Inter-turn Gaps in Small Group Discussion Talk among Korean EFL Learners

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The present paper addresses the nature of frequent inter-turn gaps in the small group discussion talk among the Korean EFL learners. Inter-turn gaps in learner interactions have been considered inevitable results from the learners' limited linguistic second language competence. However, this paper argues for the interactional complexity of inter-turn gaps as resulted from the overall lack of topic continuity and the learners' inability to develop topics in on-going interactions. In addition, another important source of frequent occurrences of inter-turn gaps was the learners' wait-and-see strategy in responding to disfluencies and difficulties in the prior speaker's turns. This paper presents a detailed analysis of several episodes of the Korean EFL learners' discussion talk to show the underlying dynamics of frequent inter-turn pauses, which made the overall impression of discontinuous and disjointed nature of the learners talk.

I. Introduction

How participants in interactions manage turns at talk is an important aspect in achieving successful communication. Since the pioneering work by Sacks, Scheglof, and Jefferson (1974) on turn-taking in mundane talk, there has been much research interest devoted to uncovering the nature of turn-taking mechanisms in conversations (Jefferson, 1986; Liddicoat, 2007; Scheglof, 1996). It is now well recognized that turn-taking in ordinary conversations is done in a rule-governed way in which participants agree upon when and who to take turns. According to Sacks et al. (1974), speakers generally follow no-gap/no-lapse principle in turn transitions. That is, the gaps between one person speaking and another starting are very short, which are measurable in just a
few micro-seconds (Levinson, 1983). When there is unusually lengthy silence between turns, it often signals problems in talk and thus is regarded "attributable silence" (Levinson, 1983, p. 299). For the first language interactions, participants' turns are generally taken smoothly and automatically with little gaps involved between turns. However, for second language learners, such automatic turn takings with minimal gaps may be challenging because of their limited linguistic and interactional competence of the target language.

Although inter-turn gaps have been widely investigated in the first language interactions (Heldner & Edlund, 2010; Maroni, 2011; Roberts, Francis, & Morgan, 2006; Sacks, 2004; Wilson & Zimmerman, 1986), there have not been many studies that examined turn-taking mechanisms in second language use situations. Only a handful of studies investigated turn-taking in nonnative speaker interactions (Carroll, 2004; Gardner, 2007; Hauser, 2009), and little has been done in specifically examining inter-turn gaps in second language learning situations.

The present study is an attempt at looking closely into the nature of inter-turn gaps in second language learner interactions and searching for possible interactional mechanisms and motivations underlying them. In order to achieve a detailed description of talk, conversation analysis is adopted as a primary methodology of data analysis. A turn-by-turn sequential analysis of the data in the present study revealed largely disjointed nature of overall interactions and found that it was attributable to the frequent inter-turn gaps. It also was found that the inter-turn gaps were the sequential consequences of talk in on-going discussions with varying interactional motivations.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Inter-turn Gaps in First Language Conversations

In their early study, Sacks, et al. (1974) observed that participants in conversations take turns to talk, one person talking at a time. The transition from one speaker to another is claimed to be achieved in an orderly manner with precise timing and little gaps. They argued for a local management of turn-taking system in that there is a set of rules with ordered options that
operate on a turn–by–turn basis (Levinson, 1983).

According to Sacks et al., (1974) talk can be discontinuous when silence occurs between turns. These inter–turn silence is assigned as a gap, a lapse, or an attributable silence. First, a gap is silence before any other party self–selects the next turn or before the current speaker continues his/her turn. On the other hand, lapse is rather extended silence that occurs at transition–place where no parties in the talk take options to self–select. In lapses, there is no expectation that any party will talk. A lapse does not occur after utterances that set up the expectation of some types of responses. For example, in the following extract from Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson. (1978, p. 25) the first pause of 1.0 can be regarded as a gap, while the second rather lengthy pause of 16.0 is considered a lapse.

(1) J: Oh I could drive if you want me to.
   C: Well no I'll drive (I don' m//in')
   J: hhh
   →  (1.0)
   J: I meant to offah.
   →  (16.0)
   J: Those shoes look nice when you keep on putting stuff on 'em.

The third type of silence is what Sacks et al. (1974) called 'attributable lapses'. If the current speaker selects a next speaker to follow in his/her current talk and the selected next speaker does not start his/her talk immediately, there can be silence between turns, which is termed as 'attributable lapse'. The following extract form Atkinson and Drew (1979, p. 52) shows an example of the attributable lapse.

