

English Non-native Speakers' Use of *But* in Conversation

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Kim, So-Yeon. 2005. English Non-native Speakers' Use of *But* in Conversation. *SNU Working Papers in English Linguistics and Language* 4, 1-21. This paper is an attempt to explore English non-native speakers' interactional use of the connective *but*. Each of the tokens of *but* in approximately 100 minutes of one-to-one interview and multi-party discussion data was coded and analyzed within the framework of conversation analysis. The findings reveal that as a whole non-native speakers demonstrate different uses of *but* at different turn-positions in a similar fashion as native speakers do. However, some distinctive features, such as the overuse of the form in environments where other types of discourse markers are generally preferred, indicate non-native speakers' not-yet-complete competence in utilizing a variety of discourse markers. (Seoul National University)

Keywords: spoken discourse, non-native speaker, *but*, discourse marker, conversation analysis

1. Introduction

The present study investigates the conversational use of the connective *but* demonstrated by non-native speakers of English. A qualitative analysis within the framework of Conversation Analysis (CA, hereafter) is conducted on the tokens of *but* in non-native spoken discourse data. Compared to the traditions in theoretical linguistics, which views linguistic structures as constituting an autonomous system independent from actual performance, studying the use of particular grammatical forms in conversational interactions is relatively a new trend. The notion that grammar and social interaction organize each other has led many linguists including discourse analysts to examine forms in actual discourse contexts.¹⁾ The systematic description of interactional practices has

1) In Ochs, Schegloff, and Thompson (1996), the shared view of grammar is that

been facilitated by the adoption of the sociological methodology of CA, which is "the systematic analysis of the talk produced in everyday situations of human interaction: talk-in-interaction (Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998: 13)."

The current study is on the line of a more recent body of works in CA that have moved their focus from native to non-native speaker talk-in-interaction (cf., Gardner and Wagner 2004, Park 2003, 2004, Wong 2000a, 2000b, Wong and Olsher 2000, etc.). After a thorough examination on non-native speakers' use of *but*, the results are compared and contrasted with those of the previous studies that have investigated the interactional use of *but* by native speakers. Lastly, some pedagogical implications are to be suggested in conclusion for improvements in further instructions to non-native speakers.

2. Previous studies

A number of studies have been conducted throughout linguistic history in an attempt to account for the meaning and functions of English connectives. Researchers differ in their views not only on the definition of the semantic and pragmatic meaning of the connectives *but* also on the relative contribution of each type of meaning to the interpretation of the connective-bearing utterance. Despite this "meaning-minimalist/maximalist controversy (Schiffrin 1987: 183)," there is a consensus that *but* is a connective that signals contrastiveness of some sort between conjoined clauses.

Earlier studies investigated *but* at the sentence level with examples that were invented based on researchers' intuition. Lakoff (1971) focuses on the nature of the contrast expressed by *but*. She considers the source of contrastive knowledge in "*John is tall but Jane is short*" as semantic contrast between the antonym pair *tall/short*, and that of "*Jane is poor but happy*" as pragmatic contrast between general expectations drawn from the world knowledge and actuality.

grammar serves as an essential resource for doing social interactional work on one hand, and can also be viewed as a consequence of the necessities in social interaction on the other.

Halliday and Hasan (1976) deals with *but* as one of the adversative conjunctions whose basic meaning is "contrary to expectation." They suggest the external/internal distinction in interpreting the adversative relation. The external meaning is "inherent in the phenomena that language is used to talk about," while the internal meaning is "inherent in the communication process." In other words, the former is similar to referential meaning usually discussed in the domain of semantics, and the latter is social and expressive meaning usually examined in pragmatics.

More recent studies moved their interest to the actual use of *but* as a discourse marker in authentic discourse. In her detailed analysis on *but* as a discourse marker, Schiffrin (1987) divides the functions of *but* into two contrasting ideas and contrasting actions. The former indicates the use of *but* when coordinating two referentially and/or functionally contrastive items, as in (1):

- (1) Debby: And you were born in North Philadelphia.
 Ira: No. I was born in uh in- in South Philadelphia,
 → **but** I moved to North Philadelphia when I was a year old.

