大學英語口語對話中語言使用「適切性」及「連貫性」之研究

紀靜芬∗

摘要

文法（linguistic）及溝通（communicative）能力（competence）的學習是語言課室必訂的教學目標。學生經過一段時間的學習後，原則上應該能夠在口語或寫作上表現出其所習得的文法及溝通能力知識。本研究選用三組大學生的口語對話預備稿，檢視該群學生文法及溝通能力的運用情形。研究討論以學生的語言使用適切性（appropriateness）及對話結構連貫性（coherence）為重點；學生的文法使用情況，則稍有觀察。研究結果顯示，三組學生僅部份表現出文法及溝通能力。語言學習進展、使用習慣、教材等或可說明成因。本文於結尾另提出未來可能研究的方向。

關鍵詞：外語學習、課堂語言學習、口語表現、文法能力、溝通能力、適切性、連貫性

∗作者係國立空中大學人文學系講師
A Study of the “Appropriateness” & “Coherence” Element in University Students’ Pre-Planned Oral Dialogue

Ching-fen Chi

ABSTRACT

Language classrooms aim at equipping learners with linguistic and communicative competence. Learners in such classrooms are supposed to perform both competences, either in an oral or a written form, after a period of learning. This study aims at examining three-pair university student learners’ partial linguistic and communicative competence in their pre-planned oral dialogue to see if the students in question are able to perform the competences as expected. Focuses are mainly on the appropriateness and coherence of English usage. The correctness of language use is also briefly examined. The study result shows that student learners partially show those two types of competences in their performance. Language learning development, input sources, culture influences could be reasons for such results. Further studies along the line are suggested at the end of the paper for reference purpose.

Key Words: Foreign language learning, Classroom language learning, Oral performance, linguistic competence, communicative competence, appropriateness, coherence
Introduction

Genuine oral communication takes place as a result of the necessity to interact with other people around. It undoubtedly requires both linguistic and communicative competence. Linguistic competence, or the knowledge of grammar, has been defined as grammatical knowledge of a language, which enables language use of a learner. Communicative competence, on the other hand, is believed to be socially bounded. It is a type of knowledge and ability that determines what and how to say to whom at when and in where. In an interwoven oral discoursal web, the interpersonal interaction is full of unpredictability and unexpectedness involving much of interpretability, appropriateness, coherence and so forth (Baron, 1989; McCarthy, 1996; Revell, 1979).

In conventional language classroom practice, linguistic competence has been visually encoded as sets of rules for learning while communicative competence has been conceptualized as notional and functional situations. The goal of such practice is to equip language learners with both competences for real-world language use and usage. Learners in such classrooms are supposed to be able to perform both competences, more or less, after a period of learning.

This paper thus is aiming at examining student learners’ communicative and linguistic competence in their classroom pre-planned oral dialogue to see if the students in question are able to perform the competences as expected. The focus will be especially on the appropriateness and coherence of speech indicative of partial communicative competence. Learners’ grammatical errors indicative of partial linguistic competence will also be briefly examined.

Background of the Study and Data Selection

A group of 20-sophomore English majors in Tamkang University had been
assigned to the author’s conversation class. In order to prepare these students for the class, a textbook was used as a source of input for language use. Before each class, students were asked to prepare a topic-oriented lesson. During the class, students were asked to get involved in discussion, do role-playing, or group reporting, depending on the nature of each lesson. New vocabulary, phrases and expressions were introduced and students were encouraged to use them in their interaction. Basically, students were given chances to practice English in their own words, either spontaneously or in a pre-planned way.

In one midterm exam, students were asked to show what they had learned. In order to preserve the communicative nature of interaction, and to make sure student learners gain some of the material taught, the teacher asked her students to form a conversation pair and choose ten vocabulary/phrases/sentences from the textbooks, which were meaningful to them, to be included in the conversation. Since the teacher believed that spontaneous speech in another language might involve various performance-distracting variables, she asked her student pairs to plan their conversation beforehand in the form of a written dialogue. And, when they came for the evaluation, they were required to converse without looking at their notes. After the mid-term evaluation, the drafts were handed in as partial requirement of the class.

In doing so, it was hoped that the written script would help students plan and organize their thought and language, cope with the linguistic barriers and focus their attention on how to make a real conversation. Also, it is believed that through meaningful planning, what has been learned, including communicative knowledge, will be triggered. In addition, through memorizing, what has been learned will then be retained for further language use.

