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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the use of connectors in English conversation between native Japanese-speakers and teachers outside the classroom. Data were drawn from six videotaped conversations between pairs of Japanese students, all learning beginning-level English, with conversational support provided by English teachers. The functions of four connective words ("okay, and, so, oh") in conversation management, for both students and teachers, were examined. Results indicate that "okay" filled such functions as transition, continuance, request for agreement, and approval, and appeared most often in the changing of topic, especially to mark the conclusion of a topic. "And" performed such connective functions as continuation, contrast, prodding, consequence, and brevity. It most often marked continuation of a topic, and was heavily used by students. "So" marked consequence, interference, summing up, prodding, filling, initiation, and self-correction, and was used most often for prodding. "Oh" marked receipt of new or unexpected information, recognition of old information, repair, shift in subjective orientation, and evaluation, and was used most commonly to mark receipt of new information and recognition of old information. (MSE)

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# CONNECTIVE CHOICE BETWEEN NATIVE AND JAPANESE SPEAKERS

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The role of connective words in discourse has received much attention in recent studies (e.g., Ball, 1985; Schiffrin, 1987; Schourup and Walda, 1988). This paper attempts to examine the discourse functions of the English connective words used in the conversations between teachers and students, focusing on what connective words are used and how. What connective words are taken up by native speakers is of great importance here in assisting non-native students to understand what conversation is going on. This is because connective words segment conversation and mark the units of discourse. Recognition of the segmentation of conversation is something with which non-native beginner-level students have great trouble.

Our previous studies suggest that teachers first set up a friendly situation and then encourage non-native beginner-level students to participate in the ongoing conversation by using some simple connective words. These connective words play an important role in conversational management, enabling the students to receive cues and increase their understanding (Tabuki et al., 1990a; 1990b). In this paper, we examine the functions of four connective words—'OK', 'and', 'so', and 'oh'.

## 2. DATA

To collect the data, we videotaped six sessions of English conversations between students and teachers outside the classroom. Five pairs of Japanese students attended the conversational sessions. They were three male/male pairs, one male/female pair and

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one female/female pair. All the students were taking an English conversation class at the time; but still had low-level verbal skills. Both native and non-native teachers of English attended the sessions to serve as helpers, not to control the conversation. Six five-minute-long sessions were all transcribed, following the next notations: - for short pauses; 0.1-0.6 seconds, + for long pauses; 1.0-1.9 seconds, ++ for extended pauses; 3.2-16 seconds (Brown and Yule, 1983). All turns in each session were numbered for identification. Table 1 shows connective words used in our data.

Table 1. Connective words used

	Teachers	Students	Total
OK	70 (41.9%)	1 ( 1.7%)	71 (31.6%)
And	25 (15.0%)	43 (74.1%)	68 (30.2%)
So	37 (22.2%)	2 ( 3.4%)	39 (17.3%)
Oh	21 (12.6%)	6 (10.3%)	27 (12.0%)
Now	7 ( 4.2%)	0 ( 0.0%)	7 ( 3.1%)
Or	4 ( 2.4%)	2 ( 3.4%)	6 ( 2.7%)
Well	1 ( 0.6%)	2 ( 3.4%)	3 ( 1.3%)
Because	1 ( 0.6%)	1 ( 1.7%)	2 ( 0.9%)
But	0 ( 0.0%)	1 ( 1.7%)	1 ( 0.4%)
Then	1 ( 0.6%)	0 ( 0.0%)	1 ( 0.4%)
Total	167	58	225

### 3. DISCUSSION

Having analyzed our data, we found some specific patterns in the way the teachers talk to encourage the students. By the frequent use of 'OK' (41.9%) and 'so' (22.2%), the teachers contributed much to the flow of the conversations, although they were

not supposed to control it. Table 1 reveals that students use 'and' most frequently (74.1%) and 'oh' relatively often (10.3%). To examine the discourse functions, our focus is put on the top four connective words—'OK', 'and', 'so' and 'oh'.

