

Discourse structure and specification of relationships: A cross-linguistic analysis

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Abstract

Using an integrated discourse framework, as developed in Tyler and Davies (1990), this paper examines two highly constrained, parallel texts, one produced by a native speaker of English, one by a native speaker of Korean. The analysis reveals the presence in the English speaker's discourse of several elements of the linguistic code, discourse management strategies, and interpretative frame which made explicit the logical and prominence relationships between ideas, thus creating a hierarchical discourse structure. These elements are either rarely used or used in non-nativelike ways in the Korean speaker's discourse, creating a more flat, undifferentiated discourse structure. These results are discussed in terms of the hypothesis put forward by Lakoff (1984), Hinds (1987) and Scollon and Scollon (1981) that degree of speaker/listener responsibility for specifying connections between ideas may be a significant pragmatic parameter along which languages/cultures differ.

Keywords: ; ; ;

1. Introduction

Working within Gumperz's (1982, 1984) framework of conversational inference, Tyler, Jefferies and Davies (1988) examined the English lecture discourse of native Chinese and Korean speakers whose discourse had been judged as difficult to follow. This analysis revealed a number of discourse-level patterns that appeared to be at variance with those of native speakers. For instance, Tyler et al. (1988) found that these non-native speakers of English tended to rely heavily on one or two lexical discourse markers (typically *and* and *so*) to convey a whole range of logical relations among ideas. Many of the occurrences of these lexical discourse markers were judged to be inappropriate or confusing, often masking the intended logical and prominence relationships among ideas.