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Discourse Markers in Task Interaction: A Comparison Between Korean EFL Learners and Native Speakers

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In the current small scale study, turn-initial discourse markers were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative methods for frequency and functioning over four categories, as they were produced during spoken task interaction in two groups of speakers; that of Korean EFL learners at the university level and English native speakers. The results indicated that learners and native speakers showed differences not only in frequency, but also in the functioning of discourse markers. While learners valued referential markers that functioned as textual interaction toward the task at hand (*so, and, but, and then*), native speakers preferred interpersonal markers that highlighted social cooperation (*right, ok, yea, that's right*). These differences suggest how the two groups viewed the interactional situation- that of classroom task activity or as social interaction. These differences, as well as implications for teaching discourse markers to build fluency in EFL learners, will be discussed.

**[discourse markers/task interaction/pragmatic function/turn-taking/
담화표지/과제상호작용/화용적기능/말차례가지기]**

I. INTRODUCTION

Discourse markers (hereby DMs) are one aspect of fluency found in native English speech. They serve pragmatic functions such as signaling relationships between discourse units (Schiffrin, 1987) and creating coherence within a speaker's turn. Recent studies by McCarthy (2006, 2009) have shown that individual speakers work together with discourse marker usage to create interactive support during the flow of talk. This interaction can be considered a type of confluence, that is, a cooperative construction of meaning across speaker turns in dialogue.

As research suggests, second language learners have an under-developed use of DMs in spoken language contexts. Given that classroom environments have typically not been atmospheres for DM learning to occur (Hellermann & Vergun, 2007) it can be assumed that Korean EFL learners will also have under-developed DM production during task interaction. With the predominance of grammar-centered focus in both teacher and student production in Korean EFL classrooms, an in-depth look at DMs in the current paper can further the investigation on pragmatic level interactions between learners, and thus help to strengthen communicative competency and fluency in general in the Korean EFL context. As one specific issue, research has suggested that Koreans transfer some L1 knowledge when speaking in L2 English. Young and J. Lee (2004) discovered that because of the agglutinative structure of word morphology in Korean, speakers and listeners construct boundaries of interactional units that are different from the boundaries that English speakers recognize. This difference is also displayed when Koreans speak English, as their research with Korean bilinguals has shown that Koreans uttered response token DMs in English more often than did their American conversation partners. Such findings would conflict usual assumptions that native English speakers have the highest frequency of DM usage, and would also suggest that Koreans value DMs that function differently than their native English counterparts. Muller (2005), for example, found that native speakers and non-native speakers of English prefer different DMs and there were differences in the usage of the individual functions.

To investigate these issues of DM frequency and function, the current study will compare the DM usage of Korean university EFL learners in task interaction to that of English native speakers involved in the same task interaction. Two questions to be researched in this study are 1) Are there any differences between learners and native speakers in frequency of DMs? 2) What is the function of DMs, as found in EFL learners' involvement in task interaction, compared to native speakers?

II. TERMINOLOGY AND INTERACTIONAL FUNCTION

Discourse markers have been labeled sentence connectives (Halliday & Hasan, 1976), discourse particles (Schourup, 1985), utterance particles (Luke, 1987), pragmatic expressions (Erman, 1987), discourse operators (Redeker, 1991), and continuatives (Romero Trillo, 1997).

A precise definition of discourse marker has been difficult to pinpoint; due to diverse research interests, there is no agreement on how they are to be defined or how they function. Most researchers, including the author for the present paper, agree that they are lexical expressions that function as non-propositional and connective units at the level of

discourse. Fraser (1999) defines DMs as "a class of lexical expressions drawn primarily from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbs, and prepositional phrases" which have "a core meaning which is procedural, not conceptual" (p. 1). Schiffrin (1987) additionally defines DMs as "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk" (p. 31), and at a more theoretical level, "as members of a functional class of verbal (and non-verbal) devices which provide contextual coordinates for ongoing talk." (p. 41).

Discourse markers are thus independent from sentential structure, as evident from the fact that "removal of a DM from a sentence initial position leaves the sentence structure intact" (p. 32). As well, understanding language use and social interaction is not revealed at the sentence level, as pragmatic meaning is discourse embedded. DMs are therefore sequentially dependent, depending on the units of talk prior and following a DM to determine the speaker's social and pragmatic meaning.

