Breaking down the dialog:
Building a framework of advising discourse

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Introduction

Over the past two decades, research in the field of language advising has increased steadily in many areas such as advisor training, roles and perceptions of advisors and development of self-access materials. Recently, more focus has been placed on the actual discourse of advising however; there remains little research that stem directly from actual samples of the advising discourse. The fundamental purpose of language advising is to help students become effective agents for their own lifelong learning and personal development and it is essentially through the advisor-learner dialog that the learning advisor (LA) can help the learner to achieve this. That is, the questions asked, the perspectives shared, the resources suggested, the advice given and the short-term decisions and long-range plans advisors encourage learners to reflect on, aim to increase their capacity to take charge of their own learning (Holec 1981). The underlying premise of language advising is that learners enter the session at point A and leave at point B, having gained a greater awareness of themselves and their ability to solve their language problem. For each learner, success depends on the degree of effectiveness of the dialog.

A strong element of advisor training is to discover and utilize tools that can help to create more skilled advisors. Although it is unwise to focus too intently on the micro-skills of counseling, the researcher felt that an analysis of macro- and micro-skills in advising discourse would help LAs to understand the structure of sessions, identify their own individual "advising style," raise awareness of the skills that were most effective and finally, to reveal the dynamics of leaner-advisor interaction. This research explored the advising discourse of LAs at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS). Through examination of transcripts of advising sessions, it aimed to identify the distinguishing features that encompassed language advising in this particular context. This paper analyzes the discourse of advising by

- Providing examples of advising practice from sessions.
- Identifying prevalent advising skills used by LAs.
- Coding transcripts based on pre-existing categories from a cross-section of specialized fields; and new categories which emerged from the data.
- Looking for patterns that revealed a basic structure to advising sessions.

The analysis was used to identify a structure of advising discourse specific to the KUIS context. An examination of frequently used skills highlighted macro- and micro-skills LAs found effective during advising, and areas in which they could improve. Common patterns emerging from the data helped to identify the underlying structure of advising sessions. The paper first takes a brief look at the literature of advising discourse, and then outlines the methodology used for transcript analysis. Findings from data analysis will be discussed and the paper

concludes with ideas for further areas of research that would contribute greatly to an area of advising that is lacking in research literature.

Models of Discourse

Sinclair and Coulthard (IRF)

Much of the literature in discourse analysis is related to traditional classroom discourse. Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) model of classroom discourse, which he referred to as IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback) was a break-through in the exploration of classroom discourse from which further models of discourse analysis sprang. Although the IRF model was somewhat rigid in its presentation, it was a system that showed a well-detailed and comprehensive structure of discourse in a particular field. The Sinclair and Coulthard model presented 22 classifications or "speech acts" for classroom discourse and although difficult to adapt to a language advising situation, during transcript analysis when the LA departed from the advising role and briefly took on the mantle of "teacher," the Sinclair and Coulthard model was consulted.

Therapeutic discourse

Advising discourse has its roots in the humanistic field of counseling which emphasizes development of the whole person. Therapists practicing therapeutic discourse are trained in observation, in being sensitive to the client, and like person-centered counseling, in empathizing with the client (Ferrara, 1994). For therapists, meaning is constructed through discourse and skills such as *echoing, mirroring* and *joint construction* are essential for effective communication. The researcher found these skills useful to consider when coding the advising

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discourse.

Counseling

There is no single definition of language advising in research literature. Riley (1997) considers advising a communicative situation, very distinct from teaching; Mozzon-McPherson (2000) separates advising into three categories: active, reactive and interactive; and Kelly (1996) refers to advising as "essentially a form of therapeutic dialog that enables an individual to manage a problem" (p. 94). Although the underlying philosophies may differ, self-access practitioners seem to agree that for effective advising, LAs need to acquire particular skills and techniques that will help learners undertake independent learning efficiently. The most frequently cited paper on advising skills is Kelly's article, in which she presents a table of 9 macro- and 9 micro-counseling skills used in language advising. Although useful in raising awareness of advising skills, LAs at this institution find the definitions to be sometimes vague and difficult to use during transcript analysis. Kelly herself remarked that she tried not to oversimplify the skills and refers to numerous other behaviors that counselors need to acquire in addition to those mentioned in her table of macro- and micro-skills, such as eye contact, acknowledgment and trust. However, without sample extracts from advising sessions showing examples of each skill, there is often debate as to the actual meaning, and the skills are left open to different interpretations. In one sense, this may lead to productive discussions however; during training of new LAs it is difficult to elaborate on each skill and there is not always time for in-depth discussion. To further professional development and to help with self-reflective practices, it is important for LAs to understand which skills have been found most

effective during advising sessions. Therefore, having more concrete definitions along with examples of extracts from advising sessions was deemed important for the researcher.

Coaching

A final option considered when examining the data was Kato and Sugawara's (2009) table of 28 coaching skills. Coaching skills differ from Kelly's skills and therapeutic discourse in that "whereas therapy focuses on healing clients' emotional pain or conflict, the primary focus of coaching is put on a person's "present" in order to act toward the future" (p. 463). Since therapeutic discourse and person-centered counseling emphasized empathy, and coaching promoted action and accountability, a combination of these skills helped to complete categories for data analysis.

Research context and methodological procedures

The advisory service at KUIS is offered to learners on an individual basis, and works mostly on a reservation system. Except for learners taking the self-study modules, it is completely voluntary and it is up to the learner to decide if, or when he/she perceives a need for it. Individual advising sessions last approximately 30 minutes in duration and are conducted mostly in English, the learners' 2nd language. In rare situations, in which learners need additional language support, Japanese is used. For this study, a databank consisting of 20 recorded and transcribed advising sessions (approximately 60, 000 words) from 8 LAs was created. These sessions included learners taking the self-study courses and also randomly booked sessions. Transcripts consisted of both first meetings

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with students and follow-up meetings. This gave the researcher a wide selection of data to work with. The LAs in this study averaged two years advising experience and learners of differing proficiency levels took part in the sessions.

Advising sessions were transcribed verbatim and NVivo was used as the qualitative tool to help organize data into categories. Rather than using categories based solely on research literature, in a grounded theory approach, the researcher first tried to find common categories that emerged from the transcripts, and then checked if there was a suitable match to pre-determined categories. From a total of 71 speech act categories across four fields at the beginning of the study, the categories were narrowed down to 31. They were labeled with 'ing' endings (*initiating, goal-setting*, etc.) to show advising as a continuous rather than a static state. In some instances, pre-determined categories from research literature were used as is, and in other cases, categories had to be more clearly defined to match the extracts. In cases where the researcher could not find a suitable fit, a new category was created and a definition given. Only LA turns were coded and not the learner's dialogue. Coded extracts ranged from a few words to longer back and forth exchanges and there were cases of overlapping of skills such as the macro-skill *concluding* which may have included the micro-skills *summarizing* or *supporting*.

Analysis and discussion of data

In analyzing the data, I first classified the 31 skills into 14 macro-skills (stages in the advising process) and 17 micro-skills (advising behaviors). Skills adapted or borrowed from literature were added to the table and definitions expanded to give

more clarity to each category (see Appendix 1). 7 skills were borrowed from Kelly's list of macro-skills (*concluding, evaluating, goal-setting, guiding, initiating, modeling* and *supporting);* 2 skills from Sinclair and Coulthard's classroom model (*acknowledging* and *directing*); 2 skills from Kato and Sugawara's coaching skills (*directing back* and *ice breaking*); and 3 original categories (*encouraging, instructing* and *rapport building*) were created as they did not fit into the existing categories. Although LAs are trained to encourage self-exploration in learners through questioning techniques, there are times when a learner may ask for help with a specific learning problem. In these situations, the LA has to weigh his/her options of how prescriptive or direct he/she should be. Therefore, *instructing* was found to be a useful addition to the list of macro-skills. There were many instances of *rapport building* in the advising sessions in which the LA tried to bond with the learner over his/her interests. This was considered different from *ice breaking*, which took place at the beginning of the session.