(2) A: Is there something bothering you or not?
   →  (1.0)
   A: Yes or no
   →  (1.5)
   A: Eh?
   B: no.

The distinction between what Sacks et al. (1974) defined as gaps and
lapses are not very clear from their arguments. Since there is no definite temporal measurement to distinguish gaps from lapses, Sacks et al. limit the occurrences of lapses to certain classes of transition places which were not clearly presented in their work. Therefore, the present study does not distinguish the two categories and treat all types of silence between turns, unless they are attributable lapses, in a category of gaps.

Inter-turn gaps have been studied in a number of different perspectives in the talk of native speakers (Jefferson, 1986; Lerner, 1996; Pomerantz, 1984; Schegloff, 1992; Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks 1977). According to the Sacks et al.’s (1974) turn-taking theory, no-gap transitions are norm in talk among proficient language users and inter-turn gaps are not accidental nor random, but they are interactionally significant. Liddicoat (2007) suggests that a lengthened transition space results in interacn in talk with varying interactional consequences and interpretations in local contexts. According to Carroll (2000), inter-turn gaps signify some socalof trouble in interactions such as upcoming disagreement, rejections, and refusals. Sh asucaher claims that no-gap transitions of turn are purposeful and deliberate achievement for the sake of avoiding the implications that inter-turn gaps may indicate.

2. Inter-turn Gaps in Second Language Conversations

Unlike first language conversations that have rather tight alignment or immediate next turn connections, second language talk appears to allow more time for turn transitions, showing a rather different pattern from the one in native speaker interactions. In fact, Schegloff, Koshik, Jacoby, and Olsher (2002) claim that a delay in the transition space of more than a beat of silence is 'potentially marked' and suggest that taking more time in turn transitions in nonnative speaker interactions may show us how the nonnative speaker participants orient to or invoke their non-nativeness.

Wong (2004) termed the inter-turn silences as 'delay' and noticed that language learners may occasionally speak slow or respond late because of their lack of full command of the target language. She further suggests that delay of uptake in turn transition space may show us the generic difference between first language and second language interaction. Delay in Wong's
(2004) study of second language users was not used to signal disagreement or a dispreferred action as often in the case in first language interaction. Instead, they acted as alternative courses of action that are resulted from variable sources in using second language.

Gardner (2007) in his rather recent study on second language learners' turn taking practices found that the second language speakers' turn starting is characterized by halting and broken starts. Also the start of turns were often delayed resulting in frequent inter-turn gaps. In her study of inter-turn gaps of ESL learners, Carroll (2000) also found that no-gap transitions were less common in the novice learners' second language talk than they were in the proficient learner talk. A recent study of Hauser (2009) looked into turn-taking organizations of learner interactions in discussion activities and found much deviations of the learners' turn-taking practices from what was found in mundane conversations among native speakers. The primary feature of turn-taking of the learners in his study was the dominance of primary speaker taking more than a minimal turn. There was a tendency that the participants were not competing each other for holding floors as in mundane talk in first language conversations, instead the learner participants were avoiding taking the role of the primary speaker.

The data gathered in the present study showed the similar pattern of frequent lengthy inter-turn gaps, which seem to result in the overall impression of disjointed nature of interactions. The present study found that a primary factor that influenced the occurrences of inter-turn gaps was topic discontinuity and lack of coherent development of the topics that were locally covered. Another factor that derived inter-turn gaps was the second language disfluencies of turn constructions in the prior turns. This paper provides the detailed descriptions of underlying interactional mechanisms that were responsible for these frequent lengthy inter-turn gaps.

III. THE STUDY

1. Participants

The participants in the present study were 18 college EFL students (4
males and 14 females) who were taking a course in English department named Current Topics in English. The course was taught strictly in English and designed to improve the learners' ability to talk about current issues in society. The course was a regular academic course for English majors and the students were highly motivated to improve their oral skills by discussing the issues raised in class sessions.

