

## **BUILDING CONNECTED DISCOURSE IN NON-NATIVE SPEECH: RE-SPECIFYING NON-NATIVE PROFICIENCY**

Yo-An Lee

### **Abstract**

The demand for proficient non-native speakers (NNSs) of English has increased across professional fields in recent years. While speaking skills involve a complex array of factors and constraints, previous studies resorted to unexamined perceptions or intuitive impressions drawn from surface linguistic features. Particularly missing is close analytic descriptions of non-native discourse that is produced in spontaneous contexts. The present study investigates the process by which NNSs of English produce connected discourse as it unfolds in real-time. The ability to produce connected discourse is considered a hallmark of advanced speaking proficiency and this study therefore focuses on tracing the sequential organization of multiple utterances that NNSs produce in spontaneous speech. Following the principles of conversation analysis (CA), the present paper analyzes three sets of excerpts demonstrating the contingent choices that NNSs make in building connected discourse. The findings offer empirical resources for non-native professionals to identify the practicality and generality of connected discourse in real-time speech contexts.

**Keywords:** Connected discourse; Non-native discourse; Speaking; Non-native speaker; ESL; EFL; Discourse; Conversation analysis.

### **1. Introduction**

A growing number of professionals use a second language to perform their daily professional tasks from business negotiations (Planken 2005)<sup>1</sup> to classroom teaching (Byrnes 2002). Accordingly, there is an increasing demand for educational programs that can help non-native speakers (NNSs) acquire advanced speaking proficiency (Leaver and Shekhtman 2002). The question is what such proficiency looks like in empirical details. Although the field of second language speaking is vast in its scope and variation (Burns 1998; Bygate 2009; McCarthy and O'Keeffe 2004), an insufficient number of empirical studies have analyzed non-native speech in its production contexts.

Nonetheless, pedagogically oriented researchers have produced a number of conceptual constructs to portray the speaking proficiency of NNSs (ACTFL 1999; Bachman 1990; Canale and Swain 1980; Celce-Murcia et al. 1995) including the Common European Framework of Reference developed by the Council of Europe (2001). Based on

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<sup>1</sup> See Nickerson (2005) and St. John (1996) for reviews of previous research on the business use of English.

these constructs, language professionals have developed numerous test rubrics to specify various functional tasks that NNSs ought to perform at different levels. The presence of the rubrics, however, does not provide any information on the forms of utterances used to perform such tasks. Nor can it enable researchers to retrieve the contingent choices and constraints that NNSs face in producing various utterances.

This problem can be traced back to the long-held analytic convention in which spoken discourse is analyzed after it is produced (Rendle-Short 2006). This post-hoc analysis is effective in identifying formal and functional patterns in non-native discourse, but it fails to describe the interactive and unplanned properties of non-native discourse in contingent production contexts (He and Young 1998; Jacoby and McNamara 1999). For this reason, testing rubrics have limitations in recovering authentic cases of real-time discourse because they are derived from pre-formulated criteria; our understanding of speaking proficiency remains conceptual or speculative, not empirical and analytic (For a similar argument, see Hyland 2002; Koike and Liskin-Gasparro 1999; Seidlhofer 2001). This may be one of the reasons why many practitioners in the field still fall back on various ill-defined criteria such as error-free speech, native-like pronunciation and ease of speaking English.

What we need is an analytic apparatus that can help researchers to capture non-native speech at an advanced level with an acceptable scope and consistency. The prior literature has shown some agreement that advanced speech involves discourse level proficiency (Bygate 1998; McNamara et al. 2002; Tyler 1992) and offered some formulations of advanced speech functions (ACTFL 1999; Byrnes 2002; Council of Europe 2001). The problem is that there are multiple ways to perform these functions and, therefore, it is difficult to determine, uniformly, how these functions are performed in what discourse outputs. We need some accessible units that can characterize discourse features as the speakers experience them. There are two technical resources in the prior literature that illustrate this type of analytic units. Bygate (2009: 413), for example, spoke of “a stretch of speech” as evidence of advanced proficiency in non-native discourse. Schegloff (1982, 1996) noted that it takes some contingent work for the speaker to produce multi-unit turns.

Incorporating these resources, I propose that the term *connected discourse* helps capture what advanced speakers can do in the real-time context of speech. This term, *connected discourse*, refers to how NNSs build multiple utterances in real-time speech. A vast array of professional tasks is carried out through connected discourse, such as making business presentations or answering questions in classrooms. Even routine conversational tasks are often accomplished through connected discourse, such as telling stories, showing (dis)agreement, joking and reproaching.

Note however that connected discourse is not to be used as a standardized criterion for a quantifiable comparison. Rather, it is designed to serve analysts as a heuristic device that channels analytic attention to the kinds of choices and constraints faced by NNSs in producing multiple utterances. In utilizing this analytic unit, we find analytic principles and resources in the sequential analysis of conversation analysis (CA) (Lee 2006a; Moerman and Sacks 1971/1988; Sacks 1992; Sacks et al. 1974; Schegloff 2007). CA researchers attend to how the given turn at talk is tied to the prior and subsequent turns. Thus, building connected discourse requires NNSs to monitor what they said before, to determine what to say next and then to recognize what becomes problematic as they speak. Tracing the

sequential ties among utterances provides authentic resources for the analyst to identify the speaker's choices, problems, concerns and logic built into multiple utterances in real-time contexts.

