

# Overuse of the Discourse Filler, “So” in Micro-teaching Talks by Koreans

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The study investigates pre-service Korean English teachers' lecture talks in order to identify what aspects are problematic for them using the discourse marker, “so”. The speech data was collected from mock lectures by university students in Seoul, Korea. The study compared the frequency of “so” as a discourse filler by the Koreans with that by native English speakers in the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English. The results indicate that the Korean participants overuse “so” as a filled pause rather than as a discourse marker. Moreover, the study confirmed that the Korean speakers use “so” in an unnatural way, different from native English speakers. The author suggests that teacher training programs teach differentiation in the subtle meanings and functions of those discourse tools, via exposure to quality input; and that the programs also provide a variety of speech practice with appropriate use of discourse markers at the moment of performance.

**Keywords:** speech errors, EFL, teacher talks, discourse markers, “so”

## I. Introduction

There has been a body of research on speech errors by second or foreign language learners. However, most of the research in second or foreign language acquisition literature is limited in that it provides episodic information on incomplete discrimination and production of specific phonemes by second or foreign language learners (Y-A Lee, S-h Choi, and J-s Joh 2009). With the increasing need for diagnostic criteria on language development and evaluation of speaking performance, there is need for research to investigate learners' syntactic and discourse speech performance. This research provides integrative information on what aspects are problematic for Korean English learners

using the discourse marker or filler, “so”, based on empirical data of their speech performance. As a part of this effort, the current study collects speech data from 11 advanced-level Korean, pre-service English teachers in a micro-teaching format and analyzes their speech errors and other characteristics of their speech performance. The results of the study provide useful intervention targets for pre-service teachers’ English speaking skills, and suggest some linguistic and discourse features that specify a particular level of speaking proficiency. The study will suggest which aspects of speech performance need intensive intervention in teacher education.

## II. Background

As mentioned above, the purpose of this study is essentially to find what are the problematic persistent aspects in EFL, pre-service teachers’ speech in Korea. Related to this topic, there are two fields of special interest in second or foreign language acquisition: One is research on the characteristics of teacher talk, and the other is the use of the discourse marker or filler, “so”.

### 1. Characteristics of Teacher Talks

With regard to teacher talks, Giouroukakis, Honigsfeld, Endres-Nenchin, and Peluso (2008: 11-12) analyzed 15 pre-service teachers’ instructional discourse and identified the teachers’ modifications in terms of different levels of a language management. The summary is as follows:

- Phonological Modifications: exaggerated articulation, more frequent and longer pauses, slower rate of speech, less reduction of vowels and consonant clusters, louder delivery.
- Syntactic Modifications: fewer subordinate clauses, shorter utterances, higher proportion of simple present, higher proportion of well-formed sentences.
- Discourse Modifications: first-person reference, teacher-initiated moves, conversational frames (e.g., *How old are you?*, *Where do you live?*, *How about...?*), more self-repetitions.

- Others: praising or acknowledging, interrupting.

More specifically, regarding the characteristic features of non-native English teachers' speech errors, Y-j Lee, I-d Kim, M-s Han, and S-y Koh (1999) pointed out frequent interruptions in students' speech and lack of interaction with students. S-b Lee (2003) characterized teacher talk with simple and short sentences, 'what' and tag questions, frequent use of cause-result patterns in narration, rare positive feedback on students' achievements and responses, and frequent repetition of words and sentences such as "so" and "What does it sound like?" In addition, H-s Ko and H-w Lim (2010) reported unnatural uses of "so" and modal verbs in the speech spoken by many of the Korean pre-service teachers studying at a university.

These previous studies have contributed to identifying linguistic features or patterns in English by foreign language learners differentiated from those by native English speakers. However, they still provide little information or knowledge about which aspects of errors need intensive intervention or practice in the context of teacher training. The current study focuses such specific problematic aspects in more detail, particularly focusing on the discourse marker or filler, "so", frequently found in speech by Korean pre-service teachers. As well as observing the cases of the unnatural use of "so" in Korean pre-service teachers' speech, the study will compare the frequency and the discourse functions of the discourse marker or filler, "so", in the speech spoken by Korean pre-service teachers with those by native English teachers in Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (henceforth, MICASE).