In order to achieve the aim of this paper—examining student learners’ partial communicative and linguistic competence in their pre-planned oral performance, three drafts were selected for analysis (see Appendix 1, 2 and 3.)
In the drafts, underlined words, phrases, and sentences (as shown in Appendix 1, 2 and 3) refer to new entries taken from the classroom learning material, an additional source of evaluation.

The three drafts used for analysis are from three pairs of the students who gave higher ratings on their oral ability compared with the rest of the class. These students are highly motivated on voluntarily expressing themselves to questions initiated by the teacher. They are also good at short role-plays and discussions. They belong to high risk-takers as well. Moreover, their TOEFL scores (with the exception of Gina and Joker), based on an unofficial test given by Tamkang University are above average among their peers (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAMES</th>
<th>LISTENING</th>
<th>STRUCTURE</th>
<th>READING</th>
<th>TOTAL SCORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JACK</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOKER</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GINA</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANNETTE</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAMELA</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALICE</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHOLE CLASS</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>520</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, the three pairs are chosen based on their higher overall proficiency. They are assumed to be good at manipulating their own language linguistically and communicatively.

Data Analysis & Findings

As stated, this paper focuses on the coherence and appropriateness of students’ pre-planned dialogue. Coherence, which marks the links of
utterances and turns (McCarthy, 1996), will be assessed based on the flow of the pre-planned dialogues. Appropriateness is referred to as language usage either shown in the oral or written form. In addition to coherence and appropriateness, grammatical errors will also be briefly examined for reference purpose. Since pre-planned written dialogues are used for analysis, intonation, stress and other non-verbal elements of a real life speech will be excluded, though they are determinative factors for listening comprehension.

The following analysis of students’ written dialogue will be categorized as Coherence, Appropriateness and Grammatical Errors. In the Coherence category, beside reference words and topics of talking, backchannel and turning-taking phrases/works will also be included. In the Appropriateness category, two subcategories—False Relating and Wrong Answering/Responding—are listed for examination too.

**Jack & Joker’s Draft**

The topic of Jack and Joker’s dialogue draft is “advertisement” (see Appendix 1).

**Coherence**

The first four utterances in Jack and Joker’s pre-planned dialogue are incoherent as indicated by randomly chosen topics of the talk. In these four lines, Jack and Joker fail to respond to what has been said. In Line 2, when Jack expresses why he got a NIKE T-shirt, Joker in Line 3 doesn’t respond directly to the word “it”; instead, he attempts to distract the topic to “advertisement”. Then, in Line 4, Jack appears to partially echo Joker’s question by relating what he himself has said about T-shirt with the advertisement question—“Well, both of them do.” Now, the topic of their talk has been shifted by the phrase “both of them”, which refer to both the T-shirt and advertisement in the previous utterances. It is clear that the topic of their utterance jumps here and there.
Back channel words such as Yes, Ya, and Oh are seen and used frequently in the draft, but only shown in the initial position of the related utterance. Turn-taking phrases/words can hardly be found in the draft expect for Well in Line 4 and 21.

**Appropriateness**

**False Relating:** In Line 10, when Jack expresses his idea about Nike’s commercial slogans, he seems to have mistaken the word “slogan” for “Peter is not like ordinary people. He’s done the marathon.”

**Wrong Answering/Responding:** In Line 1, when Joker expresses his feeling to Jack’s new T-shirt in Line 1, he uses an exclamation. But Jack in Line 2 replies “Ya, because it attracts me a lot”. “Ya” here may be good for echoing what Joker has said in Line 1 and “it attracts me a lot” is OK too. But the word “because” seems to be inappropriate when there isn’t any “why” in Joker’s statement.

**Grammatical errors**

**Phrases:** In Line 16, Jack uses the expression “I’m afraid of being against you” to express “I don’t quite agree with you.” In Line 21, the sentence, “I profor (prefer) to believe it has positive meaning” is another example of wrong use of the verb phrase.

Errors involving such as agreement and spelling are not significant here and can be interpreted as performance errors/slips of the tongue.

**Gina and Annette’s Draft**

The topic of Gina and Annette’s draft is also about “advertising” (see Appendix 2).

