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Meaning Negotiation Processes of Communication Breakdowns in L2 Learners' Interactions in the Classroom*

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This study examined the meaning negotiation processes of communication breakdowns in relation to the causes of communication problems found in interactions between learners in the L2 classroom. The data consisted of audio- and video-recordings of adult ESL learners engaged in group discussions. Analysis of the discourse occurring in the learners' communicative interactions focused on identifying the causes of breakdowns using the negotiation of meaning model (Varonis & Gass, 1985) and the learners' treatment processes adopting a process-centered approach to communication breakdown (Bruton & Samuda, 1980). The results showed that the communication breakdowns learners encountered largely arose from troubles in lexicon, grammar, pronunciation, discourse, factual knowledge, and non-hearing. In particular, non-understanding due to problems at the lexical, discourse and non-hearing level comprised the main sources of comprehension difficulty. As for the treatment process, the majority of the non-understandings were recognized by the learners, taken up for meaning negotiation, and successfully resolved. Specifically, breakdowns of lexical, discourse, and non-hearing problems were most likely to be treated through the process of being perceived, negotiated, and resolved. The communication breakdowns resulting in no resolution were cases in which the learners were aware of a breakdown but could not resolve after a negotiation process or did not perceive the problem and initiated no negotiation. Breakdowns of lexical and discourse causes were also most likely to lead the learners into these unsuccessful treatment processes.

[communication breakdown/meaning negotiation/L2 learners' interaction]

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I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, communicative language teaching (CLT) has gained much popularity as a viable solution to the quest for a language teaching approach effective in developing learners' oral communication ability. An important feature of this approach is to promote interaction between learners through pair or group work to encourage meaningful use of the target language. Research has shown that learner-learner interaction in the second language (L2) classroom enhances the amount of learners' target language use and engagement in negotiation of meaning (Long & Porter, 1985; Shi, 1998). In particular, negotiation interaction between learners is claimed to be conducive to L2 acquisition, for the process fosters interactional modification for resolution of communication problems (Long, 1983, 1996; Pica, 1994).

While considerable research has looked at factors that affect L2 learners' negotiation work such as task type (Bitchener, 2004; Doughty & Pica, 1986; Foster, 1998; Gass & Varonis, 1985) and proficiency level (Doughty & Pica, 1986; Porter, 1986; Varonis & Gass, 1985), not much has been revealed about the negotiation process in connection to the sources of communication breakdowns in L2 learners' communication. That is, what causes communication breakdown when learners of inadequate target language competence interact with each other? Which causes of breakdowns become subject to a negotiation process for resolution by the learners and which causes do not? The answers to these questions can help better identify L2 learners' communication needs and assist the pedagogical practice of learner-learner interaction in the language classroom. This study, therefore, set out to answer these questions by examining whether and how a negotiation process takes place in relation to the causes of communication problems found in interactions between learners in the L2 classroom.

II. BACKGROUND OF STUDY

1. Learners' Negotiation Interactions in the L2 Classroom

A widely endorsed practice especially in the CLT classroom is interaction between learners in the form of pair or group work. Compared to teacher-led learning, the general agreement in second language acquisition (SLA) research suggests learner-learner interaction is more beneficial for learners' L2 development. For one, interacting with each other allows learners more opportunities to practice the target language (Doughty & Pica, 1986; Long & Porter, 1985; Pica & Doughty, 1985). Afforded by a less anxiety-provoking

environment, learners are able to take more chances to express their ideas in the target language, hence, applying and adjusting their knowledge of the L2.

Another important benefit of learners' communicative interaction for their L2 acquisition is that interaction fosters comprehension of input (Ellis, Tanaka, & Yamazaki, 1994; Gass & Varonis, 1994; Long, 1985; Loshky, 1994; Pica, Lincoln-Porter, Paninos, & Linnell, 1996; Pica, Young, & Doughty, 1987) by encouraging learners' to engage in negotiation of meaning that helps generate interactional modification for resolving problems in message comprehensibility (Long, 1983, 1996; Pica, 1994). Accordingly, inquiries in research have focused on how negotiation could be encouraged between learners. One importantly investigated factor is the effect of task type on negotiation. Research has revealed that two-way tasks requiring information exchange from all parties are more likely to prompt learners to negotiate for meaning than tasks of other conditions (Bitchener, 2004; Doughty & Pica, 1986; Foster, 1998; Gass & Varonis, 1985).

