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Analysis of the Discourse Between a Tutor and a Second Language Learner: A Joint Decoding Task

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B.S., St. Cloud State University, 1975

Starred Paper

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INTRODUCTION

Tutors have a unique opportunity to help English-as-a Second Language (ESL) students develop their communicative competence. Mary Ann Christison and Karl Krahnke found that ESL students rated social contact as the largest contributor to language development outside the classroom, but also the area most lacking (69). Tutoring may be one way to provide social contact, while at the same time providing help with language, cultural, and academic difficulties ESL students may be facing. Potential ESL tutors may be uncertain, however, about the role they are supposed to play in the tutoring situation.

How does ESL tutoring differ from "mainstream" tutoring? One obvious aspect is in language difficulties. ESL students often have more difficulty than native-speaking students with spoken directions, assignments, and lectures. In addition, ESL students may be reluctant to ask questions because of the fear of making mistakes. One ESL student, commenting on the difference between writing and speaking, indicates some of the fears ESL students may have:

> Is writing more difficult than speaking? I'm skeptical about it. Because, the advantages of speaking, which are pointed in our textbook, are, for me, not meritorious--some of them . . . vice versa. Examples are as follows:
>
> X audience present--so I might be shy
> X immediate feedback--I'm scared
> X the listeners heard the words spoken, and

> the tone, volume, pitch, speed recognize the words and meanings--could it be possible even if the speaker's language is very poor?
> X subjects will fit the person and the situation (so will the words)--I'm not sure. (Spack and Sadow 583)

The tutoring situation, then, may provide an opportunity for ESL students to get to know someone well enough to feel comfortable asking questions about assignments and procedures, as well as cultural and language difficulties, in a non-threatening environment. In order for ESL students to address such topics as cultural and language differences, however, they must feel that the tutor is open to discussing subjects that may be somewhat discomfitting or difficult for both of them. Tutors may have to make extra efforts to indicate an openness to topics for discussion when tutoring ESL students.

Tutors, ESL or otherwise, should be good listeners. They should allow students time to speak. Since tutors are often gregarious people who like to help others, Muriel Harris cautions them that they may need to "learn when and how to shut up, that is, to figure out when to insert pauses or moments of silence into the tutorial" (63). This skill, often awkward for eager tutors, is, as the tutoring session which follows will illustrate, most helpful in giving the ESL student time to think about the topic and formulate questions.

One force working against the native English speaker desiring to insert pauses or gaps in the tutoring session is our culture. In the United States, according to Margaret McLaughlin, "a speaker will generally recommence talking if a partner doesn't respond, or otherwise take a turn, within three seconds" (Qtd. by Burkhalter). A speaker whose culture does not demand such quick responses, or who does not have the facility for quick response, may not be able to retain her turn to speak. Even worse, observes Amy Burkhalter, other speakers may conclude that she has not understood or that she is stupid. Tutors need to be sensitive to the fact that ESL students may need more time than native speakers to formulate responses, and may not have learned to use filler responses, such as "ahh" or "oh," or extra-linguistic gestures such as looking up, to retain their turns. Filler responses, furthermore, can be interpreted in various ways, even among native speakers, and are not a reliable measure of understanding or attention.

ESL students need practice in formulating whole utterances. Tutors should be willing to wait for them to complete their thoughts, even if it means violating the cultural imperative not to allow gaps of more than three seconds. Tutors should be especially careful not to complete utterances for ESL students unless the students

indicate the desire for them to do so.

Being good listeners includes more than allowing students to talk. It includes encouraging them to talk. A useful tutoring technique suggested by Harris (and others) is to play dumb (64). Questions, in other words, ought to indicate a real (or dramatized) search for an answer, not a desire to have students indicate if they know what tutors already know. Asking "Do you understand this?" is not a reliable way to check for comprehension. Native speakers may not answer truthfully for a variety of reasons, social as well as factual; ESL speakers probably have even more reluctance to admit that they did not understand what the speaker has been trying to tell them. As a check for comprehension, the yes/no question usually fails. It fails in the taped session in this paper. The yes/no question probably functions more as a regulator of the process of turn-taking (Is it all right if I go on?) than as a request for information.