## 2. Use of the Discourse Marker or Filler, "So"

The other theoretical base of the current study is found in the use of the discourse marker, "so". According to Fraser (1999), "discourse markers" refers to a class of lexical expressions drawn primarily from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbs, and prepositional phrases, signaling a relationship between the interpretation of the segment they introduce, S<sub>2</sub>, and the prior segment, S<sub>1</sub>. They have been of substantial interest to researchers studying language use because of their role in building a coherent discourse and indexing the relationships among the neighboring pieces of information (Bolden 2006).

Schiffrin (1987), for example, argued that “so” has a basic meaning of result and Blakemore (1988) added that “so” marks an inference. Howe (1991) also showed that “so” initiates a topic as a “marker of connection.” Moreover, Johnson (2002) pointed out that “so” prefaces questions and functions as a “topic developer” or “topic sequencer.” Raymond (2004) demonstrated that “so” can even stand alone to prompt the addressee to produce the next relevant action.

One of the notable things discussed in the previous studies is the fact that what are called “discourse fillers” or pause markers such as “um”, “well”, “oh”, and “ahh” are excluded from discourse markers in Fraser (1999). He emphasized that those “discourse fillers” lack the main feature of discourse markers, which imposes a certain range of interpretation on the subsequent segment, S2, given the interpretation of the prior segment, S1. This feature should be noted for the following discussion on the characteristics of the discourse marker, “so”, in the English speech by Korean pre-service teachers.

Regarding the semantic characteristics of discourse markers, these three aspects specified in Fraser (1999: 944-945) are noteworthy:

- Discourse markers relate two discourse segments and do not contribute to the propositional meaning.
- The meaning of a discourse marker is procedural not conceptual. It specifies how the segment it introduces is to be interpreted relative to the prior.
- Every individual discourse marker has a specific, core meaning. For example, the discourse marker, “so” signals that the following segment is to be interpreted as a conclusion which follows from the prior discourse.

The following are example sentences that may help one to understand the characteristics of “so” as a discourse marker.

(1)

Attorney: And how long were you part of the crew?

Witness: Five years.

Attorney: **So**, you were employed by G for roughly five years, right?

(Fraser, 1999: 945)

The attorney above uses the discourse marker, “so”, purposefully to emphasize the fact that the interpretation of the segment after “so” has been authorized as a properly inferred conclusion through the previous segments - that is, the witness’ answer. In summary, Fraser (1999) categorizes the conjunction “so” as a discourse marker, signaling the implication of a conclusive relationship with the prior discourse. According to him, such a function is not shared with pause markers or discourse fillers. In the framework of his theory, therefore, the use of “so” as a pause marker or a discourse filler is ungrammatical and unnatural.

Another interesting characteristic of the discourse marker, “so”, was found in Bolden (2006), Bolden (2009), and Quinn (2011). Different from Fraser (1999), they categorized both “so” and “oh” as discourse markers in the sense that they are deployed for prefacing utterances that launch new conversational issues. Bolden (2006) specified that the only difference between the two discourse markers is that “so” is used with other-attentive topics, whereas “oh” is deployed with self-attentive topics. According to her, “so” carries the implication that the topic is concerned with the affairs of the speakers’ conversational partners when it introduces a new topic. The following is an example of such.

(2)

Briar: N-n-no. She’s just .. she was just calling  
           ’cause I called her earlier. .. because I haven’t called her twice. but..  
           she was never involved in the whole free call thing.

Maya: Oh.

Briar: **So**, congratulations Maya.

Maya: Uh-oh, thanks.

Briar: I, I was I’m wanted to call you right ways, as soon as I heard and  
           then I didn’t have your number, an’ then,

Maya: u, u, w, I have a letter for you sitting in my bag.

Briar: You do?

Maya: Yeah.

(Bolden, 2006: 669-670)

In the example above, Briar at first talks to Maya about who it was on the other line, and Briar moves on to the business of the conversation, congratulating Maya on her new job. Prefacing with “so”

implies that the issue is concerned with the affairs of Maya, the speakers' conversational partner at the moment. Interestingly, such interpretation is confirmed and the implication emphasized by what is said in Briar's third turn.

Bolden (2009) also provided good evidence that the discourse marker "so" indicates the status of the upcoming action as 'emerging from incipiency' rather than being contingent on the immediately preceding talk. Moreover, Quinn (2011) showed that both "so" and "okay" indicate the structure of the lesson and their role in the classroom. According to Quinn (2011), the subtle difference is that "so" is used in more lecture-style classes as a marker of structure, while "okay" is more likely to be used in more interactive classes. These findings mean that "so" shares the function of filled pauses or discourse filler such as "okay" or "oh". From this point of view, shared in Bolden (2006) and (2009), and Quinn (2011), discourse markers include discourse fillers. The following is such an example.