Also carefully observed in L2 learners' negotiation work is the factor of proficiency level of learners. Studies have reported that learners in interactions with learners of different proficiency levels produced more negotiated interactions than with learners of the same level (Doughty & Pica, 1986; Porter, 1986; Varonis & Gass, 1985).

Consideration of factors such as task type and proficiency level reflects the attention in SLA research on ways to facilitate meaning negotiation that is believed to contribute to acquisition. There is no doubt about the value of what such research efforts can achieve for the field of SLA. As noted by Nakahama, Tyler, and van Lier (2001), however, an important area overlooked in investigations of L2 learners' negotiation work is the causes of problems in their communication, hence triggering negotiation. Even harder to find are studies examining how meaning negotiation is manifested in L2 learners' interactions in relation to the causes of breakdowns. A negotiation process for comprehension stems from a problematic message in the flow of communication. Therefore, as much as promoting negotiation of breakdowns is essential for learners' L2 development, the sources of breakdowns and how they relate to a negotiation of meaning process deserve equal attention to better understand the role of learners' interaction in L2 classroom learning. A review of the literature on communication breakdown and negotiation of meaning follows next.

2. Communication Breakdown and Negotiation of Meaning

Communication breakdown in SLA research is commonly discussed in relation to the construct of negotiation of meaning, for models (e.g., Gass & Varonis, 1985; Pica, Holliday, Lewis, Berducci, & Newman, 1991; Varonis & Gass, 1985) depicting the process of how non-understanding becomes negotiated largely present a four-stage

sequence that starts out with a problematic utterance creating difficulty in communication. According to the models, a negotiation process is initiated with a speaker producing a *trigger* utterance that elicits a *signal* or an *indicator* from the listener indicating the utterance has not been comprehended. Varonis and Gass (1985) described examples of indicators as *explicit indication of non-understanding*, *echo*, *no verbal response*, and *inappropriate response*. The signal or indicator is then responded to with a *response* from the original speaker of the message with additional information to help remedy the cause of the problem. *Repetition*, *expansion*, *rephrasing*, *acknowledgement*, and *reduction* are presented as examples of responses in Varonis and Gass' model. As a final but optional move, the model is completed with the listener's *reaction* to the original speaker's response. This four-stage model of negotiation came to be an attractive framework for studying the negotiation of meaning process, yet studies have mostly attended to the resolution steps of *signal* and *response* in the sequence (Nakahama et al., 2001).

Contrarily, in examining negotiation of meaning in conversational and information gap activities between native speakers (NSs) and nonnative speakers (NNSs), Nakahama et al. (2001) focused on the sources of communication problems likely to proceed to negotiation and categorized them into lexical, morphosyntactic, pronunciation, and discourse and content triggers. Along the same line, Mackey, Gass, and McDonough (2000) found learners' communication errors in NS-NNS interactions originated from problems of phonology, morphosyntax, and lexis. Interestingly however, Mackey, Gass, and McDonough reported negotiation for resolution of communication problems ensued only in the case of phonological errors.

A few studies have looked into the causes of communication problems in the L2 classroom setting. In elementary level French immersion classes, learners' errors triggering problems in communication were coded into grammatical, lexical, phonological, or unsolicited use of L1 (first language) to which the teachers provided systematic corrections (Lyster, 2001).

Shim's (2006) study elucidated the negotiation of meaning process by analyzing trouble sources leading to communication breakdown in teacher-student interactions with an eye on the social and contextual factors of the L2 classroom. For the teacher, communication failures triggering negotiation turned out to emerge from students' insufficient linguistic resources, the teacher's limited background knowledge, and non-hearing. The students, on the other hand, attributed the failures to their linguistic resource shortage, limited background knowledge, and selective attention.