Since these analyses are empirically grounded, the findings should provide authentic resources for further analytic applications either for language professionals who want to develop programs for advanced NNSs or for discourse analysts who need to refine their analytic methodology for non-native discourse. This approach explores a viable possibility for CA researchers who use sequential analysis for language learning research (Bowles and Seedhouse 2007; Wong and Waring 2010). The paper first offers conceptual arguments for examining connected discourse and then provides analytic descriptions regarding three distinctive ways in which NNSs build connected discourse. The excerpts in the study are part of the non-native data corpus collected at a Midwestern university in the U.S.

## **2. Review of literature**

### **2.1. *Criteria for advanced speech***

A number of empirical studies have uncovered a diverse array of factors influencing speaking ability (Bygate 2009; Hughes 2002; Iwashita et al. 2008; McCarthy and O'Keeffe 2004) that ranges from linguistic features such as grammatical accuracy or pragmatic adequacy to cognitive conditions such as degree of planning or context dependency. Several researchers, however, have proposed that advanced speaking involves the ability to engage in discourse (Bygate 1998; McNamara et al. 2002; Tyler 1992). Drawing on the guidelines from the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) and the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) (ACTFL 1999), Byrnes (2002: 36) offered the following description of NNSs with advanced proficiency:

They possess *an ability to use language in paragraph and discourse length*, to describe and narrate in different time frames, to address concrete and abstract topics, to support an opinion and hypothesize about non-present events, experiences, and issues, and can do so with only minor infractions against accuracy, with few violations of an expected level of fluency, and in a sociolinguistically appropriate fashion. (Emphasis added)

This rubric offers a list of functional tasks that advanced NNSs are expected to perform (i.e., “to describe and narrate in different time frames”) and the evaluative criteria by which evaluators or researchers can assess their performance (i.e., “with only minor infractions against accuracy”).

Although testing rubrics provide functional indicators of what advanced NNSs can do, they are not designed to provide empirical examples on how such tasks are performed. For example, it would be difficult to pinpoint the type of discourse that NNSs employ when they “describe and narrate in different time frames” or “hypothesize about non-present events.” That is to say, there are numerous ways through which these functions can be

carried out. While these rubrics reflect consensus based on previous empirical studies, this consensus is about indicators of speaking proficiency, not about empirical instances.

This empirical ambiguity is not limited to the language testing literature. The field of English for specific purposes (ESP) has witnessed a number of studies characterizing the kinds of tasks that advanced NNSs may perform, but those studies have not described how such speakers use discourse in performing these tasks (Chew 2005; Glenda and Ward 2002; Nemtchinova 2005; So-Mui and Mead 2000).<sup>2</sup> For example, Chew (2005) reported that English demand posed by banks in Hong Kong was more challenging than the banking content itself. Glenda and Ward (2002) found that the presentation skills required in the workplace were quite different from what business majors learned in college. While informative, these studies focused on interviews and surveys that elicited retrospective and reflective perspectives from NNSs, not on actual non-native speech.

The lack of empirical information on spoken discourse may be a reason why the native norm still persists as the dominant source of target proficiency, despite consistent attempts to demystify the concept (Cook 1999; Davies 2003). In fact, many practitioners in language education still rely on an unexamined sense of native norms (Prodromou 2003; Tesser 1999). For example, in their survey of university committees that hired language instructors, Koike and Liskin-Gasparro (1999: 59) showed that in the committees' search for non-native instructors with near-native language proficiency, the committee members were not able to articulate what near-native language proficiency was. Instead, the universal comment from these committees was that anyone would recognize a near-native speaker if they heard it. Others have used error free speech as an exclusive mark of advanced proficiency (Seidlhofer 2001).

## **2.2. Common analytic units**

In his informative review of speaking research in applied linguistics, Bygate (2009: 413) proposed two important questions in determining speaking proficiency: 1) "What is it about a stretch of speech which provides evidence of a speaker's proficiency?" and 2) "What does a speaker need to do in order to go beyond that level of proficiency?" It seems that the second question about pedagogical relevance can only be answered when the first question is answered adequately with informed descriptions of target proficiency.

Previous research on the stretches of speech has uncovered the influence of a vast array of social, cultural, and situational contexts (McNamara et al. 2002). Accordingly, several researchers have tried to standardize analytic units for establishing analytic consistency among studies of spoken discourse (Crookes 1990; Foster et al. 2000). The presence of common units is, however, a double-edged sword. On the one hand, common units allow a consensus among researchers on what to study and how. On the other hand, using standard units obliges researchers to locate only those cases that resemble one another; the focus on common units may therefore miss opportunities for discovering a diverse range of ways in which spoken discourse is produced and processed. For example, some researchers have used *speech planning* as their analytic unit to measure how the

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<sup>2</sup> See Bowles (2006) for a review of CA in this field.

fluency, complexity and accuracy are accomplished in non-native speech (Foster and Skehan 1996; Yuan and Ellis 2003). Their analytic focus, however, has been on identifying these indicators, not on describing the process by which speakers accomplish the above constructs.

Similar phenomena can be found in those studies that examine nonnative discourse. In her study of English discourse used in sales negotiations, Planken (2005) used *rapport management* as an analytic criterion to differentiate experienced from novice negotiators in using English.<sup>3</sup> Morell's study of academic lectures in Spain (2004) used indicators such as personal pronouns, elicitation markers, and question types to measure the *degree of interactivity* for those lecturers who used English as their primary instructional language. The problem is that although such indicators are drawn from regular features of non-native discourse, they do not necessarily describe the process by which NNSs produce their talk. That is, the search for a common unit seems to take the analytic focus away from the very process by which non-native discourse is built.