(3)  
 I think she's the most complex without being phony, writer I've ever read.  
 Okay. Um, so Refrain. Uh refrain is usually uh the main part of a song  
 (Quinn, 2011: 40)

The "so" in the first line in (3) above, comes after the instructor analyzed a poem. There is a short pause, then the topic transition is marked by "okay". The new topic, a new poem, is introduced after the discourse filler "so", indicating that there will be shift in the activity.

Regarding frequency, Quinn (2011) showed that the discourse marker "so" is used in the university classroom 0.15 times per 10,000 words on average, as follows:

Table 1. Frequency of the Discourse Marker, "So"

	Native English teachers (N=3)
Corpus size (Words)	36,162
Total frequency of the discourse marker, "So"	152
Total frequency of the discourse marker, "So" per 1,000 words	0.15

At this stage, it should be noted that the current study essentially adopts Fraser's (1999) definition and the features of discourse markers discussed above, but this study also includes the view of Bolden (2006) and (2009), Quinn (2011) on the discourse marker or filler, "so", in the analysis of speech data. Thus, the current study suggests that "so" may also function as a filled pause or discourse filler just as "oh" and "okay" do. There are two reasons for that decision. One reason is that "so" carries its own implication at the level of discourse, just as other discourse markers do - the affairs to be mentioned are concerned with the speakers' conversational partners. The other reason is that most English grammar books do not present such differentiated use between discourse markers and fillers in Korea, and thus that such information is not delivered formally to English learners. Considering that recent research, including Bolden (2006) and (2009), and Quinn (2011), acknowledge such discourse functions shared between the traditional "discourse markers" and "discourse fillers", this approach seems reasonable.<sup>1)</sup> In this context, the study will carefully examine the speech data of Korean and English speakers to determine whether they actually use the discourse marker or filler, "so", in the way that Bolden (2006) and (2009), and Quinn (2011) argued people do. This study will also investigate whether people do not use "so" as a "discourse filler" or pause marker like "um", "well", "oh", or "ahh", as Fraser (1999) asserted. Through an investigation of the inappropriate use of the discourse marker or filler, "so", we suggest which aspects need intensive intervention or practice in the context of teacher training, specifically regarding discourse markers.

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1) The alternative approach may be referred to Bies, Strassel, H-j Lee, Maeda, Kulick, Liu, Harper, and Lease (2006). According to them, discourse fillers refer to space-fillers in discourse that do not alter the prepositional content of the materials into which they are inserted but contribute to building the structure of the discourse. Thus, discourse fillers include filled pauses such as "well", "uh", "oh", "okay" and "uhm"; and discourse markers such as "you know", "so", "I mean", "anyway", and the like. They function as structuring units of spoken language as discourse markers, and sometimes mark boundaries in discourse.

### III. Research Method

#### 1. Data

The EFL speech data by Koreans for the study was collected from 11 pre-service Korean English teachers majoring in English education at a university in Seoul, Korea. All of them major in English education. Nine of them were in the second year and two of them in the third year of their university program. In Korea, the program has a strong reputation for students with highly-advanced English proficiency. Their average level of English proficiency is 106 in IBT TOEFL and 930 in TOEIC. For the research, Korean individual speakers performed 15-to-20-minute micro-teachings for a regular course in their program. The assignment attempts to provide both theoretical discussion and practical experience, from designing to performing one session of teaching in the supposed setting of a secondary school. During the session, the presenters' colleagues played their roles as high school students in a regular English class. Each presentation was videotaped and transcribed verbatim. The size of the corpus is 12,389 words.

For the English speech data by native speakers, the files in MICASE were selected from the corpus on the condition that the speech was produced by native English speakers in the field of social sciences and education, using "so". This decision was made in order to compare the use of "so" in the two corpora in similar contexts. The English corpus is composed of 34,358 words spoken by four native English teachers.