There were a total of 17 skills in the micro-skills category. 7 skills were adapted from Kelly's table (*attending, confronting, empathizing, paraphrasing, questioning, restating* and *summarizing*). For Kelly, good questioning techniques are essential for effective advising. She states that, "the self-access helper is constantly attempting to elicit learner choice and insight…while trying to avoid being directive and prescriptive" (p. 104). The researcher thus felt it appropriate to split *questioning* into 3 separate skills (*active questioning, probing questions* and *rephrasing questions*) as it constituted the bulk of advising transcripts and each skill was used by the LA to achieve different aims. 3 skills from coaching were added (*challenging, giving responsibility* and *intuiting*); 2 skills from therapeutic discourse

were helpful in classifying data (*joint construction* and *mirroring*); and finally 3 new categories (*clarifying, recalling* and *reversing roles*) were added.

Other skills in Kelly's table such as *linking* or *giving feedback* are not seen because the researcher did not find them in the transcribed data; however, this does not make them any less important. Further work in this area should see additional categories being added and created. Having completed the table of skills used in advising sessions at KUIS, the next step was to examine the most frequently used skills. Below is a look at prevalent skills that emerged from the transcript analysis and short extracts taken from recorded advising sessions which illustrate the application of some of the macro- and micro-skills, specifically: *guiding, directing, questioning, attending* and *mirroring*.

Prevalence of skills

Macro-skills

Formal advising reveals a definite structure in the dialog between advisor and learner which allows us to build a clear framework for advising. Macro-skills are part of the *process* stage of learning and can be compared to stages of a classroom teaching lesson. These skills make up the structure of the advising session. Kelly describes it as "particular strategies by a self-access helper that can facilitate learner self-management of a self-access project" (p. 94). The 9 macro-skills in her table are:

Initiating → Goal-setting → Guiding → Modeling → Supporting
→ Giving feedback→ Evaluating → Linking → Concluding

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Kelly's list is quite comprehensive in showing the different stages of an advising session; however, it is not a complete description of what occurs in all advising sessions. Depending on the institution and its policies, the structure of the session and use of intervention strategies will differ. Frequency in how skills appear depend on many factors such as type of session (self-study modules or randomly booked sessions), proficiency level of learner, purpose of session or even the feeling of the student such as if they are anxious and more time has to be spent on ice-breaking.

Advisor	MACRO SKILLS			MICRO SKILLS		
	SKILL 1	SKILL 2	SKILL 3	SKILL 1	SKILL 2	SKILL 3
Advisor 1	Guiding	Instructing	Directing	Probing Questions	Active Questioning	Restating
Advisor 2	Guiding	Acknowledging	Directing	Probing Questions	Active Questioning	Mirroring
Advisor 3	Directing	Guiding	Initiating	Probing Questions	Active Questioning	Mirroring
Advisor 4	Guiding	Concluding	Directing	Probing Questions	Active Questioning	Mirroring
Advisor 5	Directing	Guiding	Goal-setting	Active Questioning	Supporting	Attending
Advisor 6	Guiding	Acknowledging	Directing Back	Probing Questions	Active Questioning	Confronting
Advisor 7	Instructing	Guiding	Goal-setting	Probing Questions	Active Questioning	Attending
Advisor 8	Concluding	Guiding	Ice breaking	Probing Questions	Active Questioning	Attending

Table 1: Prevalent macro- and micro-skills

Of the 14 macro-skills in this study, *guiding* and *directing* were the skills most frequently used (See Table 1). *Directing* appeared frequently because the majority of sessions transcribed were from students doing the self-study modules. For LAs at KUIS, this is the core of their work. For advisors 1-6, transcribed

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sessions were first meetings of self-study modules and we can see a similarity in skills used. Advisor 7's transcript was from a booked session in which the advisor did not have a pre-determined agenda and advisor 8's transcript came from a follow-up session after the first module meeting when goals had already been established. For advisors 7 and 8, the pattern of skills used and frequency in which they occurred revealed a slightly different picture from advisors 1-6. Advisor 6's student had a high proficiency level and asked many questions throughout the session. This resulted in a higher percentage of *acknowledging* and *directing back*.

Guiding

For all 8 LAs, *guiding* was one of the most important skills which helped learners become more aware of their learning and find solutions for their problems. It was difficult at first, to code data with *guiding* skills, as it encompassed other skills such as *questioning, confronting* and/or *supporting*. In her table, Kelly defined *guiding* as "offering advice and information, direction and ideas, suggesting; to help the learner develop alternative strategies" (p. 95). This definition was used for this study in order to differentiate it from *questioning* techniques. As part of the structure of the advisory sessions, the researcher saw *questioning* as focused more on the unfolding of the language problem.

Extract 01: Example of Guiding

> Advisor: So for vocabulary, we have two ideas here that you can use. One of them is to create a quiz or a test using this website. It's very easy to use. You just type in the words and they make a quiz for you. The other one is, if you've learned

vocabulary from the book, or from a movie, watch it again.

Learner: Again?

Advisor: Yeah. Watch the same movie again. Maybe it one or two weeks later and see how much you remember, how many words you remember. If you learn words from a movie, check if you can still remember them. If you learn vocabulary from a book… You're reading a book, you wrote down the vocabulary, go back two weeks later, read the book again, see if you remember anything

Learner: Okay. But, I always, when I always watching movie, many, many vocabulary I don't know. I couldn't write down all.

Advisor: Oh that's okay. You don't need to write down all.

Learner: Oh

Advisor: Cuz it takes long to write down all the words, right?

Learner: [laughs] Yeah. I was tired to write down all.

Advisor: Just, just pick a small section of the movie. Maybe one or two chapters of the movie, and write down vocabulary.

Learner: Ahhh yeah! [laughs]

Directing

There was a high percentage of directing in the transcripts mainly because the data was from advising sessions of students taking the self-study courses. In many cases, directing lasted between 4 to 7 minutes (or about 10-15%) of the advising session. In a 30 minute advising session, this can be viewed as an ineffective use of time. Effective time management is important in advising sessions in order to address the needs of the student appropriately. There are times when a learner may come to the session on one pretext when his/her problem is something completely different. In this situation, time would be better spent dealing with the language problem and trying to discover a solution, rather than explaining the

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structure of the self-study module. The data again shows a clear difference with advisors 7 and 8. As advisor 7's student was not a module student, the advisor spent more time on other areas such as goal-setting and instructing. Along with guiding, advisor 8's follow-up session was focused on ice-breaking and concluding. This is more in line with the typical framework of advising sessions seen in research literature (see Kelly, 1996; Crabbe, et al. 2001).

Extract 02: Example of Directing

> Advisor: …So the first thing you should do before you start, you know unit, week 2, Tuesday the 25th you're handing in. Before you do this and your weekly study, you should check your level.
>
> Learner: Ah, okay
>
> Advisor: And know where you are and then you can start moving. So next Monday you're going to hand in, next Tuesday you're going to hand in unit 2 and you should have a week of study done.
>
> Learner: Okay.

Micro-skills

Where macro-skills reveal the structure of the session and are more closely in tune with classroom practices, micro-skills distinguish advising from teaching through skills associated with counseling therapy. According to Mozzon-McPherson (2000), micro-skills "come into play during any interaction with a learner and constitute an important part of a good advising session" (p. 120). LAs need to be skilled in leading the learning dialog through the process of goal-setting, unraveling the learning problem, sorting through options and deciding on a plan of action. During the process of advising, LAs get the opportunity to use a range of

micro-skills: encouraging, guiding through questioning, suggesting, and active listening, shown through attending, restating, mirroring, empathizing and/or paraphrasing. Various micro-skills were employed by each advisor depending on type of session, level of learner's language proficiency and whether it was the first meeting with the advisor or not.