As for their function, DMs signal a relationship between previous and preceding topics or grammatical units in discourse (such as with DMs like *because*, *so*, *but*, *yet*, *and*, *or*). As a marker of turn-boundaries, DMs contribute in examining how the flow of discourse is constructed interactively between participants (such as *ok*, *oh*, *right*, *yeah*, *I see*). Markers can also demonstrate a speaker's focus on other-attentive topics (*so*) and self-attentive topics (*oh*) when launching new conversational topics (Bolden, 2006), and its relationship to trouble in the speech production process as well as to indicate the 'reason-for-the-interaction's launching' (*uh, uhm*) (Schegloff, 2010). Commentary pragmatic markers (such as *frankly, incredibly, amazingly, well*) may also encode an entire message, both in force and content, which constitutes a comment on the basic message itself (Fraser, 1990). Discourse markers as a whole contribute to the more general analysis of discourse coherence- how speakers and hearers integrate forms, meanings and actions to make overall sense out of what is said (Schiffrin, 1987, p. 49).

In summary, this paper takes the perspective that the function of DMs is to ease the hearer's task of understanding the speaker's utterance, and to contribute to the interactional function of good listenership (McCarthy, 2003). In terms of coherence, DMs are signals for interactive relationship between speaker, hearer, and message. They reveal the negotiating strategies for establishing and keeping the common ground between speaker and hearer. They also provide cohesive, contextual coordinates for utterances, indexing utterances to the local contexts in which they are produced and in which they are to be interpreted.

1. Discourse Markers and English Native Speakers

The three commonly cited characteristics of English native speaking DM usage are that they are used to signal relationships between discourse units, they are grammatically

optional, and that they don't change the truth conditions of the propositions in the utterances they frame (Schourup, 1999). These characteristics can vary depending on the speech contexts, roles and relationships of the interlocutors. In conversations between friends, for example, a higher rate of pragmatic markers is used. Redeker (1990) found that approximately 50 markers per 100 clauses are provided by friends in conversation. When speakers are more aware of the hearer's current state of knowledge, it is suggested, the speaker is better equipped to process the words. With strangers this ability decreases. Jucker and Smith (1998) found that conversation partners who were familiar with each other used several DMs in their study more so than conversation partners who were unfamiliar with each other. In comparing other contexts, spoken discourse has ten times more DM usage than written discourse, dialogues have two times more DM usage than monologues, and informal discourse has two times more DMs than formal discourse (Biber, 1988). These findings suggest that casual conversation among friends would promote the highest degree of DM usage.

Research on native speaker use of DMs suggests that at least one-third to one-half of language is composed of formulaic units (Foster, 2001), while Luke (1987) showed that an "utterance particle" is found in native continuous talk on average every 1.5 seconds. Redeker (1990) found that in conversations among friends, DMs appeared at a rate of 47.8 per 1000 words.

2. Discourse Markers and English Non-Native Speakers

DMs are not used, studies suggest, as frequently by non-native speakers. Romero Trillo (2002), in a corpus-based study, compared English native speakers and Spanish non-native speakers in the use of DMs. He suggested that because of the difficulty in implementing pragmatic meaning in educational syllabuses, non-native speakers follow a "form-to-function process" in pragmatic development rather than native speakers' "function-to-form developmental process," defining as "pragmatic fossilization" the systematic use of certain forms inappropriately at the pragmatic level of communication. (Romero Trillo, 2002, p. 770).

H. Lee (1999) examined three generations of Korean-Americans (Korean adult immigrants to the US, Korean children who were born in Korean but emigrated before they turned 18, and children born in the US of Korean parents). In this study using a 40 minute interview, it was found that while adult immigrants produced the fewest DMs, children who had emigrated as children produced the most DMs, more than the subjects who had been born in the US and were of native speaker level. H. Lee does not conjecture the results, but does state that DMs are acquired through exposure to English.

Hellermann and Vergun (2007), in their 5-year research project on college adult ESOL

classes for 17 motivated immigrants and refugees, found that few of the target discourse markers *well*, *you know*, and *like* were used in classroom interaction as well as in in-home bilingual interviews. They suggest that the learners' infrequent use of these markers may be due to incidental learning, as they were not taught in the classrooms from which the data was drawn, and a result of the learners' socialization into English language use.

In addition, previous studies have shown that second language learners of a higher proficiency who are more acculturated to the L2 environment are more likely to use discourse markers at rates similar to native speakers (Hellermann & Vergun, 2007; Hays, 1992, H. Lee, 1999).

In Young and J. Lee (2004), it was suggested that Koreans value DMs that function differently than their native English counterparts. When speaking English, Korean bilinguals were shown to produce some aspects of L1 knowledge, specifically high frequency of response token DMs, at rates higher than their American conversation partners.

Tyler, Jefferies, and Davies (1988) found that both Chinese and Korean speakers of English lacked in providing cues that oriented their listeners to the relative importance among ideas within the discourse. Native speakers, on the other hand, use these cues to help construct coherence. Problems that the speakers had in DM usage in orienting the listener to the overall structure of the discourse fell into the categories of substitution, overuse, and exclusive use.