#### 2. Data Analysis

With the transcriptions of the speech by Korean pre-service teachers, two Korean researchers majoring in English Linguistics and one native English speaker read the speech and listened to the voice file if necessary. They judged the appropriateness of each utterance in terms of grammatical correctness, discourse naturalness, and pragmatic appropriateness. The researchers then counted incorrect or inappropriate expressions and wrote down the correct or appropriate expression of each count. After finishing these primary analyses, each researcher double-checked the other researchers' analysis results in terms of the

categorizations of speech errors and correct or appropriate expressions of each error. The discrepancies among these three analysts reached 11 percent of the total errors, most of which were found to be due to disagreement about the appropriateness of the excessive use of the discourse marker or filler, “so”. Through a discussion among the analysts with differing opinions, those error items were successfully re-categorized into two categories, appropriate and inappropriate use. The inappropriate use is referred as “overuse” below, as judged by the native English speaker and two Korean researchers majoring in English Linguistics.

As another way to judge the appropriateness or inappropriateness in terms of the amount of the discourse marker, “so”, the study counted to compare the occurrence of “so” in two corpora and performed a significant test of log-likelihood. Using this comparison, the researchers determined whether or not the Korean participants overused the discourse marker or filler, “so”.

## **IV. Results**

### **1. Overuses of the Discourse Marker and Filler “So”**

Based on the final decisions of the three linguistic experts, including the native English speaker, the study found an excessive frequency of the discourse marker “so”; and these are called “overuses” in English by the Korean pre-service teachers. In the 12,389 words in the lectures, on average, the Korean participants showed 221 instances of repetition of “so”. The native English speakers in MICASE, however, produced only 106 in total. For convenience of comparison, the study presents descriptive statistics and log-likelihood in Table 1 below. It shows the number of overuses of the discourse marker, “so”, per 1000 words by the Korean pre-service teachers video-taped and the native English speakers in the selected files from MICASE.

Table 2. Frequency of “So”

	Korean pre-service teachers (N=11)		Native English teachers (N=4)
Corpus size (Words)	12,389		34,358
Total frequency of the discourse marker, “So”	269		277
Total frequency of the discourse marker, “So” per 1,000 words	21.7		8.1
Log likelihood		+128.22**	
Frequency of the discourse filler, “So”	221		106
Frequency of the discourse filler, “So” per 1,000 words	17.8		3.1
Log likelihood		+240.23**	

As seen above, in terms of percentage and log-likelihood, the Korean pre-service teachers used “so” much more frequently than the native English speakers, both as a discourse filler as well as in total. More specifically, the total frequency of “so” for the Korean participants and the English speakers are 21.7 and 8.1, respectively. Log-likelihood equals +128.22 ( $p < 0.01$ ), which indicates there is a significant difference between the frequency scores of the two corpora. This finding implies that the Korean participants tend to overuse “so”, compared with native English speakers.

As for “so” as a discourse filler, the Korean teachers and the English teachers showed 17.8 and 3.1 per 1,000 words, respectively, with a log likelihood of +240.23 ( $p < 0.01$ ). This also indicates that, though both groups of teachers use “so” as a discourse filler, the Korean participants tend to overuse “so” as a discourse filler, compared to the native English speakers.

Another aspect to note here is the relationship of the frequent use of “so” as a discourse filler with speech fluency. Considering that the speed of English utterance is usually 110 to 120 words per minute in the national listening test for the college entrance examination in Korea, the frequency of 17.8 per 1,000 words for the discourse filler “so” by the Korean participants indicates that they use the discourse filler, “so”, at least once per minute in their speech. This aspect is likely to mark disfluency in communication.

The following example clearly shows how much such repeated use of “so” as a discourse filler damages fluency in speech. (In each transcript of the study, T represents a teacher, S a student, and Ss students in the classroom. In addition, the brackets [A, B] show the results of the analysis. ‘A’ represents the correct expressions, and ‘B’ contains some comments on the error indicated.)

(3)

1 T: It becomes an adjective.

2 It is similar to that thing, okay?

3 Similar to the noun.

4 Okay.

5 So, [ø, unnatural filler]

6 in the textbook there’s a human-like behaviors

7 by non-human-like,

8 right?

9 S: Oh.

10 T: So, [ø, unnatural filler]

if you’re childlike, you are kind of, childlike.

(Excerpted from Korean Participant 1)

(4)

(Looking at the noise made by one of the group in the classroom.)