The most prevalent micro-skill found in the transcribed sessions was *questioning*. The research literature suggests that an effective questioning technique is central to good advising sessions as it enhances the learner's thinking process, helps learners engage in self-exploration, and empowers them to take more responsibility for their learning. Having *questioning* as the most frequently used skill is a positive result as it shows the advisors trying to advise effectively. For 7 out of 8 advisors (see Table 1), *probing questioning* was the most frequently used skill followed by *active questioning* (or open-ended questions). Of the remaining 29 skills in the table, a variety was used; however, *attending* was the most prevalent among all advisors. I selected *mirroring* as a final micro-skill to showcase because it seemed to be quite effective during advising sessions, especially with helping lower-proficiency learners to open up about their language problems and learning history.

Active questioning

Active questioning, usually referred to as "open-ended" questions are questions which do not elicit a yes/no response and is considered to be extremely effective in helping to build a relationship, establish rapport, gather information, increase understanding, as well as encourage the learner to open up and reflect on his/her

learning, and discover his/her strengths, weaknesses and interests. Utilizing open-ended questions provided a good example of a fully learner-centered approach to learner development. As carefully crafted questions are essential in helping learners to open up during communication, it is important for LAs to develop the skill of asking the right questions at the right time.

Extract 03: Example of Active questioning

> Advisor: [laughs] Yeah. What do you think about that? What do you think about using only DVDs?
>
> Learner: Using only… Ah, I like watching so, I can enjoy but, little afraid… I felt nervous because I [laughs] my house, ah, just a minute please [laughs] I am afraid of improve my listening skill, skill, in use, use, watching DVD. I like that, but little afraid of watching movie.
>
> Advisor: So you think maybe you can't improve with only DVDs [restating]
>
> Learner: A little
>
> Advisor: Ahh. Right, right. Okay. When you watch DVDs, what do you do?
>
> Learner: First I watch with relax and try to understand the content of the story, second time, next we watch the DVD with subtitle and, but I watch five chapter only, so I can understand but not improve listening skill [laughs] and I watch the subtitle but I can't understand part of the subtitle like I check, check word or sentence, make, make a memo and finish watch I decide to search the meaning, so I don't try to watch it.

Probing questions

For learners who find it difficult to express themselves, probing questions are an effective way of facilitating the gathering of factual information, allowing

learners to respond to questions in a few words and leading the dialog in a specific direction. The danger of utilizing closed questions however is that it may shut down communication as the advisor gains full control over the conversation. Closed-ended questions leave little room for negotiation or elaboration, but used in conjunction with open-ended questions, it is effective in obtaining the specific answers the advisor seeks from the learner.

Extract 04: Example of Probing questions

> Advisor: In other words, when you're reading, is it easier to read than it is to listen?
> Learner: Yeah
> Advisor: Yeah? So when you're reading you know lots of words?
> Learner: Yeah
> Advisor: But with listening it's more difficult to catch the words. Do you think it's, do you think it's vocabulary? Or do you think it's pronunciation?
> Learner: I think, pronunciation
> Advisor: It's mostly pronunciation? Okay, am. So just because you said here "I want to learn pronunciation in conversation" and in the next one you said you want to learn vocabulary.
> Learner: [laughs] I want both
> Advisor: Both, okay. So, if you want to learn both, what do you think is more important to focus on? Is it more important to focus on pronunciation of words you already know? Or pronunciation of new words?
> Learner: Ah, pronunciation I already know
> Advisor: mm-hmm.

Attending

Active listening is essential during one-to-one communication in an advising session in order for the LA to gain knowledge of the learner and demonstrate that understanding. Unlike passive listening, active listening directly involves attending to the learner by showing attentive posture, observing the learner's body language and reflecting intently on what the learner says. It can also be as simple as indicating that you are paying attention through nods or smiles. Kelly (1996) suggests that advisors should always fully try to 'attend' to learners meaning, maintaining eye contact and pausing or being quiet to allow him/her to speak openly or freely. At times in the dialog, all that the learner needed to continue speaking was slight encouragement, such as "Uh huh," "okay," or "I see what you mean." This helped to create a feeling of trust between learner and advisor, an essential feature of therapeutic dialog.

Extract 05: Example of Attending

> Advisor: Yeah, I just don't know… What do you mean "correctly."
> Learner: Like uhm, understanding this article. Uhm, because… Actually, I want to like, share the opinion
> Advisor: Okay
> Learner: Especially in class
> Advisor: mm-hmm
> Learner: So if I made mistake about news topics, I can't share with other people, so I want to understand exactly…
> Advisor: Okay, I understand...

Mirroring

Mirroring is a skill borrowed from Ferrara's (1994) therapeutic discourse and is defined in the table as, "The advisor repeats the learner's statement or selected phrase as a request for further elaboration." In counseling, *mirroring* may include miming gestures, body language, expressions, tone of voice, eye movements, attitude, words or other features discernible in communication. Mozzon-McPherson (2000) also comments that an advisor "should be a good listener and mediator of meanings by mirroring what the learner says" (p. 122). While analyzing the transcripts, I found this to be a common feature used by LAs. In language advising, mirroring conveys understanding and advisors are able to establish clearer communication and build a greater sense of trust through matching the learner's words. It also proved to be a very effective tool in helping the learner and advisor to stay focused on specific content or a particular line of questioning. Careful observation and repetition of short phrases or words ensured that both the LA and learner remained on the same wavelength.

Extract 06: Example of Mirroring

Advisor: How did you feel when you used it?

Learner: I think useful.

Advisor: It was useful. How long did it take to use?

Learner: Thirty minutes

Advisor: Thirty minutes, that's a good time, isn't it?

Discussion

From these extracts and Fig. 1 below, we can see skills that advisors used most fre-

quently during advising sessions. The frequency of macro-skills helped to highlight the structure of sessions and it also provided information that could possibly inform changes to how advising sessions could be conducted. The frequency of micro-skills used in advising sessions revealed the LAs natural style of communicating with the learner (for example, controlling, empathizing, supporting etc.). Based on the frequency of macro- and micro-skills used, advisors are able to examine the data and make adjustments to their style of advising if changes are necessary. That is, an analysis of sessions would allow advisors to reflect on which skills were used effectively or those which were underused.