Since DMs play a vital role in English communication, one might argue that a significant part of classroom learning should be dedicated to their attention. However, this is seldom the case. As mentioned, there is a deficiency in second language classrooms on teaching pragmatic, discoursal use of the language, an area in which DMs function. As Liao (2009) stated, "as DMs are not explicitly taught in class and L2 speakers can speak grammatically without the use of DMs, DMs are usually invisible for L2 speakers who learn the language in a formal classroom setting." (p. 1314).

3. Multi-Functional Framework for Categorizing Discourse Markers

Fung and Carter (2007) provide a multi-functional framework for the categorization of DMs, considering both textual and pragmatic interpersonal dimensions. Such a framework is useful for its descriptive value in examining classroom discourse. Their multi-functional framework was used for coding the two groups' discourse in task interaction in the current study, for the categorizing of DMs. The framework proved to be adequate and sufficient, as textual and pragmatic functioning of DMs is the main focus of this study.

1) The Interpersonal Category

DMs in this category are used to mark shared knowledge (*you know, you see, listen, see*) as well as agreement, confirmation, and acknowledgement (*ok, oh, right, yeah, yes, I see, great, sure*). Also included in this category are markers that indicate the attitudes of the speaker (*well, I think, you know, like*) and inclination towards propositional meanings (*basically, actually, really, exactly*). It is in this category that one finds DMs that hold the social functions of grammar used in spoken language.

2) The Referential Category

DMs in this category operate on a textual level and mark relationships between verbal activities preceding and following a DM. Relationships are shown variously by conjunctions: cause (*because*), consequence (*so*), contrast (*but, and, yet, however*), coordination (*and*), disjunction (*or*), digression (*anyway*) and comparison (*likewise, similarly*). It is in this category that one finds DMs often used in written language, which provide indexical direction to the various semantic relationships.

3) The Structural Category

DMs in this category can be of both the textual or interactional level. On the textual level, they signal links and transitions between topics, such as signposting opening and closing of topics (*now, ok, right, well, by the way*), indicating sequential relationships (*first, firstly, second, next, then, finally*) and marking topic shifts (*so, now, and what about*). On the interactional level, DMs operate as a structural device to mark continuation of the current topic (*yeah, and, so*), to summarize opinions (*so*), to hold the floor, etc. It is in this category that one finds DMs usage to indicate the discourse in process, which may affect the current topic's continuation, resuming, ending, and so on, as well as the distribution of turn-taking.

4) The Cognitive Category

DMs in this category are used to show the speaker's thinking process on what was just heard (*well, I think, I see*), reformulate (*I mean, that is, in other words*), elaborate (*like, I mean*), as well as mark hesitation (*well, sort of*) about the utterances. It is in this category that DMs function to provide information about the cognitive state of speakers, which in cases of coherency and continuity break-down in utterances, may require DM checks that instruct the hearer to make a mental representation of the discourse.

III. METHOD

1. Participants

In this small scale study, sixteen Korean university students enrolled in the English department at a university in Seoul, Korea were subjects. The learners were low-intermediate level English learners, as determined from TOEIC scores ranging from 340 to 400. They reported having studied English formally at the university level for two years. None of them reported to have studied abroad. Their ages ranged from 22 to 26 years old. The sixteen subjects formed eight dyads for involvement in the examined task. After forming dyads, the subjects stated they were familiar with the partners, being classmates for two years. All dyads were same-sex (female).

Additionally, eight English native speakers were used as a comparison group. The subjects were adult co-workers all working at the same university as lecturers. After forming four dyads, they reported having a high degree of familiarity with their partner. Three dyads were female only, while one dyad consisted of males.

2. Task

The spoken reformulation task used in the current study is known as dictowatch. In this activity, participants sit opposite of each other, while one faces a video screen. This participant is instructed to narrate the action from the first half of a scene from a video (in this study to narrate the action from a 5 minute clip of an episode of Mr. Bean, a popular British television comedy, in which Mr. Bean is attempting to cheat while taking a test. This television comedy was chosen because of the lack of dialogue, requiring a focus on the humorous actions Mr. Bean performs). The other participant must just listen to the narration of their partner and take notes. Halfway through the scene they change roles and continue the task. At the end of the video scene (in total a 10 minute clip), the dyad uses their notes, their memory of their watched portion of the video, and combined oral output in order to discuss the video, with the aim of constructing a complete written narrative of the whole video scene. As explained by one of the developers of the activity (Sullivan & Caplan, 2004, p. 71), “the dictowatch encourages students to focus on non-salient forms, without proactively prescribing a grammatical goal, thus allowing students to work within the scope of their own IL (interlanguage). The focus of attention to both meaning and form is therefore centered on the students’ needs.”

