However it is not the absolute number of miscues per turn but the degree of severity of each miscue that is important, hence the major/minor distinction. For example, it is quite pos-

sible that a turn with five minor miscues might be perceived as being more coherent than a turn with only one major miscue.

Table 3: Number of Miscues for Each Category

Subject	A			B			C			D				Total		
	Maj	Min	Tot	Maj	Min	Tot	Maj	Min	Tot	Maj	Min	Tot		Maj	Min	Tot
SPECIFICITY	5	7	12	6	9	15	1	2	3	1	2	3		13	20	33
pronominalization	2	2	4	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	1		3	4	7
articles	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0		0	2	2
lexical choice & adjectival mod.	3	5	8	5	7	12	1	1	2	1	1	2		10	14	24
VERB PHRASE	3	1	4	0	7	7	0	1	1	0	0	0		3	9	12
tense	0	1	1	0	6	6	0	1	1	0	0	0		0	8	8
modality	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		2	0	2
voice	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		1	0	1
aspect	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0		0	1	1
LOGICAL CONN	6	5	11	2	7	9	0	2	2	2	0	2		10	14	24
syntactic incorp.	1	1	2	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0		1	3	4
discourse markers	5	4	9	2	5	7	0	2	2	2	0	2		9	11	20
Totals	**14**	**13**	**27**	**8**	**23**	**31**	**1**	**5**	**6**	**3**	**2**	**5**		**26**	**43**	**69**

Specificity

In this category the overall aim is that "the referent in the discourse should be sufficiently identified to avoid undue ambiguity or confusion for the audience" (Tyler & Bro, 1992, p. 75). Since miscues in this category were the most frequent of the three categories, semantic accuracy may be as important, if not more important, for students and teachers than the traditional area of syntactic accuracy.

Within this category, lexical choice, which includes adjectival modification, was the most common miscue. Sometimes the lexical item could have been integrated into the discourse better if the subject had given more supporting detail or used it more appropriately. An example of this can be seen below. In this and all other examples, the interviewer's question is in italics.

Example 1: *Do you think that the reasons for divorce in America are the same as those in Korea or do you think there is a difference due to culture?*
(a) I think, (b) there is to same. (c) It's different from our and American (d) but human is all the same. (e) But a little bit cultural differences. (f) America a little some personalism, (g) but we Korean have communicative group mind. (h) I

don't know group mind, (i) we have group mind. (j) Okay,
(k) that's the different point.

Units (f-k) basically can be paraphrased as *America has X and Korea
has Y and that is the difference*. However, the referents of the noun
phrases *personalism* and *communicative group mind* are difficult to
resolve. The first probably refers to *individualism* and the second to
group consensus or *collectivism*. But these are abstract concepts and
the lack of support leaves the listener with the feeling that the turn is
incomplete. This lack of support for abstract concepts is quite com-
mon for NNSs. They frequently learn vocabulary in isolation, often using
a mother tongue translation, but then get little practice and feedback
in using the new items in communicative contexts.

At other times, the lexical choice was wrong and confounded the
listener's attempt to integrate it into the ongoing discourse. This can
be seen in the turn below:

> Example 2: *What do you think are the benefits of trial by jury
> in America compared to trial by judge in Korea?*
> (a) I am very surprised about that. (b) Basically I think the
> O.J. Simpson have to be dead. (c) This result is not dead. (d)
> The money from economical power is very important in
> America and other Western. (e) Judge systems are affected
> by the money and economy. (f) We have, in Korea that is not
> occurred.

In unit (e), the subject simply makes a mistake and selects *judge*
instead of *jury*. This is critical to the turn since up till then we have
been listening to a criticism of America and the West and their *jury*
system, which is introduced in the question. Then the subject sud-
denly refers to the *judge* system that the listener associates with Ko-
rea. This interrupts the flow of meaning and creates a perception of
incoherence for the whole turn, not just the idea-unit.

Pronominalization was the second largest cause of miscuing in this
category. All cases involved third person pronoun miscues (such as *it*,
they, *her*, *he*), never first or second. This is shown in the following
turn:

> Example 3: *Do you think presidents should have a privileged
> position after they retire?*
> (a) After they retire? (b) Yes. (c) There is no people who is
> respected now after (d) he retired the president. (e) But the

future, (f) many people respect someone who was president.