It is suggested in research literature that counselors periodically stop and check whether goals are being met so that the client feels satisfied (McCarthy Veach et al., 2003). It was noticeable from data analysis that active listening skills such as *paraphrasing* and *restating* were not among the skills frequently used by LAs. Active listening demonstrates the advisors interest and investment in the relationship as he/she tries to ensure that the "message received" is consistent with "message sent." These communication skills are important in building trust with clients and helping them to make informed decisions (Jenkins et al., 1999). This may be an area advisors need to explore in future advising sessions to expand competence, and add new techniques to their style of advising. The findings showed that there was a definite structure to advising discourse and common patterns found within the discourse were used to help create the framework. The next section of this paper will examine the framework.
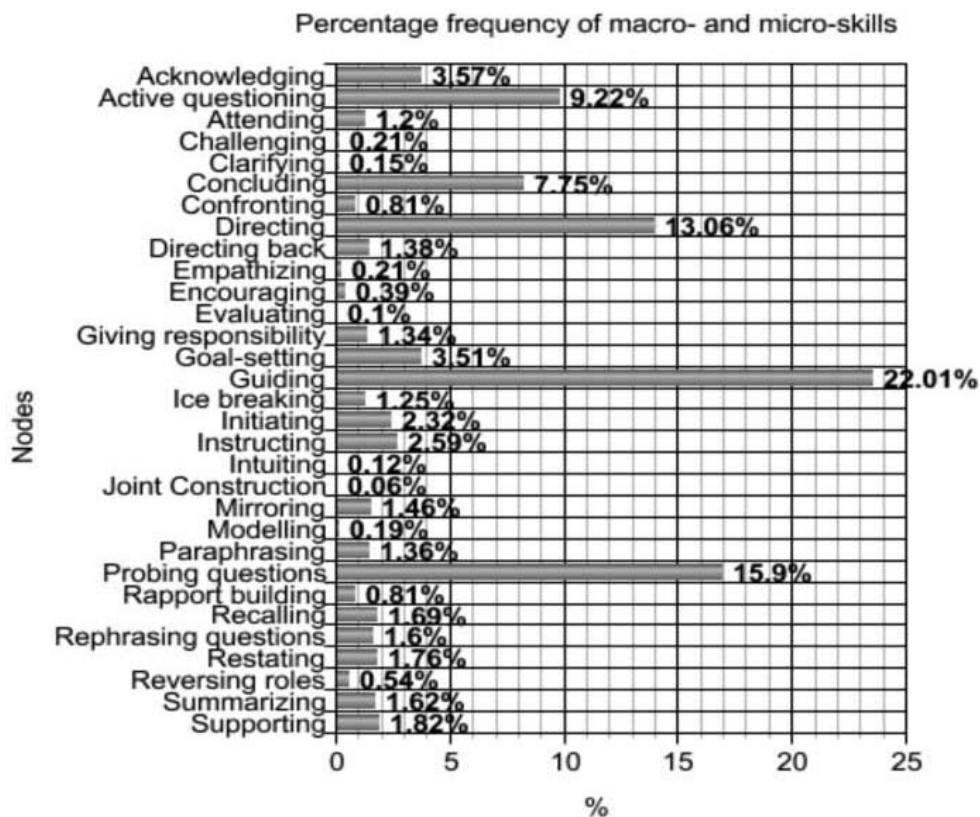
Figure 1: Total % breakdown of macro- and micro-skills across transcripts

Common patterns emerging from transcript data

After analysis of advising dialogs in a case study of 3 learners, Crabbe, Hoffman and Cotterall (2001) presented a simple framework for advisory sessions in their advising context, which consisted of 3 areas: Unfolding the problem; establishing learning goals; and finally, exploring beliefs about language learning. They admit that this is not a full representation of language learners' experiences, but offer some insight into the role of dialog in learning. After examining 20 transcripts, the structure that emerged from sessions at KUIS were broken down into four basic components: Opening the session; unraveling the problem; establishing a plan of action; and closing the session. This broad framework is offered a as a guide for effective advising rather than a series of rigid steps.

Stages of an advising session	Key features	Advising tools
1) Opening the session	• Warm welcome • Building rapport • Establishing a good relationship • Creating a non-threatening environment • Introducing a new direction	*ice breaking* *initiating*
2) Unraveling the problem	• Using effective questioning strategies • Attending to the learner • Actively listening	*goal-setting* *questioning* *empathizing*
3) Establishing a plan of action	• Making powerful connections between past (learning history), present (short-term goal) and future (long-term goal) • Helping the learner make good decisions • Providing feedback; showing support; and encouragement to the learner's ideas	*guiding* *supporting* *encouraging*
4) Closing the session	• Summarizing the session • Encouraging the learner to do his/her best • Challenging the learner • Asking the learner if he/she has any questions	*concluding sum-marizing giving responsibility*

Table 2: Structure of advising session

Opening the Session: Icebreaking – Initiating

Mozzon-McPherson (2000) writes that the first rule for a good advisor is "creating a supportive and positive climate" (p. 118). The opening of the session sets the tone for the rest of the session and it is important that the advisor show neutrality and help the learner to feel comfortable. *Icebreaking* is a mode of discussion that can be used to help the learner ease into the advising session. When advisor and learner meet, they usually engage in some small talk or social banter, which allows the LA to formulate an image of the learner; creates a non-threatening environment; helps the learner to relax; encourages the learner to participate in free conversation; builds rapport; and/or lays the foundation for the advising relationship. This may take the form of basic introductions to general

conversation, but the advisor can use this time effectively to assess the learner's comfort, mood and language skills. *Icebreaking*, by definition occurs at the beginning of a session or as usually is the case at KUIS, as advisor and learner are walking to the advising room. Common topics advisors ask learners about are for example, classes, part-time job, holiday stories, or even about a Disney character connected to a pencil or school bag.
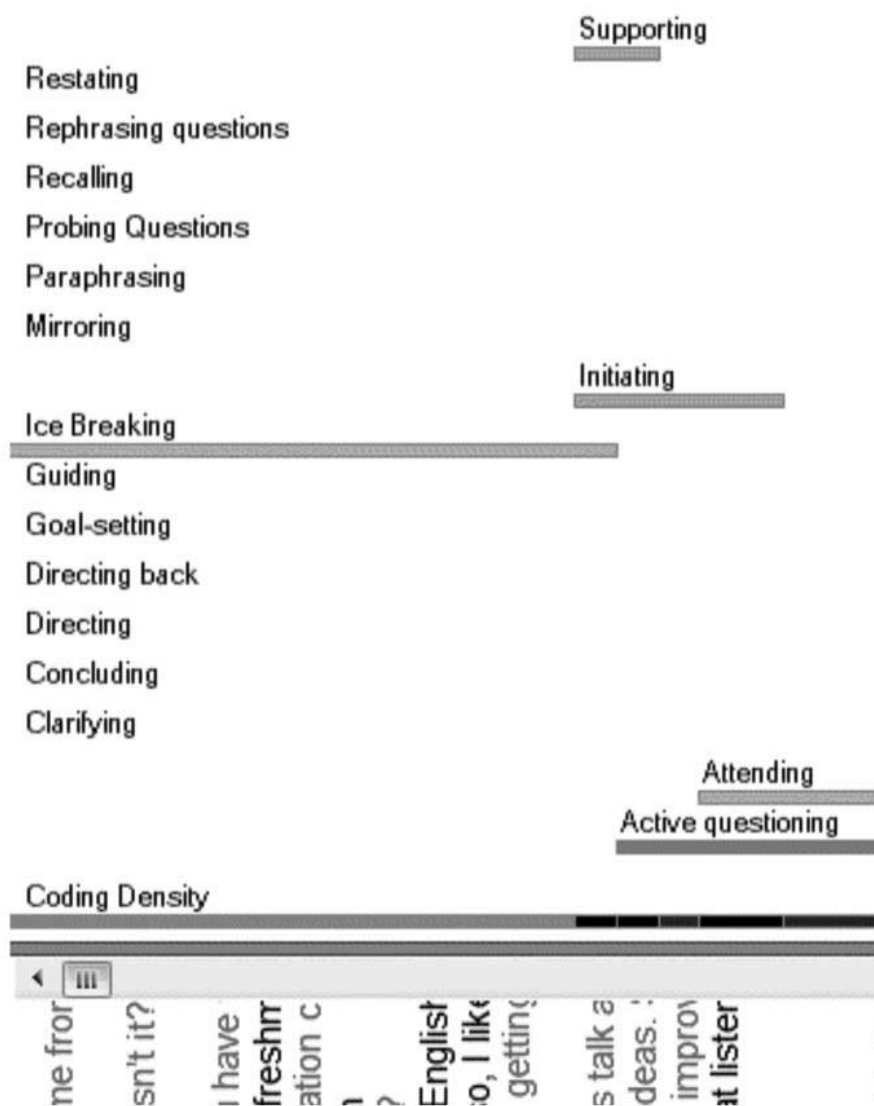

Figure 2. Opening the session

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Icebreaking differs from *initiating* in that an initiation is usually the first question that begins the formal session and prepares the learner for the task ahead. Ideally, the LA should state the purpose of the session clearly and if applicable review prior work. Examples of an initiation might be, "So, today we are going to talk about work you have done in the module so far," or "What can I help you with today?" Initiating questions tend to be open-ended in order to get the learner to introduce and talk freely about the learning problem. The learner may also initiate the session by immediately discussing the reason why he/she made a reservation to see the LA. In this case, the LA uses active listening techniques to encourage the learner to keep talking. Figure 2 shows a typical pattern of an opening sequence: icebreaking – *initiating — active questioning – attending*.