1 T: What happened to Al Italia?

2 Ss: Hahaha.

3 T: Okay, that’s it, that’s it.

4 Okay.

5 So. [ø, unnatural filler]

6 What do we...why do we have to do this?

7 Because we’re going to play some games today.

(Excerpted from Korean Participant 2)

(5)

1 T: I just wanted to revisit this issue of when a positive

2 portrayal, is negative, and the case here is uh, the

3 study that you had to read by Innocent Fagan, on the

4 Cosby Show.

5 Okay, so

6 when positive portrayals are negative

7 Innocent Fagan the Cosby Show talking about different

8 views, whether the Cosby Show was a good thing, for,

9 portraying a counter-stereo-typical view of

10 African-Americans or whether it was a bad thing.

11 **So**

12 does somebody wanna summarize for me, twenty-five

13 words or less, what the positive view is here? The

14 positive view of the Cosby Show in this article?

15 Remember you will be anonymous... Yeah?

16 S: Show a professional black family in a way that, um, a

17 very white-collar family had been shown before.

18 T: Why is that positive?

19 S: Um, well (T: wha-) counter stereotypical **um** this's

20 the kind of family that'd been mostly limited to white

21 people, um

22 T: **So** what should that do?

23 You know wha-what should that do for African-

24 Americans as a group?

25 S: Well it should change, or contribute to the change of

26 stereotypes by uh, you know letting, letting other,

27 letting out-groups know that there's another side to,

28 (the story)

29 T: Right excellent. The the first argument is that, you

30 know out-groups that is non-African-Americans,

31 watching the Cosby Show, should get the idea that

(Excerpted from English Speaker 1)

32 African-Americans are not all, you know name your

33 portrayal criminals, **um** I'm thinking of Sanford and

34 Son junkmen, **um** blue-collar workers and so on. It's a

35 counter-stereotypical portrayal and should be teaching,

36 white Americans that African-Americans can make it,

37 you know up high as well.

38 **So,**

39 positive view, counter stereotypical, challenge existing

40 views, you know the idea that, if you come to the

41 screen thinking, that all African-Americans are poor

42 or criminals when you watch the Cosby Show, that

43 should tell you, that that's not the case. Also,

44 **you know**, the positive view... includes the idea that,

45 **um**, that

46 this was th- this wasn't a typical portrayal. This was

47 a kind of ground breaking portrayal. it stood out. **Um** it

48 was kind of a It's-about-time argument. it's about

49 time, African-Americans are portrayed positively.

50 **Okay so**

51 there's sort of a relief with it, well thank goodness

52 Finally there’s a good there’s a good por- portrayal.  
 53 What about the negative view? Does anybody wanna,  
 54 bravely, summarize, what the argument was against,  
 55 the Cosby Show? Why could this be bad? Yes?

(Excerpted from English Speaker 1)

The point to note here is the excessive use of “so” by the Korean participants, compared to the native English speakers. The Korean pre-service teachers use “so” without a specified discourse implication. As seen in the brackets [A, B] in lines 5 and 10 of (3) and line 5 of (4), the Korean teachers don’t use “so” in order to index the relationships among the neighboring pieces of information, as native English teachers do in (5). The Korean participants use “so” without any specified meaning in the context. Thus, the researchers of the study agreed that “so” in lines 5 and 10 of (3) and line 5 of (4) should be deleted to make the speech sound more natural in each context. These findings imply that the Korean pre-service teachers need to refrain from the unnatural use of “so”, which otherwise marks non-fluent speech.

## 2. Characteristics of the Overuse of the Discourse Filler, “So”

The study also analyzed the unnaturalness or inappropriateness of the discourse marker and filler, “so”. Table 2 below shows the average number of times the discourse marker, “so”, was overused by the Korean pre-service teachers video-taped in the study.

Table 3. Distribution of “So” Overused by Korean Pre-service Teachers (N=11)

Items	Amount
Corpus size (words)	12,389.0
Mean number of words (A)	1,126.3
Mean number of “So” (B)	24.5
Mean percentage of “So” per 1,000 words (% of B/A)	22
Mean number of “So” overused (C)	21.5
Mean percentage of “So” overused per 1,000 words (% of C/A)	19

As seen above, 22 uses of “so” were produced per 1,000 words by

the Korean participants on average; and, 19 times, “so” was judged overused on average, implying that more than 86.4% of the uses of the word “so” by the Korean participants belong to overuse on average. In other words, their use of the discourse filler, “so” does not sound either natural or appropriate in the context given.