The subject uses the third person pronoun *he* in (d) but its intended referent is not clear. The problem is compounded by the choice of the lexical item *people* in (c). Ehrlich (1988) has suggested that a typical pattern in English is for the pronoun to bind to the nearest antecedent, provided that it matches for gender and number. This would make *people* a potential candidate, although the pronoun and antecedent do not agree in number. There seem to be two possible interpretations of the subject's intentions here. Either the pronoun *he* refers exophorically to the former Korean president who had just retired at the time and the noun *people* refers to the general public, or *he* refers back endophorically to *people*, which refers to presidents in general. That is, either (c-d) have specific reference and are roughly paraphrased as *There is nobody who respects him now since he (the former Korean president) has retired from the presidency*, or they have generic reference and can be paraphrased as *There is no president who is respected now after he retires from the presidency*. The choice of *people* suggests the first interpretation, but the grammatical construct of the sentence suggests the second.

Article miscues rarely caused anything but a minor miscue. Although the English article system is one of the most difficult areas for Asian learners to master, it is one of the most benign in its contribution to coherence. Another explanation is that article misuse is less obvious at the intermediate-low proficiency level, where it tends to be overshadowed by more obtrusive miscues.

Verb Phrase

Miscues in the verb phrase did not prove to be as damaging to the construction of coherence as they were initially envisaged. Only three major miscues were recorded, all by subject A, who seemed to have a particular problem with this area. Probably the most harmful is seen in the turn below where the subject fails to signal the modality of the idea-units presented in (h-l); they are presented as on-going states of affairs when in fact the speaker intends them to be taken as suggested points of action. The situation is aggravated by the weak marker *so* in (h) that introduces them. A firmer commitment would be *Therefore I think we should do the following things....* Although this type of marker may not be so frequent in unplanned NS speech, Williams' (1992) idea that students should "go beyond [NS behavior] in order to achieve the same results as the [NS] in terms of comprehensibility" (p. 707) justifies this type of explicit commitment.

Example 4: *What do you think is the biggest problem in Korea and if you were the president, what would you do to solve the problem?*
(a) The biggest problem is pollution. (b) Another problem exists (c) but pollution is very serious. (d) All pollution . . . er . . . (e) I can't explain. (f) All pollution frighten . . . er no . . . our lives. (g) Threatens, okay, okay. (h) So we preserved our national source and our environment positively. (i) Civil movement group are more grow and, (j) preserve environment positively. (k) Make the law prevent air pollution and elect . . . (l) Make the law to prevent air pollution. (m) And . . . I can not explain.

Tense proved only to be a minor miscue. For subject B, who made the most tense miscues, there was often some type of marker outside the verb phrase that helped the listener to successfully locate the temporal reference, such as an adverb or adverbial phrase. Where an overt marker is not present, the discourse helps to determine the temporal location of the unit to a high degree.

Logical Connection

Logical connection was the second biggest source of miscues. Most of the major miscues occurred due to discourse marking rather than syntactic incorporation. This is not surprising since second language learners, especially Asian students, have difficulty forming hypotactic constructions and tend to avoid using them (Schachter, 1974; Tyler, 1992). This was confirmed by the data, which tended to contain fewer dependent clause structures and more pre-noun modifications (as opposed to post-noun) when compared to Danielewicz's (1984) findings for unplanned native speaker speech (See Table 4).

Table 4: Comparison of Danielewicz's Findings and This Study

Feature	Danielewicz[1]	This study[2]
Words per idea-unit	7.09	7.02
Dependent clauses[3]	57	30
subordinate	19	14
relative	20	2
complement	18	10
Nominalization	1.6	0.6

Attributive adjectives	49	78
Participles	18	2

[1] Danielewicz's (1984) findings for unplanned, adult (native speaker) speech.
[2] Excluding subject D.
[3] Per 1,000 words

While unplanned NS speech does not contain many hypotactic constructions (20% according to Danielewicz, 1984, p. 237), it is possible that discourse of the type presented here, if produced by a native speaker, might contain more. The questions and expected answers are on a level of complexity and abstractness that demands a degree of syntactic incorporation over and above that required for unplanned narratives or simple descriptions of personal topics. Thus, we would expect the discourse to be somewhere between unplanned narratives and planned speech in the degree of syntactic incorporation it contains. Indeed, the instructions for the OPI call for the interviewer to push the student to a level beyond their sustained level (i.e., narratives and simple descriptions for intermediate students) to determine the breakdown level. This breakdown level occurs for a number of reasons (fluency, grammatical accuracy, etc.) but is also due to the lack of syntactic incorporation of the types that Tyler (1992) has suggested signal prominence relations within the discourse. Teachers often observe that students who can give a lengthy and coherent narration of a personal experience are often unable to coherently articulate an extended turn on a more complex topic. This is one reason that discourse miscues under the logical connection heading (i.e., how the idea-units are packaged) require further investigation.