The aforementioned studies address the sources of communication problems likely to set off a negotiation of meaning process in NS-NNS or teacher-student interactions. It is well known that learners (i.e., NNSs) in the L2 classroom setting are commonly engaged in communicative interactions with other learners. However, examinations of what brings

about communication breakdowns and whether and how the breakdowns lead to a meaning negotiation process in L2 classroom learners' interactions are scarce.

Two studies worth noting in this regard are the investigations by Bruton and Samuda (1980) and Dörnyei and Kormos (1998). Observing adult learners' interactions in an English language institute, Bruton and Samuda found that learners remedied discrete errors of lexicon, syntax, pronunciation, and task understanding using straight alternatives, offering of possibilities, repair questions, rejections, and self-corrections as methods of feedback. The study further examined the relation of learners' errors and their treatment to the communicative whole and illustrated types of communication breakdown centering on the process of communication failure. In their process-centered approach to learners' communication problems, breakdowns took one of the four aspects: (1) learners immediately notice the breakdown, repair it, and resume the communication; (2) longer time is needed for learners to notice the breakdown, hence communication is resumed after some time; (3) learners notice the breakdown, yet are not able to find the cause therefore repairing incorrectly and eventually harming successful communication; and (4) learners are unaware of the breakdown often due to mismatches between the interlocutors.

Significant in understanding how L2 learners manage problems in speaking is the study by Dörnyei and Kormos (1998). Adopting a psycholinguistic approach, the study provides a comprehensive analysis of the problem-solving mechanisms for communication problems in connection to the stages of L2 speech processing. Examples and retrospective comments from data of Hungarian English learners' elicited speech revealed L2 learners' problem-solving behaviors of communication strategies, stalling, repair, and negotiation for the problem sources of resource shortage, processing time, perceived limitations in one's own language production, and perceived inadequacy in other's performance. Meaning negotiation mechanisms unveiled the learners' use of techniques such as asking for repetition, clarification, confirmation, guessing, indicating non-understanding, and pretending understanding for problems with other's performance.

The findings of Bruton and Samuda and Dörnyei and Kormos are informative in understanding problem sources and resolution approaches in L2 learners' communication. The two studies, nonetheless, fall short in explaining meaning negotiation processes in relation to the causes of breakdowns likely to occur. In other words, what kinds of negotiation processes are adopted for the different types of communication breakdowns? Communication breakdown is an inevitable element in interaction between learners with insufficient competence in the target language. If meaning negotiation promotes modification of problematic messages, enhances comprehension, and thus facilitates acquisition (Long, 1996), then understanding why problems may arise and whether and how such problems become negotiated is crucial to better support negotiation in L2 learners' interactions. The present study undertook these issues for investigation.

III. METHOD

1. Data and Participants

The data for the present study come from a larger study (Kim, 2006) that examined how learners' language and interaction experiences with the teacher and other learners in the L2 classroom become manifested in their language development. The L2 learners in that study were divided into three groups to engage in task interactions either with a teacher or other learners across three units of the course textbook. For each unit, one group of learners worked with the teacher while the other two groups of learners interacted among themselves for the same task. As the present study was interested in communication problems and meaning negotiation in interactions of learners only, interaction data of the six learner-only groups from the three units were reanalyzed for investigation of the specific research questions of this study.

The L2 learner participants were 13 students in an English as a Second Language (ESL) Listening/Speaking class associated with a large U.S. university. The class belonged to a low-intermediate level of proficiency[1] and the learners came from diverse cultural backgrounds of Taiwan, Brazil, Korea, and Japan. The Listening/Speaking class helped learners develop communicative listening and speaking skills through various learning activities involving learners' interactions in pair and group forms. The class met three times a week and the lessons generally followed the units in the assigned course textbook.

2. Data Collection Procedure

The data consisted of audio- and video-recordings of learners in group discussions on topics from three units of the course textbook. Across the three units, the learner-only groups with three to five[2] students per group took part in discussion interactions exchanging opinions to complete task requirements. The tasks were based on activities from the course textbook with slight modifications. Tasks for the two units required learners to discuss given situations, and the task for the other unit asked learners to come up with solutions for problems shown in a picture. Each learner group discussion lasted about 20 minutes. The directions for the tasks were explained by the teacher before going into the group discussions. For the learners, the group discussions were a regular part of their class routine; hence, the data captured learner performances in interactions as found in their daily classroom learning conditions.