(Schiffrin 1987: 159)

In (1) what *but* coordinates is not only referentially contrastive (e.g. South vs. North Philadelphia) but functionally contrastive as well (e.g. requested information vs. not-requested extra information). The second function of *but*, contrasting actions, means its use as a point-making device which enables the speaker to return to a certain previous point in discourse. Schiffrin (1987) exemplifies question/answer pairs and self-repairs as two discourse units where this use of *but* for "speaker return" can be distinctly shown. Below is her example of a self-repair:

- (2) a. The only difference I think may be with-
 b. well in our area, it isn't because of the school.
 c. → **But** the only difference I would think would be the schools.

(Schiffrin 1987: 167)

The speaker in (2) used *but* in line c to return to the point before the self-repair in line b.

Fraser (1998) also treats *but* as a discourse marker, which he defines as "lexical expressions" that are "separate from the propositional content of the sentence and function to signal the relationship between the segment of discourse they introduce, S2, and the prior segment of discourse, S1 (Fraser 1998: 302)." He finds that the one and only core meaning of *but* is to signal simple contrast although the target of S2 may be either a direct, an implied, a presupposed, or an entailed message of S1.

Park (1997) analyzes a wide range of interactional functions of *but* in conversation between native speakers of English as a part of her cross-linguistic study of contrastive connectives in three languages—English, Korean, and Japanese. She first classifies the tokens of *but* according to its position in the speaker's turn and then examines the interactional functions and implications of each token within the framework of Contextual Analysis and Conversation Analysis. *But* occurs at turn-initial position in one of the three environments: in dispreferred responses, in topic resumption, and in sequence-closing sequences. Turn-medial *but* can connect a preliminary ("pre") to the main action, allow the speaker to deal with both the linguistic action and underlying action of the first pair part in a single turn, and serve as a speaker-return device after self-interruption as Schiffrin (1987) has suggested. *But* is much less likely to occur in turn-final position or as a turn re-exit device, but when it does occur, strong interactional implications are delivered with it (Park 2001).

Park (1997, 2001)'s in-depth study raises the question of the importance of addressing the various interactional use of *but* in teaching non-native speakers of English. It is hardly known, however, to what extent the non-native speakers are similar to or different from the native speakers in the matter of practicing the connective *but* in conversation. Although in her more recent studies, Park (2003, 2004) gives an account of English non-native speakers' use of discourse markers such as *but* and *yeah*, it seems that a thorough examination is not yet conducted on non-native speakers' conversational use of *but* in diverse settings. Thus, this paper replicates Park (1997, 2001)'s way of analysis with non-native

speaker conversation data, aiming at providing a more exhaustive observation on non-native speakers' interactional practice of *but*.

3. Data and methodology

I used two types of data for this paper. One is spontaneous face-to-face interview data between an instructor and university students. The interviewer/instructor is a near-native speaker of English and the interviewees are four intermediate-level (TEPS score 501-700) and two advanced-level (TEPS score 701 and above) non-native English speakers. All the participants speak Korean as their mother tongue. Each interview session followed a similar pattern—warm-up questions, topic talk 1, topic talk 2, further talk about the semester, and closing—and took 7-10 minutes. The total length of the data is approximately 45 minutes.

The other type of data was collected from multi-party English discussion sessions. The participants are either native or advanced-level non-native speakers of English. The non-native participants' mother tongue is Korean. All of them are university undergraduate students with non-English majors and voluntarily have a weekly meeting for the discussion session to practice their English conversational skills. The discussion is very informal in both format and atmosphere, and mostly consists of spontaneous talks. The length of data is approximately 60 minutes.