Just what role, then, should the tutor play in tutoring ESL students? Thomas Reigstad and Donald McAndrew see three options for tutoring situations: student-centered, teacher-centered, and collaborative, determined by who directs the session and decides what topics are to be covered. In the collaborative option, "tutor and student share equally in the conversation, in the problem solving, and in the decision making. The tutor, however, initiates

the move to a new phase and usually identifies the problem areas on which to focus" (29). Since many ESL students may not feel comfortable with a student-centered tutoring style because of the demands it would put on them to do most of the talking, I suggest that the collaborative method may be the most appropriate. ESL students themselves may be more familiar with a teacher-centered style, but this style allows them fewer opportunities to practice speaking English, not to mention fewer possibilities for a closer relationship with the tutor.

Tutors need not be experts in the subject area. Indeed, according to Harris, tutors perceived as peers, rather than experts, have more chance of success because they are "less threatening" (64). ESL students, however, especially if they are new to collaborative tutoring, may expect tutors to maintain social distance, because of the perceived social disparity between native speakers and ESL students, because of cultural backgrounds which place teachers and tutors on a higher social plane, or because of prior experiences. Working with ESL speakers, therefore, tutors may have to "make special efforts" to be seen as equals, Emily Meyer and Louise Smith point out (210). Those tutors who have studied a foreign language or have had experiences in other cultures may be more sensitive to the ESL students' feelings. They may also recognize the challenges presented by the "peculiarities" (204) of

English.

The "peculiarities" of English include not only the linguistic variables that are most obvious, but also the environment of the particular spoken or written form. Native speakers who have never studied a foreign language may be unaware of the complexity involved in interpreting a particular written or spoken form because they infer much of the situational information without being conscious of the process. Marianne Celce-Murcia contends that all of the following factors, and there may be more, may need to be considered in order to understand or appropriately produce a particular form. Tutors should familiarize themselves with this list in order to be sensitive to the factors that may interfere with communication in the tutoring conference or in the ESL student's coursework:

> Linguistic: What are the phonological, syntactic, and lexical environments of the individual terms, phrases, and clauses?
> Semantic: Is the statement about a temporary or permanent situation? Is the statement planned or unplanned? Does it use an emphatic form? Is it hypothetical or real?
> Does the potential for action exist?
> Social: What is the relationship between the speaker and listener? What degree of politeness or deference is required or in evidence? What are the educational levels of the speaker and the listener? Their sexes? Their ages?
> Register: Is this a formal, semi-formal, informal, or familiar situation?
> Mode: What are the characteristics of this particular form of discourse? Is it transitory, as in speech, or more permanent, as in writing?
> Preparation: Is this a planned discourse, such as a formal speech, or an unplanned event, such as spontaneous speech? (Celce-Murcia 45)

For ESL students, the process of interpreting situational factors in both writing and speaking is complicated by different interpretations of the same factors in their first culture and within the second (English) culture. In other words, cues may be interpreted differently by different people and in different situations. Added to problems with phonology, morphology, and syntax, these considerations make communication a complicated process indeed. Students must learn not only how to interpret spoken and written messages, but also how to formulate appropriate spoken and written responses.

In the face of this complexity, what can a tutor do to help ESL students? Tutors can help ESL students learn strategies for finding out what they may need to know. Before they can teach the strategies that may be most effective, however, they must find out what those strategies are. Anita Wenden investigated the strategies used by a second language student who chose to foster his competencies in the target language, in this case Spanish, by living among native speakers without the aid of a teacher. From interviews with the student, Wenden identified four types of strategies and the purposes for which they were used by the student. Some of these strategies are also useful to tutors trying to communicate with ESL students:

1. Cognitive strategies to gain understanding, including:
   a. focusing attention on the specific variable giving the student trouble,
   b. comprehending input through clarification, verification, or identifying patterns.
   c. increasing retention using lists and other devices, and
   d. developing an ability to use and recall.
2. Communication strategies, including making up new words to approximate an unknown word, drawing pictures, translating, and describing an unknown term, in order to communicate with native speakers.
3. Global practice strategies to increase use of and exposure to the target language, including speaking with neighbors and watching TV.
4. Metacognitive strategies, to monitor learning, including planning, monitoring, and checking outcomes. (4-5)

Tutors can model some of these strategies by using them in the tutoring session, as well as teaching the ESL students to use them in other situations. By learning strategies, according to Wenden, students will be encouraged to develop autonomy, thus lessoning their dependence on the tutor, while at the same time increasing their self-esteem. Also, students may learn to recognize and analyze their own failures (6). These goals are, of course, common to all tutoring situations, as Harris points out: "students need help in learning how to overcome problems, and they need to be aware that what they've learned can be generalized to future situations" (63).