**Coherence**

The coherence in Gina & Annette’s draft is weak too. And, it reveals
problems similar to *Jack* and *Jokers’*—aimless talk without a focus. From Line 1 to 5, the topic under discussion is vague, jumping from “an interesting advertisement” in Line 2 to “some hints” in Line 3. In Line 5, the topic goes back to “the advertisement” as indicated using the reference “it”. Then, in Line 6, “the name of the jewelry store” is the focus and then “the actress” in Line 7 comes out. In Line 8, the reference “it” comes out again to refer to the “advertisement” in the Line 2, but not to the “actress” in the previous sentence. Still, there are no clear topics and the discourse is not coherent at all. This topic shift occurs even in a single speaker’s utterances as seen in Line 10 to Line 15.

When compared to *Jack* and *Joker’s*, *Gina* and *Annette* use more turn-taking phrases/sentences, but less backchannel words. For instance, in Line 10, “From your feeling”, in Line 16 “Can I add something here”, in Line 20, “To return to the topic”, in Line 25, “On the other hand”, in Line 28, “Well”, all can be regarded as turn takings. However, *Gina* and *Annette* inappropriately use some of them. And, phrases such as “from your feeling” are more like Chinese-English translation, which appear too formal for conversation.

**Appropriateness**

**False Relating:** In Line 8, when *Annette* tries to make a comment on the ad, she abruptly uses adjectives “modern and humorous” to describe the ad while there is no related proposition at all shown in previous utterances.

In Line 10, when *Gina* tries to use the sentence “They increased many elements which were very sensible” in her speech, she seems unaware of the fact that the pronoun “they” should be something else’s reference and that “many elements” should be followed by further explanations. Thus, this could be interpreted as a false reference.

**Wrong Answering/Responding:** Incidents of inappropriate use of language occur mostly in *Gina’s* talk. In Line 1, when *Gina* greets *Annette*, she says
“Hi, Annette, you looks so great!” but, then she continues with “What happened?” Gina might use this to express her interest about why Annette looks great. But the phrase “What happened?” as used in daily conversation usually occurs in contexts involving phrases such as “You look bad.” In response to Gina’s “You look so great”, Annette misses the cue by shifting her topic on an “advertisement”.

In Line 10, the phrase “From your feeling”, though sounding like turning taking, obviously fails to echo what Annette says in previous utterances—“the modern and humorous way”.

In Line 23, Annette is supposed to echo Gina’s advertisement campaign instead of slogans but she misses the point again. She instead is giving examples of types of slogans.

In Line 20, the phrase “To return to the topic” hints seemingly Gina’s intention of continuing the previous topic. Yet, her following utterance, “that’s the so-called advertising campaign …” sounds like a conclusion statement. And, in Line 25, the phrase “On the other hand” serves little purpose as a transition marker since there isn’t any connected notion stated.

Grammatical Errors

Gina appears to clearly make more sentential errors than Annette, even more so than Jack and Joker. Line 10 to 15 is an example. Gina tends to translate Chinese into English by scrambling English words and phrases together, utterly oblivious to the correct use of English sentences. Though Gina uses more formulaic expressions than Annette, she uses them in a rigid way and isn’t aware of the tone of the speech. Since the analysis of the structural errors is not within the scope of this study, further examination is not included.

Pamela and Alice’s Draft

The topic of Pamela and Alice’s draft is about “animals’ rights” (see
Appendix 3).

Coherence

*Pamela* and *Alice’s* dialogue looks coherent. The utterances and turn takings are well shown. The pattern of Request-Answer-Feedback can be observed in the conversation. Though *Alice* in Line 12 fails to directly echo *Pamela*’s last sentence in Line 11, their talk sounds reasonable—in reality, interlocker’s attention is often distracted by things in the surrounding.

Backchannel words such as *Hey, Yeah*, are seen in the draft too, though not many. Turn-taking phrases are yet rare. Maybe it is because *Pamela* and *Alice* try to set up different scenes in their pre-planned dialogue (see Line 4 and Line 23, Appendix 3).

Appropriateness

Generally speaking, *Pamela* and *Alice* use their language appropriately except for two places. The first one is “That makes a lot of sense.” in Line 17; and the other is “What an excellent idea!” in Line 22.

Grammatical Errors

*Pamela* and *Alice’s* draft shows minor grammatical errors. The expression in Line 10, “I can’t agree with you anymore” should be corrected, as “I couldn’t agree with you more”. And, in Line 17, “Animals should have animal rights as well” should be “Animals should have their (own) rights as well”, because in English pronoun is preferred when a noun is being referring to in close proximity; it is the same in the possessive case.