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[1] The level was determined by the placement test administered by the ESL program.
[2] The number of students per group varied according to the number of students present on the day of data collection.

3. Analysis

Data recordings of the learner-group interactions were transcribed and reviewed for analysis by the researcher. Analysis focused on identifying the causes of communication breakdowns and whether and how the causes of breakdowns developed into a negotiation process. Instances of communication breakdowns were coded by adopting Varonis and Gass' (1985) four-stage negotiation model of *Trigger→ Indicator→ Response→ Reaction*. In line with Nakahama et al.'s (2001) study, first, the indicator signaling the beginning of a negotiation process was located, and then the utterances occurring prior to the indicator was traced as the trigger, that is, the cause of a communication problem with the potential of leading up to a meaning negotiation process. Identification of *indicators* and *responses* produced by the learners referred to the examples described in Varonis and Gass' negotiation sequence. Through this analytical procedure, the causes of breakdowns were classified into the six categories of lexical, grammatical, pronunciation, discourse, factual knowledge, and non-hearing. Each type of cause with illustrative examples from the data is discussed in detail in the results section.

As the transcripts of the interactions were constantly examined, several instances emerged in which the coding of indicators was not always clear-cut. As noted in Varonis and Gass (1985), some exchanges created confusion in terms of whether an utterance could be judged an indicator of a problem in understanding or a part of an exchange sustaining the talk at hand. Such ambiguous utterances complicated identification of communication breakdown causes and therefore, following Varonis and Gass, were not included in the count for an indicator, or for that matter, a cause.

Once the causes of breakdowns were identified and categorized, the ways in which the troublesome causes were treated by the learners were examined. In particular, analysis attended to the types of communication problems that led up to a meaning negotiation process with the prospect for resolution and the types that did not. Each instance of breakdown underwent close analysis for whether the breakdown was apparent to the learners and whether or not a negotiation process ensued to resolve the problem. For this process, an analytical framework permitting examination of the learners' interactions from the inception of a breakdown through the treatment process was necessary. Thus, three categories[3] adapted from Bruton and Samuda's (1980) process-centered approach to communication breakdown were employed.

1) The cause of breakdown is perceived by learners and a negotiation process takes

[3] The first two categories from Bruton and Samuda's (1980) process-centered approach to breakdowns (discussed in the previous section) were combined into one and the resulting three categories were used for the present study.

place achieving successful resolution.
2) The cause of breakdown is perceived by learners and a negotiation process takes place, but fails in achieving resolution.
3) The cause of breakdown is not perceived by learners and no negotiation takes place. Hence, no resolution is achieved.

Determination of whether a breakdown was perceived by the learners and the success of a negotiation process was made on the basis of the four-stage negotiation model. If a breakdown acknowledged with an indicator of some sort received a response resulting in a resolution of the problematic utterance, then the communication breakdown was analyzed as perceived and successfully negotiated. A signaled breakdown that did not get settled after a response was initiated for resolution was categorized as perceived yet unsuccessfully negotiated. Finally, breakdowns for which the learners were unaware of the non-understanding going on, therefore not bringing about any indicator or response for negotiation were classified as not perceived with no negotiation.

In efforts to yield reliable analytical results, the researcher examined the data repeatedly following the analytical procedures rigorously each time. Any case of discrepancy between each trial was resolved through careful consideration until a final decision was reached. Additionally, data of two learner-group interactions were chosen randomly from the six learner-group interactions and analyzed by another rater with expertise in SLA and the current research topic. A 93% agreement between the researcher and the rater was attained on the coding of causes of communication breakdowns and meaning negotiation processes for these data.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section first discusses the causes of communication breakdowns identified from analysis of the trigger stage in the four-stage negotiation sequence. Then for each type of cause, the learners' treatment of the problem source with respect to a negotiation of meaning process is described.

1. Causes of Communication Breakdowns in L2 Learners' Interactions

The analysis of data revealed six categories for the causes of communication problems found in the course of the learners' interactions. As summarized in Table 1, breakdowns in communication arose from lexical, grammatical, pronunciation, discourse, factual

knowledge, and non-hearing troubles. Definitions of each category accompanied by relevant examples from the data follow below.