Goal-setting / Unraveling the problem

After the opening sequence, the advisor and learner move into identifying and unraveling the learning problem. The goal-setting sequence generally occurs immediately after the initiation and then blends into unraveling of the problem. LAs tend to spend a longer time on goal-setting with students taking the self-study module as this is a key component of the course. For second meetings, goals may be reviewed and more time spent on discussing progress since the previous meeting, reviewing status of the previous problem, or talking about new problems and possible solutions.

Example 1: Active questioning – Attending – Active questioning – Attending – Probing questions – Attending – Probing questions – Active questioning
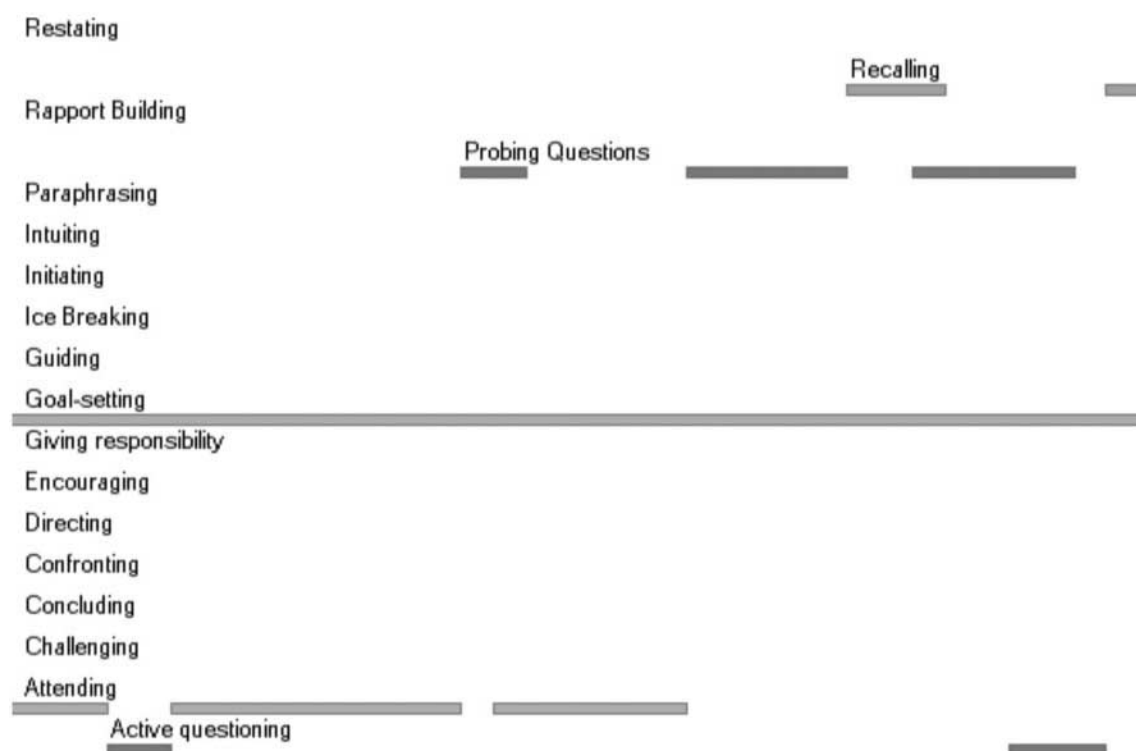

Figure 3. Goal-setting sequence

Goal-setting and unraveling the problem were categorized together as it is through the process of untying the problem that specific goals are set. The most prevalent skills during this sequence are *questioning* and *attending*. Figure 3 and Figure 4 are 2 examples that occurred frequently in the data during this sequence. During goal-setting, *recalling* was not a frequently used skill by advisors; however, it seemed to be an effective technique with learners who tended to fall back into patterns of behavior that hindered their progress, as was the case with the learner in Figure 3.

In example 1 (Figure 3), we can see the LA asking an open-ended question immediately after the initiation question in order to understand the learner's language problem. The advisor utilizes *attending* in order to encourage the learner to talk more. There are occasional moments when the advisor uses probing questions to get the learner to provide more specific answers, however she continues to pause, give encouragement and remain silent in order for the learner to speak more. In example 2 (Figure 4), the LA mixes both open and closed-ended questioning tactics to form a sort of pattern of questioning. This style of advising proved particularly useful with lower proficiency learners to clarify the learner's message and ensure that the advisor could elicit specific information.

Example 2: *Active questioning – Probing question – Probing question – Active questioning – Probing question – Guiding – Probing question – Active questioning – (Paraphrasing)*
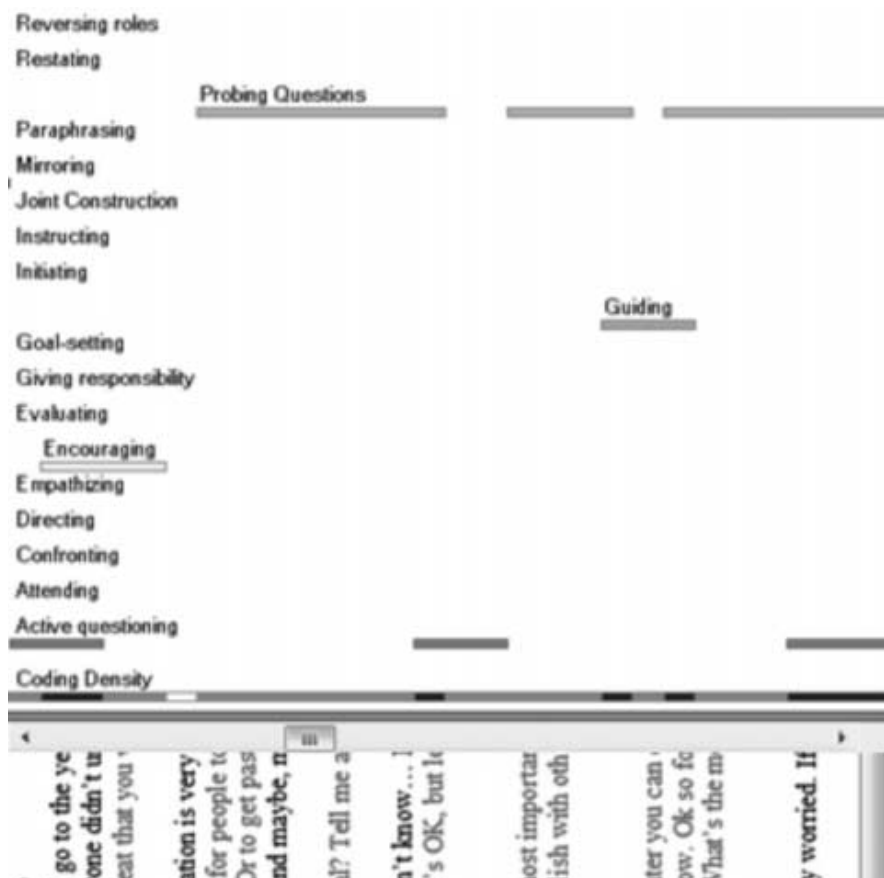