### 2.3. Building connected discourse

To fill the empirical gap, we need an alternative approach that can recover the process by which NNSs come to produce spoken discourse in a spontaneous context. Sharrock and Anderson's (1982: 173) formulation is useful for understanding this procedural alternative: "an elemental problem is to understand not what patterns activities fall into, but how they are 'put together' into whatever patterns they might make: It is the assembling, not the final shape of the assembly, that is of interest." Here the final assembly refers to the litany of factors drawn from the final forms of spoken discourse that previous studies have uncovered, but these factors do not tell us about the assembling process by which these variables are contingently put together into actual speech by NNSs.

The key to the alternative is tracing the contingent process by which NNSs produce spoken discourse. Given that advanced speaking involves the ability to engage in discourse (Bygate 1998; McNamara et al. 2002; Tyler 1992), I propose that *connected discourse* is a useful analytic resource for this undertaking. *Connected discourse* is not a quantifiable standardized unit but is rather a heuristic device that obliges the analyst to trace how multiple utterances are produced and connected to each other. In this regard, the sequential analysis in CA offers the methodological precepts (Sacks 1992; Sacks et al. 1974; Schegloff et al. 1977).

The sequential analysis attends to the phenomena of natural conversation in which the speaker of the given turn is oriented to the prior turn(s), namely, the immediately preceding turn(s) (Moerman and Sacks 1971/1988). Next turns at talk display the speaker's understanding and undertaking of the prior turn for what it means, what it calls for, and/or what work it is doing. If we apply sequential analysis to connected discourse, then we can direct analytic attention to the choices and constraints facing the speaker as he or she experiences them (e.g., how the speaker monitors what was said, recognizes its import and problems, and determines what to say next). Close sequential analysis can be used to

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<sup>3</sup> Planken's analytic categories are derived from the work by Spencer-Oatey (2000).

determine how the speaker specifies, expands, continues, elaborates and even repairs his or her own turns.

Among the number of CA studies that have examined the interactions involving NNSs (for reviews, see Kasper 2009; Markee and Stansell 2008; Seedhouse 2004),<sup>4</sup> few studies have focused on connected discourse in non-native speech. The relevant studies have been those examining how multi-unit turns are accomplished interactionally, for example, how the speaker secures turns for story-telling (Jefferson 1978; Lerner 1992; Sacks 1974), how the interlocutor exhibits his/her recognition of the extended turns to come (Schegloff 1982), and how academic presenters move in and out of the topical talk (Rendle-Short 2006). Such analyses can provide a better understanding of the contingent nature of turns that NNSs work with. Tapping into these contingent contexts can offer realistic and thus revealing descriptions of what NNSs may do in assembling multiple turns, and this addresses the first question posed by Bygate (2009: 413): “what is it about a stretch of speech which provides evidence of speakers’ proficiency?”

The question, then, is what this alternative analysis looks like empirically, and the following example illustrates the case in point. This excerpt is lifted from an interview of a non-native English speaker (Speaker A) who had been teaching Chinese for several years at a U.S. university. The interviewer (I) is asking whether there are any changes that speaker A would like to make in the language program that she works for.

- (1)<sup>5</sup>
327. I: Is there any things you would like to change?
328. A: Eh I think hm:
329. (1.0)
330. ► A: maybe the the the textbook can use some im-
331. ► improvement, aha::
332. (1.0)
333. ► A: because you know- (.) hm: China is ah: is
334. ► changing so fa:st, so some of the language used in
335. the textbook: ah-
336. I: Oh, yeah↑=
337. ► A: =Yeah so already outdated, and the::
338. (1.0)
339. A: yeah=we

After producing her answer in lines 330-331, “The textbook can use some improvement,” speaker A has an immediate decision to make as to whether she needs to say more and how. She shows her interest in saying more by producing “aha::” in line 331 (Schegloff 1982) and her interlocutor’s silence seems to acknowledge it.

Saying more represents a particular choice (Schegloff 1986), and it turns out that speaker A decides to offer a rationale for her comment. She does this by talking about China: “China is...changing so fast” (lines 333-334). As a rationale for the change of the

<sup>4</sup> See Wagner and Gardner (2004) for several studies examining non-native discourse from the CA perspective.

<sup>5</sup> See the Appendix for transcript notations.

textbook she is discussing, this turn alone does not seem sufficient. With the subsequent statement “Some of the language used in the textbook... outdated” (lines 334-335 and 337), speaker A’s rationale becomes complete as a suggestion for the change. That is, bringing up “changes in China” in lines 333-334 sets up a sequential expectation that more turns are necessary to complete her argument and that connected discourse is an outcome of the process.

The reference to a changing China reflects a distinctive choice in that it makes visible who the speaker is and what she is entitled to say (Sacks 1972). That is, she is a native Chinese speaker who has experienced how China has been changing. Once her entitlement is reflected in this way (Lee 2010),<sup>6</sup> her subsequent argument for changing the outdated language in the textbook makes sense; this contingent decision by A is something that shapes the connected discourse. This contingent decision making process cannot be retrieved through pre-given categories or conceptual indicators.

The sequential analysis shown above demonstrates that the properties of spontaneous speech and their contexts become repeatedly renewed with every current action (Heritage 1984). The speaker determines what to say based on what was said before (whether it offers a rationale for the argument or an example of suggestions). Whatever is said then becomes the context from which the next choice of utterance is made. Building connected discourse is thus not entirely a matter of executing preplanned scripts or intentions. If it were, NNSs would be best advised to focus on making scripts and practicing them. Instead, building connected discourse is reflexive to the speaker’s understanding of the adequacy and sufficiency of prior turns as the speaker makes strategic decisions to determine what to say next, if he or she says anything at all (Lee 2006b).