### 3.1. The Functions of 'OK'

We believe that 'OK' is poorly investigated discourse markers, since 'OK' has been traditionally considered as an adjective, adverb, verb, and noun. We regard 'OK' as a connective used most frequently and effectively for discourse management in the simplified speech. Table 2 shows the functions of 'OK' divided into the six categories.

Table 2. Functions of 'OK'

	Teachers	Students	Total
A. Transition-(a) Beginning	11	0	11 (15.5%)
-(b) Concluding	23	0	23 (32.4%)
B. Continuance	7	0	7 ( 9.9%)
C. Request for Agreement	13	0	13 (18.3%)
D. Agreement	9	1	10 (14.1%)
E. Approval	4	0	4 ( 5.6%)
F. 'All Right'	3	0	3 ( 4.2%)
Total	70	1	71

Example (1) shows 'OK' as (Aa) Beginning, (Ab) Concluding, (C) Request for Agreement and (F) 'All Right'. In (1), E, a native speaker of English and teacher, starts a conversation with T, a female student, and S, a male student.

(1) 1 E: OK we're ready. So, um, what we'd like to do first.

What's the date? It's the 5th of December, 1988, and first, could you please tell me, what's your name?

2 T: My name is Kimiko Taguchi.

3 E: OK, great. And what's your name?

4 S: My name is Masashi Salto.

5 E: Thanks. OK we're eating lunch here - and we're going to talk. So - um, first for about five minutes, let's just speak English. OK? - And anything is OK, just especially ask each other questions, answer, and talk about anything that you like. OK? So - um, please tell me - tell us what you like to do. (Session 5)

Let us look at OK's function as TRANSITION. This means that 'OK' appears in the transition of the discourse topic. Depending on where it is used, we subdivide the function into two sub-functions: (Aa) Beginning and (Ab) Concluding. 'OK' in Turn 1 is being used to start a topic at the beginning. In Turn 3 'OK' functions as CONCLUDING the short topic. By saying 'OK', E not only signals her understanding but finishes T's turn in order to ask S. The first 'OK' in Turn 5 is also an example of BEGINNING. E utters 'OK' to fill a gap before introducing a new topic. Next in Turn 5 we can see two 'OK's as REQUEST FOR AGREEMENT. A speaker usually successfully gets a hearer's cooperation by saying 'OK?' with a rising intonation. The third 'OK' in Turn 5 is not a connective. It simply means 'all right' and functions as an adjective.

Example (2) indicates 'OK' as (B) Continuance, (D) Agreement, and (E) Approval.

(2) 76 E: Now? OK - shall we stop now? One more question?

77 Timer: + OK.

78 E: OK - so, please - do - why do you like it? (Session 1)

When E, a native speaker, says 'Now?' in Turn 76, the timer is signaling that the time is up. So E shows her AGREEMENT by saying 'OK'. Since E hopes to continue the dialogue with T, a non-native student, the timer says 'OK' in Turn 77 to show his APPROVAL. In Turn 78 E uses 'OK' to continue the interrupted topic. We call this function CONTINUANCE because the content of the topic is not changed.

### 3.2. The Functions of 'And'

'And' is one of the most unmarked connectives so we had much difficulty in assigning explicit functional roles to each contextual 'and'. In our data 'and' was most frequently used by students (74.1% on Table 1). This is because 'and' is the most familiar and conveniently used connective just to mark the continuation of talk. Schiffirin (1987:189) claims that 'and' has two uses: (1) 'And' is a structural device for building text which can enter into syntagmatic contrasts with asyndetic connection, (2) 'and' has pragmatic effect as a marker of continuation in interaction. In Table 3 we subcategorize the functions of 'and' into six items, Item F being treated as non-connective.

