Cohesion in Nonnative Discourse

Sina Lee

(Seoul National University)

Lee, Sina. 2005. Cohesion in Nonnative Discourse. SNU Working Papers in English Linguistics and Language 4, 115-136. This study considers or as a cohesive marker and explores its conversational use in nonnative discourse. Based upon the framework of Schiffrin that or is an 'inclusive or' which allows either of the disjuncts or both, it is more beneficial than its use as an 'exclusive or' because it provides more options to the hearer. The hearer-oriented or were analyzed into four major categories. The most pervasive use of the inclusive option marker or was when it served to support one's position. Second, the cohesive marker or was employed when speakers reformulated their talk in relation to the prior talk. Nonnative speakers also displayed or to signal a turn-exit in their discourse. In exiting their turn or was often sound stretched and co-occurred with short pauses. Lastly, or was observed as a hedging device when speakers coordinated binominals to cover a broader range cueing that they lack certainty or confidence in their talk. (Seoul National University)

Keywords: cohesion, marker, or, nonnative discourse, inclusive or, turn-exit, hedging

1. Introduction

What makes a discourse distinguishable from a linear of words? How do we organize relevant sentences together? Among many possible answers, according to different perspectives, the most salient characteristic is cohesion. There are some cohesive elements in a discourse that makes it dependent with the prior or latter talk in order to convey an idea or some action as a whole. These sequentially dependent elements are interactionally constructed in a conversation discourse by the participants in a systematic way creating cohesion.

The cohesive device that links the ideas projecting an interpretation in the discourse are often referred to as discourse
markers or discourse particles which mark the boundaries of a talk (Schiffrin 2001). These cohesive tokens tie the semantically, pragmatically related expressions creating a larger text as a unified idea.

One of the cohesive devices in a discourse that indicate a semantic, pragmatic relationship creating a text is grammatically parsed as conjunctions. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976) the conjunctive elements are perceived as cohesive because 'they express certain meanings which presuppose the presence of other components in the discourse' (p.226). Therefore an analysis on conjunctions does not only indicate a simple observation on its structural aspects but an examination on the function it serves with other linguistic elements that construct a sequentially organized text.

The cohesive devices have also been referred to as discourse markers in this field of study. Previous research have centered on the discourse functions performed especially by the competent speakers of the target language. Now a growing research on discourse markers have begun to investigate nonnative speakers’ (NNS) use and their pragmatic ability observing both in and out of the classroom. Such research also have been explored in a conversation analytic approach in an attempt to explain NNSs' discourse management and turn organizations.

2. Review of literature

2.1 Previous studies on discourse markers

The cohesive elements that link the ideas together as a discourse are referred to in various forms such as discourse markers, discourse particles, discourse connectives, cue words and so forth. The underlying concept that these notions share is that these linking items bind the upcoming talk with the prior utterance creating cohesion simultaneously conveying the speaker’s intended message and facilitate the comprehension process for the hearer.

Considering the characteristics of these cohesive items which tie the units of discourse to a context, they have been discussed as discourse connectives by Rouchota1) (1996). The most notable role of
discourse connectives is that they facilitate comprehension and make the interpretation process easier for the hearer.

Heeman et. al (1998) report that it is the speaker himself who conveys the intended message in accordance with the prior utterance. They assert that discourse markers are also used by the hearers to construct expected interpretations for the upcoming utterance.

Fuller (2003) did a comparative study on discourse marker use by native and nonnative speakers. She examined five discourse markers that had high frequency in its use; well, oh, y’know, like, and I mean. The findings of the study 2) indicated that the use of the discourse markers are influenced according to the speech context and were displayed distinctively among L1 and L2 speakers. Fuller asserts that the distributions of discourse markers may not be consistent among L1 and L2 speakers 3). Furthermore, the discourse markers may be influenced according to the interactional setting of the discourse.

A recent study on coherence and cohesion had been conducted by Kim (2003) with NNSs’ narrative discourse. EFL learners were able to make similar distributions in their discourse with NSs,

1) Simple linguistic devices such as whereas, but, moreover, therefore, so, etc were examined on what they linked in the discourse in a relevance-theoretic approach.

