Discourse awareness: Going beyond the sentence

John Cambell-Larsen

Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.

(Chomsky, 1957, p.15)

Introduction.

Chomsky's famous nonsensical sentence demonstrates that language consists of more than syntactically well-formed sentences. This paper will examine language from the standpoint of discourse, that is, supra-sentential structures, both within and across turns, and suggest ways in which discourse awareness can be utilized by students (and teachers) in the second language classroom.

Research into second language acquisition (SLA) has suggested that students progress through acquisition sequences in their language development, and that the orders of these sequences are more or less fixed. (See Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991, pp. 88-100.) It is also reasonable to suggest that teachers (both native and non-native speakers) also progress through acquisition sequences as they increase their meta-awareness of the language and that discourse awareness and competence is a later occurring item in the acquisition sequences of both teachers and students. If this is so, then this lack of discourse awareness on the part of both teachers and learners can hamper the student's progress towards naturalistic language use, the kind of naturalistic use that lies at the heart of human interaction.

It will be proposed that awareness of the discourse structures of language (both L1 and L2) will provide the students (especially, but not exclusively, advanced students) with a focus for their continued development, rather than spending prolonged periods exploring the fractal edges of lexis and grammar. The focus will be on spoken discourse as this is the area that is most immediately relevant to my particular teaching situation at the university level but many of the points will be relevant, even if only tangentially, to other contexts .

Overview of Discourse and teaching.

Skehan (1996, p.18) states, "most language learning is associated with relative failure." with very few students ever achieving anything approaching native-like command of the language. McCarthy (1991, p. 34) identifies one possible cause of this failure:

Nothing we shall say will undermine the importance of grammar in language teaching; on the contrary, this chapter takes as a basic premise that without a command of the rich and variable resources of the grammar offered by a language such as English, the construction of natural and sophisticated discourse is impossible.

By implication then, discourse is built upon core lexical and grammatical competence, and questions of discourse can only be addressed once certain other language items are in place. But most students cease their studies before these conditions arise, or continue to focus on these lexical and grammatical competencies and avoid (for a variety of reasons) discourse altogether.

Discourse and learning.

To address the necessity of discourse awareness in students it may be appropriate to consider what the goal of language learning is and what kind of language output will occur if the student's awareness of discourse is lacking.

The attainment of native-like proficiency in the target language to the extent that one could be mistaken for a native speaker is tacitly acknowledged by most students and their teachers as being an unrealistic goal. A goal based on student-generated aims may be more realistic.

> Yet if the difficulty with conversation classes is widespread, so too is the desire of students to converse successfully in the language they are learning.
>
> Cook (1989, p.116)

The ability to function in the target language at the level of discourse, to deal with the unexpected twists and turns of naturalistic communication, to be able to anticipate what one's interlocutor will say next, to make oneself not only understood but also interesting and engaging to one's interlocutor is perhaps a more useful focus of study. It may also be more ultimately motivating goal for students than the prolonged analysis of language at the level of the verb phrase. These interactive skills can be realized to some extent by raising awareness of discourse; so that the students can use whatever language resources they have to best effect to achieve communication.

The consequences of a student failing to be aware of the conventions of discourse are difficult to evaluate objectively. McCarthy gives an example of a written text, with subjects initial in every clause, and comments,

> We probably now feel that the text is bland, a sort of flat landscape in which each bit of information is doled out without any overall sense of direction or organization and with equal weight given to all the elements of the message. Language teachers might recognize in this jejune version some of the characteristics of low-level learners ...
>
> (1991, p. 53)

The deficiencies noted are not only those of low-level learners without the necessary resources in the target language, but, in my experience, can also be characteristic of quite advanced learners who have devoted a great deal of attention to lexical and grammatical features of a language, but whose linguistic output can be "bland", "flat" and "jejune", sub-

jective though these judgments are. Clearly, such language output is far from desirable, and the remedy for such unsatisfactory language may lie in raising the critical awareness of discourse in students.