ESL students, of course, already use some strategies, but may not recognize them or use them often enough. Particular strategies, such as a request for clarification or repetition, may not be appropriate to particular

situations, such as a classroom lecture, or may not seem appropriate to the student who feels that she is the only one experiencing a problem. Teachers in subject matter courses are aiming their speech at a perceived group of educated native speakers and may not check for comprehension or have the time to explain what, to the ESL student, are confusing constructions or unfamiliar terms.

Tutors have the opportunity that teachers do not, to explain and clarify confusing forms and concepts. In order for this to happen, tutors must be sensitive to students' attempts to formulate questions and allow time for them to do so. The techniques of discourse analysis may help tutors themselves become aware of the ways in which they tend to control turn-taking and direct the session, sometimes to the detriment of the collaborative atmosphere. In the following transcript, the tutor's teacher-centered style sometimes interfered with the ESL student's attempts to formulate questions and limited the number of opportunities for the ESL student to form longer utterances.

THE METHOD

The Task

One cognitive strategy for preserving classroom lectures is to take notes. Another is to tape the lecture. Taping provides a more permanent record of the lecture, one

that can be started and stopped at any point, "focusing attention on the specific variable giving the student trouble" (Wenden 4). In an effort to find out how valuable taping is to ESL students, while at the same time focussing on the strategies students and tutors would use to decode tapes, an ESL Listening class at St. Cloud State University was given the following assignment in the fall of 1986:

1. audio taping four academic classes;
2. listening to the tapes with a native speaker;
3. recording a conversation with the native speaker while together trying to understand and transcribe the academic tapes;
4. using both oral and written strategies;
5. turning in all notes taken in the academic class while making the lecture tape and all notes or materials used in the tutoring session;
6. summarizing the content of the academic lecture; and
7. evaluating the entire listening homework process. (Leone)

In this paper, I will analyze a portion of one of the tutoring session tapes. My purpose in analyzing the discourse between the native speaker and the ESL student is to point out the strategies they use to negotiate understanding, where they fail and why.

The Tutor and the ESL Student

The native-speaking tutor, whom I shall call Emily, was an undergraduate student enrolled in an upper-division education methods class at SCSU. Her one-hour session with the ESL student was an assignment for her methods class. Prior to the tutoring session, the methods class discussed

the tutoring assignment briefly, but had no other training as tutors. The ESL student, whom I shall call Yoko, was a graduate of a Japanese university, a foreign student here for one year as an undergraduate. Also an education major, she planned to teach English upon her return to Japan.

The Situation

The lecture tape they attempted to transcribe was a one-hour geography lecture. Emily had not attended the lecture, nor was she enrolled in the geography class. With the limited training she had in tutoring techniques, she may have seen the task before her as one of overwhelming proportions. Emily seemed to perceive semantics as the major barriers to Yoko's understanding of the lecture and tutored accordingly. Analysis of the tape reveals, however, that the syntax and word order used by the lecturer, along with phonetic difficulties, gave Yoko more problems than semantics. In her evaluation of the assignment, Yoko indicated that she had begun to transcribe the tape before meeting with Emily, a cognitive strategy enabling her to locate trouble spots on the tape and save time when she met with the tutor. Yoko had also taken notes during the lecture, another cognitive strategy built into the assignment.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The principle strategies to elicit clarification or confirmation used by Yoko are:

1. repetition of a previously stated term with a questioning intonation . . . . . 7 times
2. restatement or attempting to restate preceding concepts in her own words or similar words . . . . . 5 times
3. metacommunication: identifying particular places in the lecture that are confusing . . . . . 3 times

Emily's principle strategies to elicit clarification or confirmation are:

1. request for response: yes/no questions . . . . . 8 times
2. metacommunication: questions or responses about particular places in the lecture, or about Yoko's questions . . . . . 6 times
3. request for additional information . . . 2 times

Number of times each successfully initiates a topic:

Yoko . . . . . 4 times

Emily . . . . . 5 times

Approximate number of words spoken by each (not including some five to ten that were spoken by Yoko but were

unintelligible):

Yoko 136

Emily. 689

Even though Emily's teacher-centered tutoring style does not allow Yoko many opportunities to initiate topics, Yoko does manage to initiate almost as many as Emily. Yoko's persistent questioning is effective, once Emily assures herself that she has covered a topic fully. A glance at the number of words spoken by each participant reveals that the tutoring session is, however, dominated by Emily, who does not need practice in formulating concepts in English.