Tracing connected discourse in its sequential context offers informative resources that channel our analytic attention to the procedures by which spoken discourse is formed. Its findings pull into view contingent resources and constraints that NNSs have to work with and demonstrate how they come to terms with the challenge. There should be a variety of ways in which NNSs address the task of building connected discourse. Offering authentic descriptions of how they do so is an important analytic task the present study is designed to demonstrate.

### **3. Procedures**

#### **3.1. Participants**

The data corpus was collected from twelve NNSs of English who were studying for their graduate degree in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) or teaching at a state university in the U.S. All participants were from four East-Asian countries (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and China) and had been learning English for more than eight years on average. Nine of the participants were pursuing a master’s degree in TESOL of whom six were female (three Japanese, two Koreans and one Taiwanese) and three were male

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<sup>6</sup> Lee (2010) describes how cultural membership is reflected in the talk exchange between a classroom teacher and her students.

(one Japanese and two Koreans). All were in their late twenties or early thirties. They all noted that during their stay in the U.S., their conversation skills had improved sufficiently for them to carry out daily interactional tasks fluently. However, they were less confident about doing tasks requiring connected speech, such as class presentations and debates. This view is consistent with the findings of previous surveys concerning East-Asian students in the US (Kim 2006; Liu et al. 2004).

The remaining three were teachers of Chinese in the East-Asian language department at the university. Two were from China, and one was from Taiwan. The two Chinese teachers were in their mid-thirties and had been in the US for five and six years. The Taiwanese teacher was in her late twenties and had been in the U.S. for two years.

### **3.2. Procedure**

Since the primary focus of the study was to describe the process of building connected discourse, two data collection methods were used: Elicited interviews and oral presentations. The English requirement for all TESOL majors was 600 points on the written TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). Among the nine TESOL majors, four were part of a study group that met regularly to practice their speaking skills. Seventeen sessions were audio-taped, and in each session, they produced 10-15 minutes of uninterrupted speech about a topic of their choice. The remaining five participants from the TESOL program were invited for an hour-long interview in which they were asked about their experience in the U.S. and issues related to their language teaching. A series of interviews was also conducted with the three teachers of Chinese. These teachers had a Test of Spoken English (TSE) score of 230 or higher. Two interviewers were involved in the study: One was the author of the project, and the other was a native speaker of English.

All sessions were audio-taped and transcribed to capture the actual speech naturalistically, generating approximately twenty-two hours of discourse data. All data were closely examined for cases in which NNSs produced connected discourse. Although the analytic focus was placed on the speech by each participant, it was apparent that these speakers reacted to their interlocutor's verbal and nonverbal responses. Accordingly, the transcript included the audible reactions from their interlocutors.

The transcribed discourse offers a practical method for describing the speaker's choices embedded in connected discourse in that it allows the researcher to return to the data repeatedly for an in-depth analysis (Jefferson 1985; Sacks 1984). I take the transcripts to be the records of speakers' real-time decisions as they build connected discourse and, therefore, it offers a useful analytic parameter that delimits and narrows the relevance of what to look for (Lynch 2011). The following collection is not intended to be a comprehensive list of the connected discourse that NNSs can produce. Instead, it offers telling examples of choices that NNSs face when producing multiple utterances and making them coherent.

## 4. Findings and discussion

### 4.1. Finding reasons to speak more

Previous studies have treated the oral language production process as a matter of activating given knowledge, intentions, plans and/or expectations into physical articulation (de Bot 1992; Kormos 2006). In contrast, the present study does not treat speaking as a matter of translating propositional knowledge into linguistic forms. Rather, I trace the sequential orderings of utterances. As the speaker completes the current turn, he or she has to decide whether to speak more and how; connected discourse is an outcome of that decision. The following excerpt shows how speaker H makes the contingent decision to continue her talk. In the excerpt, speaker H is responding to the interviewer's question about her experience learning English.

- (2)
332. I: Tell me about how you started to learn English (.)
333.       wa:y back when- did you start when you were in
334.       grade schoo:l↑ or (.) when did you start to study
335.       [English?
336. H: [Aha:: I started to study English when I was aha::
337.   ▶ third year in elementary school↑ actually (.) in
338.   ▶ Korean educational system, they start English aha::
339.   ▶ when the:y (.) they we:re middle school (.)
340.   ▶ students↑ but I started it (.) earlier than usual
341.   ▶ people.

The interviewer's question could have been answered with a simple utterance such as "grade school." Speaker H seems to do just that by repeating the exact phrase the interviewer used "...started to study English when..." (336) and then adding the phrase "third year in elementary school" in line 337.

However, speaker H decides to speak more as she launches into an explanation of the Korean educational system (337-338). Noteworthy here is the sense of why H uses "they" in the subsequent turn when she utters the phrase "they start English... when they were middle students" (338-339). Speaker H herself was a member of the Korean education system, but her use of "they" in the utterance excludes herself from those she is speaking of (Sacks 1992).<sup>7</sup> The reason for this separation is clarified in the following remark that characterizes her own experience: "but I started it earlier than usual people" (340-341).

This interplay of distinctive identity has to do with her decision to speak more and its execution is locally occasioned. That is, speaker H's initial answer (336-337) is bounded by what the question is asking (Schegloff & Sacks 1973): She has to talk about herself. In producing this answer, speaker H finds a need to situate her experience in the broader context of the Korean education system so that the interviewer may understand her case in relation to the majority of students in Korea. Speaker H's decision to speak more is then

<sup>7</sup> In his lecture that was compiled and edited by Jefferson, Harvey Sacks (1992 I: 348-353) discussed how the use of the pronoun, "they" is different from that of "we."

contingent upon and occasioned by the prior turn(s), for example, what the question is asking, and what her initial answer implicates.