The achievement of native-like proficiency at the level of discourse may not require that the speaker operates at a near-native level when judged by native speakers, rather, that he or she operates at a level whereby the stress, confusion, disorientation and feelings of inadequacy are that are characteristic of operations in L2 are reduced to a level somewhat similar to operations in the L1 (which are tacitly assumed to be usually low but not zero). To sum up, discourse represents a superordinate language skill, which can be developed once the student has certain lexical-grammatical competencies, but, it is argued here, these competencies need not be of an extremely developed nature before notions of discourse can be introduced into the learning sequence.

The Extent of Discourse applicability in the Language classroom.

Discourse analysis is a wide-ranging field, drawing upon "linguistics, sociology, psychology and anthropology" McCarthy (1991, p.1) but having in common a "focus on examining natural and extended samples of both spoken and written language" (Burns 2001, p.123). The uses to which these examinations may be put are as varied as the disciplines from which they arise. For the purposes of this paper I will outline some approaches to discourse based on practical application in the language classroom. By these means, it is hoped that the extent to which discourse awareness can be raised can be demonstrated, rather than a more abstract exposition, which may be undermined by the subjectivity that lies at the heart of discourse and discourse analysis.

> It is partly because a quality of relevance, accessible only to participants, and valid only at the time and place of utterance, can attach to any utterance regardless of its form, that no generalized judgements about well-formedness in discourse can be made.
>
> Coulthard and Brazil (1992, p.63)

Generalizations concerning discourse in language teaching may be equally elusive.

There are several factors to consider in raising students' awareness of discourse. Firstly students may reject anything outside a traditional lexical/ grammatical syllabus, especially if the focus is on passing standardized tests and the like. In these cases students may regard discourse as a distraction. Secondly, students may lack discourse competence in their L1, although "it seems more appropriate to characterize this behaviour as socially deviant than as linguistically so." (Coulthard and Brazil 1992, p.51) Sociolinguistic competence is named as one of the four language competencies in Canale and Swain's description of language competencies, along with lexico-grammatical, discourse, and strategic competencies. (Cited in Larsen Freeman and Long 1991, p. 39).

What constitutes a lack of sociolinguistic competence as opposed to lack of discourse competence may be a subjective judgement, but if we take the broadest view of discourse, i.e.,

extended (multi-sentence, multi turn) instances of language in use then we may subsume soci-olinguistic competence within discourse competence. It is clear that some people are char-acterized by such labels as "rude, evasive and eccentric" (Coulthard and Brazil 1992, p.64) which can be seen as social labels for linguistic phenomena. However labeled, if such people are lacking skill in this area in their L1 then they are unlikely to operate differently in their L2. Thirdly, students may view discourse analysis and its findings as cultural imperialism, imposing a foreign set of values, which may be in conflict with local norms, or seen to be so.

There is no simple solution to these concerns. The teacher can raise the issue of discourse awareness within the institutional, cultural, social and practical limits which apply, but just as we cannot ensure that students will learn what is taught, neither can we ensure that stu-dents will want to accept what is taught, nor that they don't already know what is being taught. Such are the constraints on discourse teaching.

Specific areas of discourse.

In this section I will examine some areas of discourse and their practical application in the language classroom. The list is not intended to be exhaustive, and the areas discussed are not assumed to be relevant to every teaching situation. They are described with the caveats above, as it is recognized that other environments, teachers, students and situations may demand a differing focus of teaching. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the underlying value of discourse awareness can be demonstrated.

Marking

One of the paradoxes of linguistic performance is that grammatical and lexical errors are an essential part of interlanguage development (See Lightbown and Spada 1999, pp. 71-90) but they are perhaps the most noticeable, noticed and commented upon factors in L2 perfor-mance, whilst the non-grammaticality of much native speaker talk is hardly ever noticed, much less commented upon.