DATA AND ANALYSIS

In transcribing the tape of their session together, I have indicated the operation of the lecture tape in brackets. Words spoken with emphasis, usually in a louder tone of voice, are underlined. Cut-offs, when a speaker interrupts herself or the other speaker, are shown by dashes, and simultaneous utterances are shown on the same line. Ellipses indicate pauses in speech.

EMILY	YOKO
[They begin playing the tape.]	
You understand all that? (laugh)	
	No.
Anytime you want to turn it off, go ahead and we'll	

discuss it.

Umm.

[Yoko stops the tape.]

O.K.

"Social Darwinism?"

Darwinism.
Do you know what Darwinism is?

Hmmm.

Evolution?

Hmmm.

O.K. The idea that man came from animals -- that was the beginning of the Darwin . . theory.

Oh.

O.K. So. What he's saying--he was jus-- Rewind just a little bit.

[They play the tape.]

Initially, Emily seems to see her task as one of teaching those terms which she anticipates as being troublesome to Yoko: "Darwinism" and "Evolution." She may also anticipate some trouble for herself, since she is not a geography major. Her directive, "Anytime you want to turn it off, go ahead and we'll discuss it," is a metacognitive strategy, an attempt to order the communicative process, and possibly to elicit further information as to just what role she is to play here, as if she were saying, "Just tell me what you want to know, and I'll explain it to you." As we shall see, this directive is ineffective, leaving Emily no choice, in a teacher-centered session, but to take control.

Emily proceeds with a tentative definition of Darwinism. Still not perceiving any definite response, although there may have been visual responses not recorded, Emily suggests that they rewind the tape, perhaps to focus on specific areas of confusion to Yoko. We rejoin them after they have listened to that portion of the tape again.

EMILY	YOKO
[One of them stops the tape.]	
	"Under, . . under . . . evolution?"
Evolution? You know what evolution is?--Yeah.	
	I don't . . I can't hear the word before "evolution."
O.K. . . . I can't either.	
[They rewind and play the tape again: "Geology in the 1800's. . uh . . underwent an evolution . . ."]	
Underwent . . .	
	Underwent?
Underwent an evolution. Underwent . . <u>un</u>--Yeah	
	Ummm Underwent.
It--It means that it jus . . had a process of changing.	Umm
O.K.	Ummm

Emily's strategy of seeking focus by reviewing the tape seems to have been successful in pinpointing the troublesome portion. Yoko specifies the location of the word that is unintelligible to her: "I can't hear the word before 'evolution.'" This metalinguistic statement is very helpful in clarifying the location of the problem. But the

nature of the problem, the confusing surface syntax in "underwent an evolution," is not addressed by Emily in her explanation. At this point, it would have been helpful if she had asked for clarification of the problem. Instead, she rephrases the syntax into "It had a process of changing" without explaining the linguistic transformation whereby "went through a process" becomes "underwent a process." Emily's insight into the meaning of deep structure of the syntax serves her well, but is not conscious enough for her to grasp the difficulties that the surface structure is giving Yoko. They continue:

EMILY	YOKO
[They replay a short portion of the tape.]	
	"Environmental Darwin . ."?
Darwin? Myself . . . I'm not really sure. Why don't you write that down now and you can ask the teacher maybe to explain a little bit more.	
	(unintelligible) ?
Environmental Determinism? O.K. Let's see if we can figure it out.	
[They play the next short part of the tape.]	