In the current study, the task interaction while discussing the video and constructing a complete co-operative narrative of Mr. Bean’s actions in the video was under examination. This kind of classroom discourse between Korean learners of English, it is

believed by the researcher, would be valuable for teachers wanting a better understanding of oral proficiency, and more specifically, the extent Korean low-intermediate university students are able to incorporate DMs in their discussion. During the dictowatch reformulation task, spoken interaction is embedded in a context which allows for students' abilities to be revealed in a variety of naturalistic speech acts, and was found suitable for the present study.

3. Date Analysis

A total of 30 minutes of task interaction was recorded for the current study. A total of 20 minutes of Korean non-native speaker (NNS) interaction was recorded, while a total of 10 minutes of English native speaker (NS) interaction was recorded. Two minutes thirty seconds of task interaction was recorded from each dyad, starting one minute after the dyad had started to perform the task (this was to better insure DM usage was on narrative and task management functions, rather than other functions like greetings, instruction clarifications, etc.). The discourse was then transcribed, and became the data for coding in the current study. The transcription was coded on the basis of a coding key adapted from Fung and Carter's (2007) multi-categorical framework for DMs, following the four functional categories of *interpersonal*, used to mark shared knowledge and response of agreement, confirmation and acknowledgment, and attitudes of the speaker (*you know, okay, oh, right, yes, hmhm, great, uhh huh*), *referential*, which marks relationships between verbal activities preceding and following a DM (*so, and, yet, or, but*), *structural*, which signposts transitions between topics, sequential relationships, as well as topic shifts, topic continuation and summarizing (*now, okay, right, first, how about, so*) and *cognitive,* which denotes the cognitive state of speakers and thinking process, reformulation, and elaboration (*I think, I mean, I see, ahh, you know*).

It must be noted, however, that absence of a DM in the turn-initial position (as well as those DMs located in the turn-embedded and turn-final positions, for example) can act in similar ways as those found in the four functional DM headings. In addition, a string of DMs may indicate different functions as revealed in the speaker's cognitive processes and thus categorized as having different functions. For example, an utterance of *ahh ok* indicates the cognitive category through their thinking process (*ahh*) followed immediately by the interpersonal category of shared knowledge and response of agreement, confirmation or acknowledgment (*ok*).

The entire transcribed task interaction of 30 minutes of the eight NNS dyads and four NS dyads was analyzed to determine both the frequency of turn-initial DMs as well as the function of such turn-initial DMs, according to the four categories.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section will provide the instances and functioning of DM usage by the Korean NNS and English NS groups.

1. Total DM Usage

The sixteen Korean NNSs provided a total of 90 instances of DMs over the 20 minutes of recorded task interaction (8 dyads, each with two and a half minutes analyzed interaction). This averaged to one DM produced every 13.3 seconds. In terms of DM usage by the NNSs across the four functional categories, there were 23 provisions of Interpersonal related functioning of DMs, 47 provisions of Referential related DMs, 4 provisions of Structural related DMs, and 16 provisions of Cognitive related DMs.

The eight English NSs provided a total of 124 instances of DMs over the 10 minutes of recorded task interaction. This averaged to one DM produced every 4.8 seconds. In answering the first research question, there is a great discrepancy in DM frequency between the two groups. In terms of DM usage by the NSs across the four functional categories, there were 69 provisions of Interpersonal related functioning of DMs, 8 provisions of Referential related DMs, 36 provisions of Structural related DMs, and 11 provisions of Cognitive related DMs. The two groups' frequency of DM usage by multi-functional category can be seen in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1

Rates of DM Usage by Multi-Functional Category

	Interpersonal	Referential	Structural	Cognitive
Korean NNSs	23/90 (26%)	47/90 (52%)	4/90 (4%)	16/90(18%)
English NSs	69/124 (56%)	8/124 (6%)	36/124 (29%)	11/124 (9%)

A list of all discourse markers spoken by the Korean NNS and English NS groups, according to multi-functional category, can be seen in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2
DM Provisions According to Multi-Functional Category

	Korean NNSs	English NSs
Interpersonal	yes, mmm, uhh, huh, no, ok	right, ok, yeah, that's right, actually, yep, basically, you know
Referential	but, so, and, and then, because	or, cause, so, and , but
Structural	so, after all	ok, so, the beginning, and, and then, first, then, the first thing, after that, wait a second, the next thing, at this point
Cognitive	ahh, oh my god	not really, ahh, well, like, I think

2. Comparison of Interpersonal Usage of DMs

Examining the Interpersonal category, 23 of the 90 provisions of DMs by the NNSs were interpersonal related. In other words, roughly 26% of all DM usage was concerned with marking shared knowledge and to indicate responses like agreement, disagreement acknowledgement, and confirmation. All DMs serving an interpersonal function in the data (*yes, mmm, uhh huh, no, ok*) performed a confirmation or disagreement with the previous turn utterance.