By contrast, discourse marking, or it's omission, is one of the areas of performance that is least noticeable and noticed in L2 performance, whilst having a key role in any true verbal communication above the level of rudimentary information exchange. Native speaking inter-locutors often have the feeling that the L2 speakers have some deficiency in their performance but can't quite isolate the cause(s), one of which may be the paucity of discourse marking. The sheer frequency of discourse markers in daily, unscripted dialogue is often not realized by teachers or students. In a transcript of a radio interview presented in North Star Advanced (Priess 1998, pp. 237-239) discourse marking is a prominent feature of the dialogue with mul-tiple and consistent uses of common discourse markers such as "well", "you know" and "I mean", among others. Simply focusing students' attention on the frequency of occurrence of these markers can raise awareness of discourse *per se* that is, the fact that speakers of any language shape what they say, comment upon its' relevance, signal that they are aware of the effect that their utterance has or may have on their interlocutor and so on.

In my experience, analyzing authentic texts (including audio-visual material) is the best way

of highlighting use of discourse markers. In fact, in the past one of the major shortcomings of the kind of scripted dialogues that were so common in ELT textbooks was the paucity of discourse markers, although this seems to be changing in some modern textbooks. (See for example the Touchstone series of ELT books published by Cambridge University Press.) This paucity of markers both reduces students' awareness of discourse and marking and often leaves the student unprepared for the nature of much native speaker conversation with its frequent marking.

In addition to raising students' awareness of the sheer frequency of discourse making, it is also important for students to define as clearly as possible the meanings and functions of common discourse markers. This is an extremely difficult task even for native speakers. In a small-scale survey (see Appendix 1) I tested native speaking EFL teachers on their ability to define common spoken discourse markers in English. The verbal responses to the questions were often vague, hedged, and contradictory, most often appealing to my sympathy as a fellow native speaker to grant that we both knew the meaning and function intuitively. Participants described the task as extremely difficult.

A classroom activity where the markers are matched by the students with functions/ definitions followed by an activity where authentic texts are analyzed in light of discourse marking has proven a popular and stimulating classroom activity in several lessons. Repeated attention given to marking and opportunities to engage in spontaneous does lead to higher levels of marking in student talk. (See Campbell-Larsen, 2013, p. 157.)

What is clear is that discourse marking is a 'blind spot' in both students' and teachers' view of language, which, if not addressed, will delay or impede the student's progress toward language use that goes beyond merely functional.

The British mathematician Alan Turing devised a famous test to differentiate between formulaic responses and communication based on thought processes. Discourse marking is a signal that the speaker has passed a kind Turing test, showing that they actually have meta-awareness of what they are saying, and its import in the real world, rather than merely applying unanalyzed chunks in response to stimulus.

Lexis: Reported Speech

"Unlike the mental grammar, the mental dictionary has had no cachet. It seems like nothing more than a humdrum list of words, each transcribed in the head by dull witted rote memorization."

Pinker (1994, p.126)

The learning of vocabulary is "the largest single element in tackling a new language for the learner:" (McCarthy 1991, p. 64) and vocabulary learning is often treated by students, teachers and textbooks alike as an activity requiring more memory than discernment.

Lexis is a broad field when viewed in terms of discourse, too broad to be given full coverage here. Rather, I will concentrate on an example of a discourse approach to a lexical area

that I have found productive in my teaching environment, giving students the ability to overcome a common area of difficulty, stimulating discourse awareness of lexical choices and giving students the wherewithal to view known language from a different perspective, leading to a greater meta-awareness of the multidimensionality of language.

Reported speech is a very high frequency activity in daily spoken English. Teaching of reporting is traditionally focused on the back shifting of tense and the rephrasing of time and place adverbs. Most students have studied these points repeatedly but still fail to utilize reported speech structures consistently or coherently. I have presented students with the following analysis of four common reported speech verbs, *say, speak, talk and tell*.

1) *Say*. To report information. E.g. He said he would call back later.
2) *Speak*. To report topic. E.g. He spoke about his vacation.
3) *Talk*. To report topic. E.g. I want to talk to you about the meeting.
4) *Tell*. To report information. E.g. He told me that it had been cancelled.
5) *Tell*. To report topic. E.g. He told us all about the accident.