The analysis is based on the framework of CA, which focuses on finding the organization and systematicity underlying the spontaneous, authentic conversation discourse (cf., Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998, Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974). As the necessary initial step of analysis, a group of graduate students trained in discourse analysis classes transcribed the recorded data using the CA transcription conventions (cf., Atkinson and Heritage 1984; Also see Appendix). Every token of *but* was collected and sorted according to its turn-position: turn-initial, turn-medial, or turn-final. The idea of positional classification was taken from Park (1997, 2001), and it did turn out that non-native speakers also show different uses of *but* in different turn-positions. The last step of analysis was to scrutinize the sequences preceding and following

the target form, i.e. *but*, in order to investigate the interactional functions it seemed to serve within the context.

4. Analysis and discussion

In the 100-minute transcription data, I only searched for the tokens of *but* spoken by non-native participants, i.e. the use of *but* made by the near-native instructor in the interview data and by the native participants in the discussion data was excluded in analysis. The tokens of contrastive connectives other than *but* such as *however* and *though* were searched at first but rarely found probably due to the nature of the informal spoken discourse data. Therefore, the synonymous terms of *but* are outside the focus of this paper.

Approximately 55 tokens of *but* were found in total. About a third of the tokens were used turn-initially, and the rest were found in turn-medial position. No token occurred in turn-final position. A detailed analysis of each token is represented in the following sections: first, the use of *but* in turn-initial position and secondly, in turn-medial position.

4.1 Non-native speakers' use of *But*

4.1.1 Turn-initial position

The CA approach to non-native speakers' use of *but* reveals that the turn-initial *but* serves two interactional functions: marking direct disagreement and dealing with the flow of the discourse topic as in topic resumption and topic shift.

4.1.1.1 Marking direct disagreement

The use of *but* in turn-initial position often signals that the speaker of that turn has a stance not aligned with the interlocutor of the prior turn. The lack of "delay devices" in the turn, which usually precede dispreferred sequences like disagreement, is more likely to mark the speaker's stance as more direct and aggressive (Pomerantz

1984). Below is an example from a discussion session, where the two non-native speakers, C and M, are talking about the popularity and importance of learning Chinese:

(3) *Learning Chinese*

- 01 C: I think it's most guys wanna (.) learn the Chinese,
 02 [because they wanna get a job,
 03 M: [°mm°
 04 (.)
 05 C: [you know=it's most [company-
 06 M: [°mm° [yeah yeah right.
 07 C: nowadays most company wanna get
 08 M: °um hm°
 09 C: a: subsidiary:: i:n china: [(.) (so)
 10 M: [°mm hm°
 11 (.)
 12 →M: **but** I think (.) even (.) even people can speak Chinese,
 13 C: (okay/yeah)
 14 M: if they don't speak English, (.) u:h [it's not (.) so=
 15 C: [°yeah right°
 16 M: =useful [(.) uh so yeah. Chinese (1.7) tss I don't=
 17 C: [°yeah >it's not useful<°
 18 M: =know after ten years or twenty years later, but right
 19 now, Chinese i::s sti:ll just second language.

In lines 1-2, C says that it is popular to learn Chinese nowadays, especially among university students who are looking for jobs. The sign of no immediate reaction, that is, the micropause in line 4 leads C to continue his talk by adding the reason why companies come to prefer those who can speak Chinese, i.e. most companies want to expand their business into China. M, who has been merely offering quiet continuers such as °mm° and °mm hm° while C talks, notices at the micropause in line 11 that C is done with his talk. He thus gives out his opinion in line 12, which is led by the turn-initial *but*. Here, what follows *but* is not aligned with the content of C's previous talk. M thinks that English is still the first priority to master and Chinese the second, even when the job market looks for candidates proficient in Chinese. Therefore M's

remark is not in favor of what C has said in prior turns, and the turn-initial *but* manifestly marks this stance of M's in advance.²⁾

Another example of *but* that is followed by more direct disalignment is represented in segment (4). Here, non-native speakers C, S, and M are talking about their experiences of reading the novel, *The Da Vinci Code*. The segment starts at the point where C asks S which language version of the novel she has read:

(4) *The Da Vinci Code*

- 01 C: and you (said) you read in English or
 02 S: yeh in Engli- in English yeah
 03 (1.0)
 04 C: it's a- a lot of Frenches in there or:
 05 S: ah yeah: bu- but I can speak French hhhhuhh
 06 M: oh::: [hhuhh
 07 C: [hhuh
 08 S: [hhuhh hhh huhh .hhuh=
 09 C: =(y'know) actually I tried with the- in Eng- read it in
 10 English, but (.5) I just (.) give up when I: read the:
 11 [()
 12 →S: [but the French is just the- for some words.
 13 C: and (it's) so French seem there and some: adju-
 14 ad- justed *pusa* (adverb) or *hyengyongsa* (adjective) hhh
 15 S: oh really?