Discussions

The above analysis shows *Pamela* and *Alice* are competent linguistically and communicatively. But *Jack* and *Joker, Gina* and *Annette* are a different
story. Though they don’t have serious problems with the appropriateness of language usage in their pre-planned dialogue, they do show their incompetence in handling dialogue coherence—both groups tend to shift the topic of talk around. As for the grammatical errors, Gina is the one who presents serious problems of the language use. And, the rest five members perform just well.

Do the student learners’ communicative and linguistic competences partially reveal themselves in the pre-planned oral performance after a period of language learning? The answer is a tentative yes. Pamela, Alice and Annette present themselves well linguistically in a dialogue form of conversation. Jack and Joker do moderately well. But Gina fails so. As for the communicative competence in terms of the scope of this study—appropriateness and coherence in a pre-planned dialogue, Pamela and Alice seem to meet the end. But Jack, Joker, Annette and Gina do not well present their communicative competence.

What could be the explanations for such a result possible?

1. The amount of grammatical errors in the pre-planned dialogue appears to relate to the proposition complication of the dialogue. The three drafts discussed have shown different ways of planning a dialogue. The first, Jack and Joker’s, and the second, Gina and Annette’s, are complicated in their dialogue proposition—they tend to discuss more topics and their dialogues are much more like an individual presentation of personal opinions. Long utterances without much conversational interaction feature those two dialogues. The last one, Pamela and Alice’s, is more of an everyday conversation with simple propositions in it. Comparing the three dialogues, the first two drafts involve more complicated concepts in discussion, which may lead to the looseness of their pre-planned dialogues, linguistically and communicatively. In Pamela and Alice’s dialogue, the proposition is simple and clear so that they tend to use the short and simple language to present it, which results in few grammatical errors.
2. A pre-planned written dialogue may not be able to fully elicit student learners’ communicative competence. In this study, student learners do not show their oral communicative competence fully. Maybe, the student subjects in the study were not familiar with or do not have enough training to write a planned dialogue so that they didn’t perform as well as they should. Expect for this, an unexpected finding in this study shows that these student subjects’ lack of coherence is similar to that found in the author’s previous study on writing, topics jumping everywhere. Why do different types of written discourse show the similarity? Are there cultural factors involved—i.e., do Chinese learners all have the same performance? Of course, further study needs to be conducted.

3. The quality and quantity of input may play a role in the unsatisfactory performance. As said, these student subjects are English majors. They are supposed to have more input than other non-English majors. But why do they fail to perform as well as they should? This has to do with the quality and quantity of input. Actually, most of the English majors’ courses are not communication-related. In those courses, student learners aren’t provided with sufficient input for appropriate language usage. And, though communicative-based textbooks may be used in some of the courses, the text materials probably don’t include enough of the language usage. Moreover, the “authenticity” of such materials is questionable.

4. Communicative competence is not fully learned yet. This point is related to the development of learners’ interlanguage system. Though interlanguage deals more with learners’ development of grammatical competence, it can as well be applied to the development of learners’ communicative competence. Maybe, the time has not come yet; the input doesn’t become an intake.

These explanations, of course, need to be further examined before definite conclusions can be drawn. Further studies could be conducted along the line of the followings: 1) whether memorizing can really improve
language learning; 2) whether real oral performance instead of pre-planned dialogue is indicative of/a reliable measure of communicative competence; 3) whether the learners modify their speech to a more speech form when they orally perform their pre-planned dialogue; 4) whether longer dialogue elicits more interpretative ability, which in turn helps elicit communicative competence in speech. Also, what kinds of classroom activities are needed for the cultivation of communicative competence? What would be the amount of input that helps the development of a learner’s communicative competence?

**Conclusions**

Pre-planned written dialogue tasks may not reveal the whole picture of a learner’s communicative and linguistic competence. However, it is a learning activity to help learners organize and plan their thought and language. It is, indeed, a way to examine a learner’s communicative and linguistic knowledge and to know what weakness such a learner may have. Although in this study, the student learners didn’t show their competence fully and well, the results have implications for classroom application. In her future class teaching, the author will focus more on the type and the amount of input students may receive in the class. Other learning activities will be carefully selected to accompany the goal as well.
References