The students are also told that the verbs have other meanings (for example , using *speak* to refer to foreign language ability, or *tell* for reported orders) but these other meanings are backgrounded for the purpose at hand.

Once students have understood these distinctions they can then use the verbs to give more shape and texture to their discourse rather than bald "He said, she said" type statements. For example, students can move from a general to specific focus in their reporting by introducing topic and speakers and then moving to information. E.g. "I was speaking to Mike the other day about the holidays and he was saying that he's not going anywhere this year." Alternatively, the students can remove the focus from the reported utterance to concentrate on other actions, e.g. "So we were just sitting there talking about work when this alarm started going off."

Similarly, the fact that the verb *tell* usually requires an object (the listener) whilst *say* does not allows the student to include a listener, for example, "David told Jenny that he'd do it." or omit the listener, as in, "David said he'd do it." The choice lies with the person doing the reporting, depending on what effect is desired. Viewing reported speech from a topic reporting or information reporting standpoint has proven beneficial to students.

The key point is that students are made aware that there is no correct answer as such. The lexical choices are to a large extent subjective, depending on the speaker's intent, once again highlighting the subjective nature of what constitutes well formedness at the level of discourse. Foregrounding and reargrounding elements are key skills if we are to use language to give texture, pace and focus to speaking and avoid the 'bland, flat and jejune' language referred to above.

Questioning strategies.

The ability to ask and understand questions in the L2 is a key area of linguistic performance

and is often covered extensively and repeatedly in language textbooks. However,

> Where questioning is concerned, instruction in the communicative classroom has typically entailed learners in extensive practice of question/ response sequences, rather than offering them insights into how questioning is realized in interactional sequences, or making references to the strategies that underlie questioning, so they could become more aware of sophisticated language use."
>
> Basturkmen (2002, p. 5)

When studying question formation in English, students' attention is often focused on the specifics of word order, tag agreement and the like, whilst ignoring some of the communicative strategies that are employed by native speakers to each other and in communication involving non-native speakers. The result can be (but not always) correctness on the grammatical level, but failure on the part of students realize the phatic nature of much questioning. Focusing on discourse aspects of question formation can smooth over some of the problems encountered in the language classroom.

The first point to be made is that students have to be made aware that some questions are more than bald requests for information. For example, present perfect questions of the type 'Have you ever eaten snake?" are not really well answered by a simple affirmative or negative. "A mere 'yes or 'no' response from the addressee would be odd or interpreted as unwillingness to interact with the speaker." Tsui (1992, p. 91) Rather, if the answer is affirmative, the speaker may be expected to recount the particulars of his or her experience, and if negative, then he or she may continue with the topic of unusual food experiences, for example, 'No I haven't, but when I went to Australia I ate kangaroo." (Alternatively, the question may have served as a topic proffer by the question asker, who intend to proceed with an anecdote related to having eaten snake.) Giving full, extended or tangential answers is a skill that many students may possess intuitively but often need to be reminded of within the classroom, in their eagerness to get the 'correct' answer and also, perhaps, because of an unconscious desire to stay within the three part exchange structure (See Coulthard and Brazil 1992, pp. 50-78). A more nuanced approach to question fomation may help students to differentiate between transactional and interactional questions.

I have sought to raise awareness of discourse considerations when asking questions in three areas. Firstly, question strings. By this I mean avoidance of asking simple unsupported questions. At a recent workshop for teachers I discovered that all teachers in attendance had regularly been asked the question "Why did you come to Japan?" and that all teachers took a negative view of this question, regarding it as either a kind of accusation, or a blunt attempt to elicit praise for all things Japanese. When the question was re-posed as a string of questions, e.g. "Why did you come to Japan? Was it mainly to teach here, or were you mainly interested in Japan and Japanese culture?" all of the participants responded that they had a much more favorable view of the question. Using question strings may be a way of reducing the directness of an enquiry, focusing on what kind of answer one expects, or giving the listener

greater leeway in answering, maintaining the phatic rather than transactional nature of the question.