2. Data Collecting Method

One of the assessment methods employed for evaluation of the learners’ oral skills as a course requirement was a small group discussion task. The students were instructed to form a group of 4–5 to participate in a group discussion task for oral proficiency tests scheduled at the end of semester. On a testing day the members of each group gathered in a classroom and were provided with a list of topics to be discussed. The topics were selected from those covered in the class sessions throughout the semester. Five groups were formed and each group was given 15–20 minutes for discussion and their interactions were video-taped. The researcher was not present in the room with the students. A total of 82 minutes of talk was recorded and transcribed in detail using the transcription notations adopted from Jefferson (1972) and Spencer-Oatey (2000).

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of recorded interactions of small group discussion tests revealed that the interactions were largely disjointed and discontinuous. The lengthened inter-turn space often produced rather awkward silence in the talk, giving the impression that the interactions did not go smoothly. A close review of them showed that one of the culprits for such disjointed impression of the overall interactions was the lengthy inter-turn gaps. When turn completions were evident with clear syntactic and prosodic completion indicators, which were supposed to prompt the next turn to start, there were often lengthy gaps instead of immediate continuing flow of talk. No-gap transition was not the norm in the discussion talk for the present study as it is in first language.
interactions. Although gaps that occurred between turns were not particularly attributable to any particular speakers, inter-turn gaps that were too frequent seemed to indicate problematic nature of the learners’ discussions.

This paper presents several episodes of learner interactions focusing on what features of interactions resulted in marked lengthy silence between turns. The inter-turn gaps in the present study seemed to be attributable to two major factors in interactions. First factor related to topic development in interactions. It was often the case that a topic initiated by a participant seemed to be developed in subsequent turns. This lack of topic development by the other participants in interactions often resulted in lengthy inter-turn gaps. Another interactional feature consequential for lengthy inter-turn gaps was the learners’ tendency to wait for a suitable place to self-select their turns when there were apparent signs of articulatory difficulties of the previous turns.

1. Topic Development and Inter-turn Gaps

One of the distinctive features of turn-taking observed in the learners’ discussions was the delay of immediate self-selection of turns. These led frequent lengthy inter-turn gaps in interactions. The participants in the discussion tests tended to take only monologic turns where they delivered their own opinions, and not responding to the others to develop the ideas presented by the others. Each participant in the present study contributed topically to the discussions as primary speakers at some point, presenting what they thought about the issues raised in the discussion. However, they apparently failed to continue and develop what the other participants talked about by not giving timely feedback or responses to the others’ talk. The following extracts display how topic discontinuity contributed to lengthy inter-turn gaps.

Extract 1

26 P1: a-nd: (0.5) we’re: (0.8) we’re start to say then: (0.2) about: (0.2) u::m
27 about four?
28 (2.0)
29 P2: four? (1.0) question [four?
30 P1: [u::h (reading the question on the sheet)) what are some things you
can do to prevent global warming? (0.5) u::h: (0.1) reduce our: (1.0) uh
meat consumption? (0.2) [o:r (what about??)
P3: [yeah:(.) we should: (1.0) we should: (1.0) u::h: (1.5) make a plan (.)
for our earth: (0.2) but- (1.0) I don't think that's yet. (1.0) what about
you. ((gazing at P1))
36 (3.0)
P1: u::h ((shyly smiling and awkward laughing))
38 (2.0)
P2: I just said I will reduce eating beef;
40 (1.0)
P3: ° yeah°
P2: you guys can:(1.0) suggest:(0.5) any other; (2.0) u::h (-) your
suggestions.
43 (3.0)
P3: I hated cow: (0.1) right now.
P1: hihi [hihihi
P2: [hihihi
P1: really? (1.0) hihi unbelievable,
49 (13.0)
P2: yeah I think we need to just:(1.0) more care:(.) about:(0.5) the
environment and global warming:(0.5) a:nd:(2.0) our consciousness is
quite; (1.0) important; (1.0) I think.