As S says in line 2 that she has read the English version of the novel, C wonders how she has understood the French words in it saying that there is many French expressions in the novel (*it's a- a lot of Frenches in there*). In S's response that she can speak French (so that it is not a concern for her), M jokingly teases her boastful remark in line 6 with an exaggerative stretched exclamation (*oh:::*),

2) What is also noticeable here is that despite the use of turn-initial *but* as a strong stance-marker in line 12, in what follows *but*, we see that the part explicitly expressing M's opposing position (*it's not (.) useful; Chinese i::s sti:ll just second language.*) is syntactically put off as far behind as possible by the use of a variety of devices such as disclaimers (*I think; I don't know after ten years or twenty years later*) and fillers (*uh*). Thus, the degree of "directness" in M's disagreement posed by the turn-initial *but* is still on the decrease until his main point is unequivocally made.

to which everybody starts to laugh. In lines 9-11, C speaks of his own trial and failure in reading the English version, which gets to be interrupted by S's overlapping turn with a turn-initial *but*. The turn-initial *but* signals S's opposed position to C's opinion that there are too many French words in the novel to read through it in English without trouble, although C shows no acknowledgement to it in particular and reemphasizes his position with more specific evidence (lines 13-14).

Both in segments (3) and (4), the use of *but* in turn-initial position functions as a stance-marker, marking disagreement and contrastive stance of the speaker towards the other interlocutor. As mentioned earlier, the *but*-initiating disagreement expressed by a non-native speaker can make her sound rude and aggressive to an unintended degree, especially if she has shaped her turn such a way due to her ignorance of the typical turn shapes of dispreferred sequences. However, as will be shown in the next section, it seems that non-native speakers are also more apt to utilize "delay devices" when they deal with delicate speech acts including disagreement.

4.1.1.2 Management of the discourse topic

The second use of turn-initial *but* made by English non-native speakers is to deal with the flow of the discourse topic. That is, *but* is used: i) when the speaker picks up the topic that she dropped at some prior point (in topic resumption); or ii) when the speaker moves to a new but related topic (in topic shift).³⁾

Topic Resumption

Segment (5) was taken from a discussion session in which the participants were sharing their own experiences of learning Chinese. It starts with M's telling his story of restarting the Chinese pronunciation practice when he had chances to make friends with Chinese-speakers:

(5) *The Chinese language*

3) The use of turn-initial *but* in "topic maintenance" is under investigation. Topic maintenance occurs when the speaker maintains the topic that is likely to be dropped.

- 01 M: I met some u:h Taiwanese and Hong kong friends,
 02 C: yeah=
 03 M: =and they were speaking Chinese, and I thought that
 04 it was really good idea ah good- it was really good
 05 chance (.) uh: [to overcome some Chinese accent (.)]=
 06 C: (())
 07 M: =problem, hhhhhuh so I practiced it fo:r °tss I think
 08 for four months°
 09 (.)
 10 M: just Chinese accent and pronuncia(hh)tion hhuh [hhh
 11 C: [even
 12 they have ac-
 13 M: .hhhhhuh
 14 C: dialect. ri[ght?
 15 M: [mm [hm, yeh they have dialect.=
 16 H: [yeah
 17 C: =hong kong [and ()
 18 H: [hong kong and [()
 19 M: [mm hm still still I think
 20 they're just- just pronunciation is quite okay. mm hm,
 21 maybe their accent is a little bit different
 22 C: yeah
 23 →M: **but** (.) for me (.) it is enough. it was enough.