TABLE 1

Causes of Communication Breakdowns in L2 Learners' Interactions

Causes of Communication Breakdowns	Number of Instances (Percentage)
Lexical	35 (36.8%)
Grammatical	11 (11.6%)
Pronunciation	4 (4.2%)
Discourse	24 (25.3%)
Factual Knowledge	4 (4.2%)
Non-hearing	17 (17.9%)
Total	95 (100%)

Lexical. This type of cause included instances in which a word or phrase led to troubles in the flow of communication between the learners as in Example 1.

Example 1

1 S3: Tor:n blanket.
2 S2: Um how to heh heh.
→3 S3: Sew.
4 S2: Sew?

The learners in this group were discussing the solution for a torn blanket for which S3 proposed "sew." In response, S2 echoed S3's utterance with a rising intonation indicating to S3 that the word *sew* has created a problem for her comprehension.

Grammatical. Communication breakdown arising from morphological and syntactic origin were classified as a grammatical cause. Below is an example of this category.

Example 2

1 S11: Yeah waiter felt uh: uh felt bad because he thought uh::
→2 oh my goodness I maybe I don't uh: I don't [work-
3 S5: [I didn't?

In Example 2, the incorrect tense in S11's utterance "I don't uh: I don't work-" has presented a problem in their communication as signaled by S5's question in the following turn.

Pronunciation. Cases in which a learner's pronunciation of a word or phrase became the source hindering communication in the interactions were classified as a pronunciation cause. Example 3 demonstrates this case.

Example 3

→1 S7: Diet? Diet. ((pronounced as /di:et/))
2 S8: Diet. ((pronounced as /di:et/))
3 S7: Diet? ((pronounced as /di:et/))
4 To lose weights you need cu- cut something in your:

The communication problem in this exchange resulted from S7's ill pronunciation of the word *diet*. To S7's production of the word as /di:et/, S8 repeated the pronunciation in the following turn indicating to S7 that a non-understanding has occurred.

Discourse. Communication problems arising from this category pertained to causes located beyond the discrete lexical, grammatical, or pronunciation feature of an utterance. Corresponding to Nakahama et al.'s (2001) study, the learners in the present study were found to experience difficulty in communication due to inability to construct and comprehend stretches of discourse in a coherent manner. For instance:

Example 4

1 S9: Uh: (1.0) when I was uh when when I went to restaurant in U.S.A., waiter
2 waiter take uh take uh how can I say (1.0) take for granted money by uh:
3 S7: by paying?
4 S9: Yeah but I don't like this heh heh.
5 S7: [You don't know?] Heh heh.

In this excerpt, S9 was talking about his experience regarding tipping in the U.S. S9 tried to explain that the waiter in a U.S. restaurant he had visited took receiving tip money for granted, which he did not approve of. His intentions, unfortunately, did not come out as coherently connected sentences to form a meaningful whole. Had he linked his ideas in longer complex sentences with appropriate discourse devices, the breakdown in this exchange might have been prevented. Eventually, S9's fragmented message ended up generating comprehension difficulty for the other learners as signaled by their questions indicating such difficulty (lines 3 and 5).

Factual Knowledge. Communication problems due to non-understanding of factual knowledge were analyzed under this category. The reason L2 learners faced

comprehension difficulty could sometimes be linked to their unfamiliarity with cultural or factual knowledge. An example is given below.

Example 5

→1 S11: Usually if a the more expensive restaurant and a hotel you need to pay,
2 you need to pay the tip. But uh usually don't pay tip in your country
3 in your ((pointing to S6)) cult-=
4 S5: =I cannot [understand.]
5 S6: [For example] what-=
6 S11: =Why?
7 S6: what-
8 S5: Uh: because which is which hotel is pay tip.
9 S6: Just=
10 S5: =Is it expensive hotel or not? I cannot understand.

The learners in this excerpt were discussing the tip culture in the U.S. To S11's explanation that tips are usually expected in expensive restaurants and hotels, S5 responded "I cannot understand," explicitly indicating a problem in comprehension of the message. The non-understanding in this situation, notably, was not attributable to a discrete linguistic item or the organization of ideas at the discourse level. Rather, S5's further explication of her non-understanding in the following turns (lines 8 and 10) makes it evident that her unfamiliarity with the custom, that is, factual knowledge concerning tipping caused the trouble.