Such a tendency to overuse “so” by the Korean participants is obvious, when (3) and (4) by the Korean pre-service teachers is compared with (5) by the native English teacher above. The Korean participants uniquely choose the word “so” more frequently than the discourse fillers, “um” and “uh”, typically preferred by native English speakers. This finding implies that the Korean speakers need to learn the specified meaning of the discourse marker, “so”, and practice to use it only in the proper context.

Note that the native English teacher in MICASE in the example (5) above, uses the word, “so” only in lines 5, 11, 22, 38, and 50 of (5) and that he employs “um” as a discourse filler rather than “so” in lines 33, 34, and 45, “uh” in line 2, and “you know” in line 44. Here, the word “so” is not used as a discourse filler, different from the cases in lines 5 and 10 of (3) and line 5 of (4). The analysis of the speech data from MICASE showed that the English teachers used the discourse marker, “so”, with proper implications relevant to the information previously mentioned. “So”, in line 11 of (5), for example, delivers an implication that what he is going to talk more about is based on the topic previously mentioned - “whether the *Cosby Show* was a good thing for portraying a counter-stereotypical view ... or a bad thing.”

A subsequent question might rise, then: why does such frequent use of the discourse maker, “so”, occur in the Korean participants’ speech? To answer this question, the study examined the two representative types of examples of unnatural use, that is, overuse of “so” in detail, and in terms of the contexts where it occurred and the functions that it performed.

#### (1) “So” as a Filled Pause

As seen in the previous research, “so” in native English speakers’ speech indexes the relationships among the neighboring information (Bolden 2006) or functions as a “topic transition” (Quinn, 2011) or

“topic developer” (Johnson 2002, Raymond 2004). However, “so” in the Korean participants’ speech in the current study does not seem to build such a coherence or deliver any relevant information to the previous utterance. On average, 86.4 percent of the overuses were commented upon by the researchers, and it was suggested that they be deleted or replaced with “um”, “uh”, or “well” in the contexts given. “So” in lines 5, 10, and 15 above belong to such examples. The excerpt below shows more of such examples.

(6)

1 T: Actually, there are four people in the picture. Yes?

2 in the middle, uh, what are these words?

3 Can you read?

4 All...?

5 Alibaba, something Forty something.

6 **So**, presently

[*um, you might guess*, unnatural filler]

7 that's not really English.

8 **So** we can just move on.

[*at this point*, unnatural filler]

9 Yeah.

10 **So**, this is just Alibaba and Forty Thieves.

[*um, well*, unnatural filler]

11 I think the language is different from English.

(Excerpted from Korean Participant 3)

The entire speech represents one turn by the Korean speaker. The speaker uses “so” as a discourse filler rather than as a discourse marker with proper discourse implication or reference to the previous utterance. The corresponding proper expressions of “so” in line 6 and 10 of (6) would be “um, you might guess”, and “well”, respectively.

Such findings support Schober and Bloom’s (2004) perspective that speech disfluency is reflected in linguistic cues such as “um”, “uh”, and “mm” and that these cues are actually good indicators of the need for clarification in the communication of the moment. The Korean teachers in the current study use the word “so” in the same way as a filled pause or a discourse filler, which indicates where clarification is necessary in the communication. This function as a simple discourse filler should be differentiated from the unique implication of “so” as a

discourse marker to specify the relevance of the following information to the previous one.

(2) “So” from “Pragmatic Transfer”

The second type of “so” constitutes 13.6 percent of unnatural use. Interestingly, different from the previous type of “so” as a discourse filler, this type of “so” has an implication similar to that of the corresponding expression, “kulenikka” in Korean.<sup>2)</sup> For example, in line 8 of (6), “so” implies that the Korean teacher take the next action because of the situation described in the previous utterance. It can be paraphrased as “(thus,) at this point”, which corresponds to “kulayse”, or “kulenikka” in Korean. This tendency was also found in other participants. The excerpt below is from one of them.

(7)

1 T: You can also make, you can also use some graphic

2 organizers, to summarize.

3 Okay.

4 **So**, now, [Let's move on to the next, unnatural filler]

5 and well,

6 and I believe,

7 you at least you have a kind of experience

8 of note taking in your in Korean.

9 Right?

10 **So**, [ø, unnatural filler]

11 you can use your experience while you're doing it.

12 And,

13 **so**, [ø, unnatural filler]

14 first, you should sum up the passage

15 by note taking and compare your note taking with your

16 friend.