Figure 4. Unraveling the problem

Establishing a plan of action: *Active questioning – Probing questions – Mirroring – Probing questions – Mirroring – Probing questions – Mirroring (Restating)*

Solid preparation is essential to effective advising. Before the session, the LA should open the learners file (if there is one) and review pertinent information,

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such as learning history, learning problems, strengths or weaknesses and possible directions to steer the dialog toward a specific objective. Prior knowledge of the language learner is helpful when guiding the learner to developing a plan of action. The action plan reveals the learner's method of achieving a particular goal and the advisor's role is to help the learner create a successful plan. It should have specific goals, use concrete terms, yet be flexible enough for modifications in case the learner decides to change direction or adopt a new goal. An effective technique used by all advisors to guide the dialog was using a quick series of active and probing questions to get the learner to simultaneously open up about his/her learning while extracting concrete information. *Mirroring* and *restating* were especially useful during this sequence to keep the learner and advisor on the

Figure 5. Establishing a plan of action

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same path. At the end of a particularly long sequence, many advisors used *para-phrasing* to ensure that the learner's meaning was understood clearly.

Closing the session: *Concluding – Summarizing – Directing – Supporting*

The closing of an advising session varies with all advisors; however, every advisor has a clear method of bringing the session to an end – summarizing the session, asking the learner if he/she has a question, or simply saying "I'll see you next week." Although there is no formal method of closing a session, it is always beneficial to document the main points of the session so that the learner
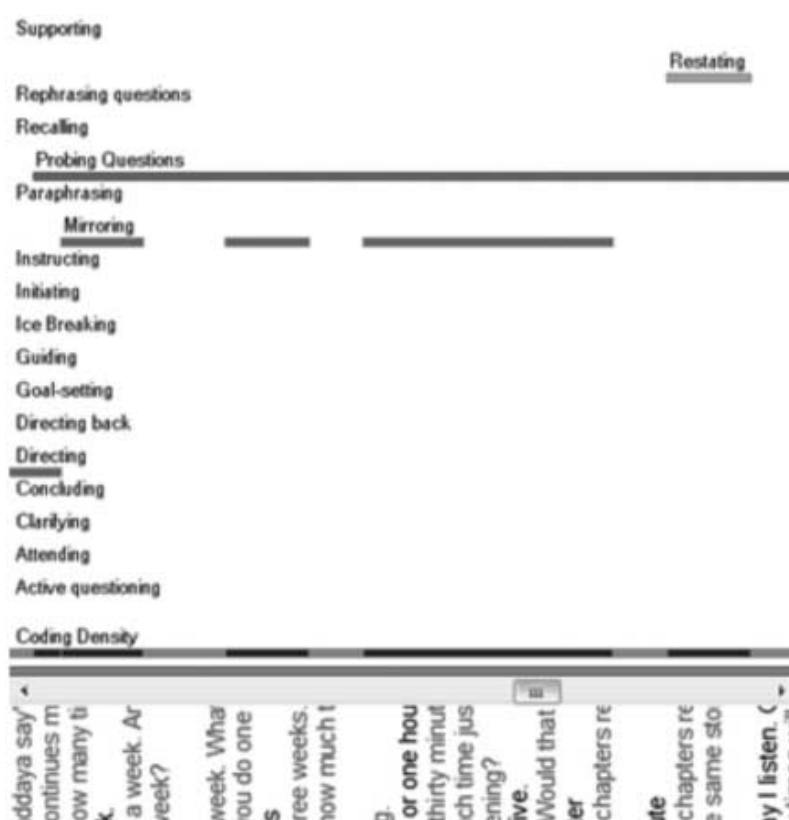

Figure 6. Closing the session

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understands what was accomplished and understands what he/she is expected to do next. Documentation also serves as a reference to the agreed upon plan of action and the advisor can use it for preparing for the follow-up session. The most effective closing of sessions have involved the skill *summarizing*, in which the advisor summarizes the key points raised throughout the session or when the advisor asks the learner what he/she recalls from the meeting. The advisor should also ensure that the learner understands the plan of action before leaving the session and any follow-up meetings should be scheduled, even tentatively. Most LAs close with a question similar to, "Do you have any questions about what we talked about today?" and this signals the end of the session.

Discussion

Effective advising depends on cooperation between advisor and learner to explore and discuss problems, and a commitment to make and stand by decisions. To be a good advisor, it is useful to recognize common patterns used during sessions that help to make the learner more reflective and aware of their learning. This enables learners to make better choices and empowers them to be more responsible. It is difficult for advisors to develop unassisted and it requires a lot of practical training. An examination of these transcripts show that there are many different methods of advising therefore each advisor has to discover which approach suits him/her best. It is important that advisors have knowledge of effective advising skills and understand why the particular approach worked with a specific learner. LAs can develop professionally by using the framework as a guideline in how to conduct sessions. This would serve as a kind of checklist for inexperienced advisors and a tool for quick reflection for more experienced advisors.

Further Research

The bank of advising transcripts compiled for this study is currently at approximately 60, 000 words. Although this was a vast amount of data to analyze, it still did not give a broad enough picture of all types of advising sessions. For better and more valid results in transcript analysis, it is best to have more transcripts of various types of sessions: self-study modules, booked sessions and follow-up sessions. This would give a true indication of how sessions are organized and which skills are most effective in specific situations. It would also be useful to have a cross-section of sessions from novice advisors and those from more experienced advisors to compare types of skills used. For purposes of a longitudinal study, it would also be interesting to discover how the advisors' skills changed over time. There is great potential in the types of discourse analyses that can be conducted from this type of data. Increasing this databank of advising sessions would allow for many different research projects to be conducted. This would be particularly useful for the training of advisors at KUIS and other institutions.

There are four research strands that would be interesting to explore in future studies. I believe that increasing this database to 100,000 words or more would allow researchers enough data to do further studies in advising discourse such as 1) analyzing learner discourse; 2) examining word frequency; 3) exploring the effect of silences on advisor-learner dialog; and 4) researching the development of a novice advisor in a longitudinal study showing changes in advisor behavior.

1) The role of learner discourse

Research on learner discourse is an understudied area, and even within advising

contexts, discourse studies tend to examine only the advisor dialog. Classroom studies of student talk in many cases focus on the percentage contribution of total talk. In language advising, it would be useful to understand how to help learners communicate more effectively in sessions and become more interactive partici-pants rather than passive listeners. This could include for example, how to ask questions, how to extend answers and learning the metalanguage that advisors sometimes use. An analysis of 'learner talk' can provide insight into the learner's ability to elaborate. Being exposed to this kind of knowledge could help the advising session to progress more smoothly. Assigning categories became difficult when it was the learner initiating or questioning. In these situations, learner initiations and questions were categorized as the LAs acknowledging. This underscores the importance of learner contributions in the dialog. The examples below illustrate the learner's questioning, clarifying and checking meaning, which helped to extend the learner-advisor dialog.

Example 1: Clarifying

> Learner: Is this similar to review?
> Advisor: Review is a little different because it's weekly review of this. But evaluate is to check how much you're improving.
> Learner: Ah.

Example 2: Questioning

> Advisor: At the practice center…
> Learner: Practice Center? Writing center is learn about grammar or something and

practice center is… what do?

Advisor: It's speaking. About speaking. So if you like make a reservation you can get one teacher and speak

Learner: Any topic is okay?

Advisor: Yes

Example 3: Checking meaning

Advisor: …if it's in English, you're exposing yourself to…

Learner: Exposing?