A confusion in terms, caused perhaps by the phonological similarity between "Darwin" and "Determine," detours the speakers' progress. Rather than say anything more about a subject about which she is not sure, Darwin, Emily wisely refers Yoko to the instructor, with an equally

wise suggestion to write the question down, so that Yoko will not forget it. Yoko repeats her request for clarification with (apparently) the term she originally intended, "Determinism." (Here she may be pointing to her notes; it is not clear from the tape.) Aware that this concept is explained in the tape, but still unclear as to the definition of the term, Emily suggests that they look for the meaning together, an example of real or dramatized "playing dumb" that Harris finds effective (64). However, instead of allowing Yoko to explain the concept in her own words, thus developing an abililty to use and recall the term, Emily does it for her in the next excerpt:

EMILY	YOKO
O.K. Turn it off.	
[They stop the tape.]	
What it means is the environment . . . everything around you . . . was what made you do certain things . . . determined how you acted . . .	Oh Ohhh
That's Environmental Determinism . . .	Ummm
So it's not so much that you have a lot of choices . . .	Ummm
It's everything that's around you: your family, social structure . . . everything. See what I mean?	Umm Ummm
So that's what determines how you react to things.	Umm

Ummmmm . . . things around you, right?

Umhmm.
Umhmm. umhmm.

Affect how person you . . .

Umhmm.
That affect a person's--
how they think, how they feel, things that they do rather than having free choice-- . . .
choice to make up your own des--to make your own decisions . . .
O.K.

[They play the tape forward.]

Faced with the task of defining "Determinism" without using the term "determine" and of defining "Environmentalism" without using the term "environment," Emily must interrupt her syntax and restart in order to manipulate simpler terms into her explanations: "environment" becomes "everything around you;" "determined" (unstated) becomes "made you do certain things." Yoko's filler replies, "Umm" and "Oh," may indicate understanding, but they may also be attempts to initiate requests for restatement or for more specific information. Emily does not give Yoko enough time to formulate a statement of her own.

Emily seems determined to finish her explanation of the implications of Determinism, assuming again that semantics are confusing Yoko. Perhaps Emily is anxious that if not allowed to finish, she will lose her train of thought: "So it's not so much that you have a lot of

choices . . . It's everything that's around you: your family, social structure . . . everything. See what I mean?" At this point Yoko can hardly deny the effectiveness of the explanation without risking a threat to the congeniality of the social situation.

Receiving no definite response, Emily again concludes, "So that's what determines how you react to things," expecting, probably, that Yoko will now see the relationship between "Determinism" and "determines," but, in effect, asking Yoko to agree to Emily's determination to get on with the tape.

Seizing the opportunity to initiate a request, and maybe not willing to risk losing it by formulating a long question, Yoko repeats Emily's "things around you," retaining the initiative with "right?" This yes/no question gives her time to formulate a longer request while Emily answers. Yoko goes on with "affect how person," but is cut off by Emily's finishing Yoko's sentence for her. The temptation to do this to ESL students, fed by our desire to hurry things along, is powerful. Tutors should try to avoid finishing sentences for ESL students, indeed for all students who need practice in formulating their own utterances.

As Emily and Yoko resume playing the tape, we are not really sure if Yoko has grasped the concept of environmental determinism or not.

EMILY	YOKO
[They stop the tape.]	
O.K. Now what they're saying was . . .	
if the environment was the only thing . . . that was responsible . . . for the	Umhmmm
way people act . . .	Umhmm
then if you looked all around the world, people	Umhmmm
should act kind of the same	Umm
. . . but that's not true . . . different cultures do things differently. Different people in different countries do things	
differently.	Hmm.
So what they're saying is that environmental determinism was kind of . . . ah . . . pulled back--	Umm
Y'know . . . was . . .um--	Umhmm
they went away from that . . . they looked into other things that might have caused . . .	
things to happen. People to--	Um

Here they go on to a new portion of the lecture, one that discusses the weaknesses of Environmental Determinism. Emily, faced with a wealth of complexities, launches into a long monologue which enables her to reconstruct and organize the ideas presented on the tape, but does not allow time for Yoko to interject. Perhaps Emily is trying to speed up the process. Perhaps Yoko understands all of the lecture so far. From her filler responses, however, we only know that she is indicating that she is paying attention. She may not really be following the process of negotiating meaning since she makes no response when Emily

indicates that she is searching for a word: " . . . pulled back --y'know . . . was . . . um--"; Yoko only repeats her "Umhmm" as before.