2) The results were as the following: the NNSs employed oh and well at the same rate in conversations with NSs. The discourse marker y’know used by NNSs were similar in conversations and interviews but the NSs showed higher frequency in interviews. Like was far less performed by NNSs overall and thus showed statistically lower rate than NSs. I mean was used more in interviews for both NSs and NNSs but the NNSs seemed to use this more often in interviews than NSs.

3) Despite the results that NNSs employ lower use of the discourse markers overall than NSs, the NN5s of Fuller’s research had been limited to only six, Germany, France, and Spain EFL students, those who share the same family language with English speakers. A concern arose whether the findings would be applicable even to speakers with distinctively different cultural backgrounds and different language families. Moreover, Fuller’s collected mixed group of gender and did not consider a great socio-variable which may have produced different outcomes. Thus to eliminate the effect of gender on NNSs’ performance, it would be best if the participants were all consistent to female or male.
sometimes even more which also proved that their use was overgeneralized and redundant. The findings implicate that the employment of these cohesive devices are still difficult to acquire, especially to 'appropriately acquire', in actual discourse.

In the past studies, the term discourse marker differed from research to research and has been defined variously. In this study, particles that mark the boundaries of the upcoming utterance with the prior talk was focused. However, those particles that also linked the utterances together, hence creating cohesion, needed to be highlighted. Thus I prefer to use the term cohesive marker loosely and focus on its use in the NNSs' discourse.

2.2 Schiffrin's analysis

2.2.1 Inclusive or

Schiffrin (1987) defined discourse markers as 'sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk' (p.31) and examined tokens produced by the NSs. Among those discourse markers this study narrows the scope to the token that coordinates the discourse hence creating cohesion in the talk.

The most salient feature of or is that it is hearer-oriented. It is hearer-directed in the sense that the speaker employs the discourse marker or in a manner to provide options for the hearer. Schiffrin describes or as an option marker in discourse (p.177).

The marker or is classified according to its features as the exclusive or and the inclusive or. The exclusive or in the "X or Y" structure holds under the circumstances that only one of the conjunctions may be true but not both at the same time (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman 1999: 477). The inclusive or, on the other hand, is true when one part of the disjunct or both holds true. The inclusive or additionally creates a choice which 'minimizes the cost that rejection of any single piece of evidence might have' (Schiffrin 1987: 178). Schiffrin demonstrates that the conjunction or as an inclusive should be perceived as a discourse marker due to its discourse functions in an interactional context.
2.2.2 Discourse functions of OR

2.2.2.1 Marking multiple evidence to support a position

The discourse marker or is employed when the speaker wishes to provide options in order to support one's position. Multiple evidence strengthens the message that was originally conveyed in a less certain manner by the speaker.

(Jack is stating that power elites will always use social differences to justify economic inequities)

(1) Jack:
   a. It's when there's an economic situation
   b. then they use race.
   c. Or they use nationality,
   d. or anti-Semitism,
   e. or what have you.

(Schiffrin, 1987, p.178)

Jack is providing multiple examples to support his position. Although one example will suffice, Jack goes on to add more examples all of which imply a possibility of selection to the hearer. The cumulative evidence together intensifies the position Jack upholds.

2.2.2.2 Offering inclusive options in disagreement

Speakers coordinate their utterances using cohesive devices such as or not only to tie discourse units together but also to provide options that are challenged against the prior speaker's ideas. These disagreements are linked marked specifically through cohesive markers such as or. In (2) Zelda is attempting to announce disagreeing responses to the prior speaker on unsuccessful marriages between people with different religions.
Zelda in (a) begins with an agreement form (Yes) but digresses from the prior position using an adversative connective but. The initial statement in (a) demonstrates one side of the disagreement and is linked with another in (b) with the cohesive marker or. Thus Schiffrin demonstrates that the speakers' multiple disagreement can be provided as inclusive options when connected with the marker or. Through the inclusive optional marker or it provides explicit implications to the hearer that what follows will also be contrasted to the prior speaker's talk.

2.2.2.3 Offering inclusive options in clarification

The marker or explicitly binds the two disjuncts together but it also serves in the discourse interactionally. One of the interactional discourse function is when providing inclusive options for clarification. When speakers' messages are not fully accepted by the hearer whether due to hearing problems or comprehension problems the recipient displays the problem. Freda and Debby are engaged in a conversation about sending Freda's daughter to the all girls' high school that both of the speakers had attended.
In (3) above, Freda shows her dispreference of girls’ high school in (b). As her interlocutor attempts to interpret her remark as a disapproval to only girls’ high school in (c), Freda clarifies her statement by disagreeing with Debby in (f) and reformulates her statements that it is not the case for only girls’ high school but for boys’ school also. The misunderstanding that arose in Debby’s remarks provided a cue for Freda to make clarifications which was actualized through the use of or.