Non-hearing. Shim (2006) in her analysis of communication breakdown in teacher-student interactions identified non-hearing as a source of why a teacher may not understand the students in the classroom. Non-hearing of each other's utterances was also found to cause problems in understanding in interactions between L2 learners in the present study. With interactions proceeding in groups of several members, the learners sometimes simply did not hear what the other had said or overlapped each other resulting in non-hearing. This case is illustrated in Example 6.

Example 6

→1 S4: Speech speech class.
2 S3: Huh?
3 S4: Speech class.

In Example 6, S4's utterance was not heard properly as signaled by S3's response "Huh?" requesting a simple repetition of the message.

The categories of the causes of communication breakdowns discussed above have been addressed in previous research on interactions involving L2 learners. In particular, communication problems traceable to an origin at the discrete lexical, grammatical, or pronunciation level have been noted with lexical features generally reported to comprise the main source of problems in the flow of communication (Bruton & Samuda, 1980; Chun, Day, Chenoweth, Luppescu, 1982; Jung & Oh, 2005; Nakahama et al., 2001). While the present study also falls in line with such findings, deserving of noteworthy mention, however, is the relatively high number of instances of communication breakdown arising from causes at the discourse level (see Table 1). As seen in Example 4, the learners in this study lacked the competence to formulate coherent utterances for a meaningful whole, which consequently led to problems in conveying ideas in unity for successful communication. It is conceivable that in interactions involving a teacher or a native speaker, there would be assistance for the learners to achieve coherence in their utterances. Yet for the English learners interacting with other learners in the present study, such support was not available and also beyond the learners' own capacity presumably due to their level of L2 proficiency.

2. L2 Learners' Meaning Negotiation Processes of Communication Breakdowns

Using the three categories described in the analysis section, the identified causes of breakdowns were analyzed for whether and how the learners initiated a negotiation of meaning process to address the breakdowns. The findings are summarized in Table 2.

1) The cause of breakdown is perceived by learners and a negotiation process takes place achieving successful resolution.

The analysis showed the majority of the breakdowns found in the learner-group interactions fell under the first category: breakdown is perceived by the learners and successful negotiation is achieved. Out of a total of 95 cases of breakdowns indentified, 74 instances (77.8%) received an indicator signaling a comprehension failure, which was recognized by the original producer of the problematic utterance, or by other members in the group. Having perceived an occurrence of a non-understanding, the original producer of the problem source, or at times other members in the group provided responses necessary for the breakdown to be negotiated and resolved successfully. Instances of learners settling non-understanding through this process could be found for all types of

causes of breakdowns. Yet, the three most common causes of breakdowns, that is, breakdowns due to lexical, discourse, and non-hearing problems were analyzed to be the areas that were most likely to be treated successfully through this process by the learners.

TABLE 2
L2 Learners' Meaning Negotiation Processes of Communication Breakdowns

Causes of Communication Breakdown	Perceived → Successful Negotiation	Perceived → Unsuccessful Negotiation	Not Perceived → No Negotiation	Total
Lexical	23 (24.2%)	10 (10.5%)	2 (2.1%)	36 (36.8%)
Grammatical	9 (9.5%)	2 (2.1%)	0	11 (11.6%)
Pronunciation	4 (4.2%)	0	0	4 (4.2%)
Discourse	19 (20 %)	4 (4.2%)	1 (1.1%)	24 (25.3%)
Factual Knowledge	3 (3.1%)	1 (1.1%)	0	4 (4.2%)
Non-hearing	16 (16.8%)	1 (1.1%)	0	17 (17.9%)
Total	74 (77.8%)	18 (19%)	3 (3.2%)	95 (100%)

Breakdowns arising from mere non-hearing were easily treated by the learners through successful negotiation. As for the lexical and discourse causes of breakdowns, the results suggest that while communication breakdown experienced from difficulties in these areas of the target language posed the greatest challenges for the L2 learners, the learners also were most capable in dealing with the lexical and discourse domains of the target language. The following is an example of this category illustrating in full the whole negotiation process that took place in the example for a lexical cause of a breakdown shown in Example 1.