The following shows another case of contingent decisions leading to connected discourse. This case was drawn from a ten-minute speech speaker G gave about the movie *The Kid*. The excerpt begins with speaker G's explanation of how the two characters in the movie, one adult and one boy, come to learn that they are related. Speaker G has just finished describing how the boy suddenly appears in the hero's house.

- (3)
37. G: And then (.) finally, (1.0) this, this ma:n and the  
 38. ► (.) bo:y (.) found that they are, they have  
 39. ► something mutual, and,  
 40. (1.0)  
 41. G: and huh: they have the same scar at this- ah  
 42. [o(h)n the same place, and then (.) they, they  
 43. I: [yeah,  
 44. G: know their relatives' names (.)  
 45. I: hm mm.  
 46. ► G: so aha: suddenly they knew that (.) this bo:y was,  
 47. ► what Rusty used to be, and (.) hm: and the:: and  
 48. there was some tension between boy- the boy  
 49. and the ma::n,  
 50. I: hm mm.  
 51. ► G: and (.) because this man was so arrogant, he  
 52. ► never let the boy sleep in the hou:se, and the-  
 53. ► actually he had a really big house, so there is one  
 54. room aha, like aha: close to the pool↑  
 55. I: hm mm=  
 56. G: =and the: this boy used to s- aha:: sleep outside  
 57. ► close to the pool, and (.) but aha:: (.) eventually  
 58. ► they are (.) their feelings are (.) begin together.  
 59. I: Okay.

The movie storyline is a major resource for speaker G to build multiple utterances. Telling a story, however, involves more than narrating what happens chronologically (Sacks 1978). As speaker G tells the story, she has to clarify her utterances, specify the relevance of the given incident and highlight particular scenes.

Note first that speaker G's turns do not follow the linear order of the story in the movie. Her account begins with a formulation of what happens in a particular scene: "this man and the boy found that ... they have something mutual" (37-39). The characters in the movie do not say "we found something mutual," and therefore, this is speaker G's characterization of that part of the movie. The question, then, is if and how this turn is connected to the subsequent turns. It turns out that speaker G uses subsequent turns to offer some evidence of the prior characterization, first with "they have the same scar on the same place" (41-42) and then with "they know their relatives' name" (41-44). It is not certain whether speaker G had planned these turns when she began in line 37. Nonetheless, this

analysis reveals how she builds coherence among utterances in her examples of the relationship between the two characters in the movie.

This continuity is also seen in the subsequent turns in lines 46-49. Speaker G, instead of offering more examples of the common attributes these characters find about each other, decides to make a comment that culminates in what they find in lines 46-47 (Jefferson 1990; Lerner 1994)<sup>8</sup>: “suddenly they know...what Rusty used to be.” This reflects speaker G’s estimation of how her prior discussion of various examples has been sufficient for a thematic shift in her storytelling; a series of incidents led the characters to realize who the boy is. Again, narrating a storyline is not simply about presenting what happens in a linear fashion; it involves formulating what happens, supplying examples of particular formulations, and/or moving to a different phase of the story while connecting utterances thematically.

During the subsequent turn in line 48-49, speaker G makes what appears to be a topic shift by stating that “There was some tension between the boy and the man.” Again, this remark is not a description of what the characters are saying but a characterization of the scenes. The subsequent turns are also organized to provide support for the characterization by offering reasons for the tension: “because this man was so arrogant” (line 51). Notable here is that in providing an example of the arrogance of the character in lines 51-52, speaker G uses a particular example, namely, “he never let the boy sleep in”; this description is also supported by the subsequent remark, “actually he had a really big house” in line 53. Again, the relevance for particular turns becomes visible and clarified in contingent decisions by speaker G in building connected discourse.

In lines 57-58, speaker G offers what seems like a concluding remark “and (.) but aha:: (.) eventually they are, their feeling are (.) begin together.” The remark displays the way the story proceeds in the speaker’s frame (Sacks 1978). The movie’s story involves more elaborate and detailed scenes than what this remark glosses over. Nonetheless, speaker G knows that she has given enough descriptions of what happens to these characters and thus, estimates that the account for the characters’ reconciliation is possible in lines 57-59.

Similar to speaker H in excerpt 2, speaker G has to monitor how her speech is heard, estimate its sufficiency and adequacy, and then determine what to say next by offering examples, commenting on the reasons for a particular characterization, and drawing a concluding comment. The logical ties and coherence interconnecting these utterances is then the product of the ongoing analysis by speaker G, who monitors the multiple turns underway, recognizes the occasional need to speak more and produces the relevant next turns. Speaker G’s turn becomes multiple, not simply out of executing the preplanned intention but also of responding to and acting on the contingent necessity to speak more as she discovers in the turns.

The contingent moves these speakers display in constructing multiple turns seem to confirm what the studies on learner strategies have demonstrated. For example, the advanced level students in Khanji’s study (1996) were able to use alternative strategies to deal with communicative problems whereas the low-level students often abandoned the

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<sup>8</sup> Jefferson (1990) noted that speakers often use three examples in listing things.

message. What the present study does is to specify how the speakers deploy these strategies in the evolving contingency of real-time discourse.

#### **4.2. Relying on dialogue format**

This section shows how NNSs use a dialogue format (A-B-A-B) (Sacks et al. 1974, Schegloff et al. 2002) to characterize what happens to them. In the following excerpt, speaker Y uses a dialog format in the context of explaining her experience with a conversational partner arranged by the international student office at her university.