2.2.2.4 Offering inclusive options in responses/questions

In response to questions, speakers’ use of or displays a point where the hearers can interpret the boundaries of the choices. Debby is asking a question on where Irene would like to live in (4).

In response to Debby’s question Irene provides her first selection in (a). The second selection of responses is added in (g) through the initiation of or. Irene perceives the complete response in (f) and introduces a new selection with the marker or.
Choice markers are not only restricted by speakers who play the part of the answerer to questions. Question producers themselves may offer various choices linking them with the connective or.

The discourse marker or was also used in or tag formations. By attaching or tags in interrogatives the speaker provides a wider range of answers from the hearer. When speakers mark their yes-no questions with or tags they are simultaneously converting their response types into much more diverse forms.

In (5) and (6) above, the speaker is producing a yes-no question in the first TCU. However, by supplementing the first TCU with examples, coordinated with or tags, the speaker increases the answer possibilities and hence presents more consideration of the hearer and their remarks. In (6) Debby forms an or tag after a possible completion point which is performed as a delayed option with a pause.

Lazaraton (1991) refers to these type of or tag questions as an add-on alternative or questions. According to Lazaraton, there are two advantages of employing add-on alternative or questions by
speakers. First, the options are set before us so that they could be selected. Second, by adding or after the first choice question it avoids disagreement. Notice the broader type of option (or where) provided at the final or tag in (6). By additionally providing a general option (or where) the speaker avoids the dispreferred response that might arouse from the hearer.

Despite the findings of the previous studies which have highlighted the functions of discourse markers creating cohesion, the research have been mainly restricted to NSs. Extending this line of research this paper attempts to investigate the functions of or, especially by the use of the NNSs with a hope that it may reveal the nonnatives feature.

3. Data and methodology

3.1 Data

The research was conducted with a collection of random samples from diverse Korean universities. Eleven intermediate and ten advanced university students have participated in a NS-NNS interactional setting. Their TOEIC, TOEFL, or TEPS scores were required for each NNS and were assigned as an intermediate or an advanced according to their scores.

3.2 Methodology

The research in this study was conducted within the framework of conversation analysis and focused on the turn-organization constructed by the NNSs. Within a quantitative approach all the productions of the cohesive marker or were coded and categorized according to each discourse function they served. The discourse function of the cohesive marker or will be introduced with the

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4) TEPS is the standardized English proficiency test which stands for Test of English Proficiency developed by Seoul National University. The intermediate level were categorized as students who contained TEPS scores between 600 and 800. The advanced level were those who scored over 800 on TEPS.
relevant data demonstrated qualitatively.

4. Analysis and discussions

4.1 Frequency analysis

In order to discuss the use of the cohesive marker or it would be best to deal first with the actual frequency by the NNSs in their spontaneous interaction with NSs. All the distribution of or in the NNSs’ production were examined and coded. The result of the distribution of the cohesive marker or is summarized in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Intermediate (N=11)</th>
<th>Advanced (N=10)</th>
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<tr>
<td>or</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>42</td>
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The frequency analysis above in Table 1 shows a strikingly large difference in the use of the cohesive marker of or among both levels. The intermediate learners displayed only 15 times of or as a discourse connective whereas the advanced learners, although one person less in size, exhibited nearly three times more than the intermediate level. The results shown above may potentially imply that as learners achieve greater competence of the target language they make more frequent use of the cohesive markers to coordinate their discourse.

The outcomes of Table 1 is merely the numbers of frequency on the marker or displayed by NNSs. It may be carefully interpreted that there is a tendency for higher L2 proficiency learners to produce coherent text than lower L2 learners. However, in order to observe the role of the cohesive marker or in NNSs’ natural discourse a closer examination in a qualitative approach will be presented.
4.2 The use of Or

In this part of the section the four major conversational use of the cohesive marker or in NNSs' discourse will be presented based upon Schiffrin's framework with a partial re-categorization of few functions.