As M says in lines 7-10 that he spent the four months only practicing Chinese pronunciation and tone (the participants use the term "accent" to indicate "tone"), C displays his understanding in lines 11-12 and 14 by checking his previous knowledge about the diversity in dialects of Chinese. C's confirmation check slightly shifts the topic of the conversation from M's personal experience to the dialects of Chinese. In lines 15 through 22, the three participants share their knowledge about the Chinese dialects. In line 23 the turn-initial *but* enables M to return to the former topic, so "*it*" in his talk refers to the four-month practice mentioned in lines 7-8. This function of "topic resumption" has been termed "speaker return" by Schifffrin (1987).

Topic Shift

The turn-initial *but* is not only used to pick up a topic previously left off but also used to enable the speaker to shift the ongoing topic to another related topic. Segment (6) below, the part following segment (4), illustrates this topic shift function of *but*. Talking about the size of French expressions in the novel *The Da Vinci Code*, C insists that it contains a number of French adverbs and adjectives while S disagrees with him:

(6) *English words*

- 01 C: *pusa* (adverb) or *hyengyongsa* (adjective) it's a lot
 02 [of difficult yeah=
 03 M: [adverb
 04 M: =°mm hm°
 05 S: I don't thi[nk so.
 06 C: [a lot of difficult (adverbs)
 07 S: I don't think so. (but) there is very: simple and even
 08 though you couldn't understand the French
 09 C: mm hm=
 10 S: =they use (.7) there is no problem to understand
 11 whole the context.=
 12 M: =maybe your English is bad h[huh [hhhh you can=
 13 C: [hhh [yeah I know ()
 14 →S: [but (.) but=
 15 M: =say that hhh
 16 S: =some some for me some:: some wo: rds (.) in English
 17 words is very very complex like a .hh it's about the:
 18 knightu: knightu some (.) the name of the knight,
 19 tem[ple: temple knightu I don't know what is temple=
 20 C: [yeah yeah
 21 S: =knightu and
 22 C: the name of work or place [or ()
 23 S: [yeah and lots of bible
 24 words
 25 M: yeah right

Up to line 11, the participants are arguing over the topic of the French expressions in the novel. In line 12 M throws a joke to C that C's problem might not be the amount of French in the English

novel but his incompetence in English. While M and C are laughing to the joke, S tries to take the floor initiating her turn with repeated *but*s (line 14). In the following talk, she speaks of the difficulty in understanding the English words in the novel, which shifts the topic from the difficult French expressions to the difficult English expressions. Therefore, the turn-initial *but* here marks the point where the topic moves to a related but new topic.

Non-native speakers' practice of *but* in topic resumption and topic shift shows their communicative competence in using a linguistic device in order to manage their interactional objects such as topic movement. Whether this competence has been learned in the process of learning English or transferred from their use of Korean contrastive connectives in a similar manner is still to be investigated.

4.1.2 Turn-medial position

But in turn-medial position, which occurred twice as often in the data as the turn-initial *but*, is found to have three interactional functions: connecting "pre" to the main action, enabling speaker return after self-interruption, and marking self-repair. Compared to native speakers' use of turn-medial *but*, the use in dealing with two actions is missing from the non-native data⁴), and the use in marking self-repair is distinctively found in the non-native data.

4.1.2.1 Connecting pre-to-main action

The use of *but* most frequently practiced by non-native speakers is to connect a pre, i.e. preliminary, to the main action. This function of *but* in turn-medial position is also found to be prevalent in native discourse data (Park 1997, 2001). Below is an exemplary segment, which contains three tokens of *but*, all connecting a

4) Two tokens of turn-medial *but* produced by the same speaker were analyzed as dealing with two actions. It will take much more tokens of *but* of such use to determine that this use of *but* is not idiosyncratic but common in non-native discourse.

weaker form of agreement (pre) to disagreement (main). Here, the participants C and M constantly express opposing views on the importance of high Chinese proficiency in dealing business with Chinese people, i.e. C thinks it is enough to speak English well whereas M thinks Chinese is a must-learn:

(7) *Chinese proficiency*

- 01 C: but if you: (1.5) if you can u:sing the english,
 02 >(speaking) english or like that,< (.5) it's- I think it's
 03 not (.3) rea:lly: needs Chinese to:: com- communicate
 04 with Chinese guys
 05 M: .h[hh
 06 C: [Chinese business guys
 07 M: the uhhhh the problem is Chinese(.) people they: are
 08 not good at english.
 09 C: >they're gonna getting better.<
 10 M: yeh of cour[se they will hhuh they-will be=
 11 C: [yeahhheh heh
 12 →M: =better.=but (.) [their education system in china, (.5)=
 13 C: [(yeah)
 14 M: =is not so good. u-
 15 C: and it's normally is (.) in business case,=
 16 M: =um hm,
 17 C: they have to: (.2) using the english.
 18 (.8)
 19 C: right?=
 20 →M: =>yes< (.) yeah right.=but (u-) y'know if you can
 21 speak Chinese, you ca:n (1.0) it'll be much better (.2)
 22 in [competing with them.
 23 C: [I think it's need (.2) it need a- o:r simple
 24 conversation or just reading >(and) [something like=
 25 M: [mm
 26 →C: =tha:t< I think it- I think I need it.=but (.6) a
 27 complicate one is all the grammar (thing)
 28 [(.) writings, (.5) I don't need- I th- I
 29 M: [mm

It is seen from lines 1-4 and 6 that C considers English as the

main mediatory language between Korean and Chinese business people. In lines 7-8, M points out the reality where Chinese are not very good at English. Then, C suggests an optimistic view on Chinese' improvement in English proficiency in line 9. In line 10, M starts his turn with a talk seemingly corresponding to C's prior turn (*yeh of course they will hhuh they-they will be better*), but what follows the turn-medial *but* in line 12 is the reason why M regards C's view too optimistic and unrealistic, i.e. the English education system in China is not very good. That is, M still stands in the position against C.

In lines 15 and 17, C once again tries to confirm his prior stance emphasizing the fact that English is not a recommended but an obligatory official language in international business. The absence of "conditionally relevant" response from M (Schegloff in press), indicated by the 0.8-second silence in line 18, leads C to make an explicit confirmation check in line 19. In lines 20-22, M first gives out the agreeing response (*yes (.) yeah right*) only to provide in the latter part of his talk more reasons to adhere to his original stance, i.e. although Chinese competency is not obligatory, it absolutely is a big advantage. Here again, the turn-medial *but* is placed between the preliminary agreeing response and the main disagreeing action, marking the contrastiveness between the two parts.

The last token of *but* produced by C in line 26 also serves the same function. In lines 23-24 and 26, C seems to partly accept M's position, but what follows *but* is the main action, which restates his prior belief indicating that his main disagreeing stance has not changed.

All three tokens of turn-medial *but* in segment (7) and more in the data are preceded by "weak agreements (Pomerantz 1984: 72)" and followed by disagreements, which seems to evidence non-native speakers' proper use of *but* as a part of delay strategies in handling the delicate nature of the dispreferred sequences.

The turn-medial *but* preceded by a preliminary is not only used to delay a dispreferred main action. It is observed that non-native speakers' delaying the main action with a contrastive pre and a connecting *but* can have an effect on delivering their textual message more effectively. Below is an example from an interview with an intermediate-level student, in which the participants are

talking about what they have studied in the textbook about modern zoos:

(8) *Modern zoos*

- 01 I: O:kay, so (1.2) was there anything ne:w, like, about
 02 the zoos when you read chapter eleven?
 03 A: u: (1.) e I think u:: animals in zoos u: are:: in (.2)
 04 → cage. [u:m(.2) e:: **but** (.2) e:: after I rid- I rid I read=
 05 I: [Mm hm,
 06 A: =this chapter,
 07 I: Mm [hm,
 08 A: [u: I know (.7) e: (1.0) modern zoos kka- modern
 09 zoos, e re- e- release animals.