The relatively high instances of confirmation DMs would suggest that the Korean learners are highly involved in task interaction and working towards accurate construction of a complete narrative. Also noticeable is the concept of "one-way" and "two-way" information flow (Willis, & Willis, 2007, p. 164). In this current study's task, the exchange is predominately a two-way flow of information. Thus, the need for accurate information exchange dictates the two-way information giver's high DM usage of turn-initial acknowledgment and confirmation functioning in response to the listener/writer seeking confirmation, as seen in both excerpt (1) and (2):

Excerpt (1)
he decided to to cheat
cheat
yes (confirmation DM)

Excerpt (2)
he want to win him
oh ok (confirmation DM)

Noticeable in the interpersonal usage of DMs is the restricted range of usages, specifically the lack of DMs marking the attitudes of the speakers (such as *I think*, *you*

know) and shared knowledge (*you see, listen*), which help to mark a stronger social confluency between speakers. As McCarthy (1998) states, "the ability to vary learner's lexis while still saying basically the same thing pushes the discourse forward and gives out important interactional signals" (p. 115). The restricted range of interpersonal DM usage suggests this is not occurring in the NNSs' interaction.

While the provision of DMs in the current data suggests an attention to task and transactional efficiency, a qualitative look at the frequency of the particular formal acknowledgement marker *yes* suggests an over-reliance on a propositional DM that carries little interpersonal convergence. Other more pragmatic functioning confirmation DMs (such as *yeah*, *sure, you see, exactly, alright*) would display this more engaged level of discourse competency. McCarthy (2003) calls these more pragmatic functioning confirmation DMs "yes-plus" words, in that in addition to acknowledging or confirming the receipt and understanding of incoming talk, they increase task involvement and interactional bonding and contribute to increased "good listenership." (p. 35~36). Examining NNSs' over-reliance of *yes* in the current study, J. E. Park (2009) found similar results examining *yeah*, and its over-reliance among ESL learners as a "strategic resource for dealing with the linguistic and interactional impediments that speakers of a second or foreign language face in interaction." (p. 302). *Yeah* is also found to frequently function as an interpersonal marker in social discourse among Hong Kong young people, "as an in-group pragmatic marker to denote emotive engagement, exclamation, or a sense of victory." (Fung & Carter, 2007, p. 430). Yet in their study involving a pedagogical setting, an over-reliance of the formal *yes* rather than *yeah* suggests awareness to the more formal pedagogical rather than social context. In the current study, the infrequent use of "yes-plus" words by NNSs is noticeable; more so in a comparative look at English native speakers' interaction.

In the English NSs' use of interpersonal DMs, results showed that 69 of the 124 DMs were related to shared knowledge, as well as responses like agreement, confirmation and acknowledgement, with a frequency of 56%. This suggests that they considered DMs showing the social function of spoken grammar to be of the most importance in task interaction. NSs responded to each other using a wider variety of interpersonal DMs (*right, ok, yeah, that's right, actually, yep, basically, you know*), which contain a higher level of discourse competency (as opposed to the Korean EFL learners' over-reliance of *yes)*, as seen in the following examples in excerpts (3) and (4):

Excerpt (3)
umhmm ok (confirmation DMs) watched him take a bite and then
starts to prepare his own sandwich
that's right that's right yeah (confirmation DMs)

Excerpt (4)
I thought he was gonna fill the loaf but he doesn't
yeah ok (confirmation DMs) so he pulls out a loaf from his trench coat

Also noticeable is a preference for informal *yeah* rather than its formal equivalent *yes*, suggesting NSs did not consider the pedagogical setting to hinder social interaction during task involvement.

3. Comparison of Referential Usage of DMs

Examining the Referential category, 47 of the 90 provisions of DMs by the NNSs were referential related. In other words, roughly 52% of all DM usage was concerned with DMs at a textual level as they signpost relationships between utterances preceding and following a DM. DMs being used were *but, so, and, and then, because*.