- (4)
445. I: Has that been helpful to have conversational,  
446. conversation partner,  
447. Y: Ah:: yeah=it is help:ful, but aha::  
448. (2.0)  
449. Y: he he's majoring in (1.5) English education↑  
450. something↑ [education depart- department↑  
451. I: [Hm hm,  
452. Y: but aha:: sometimes he- he:: really trie:s to speak  
453. very slowly↑  
454. I: Hm hm,  
455. Y: aha to make the: the partn:er (.) understand very  
456. easily but (.) sometimes I feel aha::  
457. (1.0)  
458. ► Y: you'd better speak normally, [normal speed  
459. I: [Hm hm  
460. Y: because (.) I wanna understand (.) ah: the people  
461. also.  
462. I: Right, right.

After the quick agreement “Ah:: yeah=it is helpful” (447), speaker Y comments on the academic major of her partner and then moves on to describe how he speaks by stating that “he really trie:s to speak very slowly↑” (452-453). Sequentially speaking, it is not certain whether speaker Y's comment on his major is provided as a reason for her earlier remark on him being helpful or as a reason for the slow speech. Nonetheless, it is clear that she finds reasons to use multiple utterances in the course of responding to the interviewer's question.

Note that speaker Y's comment in line 452-“but (.).. aha sometimes..”-is the beginning of her complaint but that she struggles through as indicated by the statement, “but (.) sometimes I feel aha::” leaving an audible gap of one second in line 457. She then abandons the turn constructional unit that begins with “I feel” (Schegloff 1979). This shows some degree of delay before redrafting the talk in the course of producing speech in non-native discourse (Wong 2000c). Then, with the phrase “you'd better speak normally” in line 458, speaker Y suddenly changes the format of her speech as if she is in a conversational exchange with her partner.

An indirect speech format such as “I often wanted to tell him that this was not helpful for me” would have maintained the reported speech. Unfortunately, this would have required the challenging task of working out a complex grammatical structure (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman 1999)<sup>9</sup> to translate direct speech into reported speech. In facing the immediate task of having to produce the next turn on time, speaker Y relies on the A-B-A-B dialogue format to relay what is discussed in the scene, which helps her to continue and build connected discourse.

The next excerpt shows another example of a dialogue format in non-native discourse. Speaker P is responding to the interviewer’s question about her experience learning English.

- (5)
354. I: Let me ask you about your, your learning  
 355. experience=your experience learning English,  
 356. how do you remember, how have you learned  
 357. English↑ was there a good teacher for you?  
 358. P: Hm: yeah:: (.) good teachers for me (.) I know  
 359. they (.) have lot- they have a very good (.) a  
 360. strong background (.) yes, and the:: hh basically  
 361. in Taiwan the (.) English (.) teaching system is not  
 362. good because we- wer:e kind of forced, we were  
 363. forced to study (.) to memorize everything,  
 364. ► grammar, how to use it, oh:: is- yeah this is very  
 365. ► important, you have to keep in mi(h)nd, yea:h like  
 366. a composition something like that,  
 367. (1.0)  
 368. P: but it’s not a ver::y hum  
 369. (1.0)  
 370. P: ve:ry (.) useful when you really come to US.  
 371. I: Yeah.

The question asked by the interviewer is whether speaker P has had good English teachers in the past. Speaker P first responds by commenting on the quality of a good teacher saying that “they have... strong background” (lines 359-360). Then she offers “yes” as if she is offering back-channeling to her own speech in line 360.<sup>10</sup> She then struggles to find the next thing to say: “and the::”

Later on in lines 361-365, speaker P remarks on the teaching system in Taiwan and discusses how it is not effective. She offers some examples of the teaching system but struggles to add more in line 364-“oh::” and then “is-”-which is cut off. She then utters the word “yeah,” which is followed by a dialogue format of direct speech as if the Taiwanese teacher is talking to her students: “this is very important, you have to keep in mind” in 364-365. Similar to the previous excerpt, this can be seen as speaker P’s way of coming to

<sup>9</sup> Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) also noted that native speakers do not consistently abide by grammatical rules in this regard.

<sup>10</sup> It is possible that the interviewer might have given her a response to which the speaker offered her recognition. However, the audio-tape for the data does not show it.

terms with the contingent pressure while offering relevant examples of her characterization of the Taiwanese system. This works as an example of “being forced to memorize.” This shift is completed with her “yeah” in line 364, which is followed by her concluding remark in lines 365-366 (Wong 2000b).<sup>11</sup>

These two excerpts display how these NNSs come to terms with the contingent pressure in maintaining particular reporting formats. Although using the same format may ensure continuity in their speech, their decisions to shift to a different format pull into view their contingent estimation of what has been discussed thus far and what tasks need to be performed in the subsequent turns. These speakers know that they have established enough contextual resources to inform the interviewer of who is speaking to whom. Therefore, their shift to a different reporting format is incorporated into their connected discourse.

### 4.3. *Repetition*

Repetition in spoken discourse has been regarded as a manifestation of incompetent speech in some previous studies (Shimanoff and Brunak 1997), but it is also a useful resource for managing turns at talk (Schegloff 1997; Wong 2000a). In multi-unit turns, repetitions can be a useful resource for building the next turn that is more accurate and adequate. Here, speaker M shows the repeated use of *how to* phrases.