Secondly, giving example answers to questions. The ways native speakers and non- native speakers utilize this strategy may be different but it is a useful strategy in any case. Native speakers may give exemplar answers to questions in for a variety of reasons: To predict, to clarify the intent of the question, to give the listener thinking time and so on. Non-native speakers may also exemplify for these reasons, or to make up for shortcomings in question formation. Interlanguage development may be at a stage where question formation is problematical. Consider the following question;

"How long do you working here?"

Clearly, it is not well formed and the recipient of the question may have to 'dig' to discover the questioner's meaning. Such digging can become a tiresome activity if prolonged, and also habituate the student to an unrealistically patient interlocutor. Now consider the following:

"How long do you working here? One years two years?"
"How long do you working here? To eight o'clock tonight, or nine o'clock tonight?"

In these cases the discourse strategy has made up for the shortcomings in the student's interlanguage development, and is much more tolerable to the listener over a period of time.

A third strategy is to embed the questions more firmly in discourse by supporting the questions with commentary, for example, "I m really lucky, I only live five minutes from work, so I never have to bother with the trains. How about you? How long does it take you to get into work?" Again, these kinds of supporting comments can add texture and direction to spoken communication, of course with the caveat that the speaker must have enough micro-processing ability to be able to form the comments coherently. I have found that raising students' awareness of these question strategies can elevate their discourse performance, mostly regardless of overall grammatical/linguistic ability.

Narrative.

The ability to relate stories, tell anecdotes and engage in narrative is a key human social activity. Narrative, along with jokes and the social prestige that comes with language proficiency are among the list of universal human traits identified by Donald E. Brown. (Cited in Pinker 2002, pp. 435-439) It is clear that narrative is a central part of spoken communication. Burns (2001, p. 126) reports, "In Slade's research 'story telling genres' accounted for 43.4 percent of casual conversation that occurred in workplace coffee breaks a figure that reflects the importance placed on sharing personal experiences in everyday social life." Given these points, the raising of awareness of narrative conventions cannot be neglected in the L2 classroom. Set against this, however, we must bear in mind McCarthy's (1991, p. 138) comment,

"Expecting a learner to tell a decent story in L2 is a tall order, and indeed it is; not everyone is an accomplished storyteller in their first language." Nonetheless, discourse awareness of spoken narrative does have a place in the language classroom, starting from the initial task of focusing student's awareness away from purely lexical/grammatical questions to a more holistic view of narrative.

One way to achieve this is to take the familiar classroom activity of a story strip (See Appendix 2) and present different groups with different titles. The story was originally titled 'A seat on the Train' but I have found that asking students to relate the story under the varying titles of 'Some People are so Nice' and 'Some People are so Rude' prompts awareness of discourse in narrative.

Students (often tacitly) admit that the stories should be different according to the title, and once this assessment has been made, the question of how to shape narrative according to the speaker's intent becomes a central focus. During discourse focus narrative activities the students can be made aware of some of the conventions of spoken narrative, e.g. Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Event, Resolution and Coda (See Labov & Waletsky, 1967; McCarthy 1991, p.138-139) and the different forms that narrative may take (See Burns 2001, p. 127; Eggins and Slade, 1997). Students have often commented after such activities that they have found the lesson stimulating, motivating and fun, as well as providing a welcome re-focus away from purely lexico-grammatical concerns. There seems to be awareness among some students that they have deficiencies that they can't account for on a lexical-grammatical view of language and that discourse proficiency may be one such deficiency.

Culture and L1 discourse awareness.

That cultures differ in their discourse conventions is widely accepted in the 'folk theory' of foreign language learning. The actual extent to which they differ is difficult to measure empirically. L1 interference at the level of lexis/ grammar is relatively easy to discern, for example "I saw a dream" is a literal translation from the Japanese expression usually rendered in English as "I had a dream." (夢を見た) Much more problematic is the extent to which the L1 culture influences discourse performance, if at all, given the subjective, context dependant nature of much discourse.