Advisor: Exposing…That means you are getting English.

Learner: Ah, okay!

2) Word frequency

Another area in which I would encourage further research is word frequency. Word-frequency analysis could examine how often certain words or phrases are used in an advising context. It has been suggested in the research literature that learners using metalanguage are able to express a variety of views on language and learning and come to their own definitions and conclusions on their role of language learners (Arnó et al., 2003). In the self-study materials at KUIS, special emphasis has been placed on "learning how to learn" and learners are encouraged to internalize the metalanguage that would help them discuss their learning more efficiently. The tag cloud below (Figure 8) shows the top 100 words found in the databank, 3 letters and over. Of the six areas advisors ask learners to reflect on: goal-setting, time-management, resources, reflection, motivation and strategies, the words most closely connected in the tag cloud are "goal," "focus" and "review."

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This is an indication that it may be more effective if the advisor use simpler language to communicate meaning. Research in this area could help to inform advisor training and changes could be made to the kind of discourse LAs use in advising sessions. It might also be useful for learners to be provided with a list of useful words so that they will be able to participate more actively in sessions.
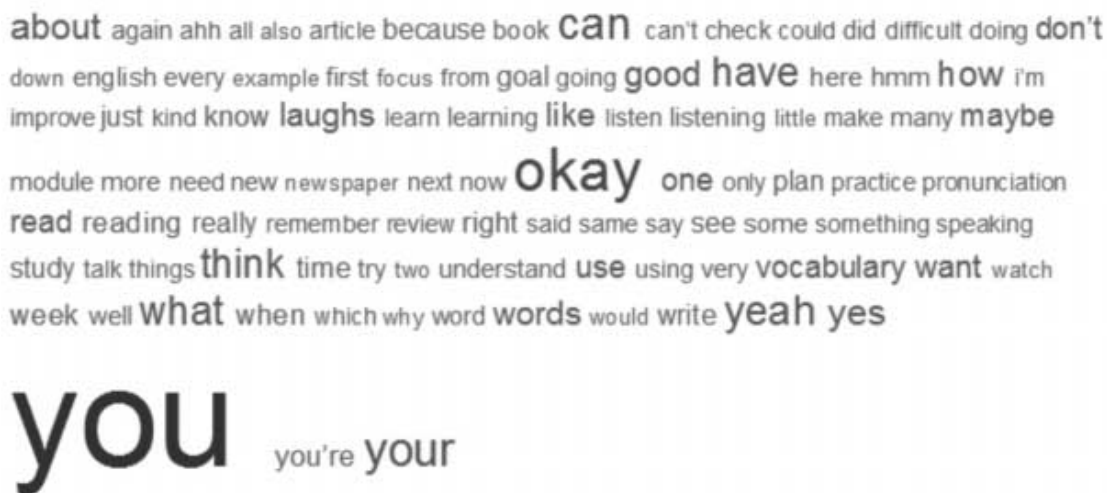
about again ahh all also article because book can can't check could did difficult doing don't down english every example first focus from goal going good have here hmm how i'm improve just kind know laughs learn learning like listen listening little make many maybe module more need new newspaper next now okay one only plan practice pronunciation read reading really remember review right said same say see some something speaking study talk things think time try two understand use using very vocabulary want watch week well what when which why word words would write yeah yes

you you're your

Figure 8: Tag cloud of the 100 highest frequency words (3 letters and over)

3) The use of silences as a technique in advising discourse

Counseling theory has indicated silence as a particularly effective technique that is often difficult for counselors, and in particular novice counselors who may feel obligated to fill silences with questions. Sharpley (1997) and Cook (1964) define silence in counseling as a pause of longer than 5 seconds in the dialog. LAs use long pauses or silences throughout the session to encourage the learner to express their thoughts, feelings or ideas. From the learner's point to view, silences can be used to reflect on or absorb what the advisor has said or perhaps to formulate what to say next. This is especially true for lower proficiency learners who have difficulty

with communicating in their L2. Reflective pauses can sometimes provide more valuable information than a monologue or question, and if LAs fill silences too quickly, the learner may feel that the LA is in control of the session and feel less inclined to give input into the session. It would be interesting to discover 1) the frequency in which silences or pause times occur; and 2) the effect of silences on the dynamics of the advising situation, such as building rapport or creating anxiety. More detailed transcripts including wait/pause times would be helpful in understanding what is considered to be an adequate "waiting time," and how long is too long in which the learner begins to feel uncomfortable. Murphy and Dillon (2003) suggest counting to ten before speaking and Narramore (1960) mentions thirty seconds as an adequate time to wait.

4) Longitudinal study of advisor growth

LAs at KUIS have to submit reflections on advising sessions and show growth over a specific time period for their professional development portfolio. It can be hypothesized that an advisor's characteristics, attitudes and behavior change as s/he gains more experience. The benefit of a longitudinal research is that it would allow the researcher to look at changes over time. It would be interesting to see the developmental chart of a learning advisor over 4 years (or 8 semesters). Figure 9 is an example of how LAs can use discourse to analyze their strengths and weaknesses. Session 1 was conducted by the advisor after 6 months on the job. Session 2 was conducted after 1 year on the job.
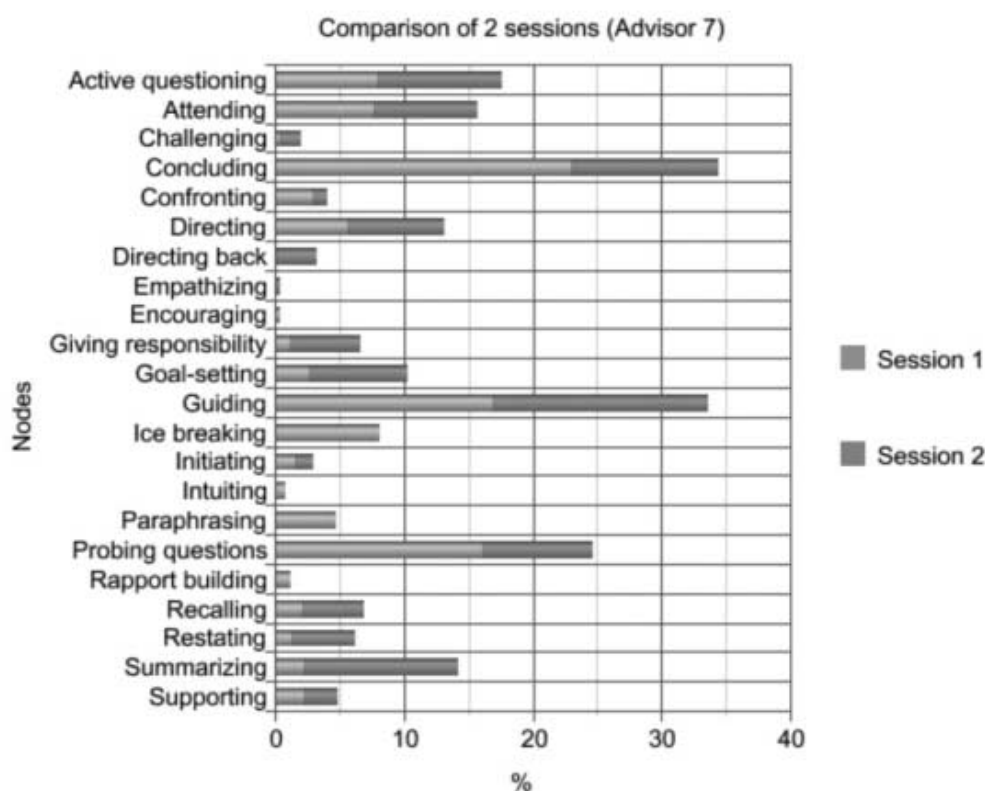
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Comparison of 2 sessions (Advisor 7)

Figure 9. A comparison of two sessions by a learning advisor

Conclusion

This paper examined transcripts from 8 LAs from a cross section of advising sessions and redefined established categories based on existing literature of advising skills, or created new categories from transcript analysis. Frequently used skills and common patterns emerging from the data allowed a framework of advising to be built specifically to match the KUIS context. In a formal advising relationship, it was found through transcript analysis that there is an introduction to the session; a discussion of goals or unraveling of a learning problem; discussion of solutions or development of an action plan; and a closing of the session. Predominant skills used by LAs were identified through transcript analysis of a bank of data, which could be used to help train new advisors.