Appendix 1  Jack and Joker’s Pre-Planned Dialogue

J1: Joker  J2: Jack

1  J1: Jack, you bought another NIKE T-shirt!
2  J2: Ya, because it attracts me a lot.
3  J1: Do you mean that the advertisement attract you?
4  J2: Well, I think both of them do.
5  J1: Why?
6  J2: I think Nike’s commercial advertisement is pretty cool. It portrays many ideas. From the article of our text book, there is a brilliant example of Nike.
7  J1: Do you mean the ad of Peter?
8  J2: Yes! In my opinion, the ad is in good taste to me. Among Nike’s ads, there will always be slogans, and this is no exception. In this one, the slogan is, “Peter is not like ordinary people. He’s done the marathon.”
9  J1: Oh! Well, I remembered that! But I think it doesn’t respect the disabled. You know, “Peter has no forearms and no legs.” Even if Peter himself says “I’m happy the way I am and I get on.” I’m still for the cynical.
10 J2: I’m afraid of being against you. Nike’s advertising campaign usually promote people to do exercise or to succumb (succeed) something originally (originally) tough to them. From Peter’s case, the giant illustrates him like a hero.
11 J1: However, ill that Nike does is to earn money.
12 J2: Well, I profor (prefer) to believe it has positive meaning.
Appendix 2  Gina and Annette’s Pre-Planned Dialogue

G: Gina  A: Annette
1 G: Hi, Annette, you looks so great! What happened?
2 A: A few weeks ago, I saw an interesting advertisement that gave me some
new ideas. Give you some hints—a pretty woman, necklace and garbage
trunk.
3 G: Wee, I think I know what ad do you mean. It’s selling the jewelry, right?
4 A: You got it. If there weren’t the name of the jewelry store, I might take it
as an image-add. The actress always dresses up for no special reason, just
for fun. I consider that it uses the modern and humorous way to sell its
product.
5 G: From your feeling let me think about an ad of president election by A-bien.
6 On the Valentine’s Day, the DPP had such an advertisement. At the
beginning, it was only showed some sentences that a man wakes up twice in
one night to hold his wife going to bathroom. In the day, he is a top guy; in
the night, he is a tender husband. They increased many elements which
were very sensible. Oh, my God. What a moving scene.
7 A: Can I add something here? Yah, I remember it. At that time, I say its
billboard posters at the side of some main roads. Actually, this ad put
emphasis on the soft part, which always makes the audience touching.
Express a warm and clear intention that portrays another type of art.
8 G: To return to the topic, that’s the so-called advertising campaign, using the
slogan and different ways to promote the style of a company and sell its
product.
9 A: Like the slogan of Ford motor—“Moving with you” and a beauty salon
“Trust me, you can make it”, always impress the consumers very much.
10 G: On the other hand, the cynical might said that the entire ads are for the
commercial purpose. There is no denying that some of them do, but we still
have the ads in good taste.
11 A: Well, I have to go now. See you.
12 G: See you.
Appendix 3  **Pamela and Alice’s Pre-Planned Dialogue**

P: Pamela    A: Alice

1. P: Today is Saturday. Do you have any plans for today?
2. A: How about going to the **zoo**?
3. P: Good idea! That’s just what I have in mind. Let’s go right now!
4. (Arrive at the zoo)
5. P: They are rhinos. Do you know rhinos’ horns are very precious in traditional medicine?
6. A: I’ve heard of that. But I don’t think they work as medicine.
7. In addition, killing rhinos just for their horns is immoral.
8. Those poachers are really mean.
9. P: I can’t agree with you anymore. That is why many rare animals are in danger of extinction. I also know some people collect **ivory** carving.
10. A: Hey, here are chimpanzees! Last summer I watched chimpanzees perform magic in a **circus** show. It’s **funny**.
11. P: Funny?!! You must be kidding. We selfish human beings train animals such as dolphins and lions to entertain us, but we’ve deprived them of their free rights.
12. A: That makes a lot of sense. Animals should have animal rights as well. Besides, it’s not fair to keep animals inside cages all day. Most of them seem unhappy.
13. P: Yeah, I think people are so **cruel** and selfish. I don’t want to stay here anymore. Let’s leave here!
15. (Leave the zoo, on our way home)
16. P: Hey, look at the **billboard**. The model wears a **mink** coat. Do you think it’s **glamorous**?
17. A: Not at all! Killing animals for their fur is terrible.
18. P: Do you think advertisements can arouse your desire to buy the **products**? I mean we see, hear, and read advertising every day.
19. A: That depends. If they are expensive products such as Chanel **perfumes**, I won’t buy them. But if the ads are about food, they always attract me.
20. A: Me too. Don’t forget. We are voracious eaters. Anyway, it’s time for lunch. How about going to Burger King?
21. P: That’s a great idea!