4.2.1 Marking multiple evidence to support a position

The most pervasive use of the cohesive marker or occurs when speakers strengthen their position by providing multiple examples and evidences linking them with a special tie.

Two major advantages may be obtained by providing additional options for the hearer. First, when speakers lack certainty in their prior response they may produce more concrete or less concrete but still relevant supporting talk to strengthen the force. It should be noted that the prior response itself was presented as a complete TCU or a completed second pair part (SPP). However, according to the interactional situation, speakers make contributions providing a supplementary SPP and project a more definite state of position. Second, by providing an additional talk speakers may minimize the risk of taking responsibility for the prior utterance. Though it has been produced in a complete TCU or as a complete SPP, when the prior response is not satisfactory it is often connected with optional TCUs or optional SPPs initiated with cohesive markers such as or.

When speakers attempt to make confirmations and ground their position they would do so by extending their talk either deductively or inductively. The former is the case of a narrowed-down scope whereas the latter is the more extended scope. Nearly all the cases of the cohesive marker or were used in the discourse as a narrowed scope to provide more concrete and specific talk.

As shown in Table 2, regardless of the L2 proficiency level, both levels of EFL learners produced more of or when they provided narrowed-down evidence of their position. It does show that the higher L2 proficiency speakers produced more of the cohesive
marker whether to narrow or to extend the scope. It is also surprising to see that there is a strikingly similar distribution of the cohesive marker *or* in both levels.

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<th>Intermediate (N=11)</th>
<th>Advanced (N=10)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>narrowed scope</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>extended scope</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
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</table>

The frequency of *or* in a narrowed scope is nearly 6 times as much than in the extended scope for both levels of NNSs. What is also notable is that the intermediate level, in fact, didn’t exhibit any of the *or* for the extended scope.

In the following example the intermediate EFL learner, SI, was asked if she would go abroad after she graduated from her university. The relevant SPP was provided in line 1. It is notable that although SI had produced a complete TCU in line 1 the NS had signaled a continuer which triggered SI to continue her turn.

1. SI: I would go
2. NS: mmm:
3. SI: because uh the degree of an(5) (.2) the degrees? sss:
4. degree of uh: biology in Korea? it's not-not so good.
5. NS: ah:
6. SI: so I want to learn other country? for example, America or Germany?
7. SI: oh: Germany
8. NS: yeah yeah. Germany is the best place to learn?
9. SI: learn biology?

And so, from line 3 SI accounts for her position even if it was not required in the first place. In line 6, SI projects that her turn will be elaborated lexically (*other country*) and through the raising

5) In NNS discourse where the speakers lack high L2 proficiency, code-switching frequently occurred even when involved in an interaction with a NS. In this case "ahni", meaning "no, not that", indicates a trouble source of the prior utterance and hence attempts to make clarifications.
intonation. It is reinforced that SI would go to another country her position being grounded once more.

This current speaker’s position of going to another country is pointed out in detail projected by for example. The specific, narrowed-down example is America and Germany. The additional talk followed by or is optional so it is not necessarily a required information. It is notable that what started off as a vague and abstract position has become more clearer through the initiation of or.

The advanced EFL learners produced more of the cohesive marker or to support their position with specific and elaborated evidences. In the following example BN was asked if Korean students cheated on research papers and reports.

(8) 1 BN : mm (.3) well I know that most of my friends, cheat?
2 NS : mhm,
3 ➔ BN : especially on you know re-reports or some essays? because the time due'd it's so short.
4 5 NS : ah:
6 BN : you know, they gave us such you know, little time. so it's far-hard for us to write one actually on our own.

Despite its false start of re-reports in line 3 the NNS provides another specific unit that clarifies the picture of the shared background information with the use of or. Through the initiation of the cohesive marker, NNSs are able to continue their talk which was unstable or uncertain from the intial production. The discourse in continuously planned and constructed as they provide concrete, narrowed-down talks.

There were only four cases of the cohesive marker or which extended the scope from what started off as a specific, detailed point of view. Only few of the advanced EFL learners were able to manage this use of or with vague expressions that enlarged the focus of the prior talk. In (9), KW is an advanced EFL learner who introduced a special game called Netball that she had once seen on TV.
In line 4 KW makes an abstract, obscure assumption that it is played on air but does not provide an accurate information. However, the presupposition of this on somewhere minimally tells us that, although not precise, it is broadcasted. An incremental TCU is supplemented with a more concrete clause on ESPN in line 4. This is once more followed by an additional TCU which implies that the prior clausal TCU (on ESPN) is too risky to stand by itself and hence to avoid full responsibility it is mitigated with an obscure expression in line 5 (or something like that). The cohesive marker or in this example serves in the discourse to extend the prior scope of the utterance so that the speaker does not run risks of the prior utterance.