Referential functioning of DMs in the current data, at 52%, represents the most frequent category utilized by the learners in the analyzed spoken interaction. This suggests that the learners are sensitive to the semantic content that has been provided previous to a DM, and work efficiently with DM usage to 'keep the ball rolling' towards task completion and to further semantic content at the textual level, as seen in excerpt (5):

Excerpt (5)
and (coordination DM) Mr. Bean sleeped *and then* (coordination DM) Mr. Bean cry himself cried
himself to sleep *and* (coordination DM)
suddenly
suddenly *and* (coordination DM) he woke up
woke up *but* (contrast DM) the test
the test was end the test was end

As the example represents (in addition to illustrating DMs in the utterance-internal position), the learners showed frequent DM referential functioning in signposting the relationship between messages preceding and following a DM. In this regard, the interaction can appear to be a never ending production of semantic content, similar to a run-on sentence in written discourse. However, with this strategy for creating successful sequential relationship (Fraser, 1990) can come increased pragmatic meaning at the discourse level. Effective referential DM usage also exhibits instances of learners developing their utterances into longer, more semantically enriched turns. Relevant to

mention at this point is K. H. Suh's (2009) study of referential DM *so* in Korean learners' spoken production. In that study it was found that learners' over-use of *so* made them committed to provide continuation on the propositional meaning of the turn. Without the ability to offer such additional contribution, they chose to close down the just launched turn constructional unit (TCU) by using the DM *yea*. In the current study, however, *so* functioned to extend the TCU in mutual cooperation of active task involvement at the textual level.

For the English NSs, only 8 DMs at the referential level were found in the current data, signifying a 6% usage in the analyzed interaction. This low rate of occurrence suggests they were not concerned with semantic content at the textual level, possibly because they considered the discourse to be at a more social level. Referential DMs shown in the data by the NSs were *or, cuz, so, and, but.*

In comparing the two groups, one coding related issue found to be interesting concerning the DMs *and* and *and then.* For the Korean learners it was shown to be often used at the textual level, in reference to the movie's description, thus coded as Referential, whereas for the English native subjects, *and then* was more used as a signposting feature indicating sequential relationships, and coded as Structural. This contrast can be seen in Korean learners' excerpt (6) and English natives' excerpt (7):

Excerpt (6)
slide over to him over to him *but* he is warning to Bean
yes
ahh
but the guy warning to Mr. Bean
to Mr. Bean *and then* (Referential, coordination DM) Mr. Bean tried
to cheat again?

Excerpt (7)
yea I'm good
and then (Structural, sequential DM) *the next thing uhh* this is when
Mr. Bean pulls out the loaf
yea at this point he reaches into his coat his trench coat

Also interesting is the varying functions of the specific DM *and* in the current data. As Fung and Carter (2007) define it in the Referential category, *and* operates as coordination, and marks relationships between verbal activity preceding and following a DM, as well as where one finds DMs often used in written language. In the Structural category, *and* operates as a structural device to mark continuation of the current topic.

Due to the over-reliant use of *and* by the Korean learners to further the semantic content at the textual level (the "keep-the-ball-rolling" effect), it was considered to be referential in nature, as it operated on the textual level in the learners' discourse. Several Korean subjects used this DM strategy in this study, with the resulting task interaction resembling the spoken equivalent of a run-on sentence.

4. Comparison of Structural Usage of DMs

The NNSs had 4 instances of Structural DM usage, at a 4% rate, suggesting that they did not successfully signal links and transitioning between topics, such as signposting, nor did they indicate sequential relationships and mark topic shifts. DMs of the Structural category found in the learners' data were *so* and *after all.*

Looking at the lack of structural DMs, the data suggests that learners infrequently signaled the linking of topics (for example, the opening, closing and continuation of topics) during their reformulation discourse. One explanation for this could be the orientation the learners adopted when performing the task. As Ellis (2003) explains, the particular orientation that learners take when faced with a task determines the kind of activity that results. Previous experience with similar tasks, as well as the kind of activity they associate with the communication context they are involved in, helps to determine the view they take. In the current study, since the learners were familiar with each other and had performed several similar tasks prior to the current one as classroom exercises, it is suggested that it was not necessary to set the discourse into a structural pattern, and that being "on task" (p. 187) was adequate for the discourse to function. As seen in one of the few examples, the current topic has reached a block, in which case the speaker signals that they would like to redirect the discourse from a previous topic to a new topic, as seen in excerpt (8):

> Excerpt (8)
> the guy throw his answer question his answer paper
> paper exam?
> *so* (topic shift DM) Mr. Bean
> Mr. Bean

In comparison, the English NSs showed a much higher rate of Structural DM usage, appearing in 36 instances, or 29% of all DM functioning. This suggests that they were much more focused on DM usage that indicates the discourse in process, such as signposting indicators for the current topic's continuation, resuming, ending, as well as proper distribution of turn-taking. DMs in the Structural category provided by the native

speakers were *ok, so, the beginning, and, and then, first, then, the first thing, after that, wait a second, the next thing, at this point,* indicating a wider variety of techniques to structure the discourse at both the textual and interactional level, as seen in excerpts (9) and (10) (also seen in excerpt 7):

Excerpt (9)
ahh he trimmed the loaf of bread *ahh I got you ok*
ok and then after that (sequential DMs) he takes out