In her evaluation of the assignment, Yoko stated that she felt that the education student (Emily) "didn't like this work," and that she (Yoko) was more successful working on this tape with a tutor from the ESL tutoring center. We may wonder what gave Yoko the impression that Emily didn't enjoy this work. Perhaps it was Emily's concern with moving things along, or her tendency to persevere in long explanations without giving Yoko a chance to interrupt.

We may read Yoko's filler responses here as a form of polite, but unresponsive, attention, but such a reading is our own interpretation. Discourse analysts, however, would probably conclude that Emily is determining the turn-taking rules for both of them. The session continues:

EMILY	YOKO
	Thing . . thing in environment . . .
Umhmmm	
	um . . influence . . . people . . . differently?
Umhmm Exactly.	
	. . . another (unintelligible) ?
Umhmm So. The myth in environmental determinism means that if the environment is the same, the people should act the same, right?	
	(unintelligible)

So that's what they're saying that this . . . this really didn't prove to be true.

Ummmmm . . . I . . . I think that the more thing environment is . . . ah . . .

Similar . . . the thing
similar . . . environment

Even in similar environments people . . . did things differently.

Umm

Different cultures would do things . . . differently.

Ah.

Even though the environment around them is basically the same.

Ah . . . O.K.

O.K.?

[They play the tape forward.]

Here Yoko regains some control of the discourse. Again she begins by repeating a phrase used by Emily: "thing(s) in (the) environment." Undetoured by Emily's responses, which confirm that Yoko is correct so far, Yoko takes two turns to formulate a restatement/request for confirmation: "Things in (the) environment influence people differently?" Emily's response is clear: "Exactly." Emily seems more relaxed here, allowing Yoko the time to ask two more questions (unintelligible) and begin a possible summation: "I think that the more thing(s) environment is . . ." Emily fills in the needed word, possibly from Yoko's written notes, since she is so certain that it is the correct one. Yoko may have needed

help in pronouncing it. This portion of their session together seems to be more collaborative, with both of them contributing to the negotiation of meaning, and the initiation of topics being done by Yoko.

Emily then again summarizes for Yoko, rephrasing some of Yoko's syntax: "Different cultures would do things . . . differently," but this time, in contrast to earlier attempts at mutual summarization, Yoko seems to indicate understanding: "Ah . . . O.K." The technique of rephrasing the ESL student's reply instead of directly correcting it is a good tutoring strategy. Joan Schwartz sees this kind of correction as being closer to the way that two speakers of equal skill would usually correct each other and less disturbing to the flow of discourse (151). ESL students often state that they would rather be corrected by listeners than allowed to go on making the same mistakes, but correction must be done carefully, so as not to interrupt the normal flow of discourse.

EMILY	YOKO
[The tape is playing. Yoko stops it in mid-term: "Possib-"]	
Just a minute--finish it-- finish that thought.	
[They repeat the portion of the tape through "Possibilism."]	
O.K. Now what they're sayin' is . . . um . . . in answer to the environmental determin-- a	

different way to look at it came from the French . . .

Um

an' it was called Poss-i-bil-ism [looking at notes?]

Mm

An' that means that the environment offers different poss-i-bil-ities.

Different choices.

Differen . . .

People could make choices now . . . but the environment around you is important.

Umhmm--

You understand environment, don't you?

Envo--environment?

Environment. O.K.

That you understand.

. . . Pardon?

D'you understand what the word "environment" means?

Yes, . . .

O.K. That's good.

They go on in the lecture to the introduction of the concept of "Possibilism." Yoko stops the tape, possibly at the point where she misunderstood the phrase "came the answer" (see below), but Emily directs her to play it through to the end of the thought: "Just a minute--finish it--finish that thought." The two speakers have conflicting desires at this point. Yoko may want to pinpoint a trouble spot, but Emily does not recognize this because of her own desire to hear the lecturer finish his thought so she can make sense of the lecture. The tutoring process may have been enhanced if Emily had heard the

lecture. In this situation, however, such background would probably have made no difference, since Emily is concerned with her own need for closure.