Table 3. Functions of 'And'

	Teachers	Students	Total	
A. Continuation	16	27	43	(63.2%)
B. Contrast	4	1	5	( 5.1%)
C. Prodding	2	0	2	( 5.1%)
D. Consequence	1	1	2	(35.9%)
E. Brevity	0	1	1	(17.9%)
F. N + N (or) S + S'	3	12	15	(15.4%)
Total	26	42	68	

Example (3) illustrates 'and' as (A) Continuation, (B) Contrast, and (F) N + N. K and W, both male students, talk with E, a native teacher.

- (3) 59 K: What did you do last week?  
60 W: Uh, I watched - uh - television. Uh - Nihon series baseball game, uh ++ Saturday and Sunday.  
61 K: I, I, I watched too. (laugh)  
62 W: I'm fond of the Chunichi Dragons. Uh + Saturday I, I say + damn it, I say damn it, and Sunday I'm glad.  
63 E: Uh, did they lose on Saturday?  
64 W: Yes.  
65 E: And they won on Sunday? Good.  
66 W: Yes.  
67 E: Good, (O)K. Uh so what do you want to talk. Let's talk about your family - a little bit, OK? + So - tell us about your family. Yeah ++ yeah why not. (laugh) OK.  
68 K: My family is four people + and with me. Uh - my, my father is uh + making, making - maked women's wear.  
69 E: Uh huh.  
70 K: And, and - he - he's very hard.  
71 E: Very?  
72 K: Very, very hard, uh - hard.  
73 E: Uh.  
74 K: And my mother is elementary school teacher. And, and she's very hard too.  
75 E: Working hard?  
76 K: Yes.

(Session 3)

'And' in Turn 60 serves just as a coordinator of 'Saturday' and 'Sunday', not as a discourse marker. So this 'and' in this context does not affect the flow of conversation since this type of 'and' has limited usage within a sentence. W in Turn 62 talks

about baseball games and he supports the professional team—the Chunich Dragons. The utterance 'I say damn it' contrasts with the utterance 'Sunday I'm glad' by the connective word 'and'. This 'and' is replaceable with other similar connectives such as 'while' and 'but'. The unit of talk in Turn 62 is affirmed by E in Turn 63 and Turn 65 saying 'Did they lose on Saturday?' and 'They won on Saturday?'. So 'and' in Turn 65 has a meaning of CONTRAST since this 'and' contrasts 'lose' in Turn 63 with 'win' in Turn 65. K in Turn 68 through 74 repeats 'and' as many as six times. Students of verbally beginners' level are likely to use many 'and's just to indicate CONTINUATION filling gaps between units of talk, probably because they need much time before putting into their next utterance.

Example (4) illustrates 'and' as (C) Prodding. Two female and non-native students, Ka and Ki, talk with S, a non-native teacher of English.

- (4) 7 Ka: How many people in your family, family?  
8 Ki: Father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, brother, um,  
    six people. ++  
9 S: And?  
10 Ka: How about father?  
11 Ki: Father? (Japanese) ++ (Session 4)

Both Ka and Ki are very nervous at the beginning of the conversation. So, in Turn 8, Ki is hesitant and keeps quiet for a while. To break the ice, S urges Ka to ask another question by saying 'And?' in Turn 9. This 'and' functions as a marker for a hearer to start an utterance. We define this function as PRODDING. This use seems to be a characteristic of Teacher Talk.

Example (5) shows 'and' as (D) Consequence. E, a native teacher, starts to talk with Ka and Ki, both female students. Before this session, E overheard them talking with a Japanese

teacher in Japanese.

(5) 3 E: That was loud, too. Very good. Then - shall I sit here? - OK, - and I was very happy - because I could understand - when you were talking about snakes, "Oh, I understand!"

4 Ka & Ki: (laugh)

5 E: So, in, uh - you saw a snake in the mountain?

6 Ka: Yeah.

(Session 4)

'And' by E in Turn 3 functions as CONSEQUENCE. She was happy because E (though she is a non-native Japanese speaker ) could understand the previous Japanese conversational session. This 'and' is worth noticing because it precedes its cause. Native teachers seem to use 'and' tactfully to continue their turn.