In this extract, the three participants were talking about the issue of global warming by taking the role of a primary speaker in the discussion. It is noticeable that when a participant was the primary speaker, the other participants acted peripherally, refraining from making substantial turns. When they took turns, those were brief and simple continuers. These, in turn, led rather lengthy inter-turn gaps. For example, in line 33 P3 claimed that she should make a plan for saving earth and asked an opinion of P1 as shown in her gazing at P1 in line 35. The silence in line 36 is significant in that P3's nonverbal cue 'gazing' selected P1 as the next speaker, but P1 did not immediately respond to the prior turn, which resulted in a lengthy gap. In this case, the primary speaker P3 selected P1 as the next speaker and P1 was obliged to speak on the completion of the previous turn. The gap in line 36 here was therefore attributable to P1 and interpretable as P1 not speaking for some
reason. Although P1 responded in line 37, it was a minimal acknowledgement with uncomfortable speech. There was another gap following P1's turn in line 38. Entailly, P2 self-selected as the next speaker in line 39 claiming she had already talked about the topic and invited the other participants into talk instead of elaborating and developing P1's talk. After P2's invitation of the others to talk in lines 1–an, no party took turns, which was clear in the lengthy gap in line rk. The gap of 13 seconds in line r9 also was attributable to topic discontinuity. When the primary speaker reached transition-relevant places (lines 35, 39, 43, and 48), lengthy gaps followed and the other participants but the primary speaker produced at most minimal responses.

**Extract 2**

41 P12: I: (0.1) heard something from her. (1.0) beca:: (0.3) she; (1.0) studied in Australia. (0.5) and I heard Australia? (0.7 ) is; (0.3) really; (1.0) the Australian people have; (0.3) big racial stereotypes. (2.0) a::nd (2.0) I ask her; (0.8) u::h (1.0) didn't it; (0.2) didn't it tough (−) to you? (1.0) for you to live there? (−) a::nd she said; (1.0) yeah I− (−) yes I experienced stereotype; (0.2) because of racial stereotypes; (0.5) and some day; (1.0) I finished; (2.0) uh I studied; (1.0) i:n (1.0) uh library? (1.0) a::nd (0.3) I− on the way to; (−) go home. (2.0) some cars stop; (1.0) in front of me. (1.0) a::nd (0.3) they pushed; (0.5) some eggs [at her.

51 P11: [eggs?

52 P12: yeah eggs.

53 P11: oh really?

54 P12: uh huh,

56 P11: that's surprisi− hihi sing.

57 (8.0)

58 P12: yeah poor girl.

59 (11.0)

60 P11: u::h (4.0) I also have; (−) racial stereotypes. (1.0) of; (0.2) u::h: (2.0) in Japan.

61 (2.0)

62 (2.0)

63 P12: o::h.

In the above extract, the lengthy inter-turn gaps in lines 57, 59, and 62 were largely attributable to the lack of topic continuity and development.
Although P12 told a long story about her friend in Australia in her turn from lines 41 to 50, the other participants, P11 and P13 were not showing any efforts in developing the story told by P12. The responses P11 provided in lines 51 and 53 were simply confirmation checks. P11’s response in 56 for P12’s storytelling was very brief, which led a lengthy gap of 8.0 following the turn. In line 58, P12, the original story teller self-selected as the next speaker and added her feeling on the story she had been telling. Then, there was another long gap in line 59 where no other parties in the talk took turns. The disjointed nature of the talk was more clearly visible in the following extract.

**Extract 3**

93 P12: yeah. (1.0) they just distinguish; (0.5) their- (-) this- (-) they; (0.5) just judge; (0.5) their skin. (1.0) not their; (1.0) ability; (-) o::r; (2.0)
94 how- how they love their chil- children; (0.5) and how do they- (1.0) their best for teaching somebody. (1.0) just they; (1.0) just they::::
95 are judged by their skin. (2.0) yellow, (.) or white, (. or black.
96 (5.0)
97 P12: ((gazing at P13)) how do you think.
98 (3.0)
99 P13: u:::m I think; (3.0) Korean (0.5) old generation? (0.3) is; (1.0) conservative.
100 P12: uh mmm.
101 P13: so:: (1.0) because of woman? (1.0) don't don't don't.
102 P12: uh mmm.
103 P13: so; (1.0) old generation have; (1.0) open mind. (0.5) and; (1.0) don't; (0.5) strict and rigid.
104 (4.0)
105 P12: uh mmm.
106 P13: °yes.°
107 (5.0)
108 P12: yeah I also think; (1.0) falling in love; (0.5) with a foreigner? (2.0) that’s okay but; (-) I'm just scared of people's views. (1.0) if I:::'m
109 fall in love; (_) with foreigner? (-) they'll think; (2.0) I::::: have sex.
110 (0.5) have love. (-) make love. (0.3) with him.
111 (2.0)
112 P12: fo::r (0.5) they just have; (2.0) they just think cause; (1.0) the
113 foreigner is; (1.0) opener than (-) ours.
In extract 3, P12 who had been taking many turns as the primary speaker was talking about the discriminatory practice in private language schools in Korea. In lines 93–97, P12 was telling that it is unfair to judge a teacher by his/her skin color instead of how well they teach. Immediately after P12's turn completion in line 98, there was a lengthy gap of 5 seconds, where P12 apparently was waiting for the other participants to chip in and give their opinions. However, neither P11 nor P13 took turns and in line 99, P12 took a turn to select the next speaker by gazing at P13, asking her opinion. Although P13 was selected by P12 as the next speaker, she did not immediately take a turn, resulting in another gap in line 100. When P13 finally took the turn in line 101, she failed to stick to the topic initiated by P13 in her previous turn, rather initiated a new topic of Korean older generation in lines 101 and 102. P13 continued to talk in lines 104 and 106–107, however, this new topic was not responded by the other participants as shown in again the long gaps in lines 108 and 111. In line 112, P12 raised another topic of other people's views on inter-racial couples. Her new topic realized in lines from 112–115 and 117–118 were still not responded and developed by the other participants. The gaps in lines 116, 119, 121, and 123 all illustrate how a topic in this talk failed to be developed and coherently connected.