- (6)
242. M: The language teacher the:y (1.0) have to know  
243. their own culture,  
244. (1.0)  
245. I: Hm mm=  
246. M: =because when you are teaching language, it’s  
247. not just teaching (.) how to spea:k, how to say  
248. that (.) in Chinese or in language, you have to-  
249. ► you have (to know) (.) how to interact with  
250. ► people [and-  
251. I: [hm mm,  
252. ► M: to interact with people, you should know the  
253. culture,  
254. (1.0)  
255. M: some- (.) so:  
256. (2.0)  
257. M: you, the- good language teacher they have to (.)  
258. be aware of their culture (.) and when they teach  
259. the students, they have to (.) show (.) the tudents  
260. (.) what’s the culture difference (.) and then, they  
261. know the: your own culture,  
262. I: Hm mm=

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<sup>11</sup> Wong argued that NNSs’ use of “yeah” may be a delayed response, not a continuer to show that they are attentive.

Speaker M's first use of the *how to* phrase comes in the context in which she elaborates on what it means to teach language (247). Through the repeated use of *how to* phrases, speaker M wants to differentiate what she thinks is an important element of teaching, namely, how to interact with people (249-250) from the conventional understanding of language teaching.

As amply demonstrated in previous sections, building connected discourse involves the task of estimating the adequacy and sufficiency of what has been said. After comparing "how to interact" with "how to speak or how to say," speaker M connects "how to interact" to knowing the culture by stating that "if you want to focus on how to interact with people, you should know the culture" in lines 252-253. Juxtaposing the same phrase "how to" allows speaker M to compare the two different methods of teaching, which then becomes a springboard for producing multiple utterances. This kind of repetition is different from what some prior research has associated with low-level non-native students (see Nakatani & Goh 2007 for a review) for negotiation of meaning. Rather, it is a contingent strategy that arises naturally in the course of attempting to communicate (Ellis 2008). Skehan's comment (1998: 33) is notable: "Repetition in the language we produce provides more time to engage in micro and macro conversational planning."

The next excerpt shows more elaborate ways of using repetitions by illustrating how speaker R constructs her turns. In this segment, speaker R discusses her teaching experience with regards to all of her English language classes in her home country when she began her teaching for the first time.

- (7)
138. R: So other teachers took already (.) classes they  
 139. wanted to take, and then, I am [then taking  
 140. I: [Oh:: I see.  
 141. I: leftovers: to: (.) because [you- <because you are  
 142. R: [( )-  
 143. R: new uh::> the:: new teacher=  
 144. I: =New teacher.  
 145. R: Right (.) hhh because I'm new teacher.  
 146. I: Hmm  
 147. R: S:o (.) it really (1.0) aha:: made me, not upset,  
 148. but confused.  
 149. I: Right.  
 150. ►R: I was very worried about that.  
 151. I: Okay.  
 152. R: Yeah, yeah=so: I spent (1.0) one month, which is  
 153. March, worrying about many things, and then, I  
 154. feel, I felt like school (.) the instructions which  
 155. are, which were given from my school, that was  
 156. ► kind of la- at last minutes, everything was at the  
 157. ► last minutes, so I cannot be, I couldn't be (1.0)  
 158. perfect (.) before I teach.  
 159. I: Okay.  
 160. R: before I started teaching, so that was very bad, I  
 161. was very aha:: frustrated at that time, so like, a  
 162. week ahead, ah- no, a week before, I got (.)

163. teach(h)ing materials, even though I have, I had  
 164. been told that I(.) I would, I would be teaching  
 165. 18 hours a week but- (.) that was a week before  
 166. when I got- (the materials).

The excerpt begins with speaker R's description of how the courses were assigned to her in the first semester (138-143). There are several exchanges between the interviewer and the interviewee in which speaker R discusses why she had no choice regarding which courses to teach. Later, she formulates the whole situation by saying that "I was very worried about that" (150). Notice that in lines 152-154, speaker R repeats and thus expands this theme of "worrying" in a more elaborate manner by building connected discourse: "I spent one month...worrying about many things."

Note also the next turn, in which she says "I feel" and then repairs it to "I felt like..." in lines 153-154, which is another indication of how she is monitoring her own speech and making corrections as she proceeds. A similar repair takes place in the next line where she repairs "which are" to "which were." In this series of repairs, speaker G edits her speech. Further, she repeats parts of her prior speech and then corrects or elaborates on it.

A similar type of repetition is shown continuously in the next series of utterances. Speaker R says that "that was kind of la- at last minutes" (156). Then she uses the same theme "last minute" in the full-fledged utterance "everything was at the last minute" in lines 156-157. Each of the subsequent utterances is topically and grammatically accumulative as she adds a new element to what she has already said. This is followed by another repair in which "I cannot be" is repaired to "I couldn't be" in line 157. This speaker uses repetitions again in the next series of multiple utterances. For example, "a week ahead" is repaired to "a week before" (162), and "I would" is later expanded to "I would be teaching" (164).

This series of repetitions in the excerpt cannot be considered merely indicative of a lack of proficiency. Rather, it is a useful resource for NNSs in securing some time to correct, elaborate, and specify their utterances while keeping their turns alive. In this sense, repetitions demonstrate the speaker's ability to identify the import of prior turns for the problem and the possibility of generating coherent next turns. Thus, to see the logic, rationale, concern and problems embedded in multiple turns, it is critical to examine the sequential relations among multiple utterances. The use of repetitions is a contingent resource for NNSs as they use them as a springboard for building subsequent turns.