Here again, then, Yoko must wait for Emily to formulate a summary of this part of the lecture tape before she will allow Yoko to request clarification of particular points. Such suspensions of need are probably unavoidable in discourse, demanding that speakers be patient and either have a good memory or jot down items that should be returned to. At the end of Emily's summary, Yoko begins a possible restatement, "Differen--," but is cut off by Emily's "Different choices," which may or may not be the phrase Yoko had in mind. Recognizing Yoko's confusion, perhaps from extra-linguistic signals such as facial expression or pointing, Emily asks a yes/no question about the term she thought she had covered a while ago, "environment": "You understand 'environment,' don't you?" Receiving only a questioning response, "Environment?", Emily nonetheless assumes that Yoko understands: "O.K. That you understand." Here, however, despite Emily's indication of closure, Yoko persists: "Pardon?" directs Emily to backtrack to her question about environment, to which Yoko does reply afffirmatively, but with a rising intonation that indicates some reservation about the reply. The intonation is ineffective; Emily again is not actively listening, and they go on to the next part of the lecture.

EMILY	YOKO
	But Possibilism . .
Possibilism. O.K. That. O.K. What that means is, as far as I can pick up from <u>there</u>, is that, um, there're different possibilities . . . because of the environment . . . determinism said, this is the way you act because . . of . . the environment. But the Possibil--what was that called . . Possibil . . ism?	
	Um
	Possibilism.
Yeah. You had more choices. . . but they were influenced . . . by your environment.	
	So . . . different . . . different . .
Umhmm	
	<u>(unintelligible)</u>?
It's <u>still</u> a lot of environmental . . ah . . factors that are involved . . . but you had more choices.	
	En--environmental Determinism . . . believe that . . . environment decide?
Umhmm. Basically.	
	How. . . how the person act? and . . . Possib-- Possibilism . . . mean that person . . . a person can act . . . by his . . . option?
Umhmm.	
Umhmm. Umhmm. Right. Right. They're still influenced by their environment . . . but they have choices.	
	<u>(unintelligible)</u> ?

Yoko, again trying to summarize, "But Possibilism," is interrupted. Emily plunges into an explanation based on

the implications of the word "possible," but must interrupt herself to seek the correct pronunciation from Yoko, an interresting twist. The limitations of Emily's knowledge of the subject may here be of benefit to Yoko's desire to initiate requests. Completing perhaps only her fourth question since the session began, Yoko asks, "Environmental Determinism . . . believe(s) that . . . (the) environment decide(s)? . . . How the person act(s)? . . . And Possibilism mean(s) that . . . a person can act . . . by his . . . option?" indicating her perception of the relationship between the concepts by using her own term, "option." Emily's short answers allow Yoko to continue her active listening, her own reconstruction of the lecture. At this point, as they move on, we are confident that Yoko understands the previous concept. She is now free to pursue the meaning of "came the answer."

EMILY	YOKO
	Umm . . . umm . . . I think (unintelligible) by the recording, I think . . . (unintelligible) [indicating notes?]
Oh. . . I don't . . . I heard . . . I just heard him say the . . . environmental determinism was German and came out of Germany and United States geography . . . This came out of France . . . I don't . . . I mean you can run it back	Umm Umm

if you want to get the
name . . . I . . . I
missed the name too.

[They play the tape: " . . . came the answer from the
French called Possibilism."]

O.K. There's nobody's
name . . . Possibilism
is the name of--

Came . . . came
answer . . .
(unintelligible)
name?

A name? Say that again?

Came . . came answer

I din't hear that . . .

Umm

Run it back again . . .
Yeah. . . back it up.

[They begin to replay the tape.]

"Wasn't plausible"
"Came the answer"
Came the answer--that's not
a name.

[They stop the tape.]

"Came the answer"--what they're
saying is . . . they found
that environmental determinism
. . was not . . acceptable.

Umm

And so in answer to that . .
something . . . to take its
place . . . came the answer
. . . something to take its
place . . . that's sort of
what it means.

Um

Possibilism came . . and took
the place of Environmental
Determinism.

Oh.

O.K.