Although there were not many instances in the data where a lack of syntactic incorporation caused a major miscue, this was due in part to the absence of hypotactic constructions and the difficulty of marking a feature as a miscue through its absence. The following shows where a piece of discourse might benefit from some syntactic incorporation:

> Example 5: (a) Our company's master plan is fixed. (b) We have to observe the schedule and time. (c) I must put the drawings to the field that schedule time . . .

The idea-units here are presented as an unarticulated set of relations. The only clue given to the listener for integration of the ideas is the lexical cohesion. An alternative rendering using syntactic incorporation and discourse marking to make it more easily understood could be *We have to observe the schedule and time of our company's master*

plan which is fixed. Therefore I must send the drawings to the field on time.

The problem for the teacher is what advice should be given to students regarding syntactic incorporation. Both Korean and Japanese students tend to avoid using such devices (Schachter, 1974; Tyler, 1992). In addition, Tyler (1994) has shown that even when they are used, if they are not used in a native-like way, they can cause more confusion than if not used at all. The ability to construct a relative clause in a syntactically correct way does not guarantee its success since the speaker also needs to know what information to foreground.

The use of syntactic incorporation is quite complex and further understanding of how it is used by NSs is needed. It is certainly not something which could be explicitly taught to students in a few lessons, but students should acquire competence in this area if they are to handle the complexity of questioning and the type of speech investigated here.

Miscues through discourse marking are more overt and easier to identify since most students have the resources to articulate them. It is their misuse that is of more concern. Several major miscues occurred in this sub-category. The common markers such as *but* and *so* were used correctly in many cases but there was a tendency to overextend their use to act as cover markers in some instances. Subject A sometimes used *but* as a cover marker for arguments, and subject B used *so* at times to introduce idea-units that were not logical consequences of preceding discourse, its normal usage. Tyler (1992) found a similar pattern with the marker *as* for Chinese students of English. At other times, markers were dropped or missing, leaving idea-units "stranded."

The turn below is an interesting case of how miscues in logical connection can lead to difficulties:

> Example 6: *Why are Korean parents so concerned about their child's girlfriend or boyfriend?*
> (a) In Korea, (b) parents always want to know about her children. (c) They want to know their children's behavior like at school or at company or something like that. (d) So, because of the wedding is very important, (e) because of wedding is very important, (f) I think, (g) they decided a whole life (h) when someone marry someone. (i) So, parents concentrated their interest on her or his girlfriend or boyfriend.

Here the relationship between the information in (d-i) is not made explicit. This is largely due to the connectors linking (d-i). A paraphrase of the NNS's probable intention is *Marriage is very important since a*

person's future is determined when they marry; thus Korean parents are very interested in their child's girlfriend or boyfriend. However the logical connections are not made clear. First, the NNS confuses things by introducing (d) with the marker *so* and then immediately substituting it with *because of*. Idea-unit (d) is then repeated in (e). Then units (f-h) are simply juxtaposed with (d-e) giving no indication of how they should be integrated into the discourse. They are in fact parenthetical remarks but there is no marking to indicate this. On the contrary, they are more likely to be taken by the listener as the logical consequence of (d) even though this is not the NNS's intention. Finally, the real logical consequence of (d) is given in (i), but the listener cannot be sure what it is the logical consequence of. In this particular turn, miscues in lexical specificity and repetition add to the confusing nature.

The turn below reiterates how discourse markers can be given, but then the subject does make clear what information is supposed to fall under the "umbrella" of the marker.

> Example 7: *Why do you think the communist north (Korea) is continuing to send infiltrators to the south?*
> (a) I didn't think about that deeply, (b) but the situation in north is very dangerous now, (c) I think. (d) So, There . . . (e) relatively we South Korea is so calm down relative to north. (f) So the top of the North Korea wants to disturb us, (g) because they are now disturbing. (h) The situation of the north is very boring. (i) The situation is very dangerous, (j) I think, (k) so the top of the north send the person or people to disturb our country.