On one hand, Larsen-Freeman and Long report,

> For example, Giddens, Inoue and Schaefer (as reported on in Hatch 1983, pp. 147-8) constructed role play situations to elicit complaints from Spanish, Japanese and English native speakers ... They discovered that speakers of all three languages structured their complaints in much the same way.

(1991, p. 71)

On the other hand, McCarthy comments,

Many teachers will be familiar with individuals or groups from cultures where longer

silences seem to be tolerated in conversation (e.g. Finns) or where the 'thinking time' before a response is forthcoming seems agonizingly long (a tendency observable in Japanese learners).

(1991, p. 129)

The overlaps, near similarities and outright opposites that constitute discourse comparisons across cultures is a complex area, most often finding expression in vague, subjective 'feelings' that the communication is somehow 'foreign' or 'strange', when differences are noted. Where differences are not noted no comment is made, the assumption being that the discourse structure constitutes 'common sense'.

This area is one of particular difficulty in the language classroom, but also a vital area of awareness. If we take the above example of 'thinking time' in Japanese, this is one of the most common complaints that teachers voice about their students (along with the 'digging' referred to above). Likewise, Japanese students often voice complaints that they are constantly being interrupted by English speakers, and not given enough time to respond. This problem is a source of real friction, both inside and outside the classroom, straining the sympathies of the interlocutors severely.

Again, analysis of authentic material can make the case clear to students that English native speakers may interpret silence of more than two or three seconds either as a signal of non-comprehension, a tacit invitation for the current speaker to continue the turn or a social signal of disinterest or annoyance. In the radio interview transcript referred to above (Priess 1999, pp. 237-239) the students' attention can be drawn to the fact that over 19 changes of turn there is not more than one second of silence between turns, and several interruptions. Whether students accept this as a norm to be aspired to, or continue to characterize English discourse as rude and impatient is a subjective assessment. The best the teacher can do is to draw attention to the nature of the problem and highlight the consequences of failure to adhere to the paradigm, for example a questioner may rephrase the question if there is silence, rather than wait for several seconds for an answer.

The teacher must be aware of the cultural sensitivities of the students and present discourse differences as objectively as possible, avoiding subjective language and resorts to crude stereotypes. It may also be beneficial to highlight discourse similarities between the two communities, if discernable.

Underlying all of the above points is the fact that students will often be considering discourse conventions in their L1 as they are encountering notions of discourse in L2. For example, in the course of discourse marking presentations, students can be made aware of the prevalence of discourse marking in Japanese. I have told a short anecdote to students in Japanese, once whilst attending to grammar and lexis but neglecting marking, and again utilizing discourse markers but paying scant attention to grammar. Students universally agree that the marked version of the story is much more accessible and can draw the relevant conclusions for their own language use. Likewise the difficulty of defining markers correctly can be demonstrated by asking students to define Japanese discourse markers. In all of the areas

mentioned above it is implied that L1 discourse awareness is a corollary to awareness raising in the L2 classroom. Comparisons with the L1 are logical and automatic consequence of any activity concerning discourse awareness.

Conclusion

In applying these ideas in the classroom I have had consistently (often unelicited) positive feedback from students. I would be hesitant to claim that as a result of discourse focused teaching that student's discourse skills improved substantially. I would, however, state that students found the lessons stimulating, perhaps as a welcome relief from more traditional language lessons, perhaps because raising awareness of discourse seems to highlight an area of deficiency that many students are aware of but unable to identify clearly. Crossing the threshold of discourse awareness into discourse competence is a gradual process, but once crossed, the language user can be said to have entered a language community, that is, to be in possession of language for its' basic interactive social function.

> "Many studies have shown … that most of our talking is gossip. We discuss each other, who is having what relationship with whom and why; we approve and disapprove, take sides, and generally chat about the social world we live in."
>
> Blackmore, (1999, p. 96)

Simply stated, discourse is as much a part of language as grammar or vocabulary, and as such, it must be seen as an integral part of any language program. Raising critical awareness of discourse among students in both the target language and their mother tongue is a vital activity if the goal of language instruction is to be anything more than the rudimentary exchange of information.