Example (6) indicates as (A) Continuation and (F) S + S. E, a native teacher, changes the subject by asking Ka, a female student, about what kind of animals she likes.

(6) 31 E: OK. Now let's talk about animals. OK? - And I want you to tell us what kind of animals you like - and why you like it. OK? - So what kind of animals do you like and why?

32 Ka: Um ++

33 E: Why?

(Session 4)

The first 'and' in Turn 31 links the first utterance with the next one very naturally, functioning as CONTINUATION. The third 'and' serves as CONTINUATION as well but has an obvious syntactic gap in it, i.e., 'why (do you like those animals)'. The second 'and' has a very syntactic function since 'and' here connects S with S. [S + S] as well as [NP + NP] has a syntactic function but has no discourse function. This 'and' is treated as non-connective.

Item E categorized as BREVITY on Table 3 is used as an idiomatic expression meaning such as 'and so on' or 'and so forth'. We have just one sample of this function used by a student, which is not included in this paper.

### 3.3. The Functions of 'So'

Schiffrin (1987: 217-25) says that 'so' has a double role as a marker of potential transition. It is used as a turn-transition device which marks a speaker's readiness to cancel the opportunity to continue. It also allows a speaker to continue if a hearer does not take an offered turn. In the conversations between natives and low-level non-natives, non-natives tend to miss offered turns very often; therefore, natives seem to use 'so' often as turn-transition markers in simplified speech. The functions of 'so' are classified as in Table 4.

Table 4. Functions of 'So'

	Teachers	Students	Total
A. Consequence	3	2	5 (12.8%)
B. Inference	2	0	2 ( 5.1%)
C. Summing up	2	0	2 ( 5.1%)
D. Prodding	14	0	14 (35.9%)
E. Filler	7	0	7 (17.9%)
F. Initiation	6	0	6 (15.4%)
G. Correcting oneself	3	0	3 ( 7.7%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>39</b>

Example (7) shows 'so' as (A) Consequence, (D) Prodding, and (F) Initiation. E, a native teacher, starts a conversation by asking questions about the hearer's family.

(7) 1 E: We know each other already, so - uh let me ask you some questions, so - about your family OK? - Please tell us about your family. So, Mr. - Sugiyama - Sugiyama.

2 S: Family?

(Session 1)

The first 'so' functions as CONSEQUENCE. Since they know each other, they do not have to introduce each other. Therefore, E starts to ask questions with 'so'. The second 'so' is used as a marker to initiate a new discourse topic. We call this function INITIATION. The third 'so' is meant as a signal for a hearer to take a turn. We call this function PRODDING.

Example (8) illustrates 'so' as (C) Summing Up, (D) Prodding, and (E) Filler. In (8), E, a native teacher, starts to talk with two female students.

(8) 3 E: That was loud, too. Very good. Then - shall I sit here? - OK, - and I was very happy - because I could understand - when you were talking about snakes, "Oh, I understand!"

4 Ka & Ki: (laugh)

5 E: So, in, uh - you saw a snake in the mountain?

6 Ka: Yeah.

7 E: Oh, yeah. (laugh) Yes, scary. OK, so, let's talk - again in English and more questions - and talk a little bit more. OK, so, what did you do last week?

8 Ki: Last week + um ++

(Session 4)

'So' in Turn 5 has a summarizing function. E summarizes what both Ka and Ki have talked about in the previous conversation. This 'so' functions globally beyond small units of discourse. We name this function SUMMING UP. The first 'so' in Turn 7 functions as FILLER. It allows E to fill a gap and to continue her turn. The second 'so' in Turn 7 is used as PRODDING. The 'so' as prodding

tends to be followed by questions because this is a signal for a speaker to give up his/her turn to a hearer.

Example (9) shows 'so' as (B) Inference and (G) Correcting Oneself. S, a non-native student, is talking about his brother with E, a native teacher.