This turn is relatively well formed until (g) where the subject gives the marker *because* and then attempts to give the reason why North Korea is disturbing South Korea. However, the information contained in the unit (they are now disturbing) cannot logically be a reason since it merely repeats what has been said before. Idea-unit (h) is then given but without any connector to show how it should be integrated into the discourse. It is possible that the previous *because* was intended to carry over to this idea-unit but again it is difficult to see how the fact that *the situation of the north is very boring* could be a plausible cause, since boring situations do not normally lead to confrontation. Idea-unit (k) is given in a similar manner and again we are not sure if it is the reason. Finally, the subject introduces (k) with the marker *so* signaling that it is the consequence of the preceding discourse. However, the information in (k) has already been stated and thus is not a candidate

for logical consequence. The listener is not clear why North Korea is disturbing South Korea.

The idea-units are quite well formed syntactically, apart from the direct object *us* missing in (g), so merely repairing the grammatical errors would not make the turn any easier to understand. The chief reason why it is difficult to understand is that a series of ideas have been presented in a disconnected manner. Some of the idea-units are obviously not what the subject intended to say, and clearly he is having a hard time formulating his idea into exact words. But connectors such as *sorry, no that's wrong, what I mean is. . . .* and *as I said* would have helped the listener to integrate the information more successfully. Again, while NSs may avoid such overt marking in their speech, NNSs need all the help they can get to maintain coherence, and a certain degree of overuse is a suitable communication strategy.

As a final example, consider Example 1, discussed in terms of specificity previously. It presents an interesting case that shows how logical connecting can work in tandem with specificity miscues to create a degree of incoherence. The first half (a-e) has poor logical connection, saying the reasons for divorce are the same and then saying they are different. The subject's opinion is not clear. From (f) onwards, the packaging of information improves but then specificity miscues come into play (see the Specificity section above).

Cross-Student Comparisons

Before leaving the data, it is interesting to make some cross-student comparisons. Two of the subjects were rated at advanced level and two were rated at the intermediate level according to the ETS/ACTFL proficiency rating scale. This is a major boundary in the rating scale, and although a study of this size cannot demonstrate this statistically, it does appear that there is a difference in the number of miscues and their quality between the advanced and intermediate speakers. In particular, subject A (level 1) consistently made major discourse miscues in all three areas. The advanced level subjects C and D made fewer miscues per turn (see Table 2) and had fewer major miscues. It is possible that requirements for reaching the advanced level on the rating scale include the ability to address topics with a certain degree of complexity/abstractness using extended discourse that is structured coherently and relatively free of miscues. Although additional research with a substantially greater number of turns is required to support this assertion, teachers should be aware that their students need to be pushed to deliver extended discourse if their proficiency level is to be correctly determined.

Conclusion

This exploratory study has investigated the discourse of four Korean non-native speakers of English to see if miscues in the area of specificity, logical connection, and the verb phrase tense/aspect contribute to the perception of incoherence for the native speaker/listener. The analysis indicates that miscues in the category of specificity and logical connection were present to a high degree and, in many cases, were major miscues that caused confusion for the NS listener. Miscues in the verb phrase category, however, were not as common. It was suggested that a focus on semantic accuracy and communication strategies emphasizing explicitness would help to correct these miscues. In addition, there appeared to be a difference in the quality and quantity of discourse miscues between the advanced speakers and the intermediate speakers, although this could not be demonstrated statistically.

As mentioned, coherence in discourse is a function of multiple variables. This study has only been able to look at a subset of these variables, and the author acknowledges its limitations. However, these features have received little attention in the past, even though they are potentially more problematic than grammatical errors. It is hoped that this study will raise teacher and student awareness of these features and lead to further discussion. It is therefore suggested that the following are important areas for future research:

1) A study needs to be conducted with a panel of raters independently judging coherence. The raters could subsequently be interviewed to determine what features led to their perception of incoherence. This would permit assessment of inter-rater reliability.

2) A greater number of discourse turns from a wider variety of students would enable the results to be generalized to other students from the same population. In particular, more turns would highlight the variation in features of students above and below the advanced level, which is a major boundary in the ETS /ACTFL rating scale.

3) More research into unplanned NS speech is needed to highlight the variation in syntactic incorporation due to changes in topic complexity and/or the degree of abstractness. It should not be assumed that unplanned NS speech is homogeneous in this respect.

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