References.

Basturkmen, H. (2002) 'Descriptions of Spoken Language for Higher Level Learners: The Example of Questioning. *ELT Journal* 55/1: 4-13.

Blackmore, S. (1999) *The Meme Machine*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Burns, A. (2001) *Analyzing Spoken Discourse: Implications for TESOL*. In Burns and Coffin (Eds.): 123-148.

Burns, A. and C. Coffin (eds.) (2001) *Analyzing English in a Global Context*. London: Routledge.

Campbell-Larsen, J. (2013). Helping students pass the Turing Test. In N. Sonda & A. Krause (Eds.), *JALT2012 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT.

Chomsky, N. (1957). *Syntactic structures*. The Hague: Mouton.

Cook, G. (1989) *Discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Coulthard, M. (1992) *Advances in Spoken Discourse Analysis*. London: Routledge.

Coulthard, M. and Brazil, D. 1992. *Exchange structure*. In Coulthard (ed.): 50-78.

Eggins, S. & Slade, D. (1997). *Analyzing casual conversation*. London. Continuum.

Labov, W. & Waletzky, J. (1967). Narrative analysis. In J. Helm (ed.), *Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts*. Seattle: University of Washington Press. (pp. 12-44). Reprinted in *The Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 7. 3-38.

Larsen Freeman, D. and M. H. Long, (1991) *An Introduction to Second Language Acquisition Research*. Harlow: Longman.

Lightbown, P.M and Spada, N. (1999) *How Languages are Learned*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McCarthy, M. (1991) *Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pinker, S. (2002) *The Blank Slate*. London: The Penguin Press.

Pinker, S (1994) *The Language Instinct*. New York: Harper Collins.

Priess, S. (1998) *Northstar advanced. Focus on Speaking and Listening*. New York: Longman.

Skehan, P. (1996) *Second Language Acquisition Research and Task-Based Instruction*. In J. Willis and D. Willis (eds.): 17-30.

Tsui, A. (1992) *A Functional Description of Questions*. In M. Coulthard (ed.) 89-110.

Willis, J and D. Willis (eds.) (1996) *Challenge and Change in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Heineman.

Appendix 1.

How long have you been teaching English?

Define the following discourse markers.

EG: Anyways.   To dismiss the previous discourse in anticipation of the main point, which will follow.

     1) By the way.

     2) As I was saying.

     3) Of course.

     4) Now then.

     5) Honestly.

     6) Actually.

     7) After all.

     8) Mind you.

     9) So to speak.

     10) Believe me.

On the following scale how difficult do you rate this task?

     1......2......3......4......5......6......7......8......9......10

Easy   Difficult.

Read the following definitions.

1) By the way.   To change topic to an unrelated topic, acknowledging that it has no   connection to the previous one.
2) As I was saying.   To return to a topic that was dropped previously.
3) Of course.   To foreground information whilst acknowledging that it is already known to the other participants or generally known.
4) Now then.   To signal a change of discourse focus, said by a person who is understood to be in control of the discourse focus.
5) Honestly.   To introduce critical remarks, acknowledging the impact they may have.
6) Actually.   To signal that expectation have or have not been met, and to introduce corrections.
7) After all.   To suggest that the speaker has a strong point that the listener has not taken into consideration.
8) Mind you.   To introduce a counterpoint that has occurred to the speaker while speaking.
9) So to speak.   To signal that the speaker is tentative about the force or aptness of his expression.
10) Believe me.   To suggest that the speaker is in possession of salient facts that are not known to the listener.

Do you agree with the definitions?

1= Good definition

10 = Poor definition.

X= Don't understand the definition.

Appendix 2.

Look at the following story strip.

Each student choose one of the following titles and tell the story to your partner.

    a) Some people are so nice.
    b) Some people are so rude.

Discuss the differences in the two stories.