By examining the three extracts presented above, it is clear that the turn-taking practices found in the talk among the learners in this study show a fairly monologic character. That is, the learners were so busy in delivering their own opinions that they could not dialogically develop other people's turns in a coherent manner. Furthermore, in all of the three extracts, there were occasions of gaps attributable to an individual participant where he/she was obliged to talk. These attributable gaps can be interpretable as indicating
some problems in interactions (Markee, 2000).

Many researchers (Beach, 1996; Schlegel, 1998) point out that brief gaps following minimal turns function as further eliciting others’ responses. When a speaker provides unelaborated and minimal responses to the previous turns, the hearer often interprets the minimal responses as problematic and tends to indicate it through the immediately subsequent gaps, which may be purposefully delaying participation in hopes of prompting the speaker to expand on what was said. It is also noticeable that although the current speaker did not select next speaker and inter-turn gaps seemed to indicate that the current speaker may have expected the others’ to elaborate on or develop the topic. However, that did not happen in the present study, which contributed greatly to the failure to promote further talk on the topic.

2. Articulative Difficulties in Turn Constructions and Inter-turn Gaps

Another possibility of interpretation for the occurrence of frequent inter-turn gaps that will be explored here is the gaps as a way of dealing with the disfluent turn-productions in the previous turns. The inter-turn gaps that are shown in the following extracts seemed to be attributable to the deficiencies and target language difficulties in the prior turn’s productions. Carroll (2004) reports similar finding in his study that when current speakeroductio was highly disfluent, the transition to the next ctio was delayed due to the next speakerodu"wait and see" attitude. According to Carroll (2000), when current speakeroductio produced in Carrhatic fashion with numerous sigtio wadifficulty like lengthy intra-turn filled and unfilled pauses and sound strecteak, it is difficult for the other po the nexts to project a precise timing of possible turn transition. As a results, the po the nexts in Carroll’s study employed a strategy of seeking ineakerduces insafer plere becauserget l speanot sure about whether the current speaker had completely finished his/her turn or not. This tendency of wait-and-see attitude was held responsible for inter-turn gaps in the present study as well in that there often came inter-turn gaps following the turns showing great difficulty in articulation.

In responding to disfluent turns with frequent intra-turn pauses and displays of hesitations, the participants tended to feel safe to wait for the
current speaker to stop speaking and delay the starting of their turns to conform to the no-overlap rule of turn-taking. The participants in the present study were largely novices in English speaking skills, which was evident in various signs of disfluency and troubles such as turn-holding markers (e.g. 'uhm'), numerous lengthy intra-turn pauses, cut-offs, and self-repairs. These features of the learners' talk show us that they had difficulty in being able to say what they wanted to say due to their limited language proficiency. Extract 4 displays several occasions of lengthy inter-turn gaps that were apparently attributable to the heavily disfluent talk in the previous turn production.