Excerpt (10)
and then the next thing (sequential DMs) uhh this is when Mr. Bean
pulls out the loaf
yea at this point (sequential DM) he reaches into his coat his trench
coat

5. Comparison of Cognitive Usage of DMs

The NNSs had a total of 16 provisions (17.7% of all DMs) of cognitive related DMs, defined as marking instances of the speaker's thinking process, reformulation, elaboration, and acts of hesitation. DM usage of a cognitive function provided by the learners was restricted to the utterance *ahh* and one instance of *oh my god*, as seen in excerpt (11), marking instances of sudden realization in the speaker's thinking process:

Excerpt (11)
oyster
ahh ahh (realization DM) he eats imitating he eats oyster
imitating him *so*
ahh (realization DM) Bean
bean eats oyster
oh my god (realization DM) *but but* oyster is rotten rotten

In comparison, the English NSs provided a total of 11 cognitive related DMs, at a 9% rate. DMs produced were *not really, ahh, well, like, I think.* In cases of coherency and continuity break-down in utterances, cognitive DMs function to instruct the hearer to make a mental representation of the discourse, as seen by the native speakers in excerpts (12) and (13):

Excerpt (12)
but Mr. Bean denies
well (hesitation DM)
or declines *yea* mr. bean *oh no* you said *uhh* he wants it he looks like
he wants it
well (thinking process DM) what I said was what he says is *I think*
'no absolutely' *so* its real *like* what he says is weird its *like*
oh

Excerpt (13)
and pulled out a loaf of bread and scissors?
yes that's right actually I think (thinking process DM) the loaf of
bread came from the left jacket pocket the right jacket
pocket he pulled out scissors
so is it the loaf of bread was which left or right?
I think (thinking process DM) it was left
ok

As excerpt (12) shows, the speaker uses *well* to express a hesitation in the discourse continuity, at points where reformulation and additional clarification are needed in the information exchange. Similarly, in excerpt (13) the speaker uses *I think*, in combination with *actually*, to indicate a show of his thinking process as the discourse has stalled and reformulation of the current topic is needed. These usages of *well* and *I think* illustrate the native speakers' concern and ability to co-create mental representations of the discourse, helping each other with recollection of the video's scene, in order to clarify and improve the information exchange, towards task completion.

In comparing the two groups and their use of cognitive functioning DMs, the data suggests that the Korean learners have a restricted ability in instructing the hearer of coherence and continuity break-downs that occur during task interaction. It is worth mentioning that in coding, *ahhh* can also be interpreted as an Interpersonal DM signaling acknowledgement (similar to *ok, oh, I see*), in which case the Korean learners provided practically no DMs showing the cognitive state of speakers. Overall, the deficiency in cognitive DMs in the data suggests that the learners lack an understanding of the mental representation of their partner, which can lead to a lessened sense of interactive cohesion in task production and discourse in general.

V. CONCLUSION

In the current small scale study two groups were compared concerning their use of DMs during task involvement. With arguably a grammar-centered focus in both teacher and student production in Korean EFL classrooms, investigations on DM usage like the current study can help to shed light on pragmatic level interactions between learners, which can help to strengthen communicative competency and fluency in general in the Korean EFL context. This study is concerned specifically with DM usage as they occurred in a reformulation dictowatch task. An important consideration, therefore, is that DM usage can vary as the orientation of the task dictates (Ellis, 2003)(for example, open tasks as opposed to closed tasks, and one-way as opposed to two-way tasks) and other variables such as learner-learner familiarity, gender, and experience with similar task deployment. Learners' proficiency level, rated as low-intermediate in the current study, also contributes as a factor determining the frequency and function of DMs. Dyads of a different nature, such as mixed sex or NNS-NS, are also likely to promote differences in DM usage. While insights can be gained, the functioning of DMs and their frequency in the current small scale study of only 30 minutes of analyzed data cannot be generalized as representing all learner interaction in task involvement, involving various other learner proficiencies, or to other speech contexts.

Quantitatively, an examination of the Korean learners' provision of DMs reveals that interpersonal and referential DMs were used most frequently. However, the learners displayed over-reliant use of the specific DM *yes* to mark social meaning as an interpersonal function in the discourse. This would support the findings of Young and J. Lee (2004), in that Koreans, when speaking English, provide response tokens at a higher rate than their American counterparts, stemming from L1 knowledge that Korean speakers and listeners construct boundaries of interactional units that are different from those that English speakers recognize. It would, however, be misleading, therefore, to suggest that interpersonal cohesiveness was achieved through this high rate of use. It is suggested that *yes* does not display shared knowledge at as high of a degree as other interpersonal functioning DMs such as *sure*, *you see*, *exactly* and *alright*. Taking this into account, other than *yes* the learners displayed a restricted use of markers that show interpersonal solidarity, supporting the findings of Fung and Carter (2007), and the over-reliance of *yes* as a DM could indicate a necessity to expose the learners to other DMs. Alternatively, another reason for the over-reliance of *yes* by the NNSs could be their consideration of the pedagogical setting to require an attempt at prestige forms of English grammar and pronunciation. Therefore the formal *yes* was selected over the more informal equivalent *yeah*. This suggestion increases in relevance when native speaker production is explored, with their preference for *yeah*, indicating they