4.2.2 Reformulation

Reformulation in this case literally holds in those situations where the speaker actually converts the form, syntactically or semantically, and hence makes it differ from the prior utterance. Thus the cohesive marker or marks the boundary of the prior utterance and the former simultaneously projecting a reformulation of the upcoming disjunct.

In most of the NNSs’ data speech, especially for those who had insufficient L2 proficiency, speech perturbation occurred frequently with signs of hesitations and pauses. It may be hazardous to demonstrate that speech perturbations represent merely disfluency of the speakers (Lee 2004). Sound stretch and pauses may also display speaker’s willingness to hold the turn and facilitate the speech planning process.
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<tr>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>mhm, (ps) how do you think um a college student can make it easier (.3) to find a job. what can be [ prepared</td>
<td>SW</td>
<td>[easier uh:: (2) first of all</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>SW</td>
<td>it is (.2) depends on (.2) their (.3) uh (1) their (.3) novel-novel</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>novelty?</td>
<td>SW</td>
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<td>NS</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>novel? oh:: novelty (.5) like their preference?</td>
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<td>SW</td>
<td>yea:h .</td>
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<td></td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>oh .</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>SW</td>
<td>preference or:: (.2) their gift.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>mhm</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>SW</td>
<td>not (.2) skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>mmm</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>SW</td>
<td>not usual skill, (.4) okay (.5) but their special?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>like natural [natural gifts .</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>SW</td>
<td>[special yeah yeah.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>oh:: okay so, (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>SW</td>
<td>I mean (.5) yeah nature gifts .</td>
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</table>

In example (10) the intermediate EFL learner, SW was asked on her opinion of how college students could be prepared on finding their jobs. What is notable is the NNS’s use of *yeah* in line 7 and the *oh* produced by the NS in the following line. The conversational use of *yeah* by the NNSs does not necessarily seem to indicate full confirmation to the prior talk. In this case it may be observed as a weak disagreement used by the NNS in a way that is presented in the conversation so that it will not be face-threatening to the interlocutor and simultaneously to prevent from communication breakdowns. However the NS in line 8 has interpreted this prior *yeah* as a confirmation and attempted to make a closure with the receipt token *oh*. It is in line 9 which projects that what the NNS had formerly presented as an confirmation on the surface (*yeah*) was not actually a full confirmation but a pre-dispreferred token to provide a main action of disagreement. The NNS had carefully exhibited a disagreement in a mitigated tone by providing another option with *or*. SW has launched a reformation of the prior utterance with the initiation of *or*. This may be a communicative strategy of the NNS to present disagreements to the prior talk. The construction in this case has been provided by minimal confirmations and was possible through the cohesive marker *or* where the NNS made reformulations to
imply that it is not in the case of the prior talk but the upcoming talk.

The next example shows a case of an advanced EFL learner who attempts to make reformulations through the connective or. The interviewer asked whether there was a good reason to get a divorce or not. After receiving clarifications to the FPP, ES in line 3 first uses um:: to hold the turn. The interlocutor acknowledges that the NNS is willing to continue her turn and provides a continuer with a rising intonation to pass the turn.

(11) 1 NS : is a good reason. why.
2  (1)
3 ES : um:: (.5)
4 NS : mhm,
5 ES : when when they uh when they need to um:: (.3) when they feel they are they didn't (.3) they didn't get congregation each other or (.3) they didn't have (.5) another dream or another object for
6  ➔
7 the other life ,

The advanced EFL learner constructs a lengthy turn from line 5. The first response was that there wasn't enough interaction among each other. And the second answer was supplemented with the cohesive marker or in line 11. What is notable in line 7 is that the NNS completes a sentential TCU (they didn't have (.5) another dream) but extends the talk by positing or at the possible completion point. The cohesive marker or projects that the upcoming talk (another object) is not an additional option to support one's position but is presented simply as a reformulated option of the prior talk (another dream). By supplementing the prior discourse with a similar talk one can minimize the cost of it being rejected.