Extract 4

File 0000 (00:10:32)

142 P1: relocated rainfall?
143 P3: yes.: (. ) u:::h: (3.0) this– a:::nd: (2.0) [" 뭐지"] original: (2.0) region?
144 (2.0) many– re- u:::h (1.0) many rainfalled: (2.0) but– now? (2.0) they;
145 (―) relocated: (―) other place: (0.5) rainfalls: (0.5) increasing.
146 (3.0)
147 P2: okay,=
148 P3: do you understand? [hiihiih
149 P2: [yes? (0.5) but– (1.0) what is the problem.
150 (2.0)
151 P3: u:h:
152 P1: (it's starting?) th– (2.) that de– desert?
153 (3.0)
154 P3: also, (2.0) but:(–) u:::h:
155 (3.0)
156 P2: you mean: (1.0) the:: huge; (1.0) changing:=
157 P3: yes yes [huge changing.
158 P2: [temperature;=
159 P3: yes.
160 P2: is quite dangerous: (2.0) is it,
161 P3: that’s– that changes: (2.0) u:::h (3.0) that change is difficult: (2.0)
162 people too. (2.0) ( ?) to people.
163 (3.0)
164 P3: right?
165 P1: uh hiihiih
166 P3: u::h; (4.0) I don't know; (3.0) what I'm talking.
167 P2: [hihi
168 P1: [hihihi what are you talking about that,
169 P3: u::h; (1.0) u::h; this~ this hu~ huge change? (2.0) change is; (1.0)
170 u:::::h;
171 (2.0)
172 P2: making some many disasters in the world?
173 P3: yes; (1.0) a:nd; (1.0) uh that's effect? (1.0) affect; (2.0) fro~ (2.0)
174 u::h; (1.0) from; (0.5) people.
175 (4.0)
176 P3: no?

In extract 4, P1 in line 142 made a confirmation check of what P3 had said in the previous turn by repeating the term 'relocated rainfall' with a rising intonation. In lines 143–145, P3 took a lengthy turn to explain what she meant by the term 'relocated rainfall'. One noticeable feature of P3's turn here was the frequent cut-offs, pauses, use of L1, turn-holding uhs, and sound stretching, which could be characterized the talk as highly disfluent. P3 was a novice L2 speaker with great difficulty in commanding English. The pause in line 146 immediately following P3's disfluent turn may have been a response to the previous problematic turn. Although P3's turn has completed with a clear falling intonation indicating the turn completion in line 145 no other participant immediately self-selected as the next speaker and chose to wait for a safe timing to take turns. The difference of this type of inter-turn gaps from the ones caused by lack of topic continuity discussed in the previous section was the fact that the topic in this case was continued to talked about after the inter-turn gaps as shown in lines 156 and 172 where P2 oriented to the existing topic and elaborated on them.

Extract 5
39 P4: actually I prepared; (−) fo:r (.) global warming. (1.0)=
40 P6: " uh huh"
41 P4: so: (−) do you know (1.0) WWF? (2.0) WWF is; (1.0) world; (0.5)
42 wild life? (0.3) fund. (1.0) so they say; (0.5) the global warming is
43 getting worse. (1.0) so:: (2.0) u:::h (4.0) I heard some; (0.5) u:h
44 news, (0.5) and; (0.5) the aric is; (2.0) melting? (1.0) a::nd many
In extract 5, P4 was the primary speaker who talked about the seriousness of global warming from lines 41 through 46. She apparently was another novice English speaker who had a great deal of difficulty in articulating what she wanted to say in English. As shown in her turns throughout the interactions (lines 41–46 and 48–51), her talk was characterized by numerous intra-turn pauses, stretching of vowel sounds, and turn-holding discourse marker 'so'. One interesting point found in this interaction was that P4 had so many pauses with falling intonations, which could be readily interpreted as transition places where the other participants could chip in and start their turns. For example, in lines 43 and 45, there were several transition relevance places, but none of them were taken as chances for turn transitions. The disfluent nature of P4's turn production made it difficult for the other participants to self-select their turns at the right timing. The pause in line 47, therefore, can be interpreted as attributable to the other participants' wait and see strategy, not knowing exactly when it was the right time to start their talk.