From its syntactic position in the lecture, ". . .
came the answer from the French called Possibilism," the

phrase "came the answer" seems to Yoko to be a name. The nature of Yoko's question is made clear to Emily by Yoko's metalinguistic reference to the tape: "I think, (unintelligible) by the recording, I think (unintelligible)," and possibly by Yoko's pointing to her notes. Emily's response is appropriate, showing that she understands that they are looking for a specific term, in fact a name, although she indicates that, if there is a name in that section, she doesn't think it is an important one: "I mean, you can run it back if you want to get the name . . . ." To the credit of both speakers, they persist in their quest through two reruns of the tape, despite Emily's doubt that the term exists. It seems as if they are more comfortable with each other here, possibly because they are getting to know each other a little bit. It may also be that Emily senses that their hour is almost over.

Finally pinpointing the phrase in question, Emily repeats it several times with emphasis, then explains it by glossing its meaning, "in answer to that . . ," but one wishes that she had drawn attention to the inversion transformation whereby "the answer came" became "came the answer" and its use by the lecturer for emphasis.

CONCLUSION

Tutors of ESL students should be aware of the difficulty the students may have in phrasing questions and in formulating requests for clarification. The ESL student in this study was cut off repeatedly when trying to begin a summary or request. The tutor often seemed more concerned with formulating her own response, as we all often are in discourse, than with meeting the ESL student's needs.

Tutors should be aware that seemingly simple surface structures may present great difficulties to ESL students and need to be clarified structurally, as well as semantically. "Came the answer" and "underwent" gave the ESL student in this study as much trouble as the meanings of the concepts covered in the lecture. ESL students should be encouraged to articulate the particular part or aspect of the discourse that is confusing to them. Because of unequal language abilities, as well as social factors inherent in the tutor-ESL student situation, it may be up to the tutor to indicate her willingness to go over the confusing segment of language until it is clear to the ESL student.

Phonology also presents problems to ESL students--problems that may not be apparent to tutors--such as Yoko's confusion of "Darwin" and "Determine" in this study. Such confusion may have been caused by the close proximity of

these terms in the lecture. It may also have been caused by the difficulty of discriminating between vowel-r sounds, eg. -ar vs. -er. Tutors who have never tried to discriminate between sounds which are not separate phonemes in their native language may be insensitive to the challenges English phonology presents to ESL students.

The perceived social relationship between first and second language speakers may hamper the communication process. The relationship of the subjects in this study may have dampened the assertiveness of the ESL student, partly because she perceived the other student to have a negative attitude about tutoring her, possibly because she knew that the other student was tutoring as an assignment, not as a paid tutor, possibly because she perceived cues in the other student's behavior that indicated a negative attitude, toward either the task or the ESL student, or both. The ESL student reported that she later went to the tutoring center, where she was more successful in obtaining a tutor with a positive attitude:

> After listening to the explanation of a student of Education Class (Emily), especially that of a tutor (center), I could understand the lecture clearly. This homework was very benefitial (sic) for me though it took me a lot of time. And I came to be accustomed to his (the lecturer's) speech. Also I enjoyed working with the native speaker (Emily). But I felt the student of Education class (Emily) didn't like this work. Next time, I would like to work with the (center) tutor. (Parenthetical insertions mine.)

Notice how careful she is to compliment Emily, even though

she feels that Emily didn't enjoy the work. It is difficult to elicit honest evaluations from students in any culture, but especially so when they see themselves as guests in the country. Tutors who enjoy the work and the students are certainly preferable to those who don't; however, even those who do may need to articulate that attitude, since ESL students may have had negative experiences in the past. The long process that communication sometimes involves demands that both participants be open to cues and be willing to persevere. It would be interesting to compare a tape of Yoko's session with the tutor in the tutoring center to the tape in this study, to see how the two tutors differed in their approaches, and if a different approach elicited different responses in turn from Yoko.

In addition to her positive assessment of the assignment, we may also note the complete ideas expressed in the ESL student's evaluation compared with her halting, tentative speech on the tape. Writing allows time to compose and correct. Speech does not.

It is clear that ESL students' concerns about being misunderstood can raise their anxiety levels to the point of restricting attempts to communicate, probably contributing to their lack of contact with native speakers outside the classroom. One positive effect of the listening assignment in this study was contact, however

limited, with a native speaker outside the classroom. Native-speaking tutors who are good listeners and willing to engage in the sometimes exhausting process of communicating with an ESL student may well find that they have much to gain from the experience, as well as much to contribute to the communicative competence of the ESL student. Tutors can make a big difference in the language development and the self-assurance of ESL students.

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