4.2.3 Exiting a turn

Closing a turn may be more difficult than beginning a turn even for NSs. The burden is heavier for NNSs when they lack proficiency in their foreign language. Closures of a turn may not be a simple matter of just completing a TCU. For the speakers also have to be aware that to signal that they are exiting their turn the
final position of a turn should also cue an ending intonation. When NNSs’ intonation are not appropriately performed they may receive a continuer from their interlocutors and hence the talk may lead to extension rather than bring it into a termination (Park 2004).

(12) 1 IK : diet (.5) um (.2) jogging?
2 NS : re- uh jogging? um: what kind of diet was it.
3 IK : sss:: um (.3) ((clears throat)) I think sss:: um in America?
4 NS : mhm ,
5 IK : it's a (.3) it means (.2) um regular-regular (.3) some food?
6 NS : mhm ,
7 → IK : or:: (.4)
8 NS : mhm ,
9 IK : um (.5) hhhhhh
10 NS : ah:: so just eat less food and go jogging a lot .
11 IK : em yeah.
12 NS : mhm , I see.

In (12) the intermediate EFL learner, IK, was asked if she had ever been on a diet. Although IK has completed a sentential TCU in line 5 she raises the final tone which indicates that she is not fully satisfied or certain with her response. The NS requests for clarification to the prior response. In line 5, the grammatically complete sentential TCU has been produced in an non-ending intonation which elicits a continuer from the interlocutor. It is line 7 where IK produces a turn exiting marker or where she has acknowledged that her interlocutor expects IK to continue with her turn. The sound stretch of or:: with a short pause project that her prior turn was in fact complete and that the speaker does not intend to extend the talk further. The or in line 11 has occurred as a trail-off where the speaker employs the or as a turn-exiting device marking the prior turn to be complete. In the case above it is after the point where the NS perceives the turn to be complete and brings the current topic to a closure.

The next example is a conversation between an advanced EFL learner, HB, and the NS interviewer on punishments for college students' cheating. The initial SPP is provided in the immediate turn with a sentential TCU in line 3. Notice the short pause with the sound stretch of or followed by another short pause in the
same line. The additional turn has been aborted and has remained as a trail-off by the NNS.

The aborted TCU in line 3 has been initiated with a turn-exiting device marker or in line 3 and has been roughly exited with laughers in the final position. However the NS responds with a continuer with a slightly rising tone signaling that the interviewer would pass the turn.

(13) 1  NS :  mm: (.2) okay. um: what punishment do you should be given to
2   students who cheat
3  HB :  um:: (2) sss:: that score of F? (.4) or:: (.8) hhhhhhhh
4  NS :  mhm,
5  HB :  uh (1) sss::: not um (.7) giving a chance to um (.5) chance to uh
6   (.3) attend (.3) that le-that subject.

The sound stretch of or:: along with the intra-turn pauses and final position of laughers mark that the prior turn was complete and that the speaker wishes to exit the turn.

What differs in the use of turn-exiting devices between the intermediate and the advanced EFL learners' data is that in the case of the former, the turn-final or was remained as a trail-off and it has been the interlocutor who has completed the turn. However, in case of the latter, it is the NNS who receives the passed turn and manages to complete the turn by herself. Due to higher L2 proficiency, the advanced EFL learner was able to finish the remaining of the aborted TCU which was in the prior turn left as a trail-off.

4.3.4 Hedging

The final conversational use of or in NNSs' discourse is presented as a hedging device. When observed more carefully the coordinated unit is added to give a cue to the interlocutor of the speaker's intended message. One of the intended message may be to signal that the speaker is uncertain of the prior talk and hence decides to employ a hedging device so that it may not be rejected. A striking difference of the hedging device from all the others is that there exists a tendency for it to be constructed as a coordinating
binominal phrase. The coordinated elements are items that cover a range to imply that the message can be interpreted loosely.

In Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English it is reported that in written data recurrent binominals are connected with or and usually combined with referents that hold opposite meaning. The implication that this proposition holds is that it is true under all circumstances.

In our spoken data the case was also similar as in the example below. In (14) the interviewer asked the intermediate EFL learner, YN, the reason why she thought it was unhealthy for young people to drink. YN accounts for her prior response from line 2. What catches the eye in line 2 is the use of or in the position of the subject.