(9) 20 S: Yeah. My brother is family computer, uh - every day -  
um, de, de, de, de.

21 E: (laughs)

22 S: Yeah.

23 E: Yeah, what - so how old is he?

24 S: He is ++ 15 years old, and ++ (Japanese) senior high  
school.

25 E: Um.

26 S: Um ++

27 E: So instead of doing homework, he plays the computer?

28 S: Un.

29 E: Um. (laugh) OK, good. (Session 1)

'So' spoken by E in Turn 23 is used in order for E to correct herself. By inserting the 'so', E was able to cancel the previous word 'what' and replace it with 'how' to ask an age-related question. We have named this usage of 'so' CORRECTING ONESELF. 'So' in Turn 27 functions as INFERENCE. E, judging from the previous context, infers that S's brother plays with the computer instead of doing homework.

### 3.4. The Functions of 'Oh'

'Oh' has been traditionally viewed only as an exclamation or interjection. Schiffrin (1987:74) claims that ''Oh' occurs as speakers shift their orientation to information. Speakers shift orientation during a conversation not only as they respond affectively to what is said, but as they replace one information unit

with another, as they recognize old information which has become conversationally relevant, and as they receive new information to integrate into an already present knowledge base.' Thus she defines 'oh' as a marker of information management. Table 5 shows five different functions of 'oh's.

Table 5. Functions of 'Oh'

	Teachers	Students	Total
A. Receipt of New Information			
- (a) New Information	4	1	5 (18.5%)
- (b) Unexpected Information	3	0	3 (11.1%)
B. Recognition of Old Information	5	2	7 (25.9%)
C. Repair	1	1	2 ( 7.4%)
D. Shift in Subjective Orientation	4	1	5 (18.5%)
E. Evaluation	4	1	5 (18.5%)
Total	21	6	27

Example (10) shows 'oh' at (Aa) Receipt of 'New Information, (Ab) Receipt of Unexpected Information, (D) Shift in Subjective Orientation and (E) Evaluation. In (10), E, a native teacher, is asking why O, a non-native student, likes baseball.

- (10) 32 E: OK. Why do you like baseball?  
 33 O: (laugh) I'm from Nagoya.  
 34 E: Oh.  
 35 O: Nagoya, um ++ professional baseball team, Chunichi Dragons. Top - Central league top.  
 36 E: Oh, REALLY. Oh. great. Uh huh.  
 37 O: (laugh) (laugh)  
 38 E: So, does everybody in Nagoya play baseball?

39 O: (Japanese)

40 E: Oh! (laugh) And - why do you like golf? (Session 2)

E in Turn 34 is surprised, saying 'oh' upon receiving an unexpected answer 'I'm from Nagoya.' The first 'oh' in Turn 36 is just an indication that E has received new information since E did not know that Chunichi Dragons ranks top in Central League while the second 'oh' functioning as EVALUATION in Turn 36 is not related with a specific question or statement but is rather related with discourse management. That is, the 'oh' in Turn 34 and the first 'oh' in Turn 36 function locally<sup>2</sup> whereas the second 'oh' in Turn 36 works more globally in terms of conversational management. E in Turn 40 is surprised saying 'oh' and shifts her orientation because E thinks that O's answer in Turn 39, meaning 'yes' in Japanese, is cute.

Next let us look at an example where 'oh' functions as (B) Recognition of Old Information. In Example (11) K, a non-native student, is talking about a dish he made with meat and 'panko'. But he does not know an English word for 'panko', and W, a non-native student, points to the bread crumbs on the table, saying 'Here' in Turn 53. And now E, a native teacher, understands the meaning of 'panko' in Turn 54, repeating 'oh' three times.

(11) 47 E: Panko? Is it food?