## 5. Conclusion

Advanced speaking proficiency is a main goal for many aspiring NNSs of English. However, previous studies have typically viewed discourse to be a manifestation of a speech plan and the realization of the cognitive process (Kormos 2006; Levelt 1989). Thus, what matters is identifying the regular features of discourse and classifying them into abstract constructs as manifestations of cognitive speech plans. Their conceptual constructs and categories of discourse features, however, seem to be independent of the choices and

problems that NNSs experience in real-time speech; this raises the question of whether previous studies were properly equipped to exemplify L2 speaking proficiency empirically.

In light of this empirical problem, the present paper respecifies the construct of speaking proficiency by examining the actual speech produced by NNSs in spontaneous contexts. This alternative approach focuses on demonstrating the types of contingent choices embedded in the discourse by advanced speakers and the constraints they face. Therefore, I nominate *connected discourse* as a heuristic unit that allows us to capture the contingent choices that NNSs face in producing multiple utterances. I contend that connected discourse reflects a typical way in which a vast array of professional and conversational activities is carried out. Examining the sequential relations among utterances (Schegloff 1995) allows access to the contingent process by which discourse action and activity are carried out.

The present paper considers a collection of excerpts demonstrating the different types of strategies that NNSs employ in coming to terms with the sequential context and contingent conditions that spontaneous speech entails. Pre-given categories drawn from functional and formal regularities do not do the analysis justice because they cannot retrieve the very choices and constraints that face NNSs in producing these regularities. In addition, the content of connected speech cannot provide the whole story because it disregards the process by which connected utterances are built.

The results of this study have important implications for practitioners and researchers. First, they call for the examination of the process of speech production to identify the choices, problems, concerns and logic built into the organization of non-native discourse. Reporting the regular but disparate patterns of discourse cannot teach NNSs how these regularities can be produced. Discourse regularities are the outcome of a litany of strategic and contingent choices that NNSs face in spontaneous contexts. Consequently, the methods by which discourse tasks are carried out in close sequential details need to be examined.

Thus, it is important to somehow trace the choices that NNSs make and the contingent constraints that they face because these factors shape their speech. Being aware of contingent features, NNSs would be able to make independent decisions on whether and how the given discourse tasks are carried out. This would be particularly useful for programs designed for NNSs who require professional English proficiency (Leaver and Shekhtman 2002; Seedhouse and Richards 2007).

Second, the descriptive analysis presented in this paper offers a way to overcome the difficulty in establishing a realistic description of NNS talk. Previous studies have focused on the presence or absence of discourse evidence for given functional tasks, and sequential analysis in CA problematizes this either-or criterion used in the testing literature by demonstrating how these functional tasks can be carried out in much more diverse and complex ways. By specifying contingent choices and constraints embedded in connected discourse, the present study provides exemplary findings that are empirically truthful to the experiences of NNSs in real-time production contexts.

Third, the present paper proposes an analytic resource, namely connected discourse, as a context-free and context-sensitive heuristic unit for examining non-native discourse. Several CA researchers have proposed analytic frameworks (Bowles and Seedhouse 2007) through which the distinctive institutional features of discourse can be identified for

pedagogical purposes. Connected discourse can serve their purposes well as a heuristic device for identifying NNSs' contingent choices in performing various activities in each production context. When there are sufficient numbers of findings on the process by which connected discourse is built, the task of defining and evaluating proficient NNS speakers should have stable empirical footing.

Finally, this analysis helps us to understand the nature of unplanned discourse (Makoni 1996; Ochs 1979; Ortega 1999; Starks 1994). Often, external criteria are used to harness the contingency of speech because these criteria make the examination of the actual speech unnecessary. However, contingency is essential for understanding the process by which multiple utterances are built and made coherent. Accommodating the contingency of speech in this way brings out a different sense of authenticity. In traditional research, it is important to produce language input that is identical to language use in the real world; the bulk of language programs have pursued this pedagogical goal. However, the present study finds authenticity in the types of choices and the contingency of the talk that spontaneous speech entails. Examining non-native discourse in its natural context offers resources that sensitize us to these authentic tasks and the challenges they call for, which may not be captured in global and generic evaluation categories. In this regard, the present research offers a preliminary examination of the ways in which connected discourse can be informatively and systematically inspected by incorporating the contingent properties of real-time speech.

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### **Appendix: Transcript Notations**

- [ ] Overlapping utterances
- (2.0) Timed silence within or between adjacent utterances.
- ( ) An uncertain hearing of what the speaker said.
- (( )) Scenic description and accounts
- (.) A short untimed pause.
- = Latching that indicates no interval between adjacent utterances.
- A halting, abrupt cutoff
- . Falling intonation, e.g. sentence final.

- Quieter than surrounding talk
  - : A prolonged stretch
  - Stressed syllable
  - ↑↓ Marked change in pitch: upward or downward.
  - (h) Aspirations
  - (.h) Inhalations
  - > < Utterance is delivered at slower pace than surrounding talk
  - < > Utterance is delivered at quicker pace than surrounding talk.
  - ▶ Line of particular interest in the discussion
- (cf Atkinson and Heritage 1984)

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YO-AN LEE is a faculty member of the English Department at Sogang University, Seoul. His research focuses on ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, face-to-face interactions, classroom discourse, qualitative ethnography and composition. He has published work in *Discourse Processes*, *Journal of Pragmatics*, *Applied Linguistics*, *TESOL Quarterly* and *Text & Talk*. His current projects include nonnative discourse, lecturing sequences and composition studies.

Address: English Department (J Building), Sogang University, Shinsu-Dong 1, Mapo-Gu, Seoul 121-742, Korea. Tel.: +82-2-7058298; e-mail: yoanlee@sogang.ac.kr