Without receiving the others' responses to her opinion, P4 in line 48 self-selected her turn and continued her talk. In line 50, there was a clear transition point when she finished her sentence 'we should do' with a clear
falling intonation and a pause of 2 seconds. However, no one self-selected to take a turn and finally P4 decided to seek for the other’s opinion and selected P6 as the next speaker by gazing at her in line 50. In lines 54–57, P6 answered to P4’s question by suggesting several ways to protect environment. Again, P6’s turn in lines 54–57, although she was a better English speaker than the other participants as shown in her grammatically error-free sentences, she also had frequent intra-turn pauses and vowel stretching in her turn, which may show that P6 needed time to select what to say to the question abruptly asked by P4 in the previous turn. But, still this halting nature of P6’s turn had the similar effect to produce the inter-turn gaps in line 58.

The analysis of extracts 4 and 5 has shown that the frequent inter-turn gaps in the learners’ talk were not merely products of faulty or limited linguistic competence of the learners. Rather, it is possible that the inter-turn gaps may be an interactional move employed by the participants in response to the speaker who had difficulties in producing turns in target language. It is based on the assumption that when current speaker's turn is problematic and disfluent, rightly judging the transition relevance place may become undependable, which makes the other participants take a wait-and-see attitude. In other words, inter-turn gaps can be a way of learners’ strategy to deal with the disfluent turn-production of the previous turns by the other participant.

V. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper is to identify a regularly occurring turn-taking pattern in second language speaker talk. It shows the struggle of language learners to initiate turns in a timely manner. The present study looked closely at the distinct feature of learner talk, the lengthy and frequent inter-turn gaps, by analysing talk from smtalanaoup discussion task. It tefefound that the frequent inter-turn gaps were largely attributable to two important interactional mechanisms. Fmst, the gaps occurred because of topic discontinuity in the discussions. The learners fail into develop topics raised by the primary speaker c disconticeding turn in a coherent manner. Thus, when the primary speaker who t f etaking the current turn completed his/largely atno other participant t fewsioing to chip in and develop the ideas
or opinions raised by the primary speaker. This a result, there were often lengthy inter-turn gaps at transition relevance places before anyoneonalf-sel meed and started his/largely. From this observation, one could see that turn-taking during student discussions regarding language changes may contribute to students' focus only on the primary speaker role and developing meaningful discussions. This may give us, as language teachers, a new perspective on the role of discussion activity in teaching and learning. Language teachers should be aware that discussion activity may in fact be another chance for learners to deliver their speech unidirectionally without having much chance to exchange and share their ideas with their peers.

Second interactional factor that seemed to lead inter-turn gaps was coming from the disfluent nature of the learner's talk before the gaps occurred. Inter-turn gaps in the present study were found to occur subsequently after haltingly produced turns with numerous pauses, irregular tempo, and re-starts. When there were signs of disfluencies such as intra-turn pauses, sound stretches, and turn-holding markers in the current speaker's turn production, the other participants tended to give some time (inter-turn gaps) before they started their turns. Through a close look at how inter-turn gaps were realized, it was evident that not all gaps in learners' talk were due to processing times or language difficulties. As shown in the data of the present study, some inter-turn gaps are interactionally motivated as consequences of responding to problematic nature of prior speaker's turns.

One of the benefits of investigating novice L2 learners' interactions like the ones analyzed in the present study might be to give us the new perspective on how we view L2 learners' talk and their ways of interacting with others. It provides us with a deeper understanding of the learners' difficulties and problems, which can be targets to work on to build learners' language interactional skills. There is always pressure to begin a turn at talk and participants in the talk to attend closely to the timing of their own language production and their partners' speech and deal with timely flow of interactions. Timing is central to spontaneous speech and language learners should learn how to synchronize the
inter-turn gaps during the interactions. Turn-taking is clearly a challenging task for novice language speakers, and yet it is a crucial interactional skill.

REFERENCES

Inter-turn Gaps in Small Group Discussion Talk among Korean EFL Learners


**APPENDIX**

Transcription Conventions

Simultaneous utterances

\[ \text{Simultaneous, overlapping talk by the participants} \]

Contiguous utterances

\[ \text{No interval between the end of one speaker's turn and the beginning of the next speaker's turn.} \]

Intervals within and between utterances

\( (0.0) \) Intervals in the stream of talk timed in tenths of a second either within an utterance or between utterances

\( (.) \) Micro pause

\( (-) \) Brief pause

Characteristics of speech delivery

\( - \) A halting, abrupt cutoff

\( \ast \ast \) Lower amplitude: sound that is quieter than surrounding talk

\( \text{hihi} \) Laughter tokens

Underline Underlined type indicates marked stress

Capital letters Capitals indicate increased volume

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