(14)  
1  NS :  okay, why
2  ➔ YN :  because (.3) it for has and many people drink (.5) he or she
3  wants to (.5) hhhhhhh (.3) how can I (.5) explain
4  NS :  uh: it's unhealthy?
5  YN :  healthy and (.3) for other people?
6  NS :  mm:
7  YN :  that just (.3) um:: (2) enjoy for pst one person.
8  NS :  ah::

First the NNS starts off with a plural noun but in the first person. Then after a slight pause of 0.5 seconds the subject is restarted with a third person singular noun. The uncertainty of the prior talk, fearing that it may be rejected, is then hedged by producing a third person singular subject coordinated with or. The coordination phrase he or she is produced to imply that the speaker would not take full responsibility of the production and that by extending the range the implied proposition may be interpreted as 'regardless of' or 'always true'.

The use of or as a hedging device is similar for the advanced EFL learners too. In (15) HB was asked why the older people didn't understand most of the younger people. HB manages to provide explanations that older people do understand the younger people but it is just a matter of expressions. However the NS keeps sending continuers to the first few turns. This demanding signals adds an extra weight to the NNS where she frequently
produces pauses, repetitions along with false starts in line 3 and 4.

What HB is attempting to express from line 3 is that older people have gone through their twenties, just as the younger people, and so that is why they make prohibitions and exhortations. By coordinating the binominals as *this or that* as indicated in the arrow HB expresses that the older people advises the younger people 'not to do this and not to do that'. The hedging device *or* has connected *this and that* to indicate an abstract ideas of what older people would give as counselors.

(15) 1 HB : in their? (1) in their um:: (.5) twenties?
  2 NS : mhm ,
  3 HB : hhhhhh (.5) but (.3) they think (.2) I think they (.4) want to:
  4 want to-to us uh: to don't like don't like this or that?
  5 NS : mhm ,
  6 HB : because they know they knew they (.2) they know that is
  7 very um: (.3) that isn't good for us
  8 NS : mhm::
  9 HB : so:: they they express their feelings uh or they don't they say
  10 . they don't under-understand us.

What is observable in this data is that even though the NNS had provided quite a few lengthy talks the interviewer continuously passes the turn with *mhm*. It may be that the NS had not quite fully comprehended what the NNS was trying to convey at every moments. Especially when the NNS had produced a rather vague expression as *this or that* it is possible that hearers may not grasp a clear idea of what it meant. It is when HB concludes her idea from line 9 hat the NS changes the receipt token to *mmm* and *yeah* where she projects her understanding.

5. Conclusion and pedagogical implications

This study observed the cohesive marker *or* and the role it serves in NNSs' discourse. The use of the cohesive marker *or* employed in the NNSs' speech were indentified in the following four ways:

First, the cohesive marker *or* most commonly occurred when speakers provided multiple evidence to support their position.
Strengthening the speaker's general position by listing examples were delivered in two ways: extending or narrowing the scope of evidences. Second, NNSs frequently employed them where reformulation was required. In case of the intermediate EFL student the or was used when speakers attempted to reflect disalignments to the prior speaker's turn but in a mitigated way. For advanced EFL students or was observed when speakers provided an alternative to the former talk when they found the prior talk unsatisfactory. Third, or was displayed when speakers did not attempt to continue the talk and used or to manage in turn exiting. They were usually managed in turn-finals with sound stretches. Last of all, or was employed as a hedging device. When speakers are uncertain of their talk they extend the range of the discourse by coordinating elements, especially binominal phrases, to signal that they will not take full responsibility.

The analysis in this study showed that they not only provide important information about the current speaker but as an interactional marker, they also focus on the hearer and how the hearers comprehend the message in the conversation. The findings of this study guide the direction to further consideration on pedagogical implications. What may be the most important issue of all is that the NNSs may be misleadingly instructed in educational settings when instructed that the cohesive marker or serves only as an exclusive or. Raising the educator and the learner's pragmatic awareness through explicit instruction may bring a beneficial effect on its actual use in interactions. In order to raise their awareness providing activities or tasks that demand the use of or in various contexts are essential. Once the NNSs understand the various discourse functions of or they may make more use of it as a communicative strategy to make reformulations, turn-exits or as a hedging device in their interactions.

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Sina Lee
sinallee@naver.com