48 K: Yes.

49 W: Panko is bread, bread + uh ++

50 K: Uh, this.

51 E: Just white bread?

52 K: Yes, bread, it's, it's dry.

53 W: Here.

54 E: Oh, oh, oh, bread crumbs!

55 W: Yeah, bread crumbs! (laugh)

56 E: Oh, you made pork cutlet last night? You cooked?

57 K: Yes, yes.

(Session 3)

'Oh' by E in Turn 54 indicates that she was able to recognize what 'panko' is from the previous context. Now she has got the meaning of 'panko' and next she guesses what W made with meat and 'panko'. She was confident her guess was right because she employed a discourse marker 'oh' in Turn 56. 'Oh' in Turn 56 is functionally more global than 'oh' in Turn 54 since the statement 'you made pork cutlet' is far back beyond a small unit of talk about 'what is panko', relating to the question 'What can you cook?' in Turn 35, which is not shown in Example (11).

Example (12) indicates 'oh' used as (Aa) Receipt of New Information and (C) Repair. In (12), both W and K are non-native male students.

(12) 22 W: Uh ++ when you cook miso soup?

23 K: Uh ++ (Japanese) I feel, I feel cold, uh - or, uh +  
(Japanese) weather is, weather is cold day.

24 W: Morning?

25 K: No. I, I, I make it in the dinner.

26 W: Oh + what else?

27 All: (laugh)

28 K: + What else. Well, well, donburi.

29 W: Oh + Tamago donburi?

30 K: What?

31 W: Tamago donburi?

32 K: Yes, yes.

(Session 3)

'Oh' in Turn 26 simply means that W has received new information: 'K makes miso soup at dinner, not in the morning.' However, 'oh' in Turn 29 does not only indicate that W has received known (or old) information 'donburi' but that he has added something new 'tamago' to it and then asked K to confirm. We call this function

of 'oh' REPAIR.

#### 4. SUMMARY

This paper puts focus on the connective words used in the conversations between verbally low-level students and native speakers of English or fluent English teachers. It seems clear that in the simplified speeches simple connectives such as 'OK' and 'so' play an important role in conversational management. By the frequent use of these connectives teachers give support to low-level students, while students who have not acquired the markers for conversational management tend to be silent or use 'and' quite frequently to fill the gaps between units of talk.

Let us restate the points made in this paper. (i) 'OK' has such functions as (A) Transition, (B) Continuance, (C) Request for Agreement, (D) Agreement, (E) Approval, and (F) 'All Right' as non-connective. 'OK' is used by teachers most frequently and appears most often in the transition of the topic (47.9%), especially as a marker of the conclusion of the topic (32.4%). (ii) 'And' has such functions as (A) Continuation, (B) Contrast, (C) Prodding, (D) Consequence, (E) Brevity, and (F) N + N or S + S. 'And' functions as a marker of continuation most frequently (63.2%) and is heavily used by students. (iii) 'So' has such functions as (A) Consequence, (B) Inference, (C) Summing Up, (D) Prodding, (E) Filler, (F) Initiation, and (G) Correcting Oneself. It is most often used as a marker of Prodding (35.9%). (iv) 'Oh' has such functions as (Aa) Receipt of New Information, (Ab) Receipt of Unexpected Information, (B) Recognition of Old Information, (C) Repair, (D) Shift in Subjective Orientation, and (E) Evaluation. In our analysis 'oh' is most frequently used as a marker of Receipt of New Information (29.6%), and Recognition of Old Information (25.9%).

Our research is still preliminary and small in size; however, it points out the significance of the functions of connective

markers in simplified speech. Further study along this line will be beneficial to the investigation of use of connectives for conversational management.

#### NOTES

\*This is a slightly enlarged version of the paper read at the Fifth Annual International Conference on Pragmatics and Language Learning held at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign on April 5, 1991. Thanks go to the participants of the conference for helpful and valuable comments.

- 1 N represents nouns and S sentences, respectively.
- 2 The first 'oh' in Turn 36 is a response to the immediate previous utterance 'Central league top' in Turn 35 while the second 'oh' in Turn 36 is a response to the whole unit of discourse —Turn 32 through 35. Thus is a difference between local 'oh' and global 'oh'.

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