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A great amount of emphasis was placed on the analysis of macro- and micro- skills; however, the researcher was careful not to examine the discourse only from the technical aspects, reducing it to mere skills, but to present the bigger picture and see the session as whole. This research aimed to provide a table of skills as a tool specifically for raising awareness of effective advising behaviors and to show a common structure to advising that LAs could use as a framework to guide future sessions and possibly inform the kind of training LAs receive during their first few weeks on the job. Language advising is still trying to establish a formal identity and with more focus on the distinctive features of advising and the advising discourse, changes could be made based to training programs based on empirical data. Advising discourse is an essential area to explore if we are to continue making progress within this field. This is especially important for advising in EFL contexts, which continues to see growth in the area of self-access learning.

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Appendix 1: Table of macro- and micro-skills
Macro-skills

Macro skill	Adapted / Borrowed from	Definition
1. Acknowledging	Sinclair & Coulthard	The advisor responds to a question posed by the learner. This may lead to the advisor making suggestions or giving the learner information (guiding)
2. Concluding	Kelly	Bringing the advising session to an end. This may include summarizing what was said during the session, explaining to the learner what is expected of them following the session (directing), encouraging the learner to take action and report back to the advisor and/or recommending useful materials to the learner.
3. Directing	Sinclair & Coulthard	This is where advisors direct/ask students to do something or give information about something. [NOTE: Sinclair & Coulthard refer to this as "Realized by a command. Its function is to request a non-linguistic response."]
4. Directing back	Kato & Sugawara	When the session goes off track and the advisor needs to direct the session back to where the conversation left off or back to a focus on the student's goals.
5. Encouraging	Kelly	Helping the learner to feel secure about a problem he/she may feel nervous about.
6. Evaluating	Kelly	Appraising the learner's progress and achievement to acknowledge the significance of the learner's effort and achievement
7. Goal-setting	Kelly / Kato Sugawara	Helping the learner to formulate specific goals and objectives to enable the learner to focus on a manageable goal. This can include a series of open and closed ended questions until the learner decides on a focus. This process is usually the first 1/3 (or sometimes 10 minutes) of the advising session.

8. Guiding	Kelly	Offering advice and information, direction and ideas, suggesting to help the learner develop alternative strategies.
9. Ice Breaking	Kato & Sugawara	At the start of the advising session, advisors start with a casual conversation, topics such as weather, class work, health... It is a time for you to know the student's condition (tired, sleepy, excited, nervous, etc.).
10. Initiating	Kelly	Introducing new directions and options to promote learner focus and reduce uncertainty. Initiating sequences do not have to necessarily be at the beginning of the sequence. An initiation is realized by a change in direction, a close of a particular topic/direction and the beginning of a new one; the first question/statement of the advising session. This can be done by either learner or advisor.
11. Instructing		The learner asks the advisor to help him/her with a specific language problem. The advisor breaks role from 'advisor' and becomes instructor. The advisor explains terminology to the student that he/she may find difficult to understand.
12. Modeling	Kelly	Demonstrating target behavior: To provide examples of knowledge and skills that the learner desires.
13. Rapport Building		Provide a non-threatening setting and communicate accurate empathy and unconditional regard; The goal is to build/establish mutual trust.
14. Supporting	Kelly	Providing encouragement and reinforcement to help the learner persist, create trust, and to acknowledge and encourage effort.

Micro-skills

Micro skill	Adapted / Borrowed from	Definition
1. Active questioning	Kelly / Kato & Sugawara	Using open-ended questions to encourage self-exploration; To elicit and stimulate learner disclosure and self-definition; To have students come up with a solution by themselves.
2. Attending	Kelly	Giving the student your undivided attention to show respect and interest to what s/he is saying; To focus on the person.
3. Challenging	Kato & Sugawara	To strengthen the learner's motivation toward improving his/her weak areas. The advisor tries to get the learner to make a promise to him/herself.
4. Clarifying		The advisor completes the learner's sentence if the learner is having difficulty speaking; or if the message is unclear or vague in order to clarify the true meaning.
5. Confronting	Kelly	Surfacing discrepancies and contradictions in the learner's communication to deepen self-awareness, particularly of self-defeating behavior.
6. Empathizing	Kelly	Identifying with the learner's experience and perception to create a bond of shared understanding.
7. Giving	Kato & Sugawara responsibility	Advisors give students control over their actions to help them to be more responsible about their learning. For example, advisors asking students to report back on a particular plan of action. (Note: It's best to set a specific date to help motivates students to carry out the action.)
8. Intuiting	Kato & Sugawara	The advisor feels/intuits something from the student's attitude or response. It is a good time for the advisor to comment on it to help the student open up about their true feelings. For example, "When you were talking about your English pen pal on the Internet, your eyes opened up and the rhythm and tone of your voice sounded really excited. Is this correct? What makes you excited?"
9. Joint Construction	Ferrara	The advisor completes the learner's sentence to help the learner when he/she is searching for words. This helps the session to continue more smoothly and ensures that the learner's meaning is clear.
10. Mirroring	Ferrara	The advisor repeats the learner's statement or selected phrase as a request for further elaboration or to highlight an important point.
11. Paraphrasing	Kelly	Simplifying the learner's statements by focusing on the essence of the message; To clarify the message and to sort out conflicting or confused meanings.

		Advisors may paraphrase after a few exchanges to ensure that he/she is following the learner's message.
12. Probing Questions	Kato & Sugawara	Questions seeking specific information or deeper detail about a particular question or problem. These questions may be open-ended but are usually close-ended (Yes/No type) questions. These questions are pretty direct and are especially useful when trying to get to the root of the problem. [NOTE: A spate of questions may be asked in quick succession in cases where the advisor is having trouble getting the learner to open up or talk freely about an issue/problem, maybe due to L2 problems] Adapted from K&S "untying questions"
13. Recalling		The advisor uses past information of the learner (learning history, module...) to help with goal-setting or guiding the session. By using past information, the advisor can show the learner that he/she is familiar with the learner's learning history. This helps to strengthen bond between advisor and learner. Also, recalling what the student said during the interview or in the module in the student's own words to ensure clarity. For example, "So you said before..., right?"
14. Rephrasing questions		When the advisor asks a question and the learner seems to have difficulty processing the question, the advisor rephrases the question to make it easier for the learner to understand it. In some cases, the advisor may give an example to help prompt the learner understand the kind of response the advisor is seeking.
15. Restating	Kelly	Repeating in your own words what the learner says to check understanding and to confirm learner's meaning. When the advisor is uncertain of the actual meaning the learner is trying to convey, he/she tries to clarify the situation. This helps to ensure that both advisor and learner have the same understanding of what is happening at that time during the session.
16. Reversing roles		Encourage the learner to examine his/her situation from a new/different perspective to get a clearer understanding about him/herself. Learners should be able to think more deeply about their situation this should enable them to grow beyond their present situation.
17. Summarizing	Kelly	Bringing together the main elements of a message in order to create focus and direction. The advisor may summarize points made during the advising session, or work done in the modules.