Here, the instructor asks in lines 1-2 whether student A has gained any additional knowledge from the textbook, but what starts A's turn in line 3 is not exactly the answer to the question or the requested information. The real answer is the part that follows *but*, i.e. lines 4, 6, and 8-9. The part preceding *but* works as a pre to the main answer in that by first informing what knowledge the speaker previously had about the zoos (*having cages*), it makes the newness in her main answer (*releasing animals*) contrastively salient to the hearer and easy to understand.

4.1.2.2 Speaker return after self-interruption

Just as native speakers use *but* turn-medially as a device for speaker return after self-repair or self-interruption (Park 1997, 2001, Schiffrin 1987), non-native speakers often resort to the "point-marking" function of *but* in managing their turns at talk. The advanced-level interviewee in segment (9) practices *but* as a speaker return device, while answering to the interview question about the appropriate test policy against cheating at a university:

(9) *Test policy*

- 01 S: If you are a member of a small universitytask force
 02 fo:r to determine the university test policy and cut out

- 03 cheating, what would you do.
 04 T: mm
 05 S: As I have said, just name released hhhhh he heh.
 06 T: mm hm
 07 S: that is the good way, justuh put the name: and let
 08 dih everybody know:
 09 T: hm[mm
 10 S: [who have (.) cheated. so thisis duh (.) really (1.0)
 11 → kinduv uhm severe thing hhhhehh. **but** I don't- I
 12 don't think there is no other way,

After reading the interview question aloud in lines 1-3, S suggests "name release" as the best test policy to cut out cheating. Rather than providing proper reasons for others to accept her view, she interrupts the stream of her own answer in lines 10-11 by making a negative self-evaluation on her own suggestion (*so this is duh (.) really (1.0) kinduv uhm severe thing*). The following turn-medial *but* returns S to the point before self-interruption where she insists her suggestion is the best policy possible.

The formerly presented segment, segment (3), also contains a turn-medial *but* of speaker return. The latter part of it is duplicated below for convenience:

(3) *Learning Chinese*

- 12 M: but I think (.) even (.) even people can speak Chinese,
 13 C: (okay/yeah)
 14 M: if they don't speak English, (.) u:h [it's not (.) so=
 15 C: [°yeah right°
 16 M: =useful [(.) uh so yeah. Chinese (1.7) tss I don't=
 17 C: [°yeah >it's not useful<°
 18 →M: =know after ten years or twenty years later, **but** right
 19 now, Chinese i:::s sti:ll just second language.

Here, M expresses his view that mastering English comes before learning Chinese. In lines 16 and 18, however, he pauses in the middle of his turn for 1.7 seconds and admits the uncertain validity of his current view in the future (*I don't know after ten years or twenty years later [Chinese may have priority over English]*).

The self-interruption is resolved when *but* returns him to the point before the 1.7-second pause.

4.1.2.3 Marking self-repair

The last interactional function of the turn-medial *but* is to mark self-repair. In segment (10), the participants M and J have the same major, and M is showing his interest in the courses J is currently taking:

(10) *Subject name*

01 M: what is the subject.

02 (1.0)

03 J: evaluation,

04 (.5)

05 M: a corporate evaluation.

06 →J: uh::::: right. **but** the subject name is (.) *kiep*

07 *kyengyeng thukkang* (seminar on corporate

08 management) hhhh .hh yeah. **but** we study evaluation.

To M's question in line 1 asking the name of the course she is taking, J gives an answer in line 3. After an attempt to place the course during the 0.5-second pause (line 4), M makes a confirmation check in line 5 with what he thinks is the full name of the course. Then, J confirms the course name in a very hesitant manner (*uh::::: right*). What follows is a turn-medial *but* and her self-repair of the name of the course. That is, she self-corrects the previous answer she has given to M in line 3. The reason she at first gives the wrong answer is because, on receiving M's question, J assumes that M would be interested in what they study in the course, while M literally wants to know the exact name of the course. M's confirmation check makes J recognize M's intention and make a self-repair. Thus, the turn-medial *but* here marks the point of self-repair.