17 Okay? It's a kind of group work.

18 **So** [ø, unnatural filler]

19 together make a one sum up. Okay? Start.

(Excerpted from Korean Participant 4)

2) Se, S-k (1999) discuss the similarity in discourse functions between “so” in English and “kulenikka” in Korean. Refer to Cha, Y-j (2000) for more in details of discourse markers relevant to “so” such as “kelayse”, “kulenikka”, “kulemulo”, and “kulem”.

While “so” in lines 4 and 13 of (7) functions as a filled pause, the one in line 10 of (7) implies a consequence. With “so”, the teacher in line 10 of (7) points out that his students have some experiences to share with each other, and consequently the students may use the experience for their own writing in Korean, which the teacher is going to ask them to do. Such consequential meaning is the core of “kulenikka (meaning, “thus” or “therefore”)” in Korean.

This aspect reminds one of “pragmatic transfer” in Kasper (1992) and Quan and Zheng (2012), which refers to the influence exerted by learners’ pragmatic knowledge of other than the second language on second language learning. The Korean teachers in the current study seem to overgeneralize their pragmatic knowledge of “kulenikka” in Korean and inappropriately apply its function as a discourse marker to the use of “so” in lines 8 of (6) and 10 of (7).

To return the question, Why does excessive use of the discourse marker, “so”, occur in the Korean participants’ speech? there are two answers, depending on the types of “so” used: First, the filled pause, “so”, tends to be used by the Korean participants instead of “um”, or “uh” employed by native English speakers. The Korean participants seem to lack the ability to differentiate between these discourse fillers. Second, the discourse marker, “so”, tends to be used by the Korean participants because they are transferring the discourse or pragmatic implication of consequential meaning from “kulatorye” or “kulenikka” in Korean.

## **V. Discussion**

So far, the study examined the overuse and misuse of “so” as a filled pause and as a discourse marker by the Korean pre-service teachers and the native English teachers in classroom contexts. It is obvious that the Korean pre-service teachers participating in the study overuse “so” in their speech, without distinguishing the functional difference between filled pauses and discourse markers. As a result, their speech does not flow smoothly, but is marked by repetitions of a meaningless or inappropriate “so”.

These findings can be discussed from several different perspectives. First, though limited until it is confirmed by further research with bi-

lingual adults in comparable contexts or tasks with different levels of stress or work intensity, it is most likely that the overuse of discourse fillers found in the current study is a reflection of disfluency. Second, Fraser's (1999) strict definition of discourse markers and discourse fillers does not seem to be convincing. The findings above lead to the conclusion that it is more desirable that discourse fillers refer to space-fillers in discourse that do not alter the prepositional content of the materials into which they are inserted, but that contribute to the building of a coherent discourse structure. In this framework, Korean pre-service teachers seem to have a strong tendency to use the discourse marker, "so", to fill their long pauses. In their understanding, discourse fillers include discourse markers such as "you know", "so", "I mean", "anyway", and the like; as well as filled pauses such as "well", "uh", and "um". Third, the research results indicate that the characteristics of learners' psycholinguistic factors need to be considered in order to provide effective intervention, particularly for advanced learners of English. Note that the research found overuse of filled pauses by the Korean learners of English; and that this seems to result from "pragmatic transfer" in the learning system, similar to Quan and Zheng (2012). Lack of knowledge of the detailed functions of filled pauses and discourse markers results in pragmatic transfer in second language learning. Finally, in order to generalize these conclusions, further studies need to be done, particularly with a larger speech data as well as in more various contexts of teaching.

The study has contributed to the provision of empirical data of specific critical errors of bilingual adult speech in classroom instruction with a significant implications. Regarding the improvement of teacher training programs, the study suggests that it is necessary to teach the accurate meanings and detailed functions of discourse markers such as "so" and "okay". In order to reduce the inappropriate use of discourse markers by Korean learners at the advanced level of acquisition, the curriculum has to provide knowledge of how a variety of discourse markers work for a specific purpose in a context. At the same time, Korean learners need to learn the distinctive usage of filled pauses with "um", "uh", or "well". Otherwise, their unnatural speech, with these two discourse tools, would persist and delay the acquisition of fluent speech. As a way to provide intensive intervention, this study suggests that the curriculum strengthen repeated ex-

posure to and rehearsal of those discourse tools via quality input in textbooks and conversational interactions between teachers and learners.

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