considered the interaction to be social rather than pedagogical in nature. Over half of all English native speakers' DM usage was dedicated to interpersonal functions, suggesting they valued and were able to express the social functions of spoken grammar while involved in task interaction. A larger repertoire in interpersonal DMs was also shown by the native group, suggesting a higher level of semantic variation in the cohesiveness of spoken discourse.

On the referential level the learners showed the most variety and frequency of DM usage, at over 50%, suggesting that working on a textual level towards task involvement and completion (through such DMs as *but, so, and, and then*) was given higher priority than interpersonal relations, possibly due to task orientation and familiarity of partner. Considering the task in the current study as classroom activity, the learners indicated a preference for DMs that functioned toward correct and efficient task involvement and completion. English natives, on the other hand, had a restricted use of referential DMs (6%), which suggests that little concern was given to textual level marking and indexical direction to the various semantic relationships.

The largest difference between the two groups appears in the structural functioning of DMs. For the learners, this was restricted to infrequent instances of *so* and one *after all*, implying that the learners were not interested in (or not able to make) organizational marking at the discourse level. For the English native group, a greater attention to DM usage that indicates the discourse in process was found.

In cognitive DMs, learner use was restricted to *ahhh*, although coding interpretation could place this as an interpersonal functioning DM. Speakers show no instances (or ability) to either share the thinking process or provide cognitive state information, both of great importance when coherency and continuity breakdown occur during the discourse. Native speakers as well showed infrequent usage; however a wider range of cognitive DMs were used.

In summary, quantitatively there is a large discrepancy between the use of DMs by NSs and that of NNSs usage, with similar findings of that of Fung and Carter (2007). While NNSs showed a preference for referential functioning DMs, indicating textual relationships preceding and following the DM, usage by NSs showed more of an attention to interpersonal functions, to mark shared knowledge, attitudes and responses.

As for implications for EFL classrooms, if a primary goal of pedagogical tasks in the classroom is to create opportunities for natural production of English that is focused on message conveyance, then striving for native-like fluency should be of great interest to language teachers. DMs studies including the current one have shown that foreign language learners have an underdeveloped use of DMs when compared to native speakers; as well as their DM functioning being significantly different from that of natives speakers. Compounded with this is that DMs, as markers of pragmatic meaning,

are not commonly found to be part of language classroom curriculum (Hellermann & Vergun, 2007).

Therefore the question is: How can teachers promote DM usage in learners' production in order to increase the notion of confluency, as suggested by McCarthy (2009)? One step is to recognize the active responsive role that listeners bring to the interaction process and to acknowledge listenership (Dushku, 2010; Field, 2008) that comes with turn-initial DMs such as response tokens and back-channeling (McCarthy, 2003; Tao, 2003). This would help to illustrate the attention native English listeners pay to the interactional process, and previous turns, before attending to transactional elements.

However, task interaction between learners does not ensure that natural target discourse activity will occur; it is therefore necessary for turn-taking to be developed consciously by the teacher (Dornyei & Thurrell, 1994) with a "direct approach" that focuses on conversation fluency "more systematically" (p. 41). As well, the three part approach of illustration.interaction.induction (3Is) (McCarthy, 2005) promotes analytical strategies in DM awareness by highlighting 'illustration' through authentic materials, 'interaction' through discussion of DM language features, and 'induction' by learners' self-discovery of rules and proper usage through observation (Sayer, 2005).

The current small scale study has shown that these particular NNSs use DMs at a very restricted level and with limited functions as compared with these particular native speakers, supporting findings by Fung and Carter (2007) among others. Further investigations are needed to explore why this is the case. While learner L2 proficiency at low-intermediate certainly was a contributing factor in this study, other variables, such as first language transfer (Young & J. Lee, 2004) and immersion in the target language community (Hellermann & Vergun, 2007), are suggested to provide additional insight for future investigations in this growing literature on DMs, which includes interlanguage pragmatics. As well, a more detailed look at Korean EFL learners' DM usage in different contexts, such as tasks of various complexities and with different responsibility between participants, will help extend the investigation of this under-examined area of language learners' spoken production, in their efforts toward English fluency.

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Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: Tertiary

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