Note that this use of *but* is not found in native discourse data. That is, native speakers seldom use *but* turn-medially to mark the following self-repair. Instead, it is examined that another discourse

marker, TCU-final *actually*, shows a similar use in native data (Clift 2001). In her detailed study on the interactional meaning of *actually*, Clift (2001) notes that TCU-final *actually* in self-repair "marks its TCU as a parenthetical self-correction, leaving trajectory of talk before and after unaltered (Clift 2001: 286)." We see that the token of *but* just examined in segment (10) is substituted by TCU-final *actually* and makes the same sense as in "Right. The subject name is *kiep kyengyeng thukkang* (seminar on corporate management) actually. But we study evaluation." Thus, the non-native speakers' distinctive use of one discourse marker, *but*, may reflect their not-yet complete awareness of the use of another discourse marker.

4.2 Native speakers vs. Non-native speakers

According to the analysis thus far, non-native speakers are largely aware of and capable of using a variety of interactional functions of *but*. Contrary to the general expectation that linguistically incompetent non-native speakers will also find it difficult to use linguistic devices like discourse markers in managing their turns at talk in interaction, the biggest difference found between native and non-native speakers' use of *but* does not lie in their inability of using the form, but in their overuse of the form. The incipient results of the current study show that non-native speakers resort to *but* even in the interactional environments where native speakers make use of other forms of discourse markers. Non-native speakers' overuse of *but* may be attributed to the fact that it is one of the most generally and frequently used discourse markers.

4.3 Individual variations and pedagogical implications

Although the range of non-native speakers' use of *but* is found to be wider and more varied than commonly expected, one should be cautious when she tries to apply the findings of the current study to individual non-native speakers. In the data, it seems that some speakers resort to the various interactional use of *but* far more excessively and diversely than the others, so one should bear the possibly big individual variations in mind in accepting the results

of this paper.

In particular, there seems to be a difference to a considerable extent in the conversational use of *but* between intermediate-level and advanced-level non-native speakers, which is not investigated in depth in this paper due to the relatively small size of the intermediate-level speakers. It is assumed that the improvement in overall English competency will enhance the appropriate use of *but* as well. Moreover, if it turns out to be the case through further research that intermediate-level speakers do not utilize the full range of interactional use of *but*, whereas advanced-level speakers overuse *but* in ignorance of the interactional use of other linguistic devices, the locus of pedagogic emphasis will have to be differentiated according to the proficiency level of the speakers.

5. Conclusion

This paper examined the conversational use of *but* by non-native speakers of English. The analysis on over 50 tokens of *but* in the data reveals that the non-native speakers use *but* most often in turn-medial position and second most in turn-initial position, just as found in the native speaker discourse data. The turn-initial *but* is used in marking direct disagreement and managing the topic flow in the discourse as in topic resumption and topic shift. *But* in turn-medial position serves the functions of connecting a pre to the main action, enabling self return after self-interruption, and marking self-repair. The use of *but* instead of TCU-final *actually* in self-repair evidences that further studies on this target form should be conducted parallel to the research on the interactional use of other discourse markers. In addition, further investigation on intermediate-level non-native speakers' use of *but* is urged to complement the current study and draw out more consequential pedagogical implications.

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Appendix

Transcription Conventions

- [Overlapping or simultaneous talk
- = A latch sign is used when the second speaker follows the first with no discernible silence between them. It can also be used to link different parts of a single speaker's utterance when those parts constitute a continuous flow of speech that has been carried over to another line to accommodate an intervening interruption.
- :: Colons indicate prolongation of the immediately prior sound. Multiple colons indicate a more prolonged sound.
- : Underscoring indicates some form of stress, via pitch and/or amplitude.
- (.5) Length of pause
- (.) Micropause
- ° A degree sign is used to indicate a passage of talk which is quieter than the surrounding talk.
- ? A rising intonation, not necessarily a question
- , A continuing intonation
- A cut-off or self-interruption
- < The less than symbol indicates that the immediately following talk is jump-started, i.e. sounds like it starts with a rush.
- hhh Hearable aspiration: It may represent breathing, laughter, etc.
- (0) Transcriber's descriptions of events
- 0 Uncertainty on the transcriber's part