Example 7

1 S3: Tor:n blanket.
2 S2: Um how to heh heh.
3 S3: Sew.
4 S2: Sew?
5 S3: Sew ((does the motion of sewing)).
6 S2: Use yeah yeah yeah yeah. How to spell?

This exchange evolved around S3 proposing the term *sew* as a solution for the torn blanket presented in the task sheet. S3' suggestion in line 3 became the trigger for a problem in comprehension, which was indicated by S2 in the following turn through an echo of the word *sew* in a rising intonation. S3 noticed that his utterance has created a breakdown and responded by restating the term *sew*, further supporting it with a motion

demonstrating sewing to ensure understanding. S2's reaction to S3's response clearly displayed that the non-understanding from a lexical cause was cleared up as was shown in her utterance in line 6. Through the negotiation process, the source of communication barrier in this exchange between the L2 learners was successfully addressed.

2) The cause of breakdown is perceived by learners and a negotiation process takes place, but fails in achieving resolution.

Among the 95 instances of communication failure analyzed in the data, 19% of breakdowns perceived by the learners failed to lead to a successful negotiation. The indicators in reaction to these causes of communication troubles were treated through the learners' responses attempting to clarify the source of trouble. Such efforts apparently demonstrated the learners' awareness of the breakdown. Nevertheless, the responses offered by the producer of the problematic message or other members of the group did not suffice as the information needed for the meaning negotiation to end in success. Resolution of the communication breakdown in these cases could not be obtained.

As seen in Table 2 above, the causes belonging to this category were not limited to a particular type but involved the varied causes identified in the data. Notable, however, is the fact that the learners' non-comprehension at the lexical and discourse level comprised the two most common sources of breakdowns ending in unsuccessful negotiation. Although apparent to the learners, these comprehension problems of lexical or discourse origin seemed to be most troublesome to treat even with the negotiation process. Example 8 and Example 9 exemplify these cases.

Example 8

1 S7: Uh [lose weight and be in good shape heh heh. Oh] my god heh heh.
2 S5: [Lose weight and be in good shape.]
3 S7: [It's for me.
4 S5: [Training.
5 S8: Training.
6 S7: Work out [work out.
7 S8: [Weight training?
8 S7: No. Work out? Work out [every day.
9 S5: [Work hard?
10 S7: Uh: a good way a good way to be:

In discussing ways to lose weight and be in good shape, S7 in line 6 above proposed the lexical expression *work out*. S8's question in the immediate turn functioned as an indicator

exhibiting that the message has generated a problem in comprehension. S7 perceived the signal and offered further responses as an effort to negotiate the source of trouble (line 8). S7's efforts proved to be in vain, for her explanation was met with the reaction of another signal of non-understanding by S5 (line 9). Presumably judging to be beyond her competence, S7 did not invest further in explaining her original message and moved on with her agenda as can be seen in line 10. This negotiation exchange comprised of a lexical cause (i.e., trigger) of breakdown, indicator, and response eventually could not reap resolution for comprehension.

The following is an example of a discourse-level breakdown ending in unsuccessful negotiation.

Example 9

1 S9: Uh: (1.0) when I was uh when when I went to restaurant in U.S.A., waiter
2 waiter take uh take uh how can I say (1.0) take for granted money by uh:
3 S7: by paying?
4 S9: Yeah but I don't like this heh heh.
5 S7: [You don't know?] Heh heh.
6 S9: [I don't like it yeah.] I don't like ( ).
7 S10: [Ahh (just) pay.
8 S7: [Okay.
9 S9: Yeah. I don't I don't I did I don't want to pay.
10 S7: Okay. But you paid?
11 S9: Huh?
12 S7: You paid? You don't like but you paid?
13 S9: I don't li- I don't want to pay the extra money.
14 S7: Okay, uh:: for for me they have um paid included in the cost.

This exchange shows how the discourse-level breakdown illustrated in Example 4 was addressed by the learners with respect to a negotiation process. The learners in this exchange faced communication failure due to S9's inept ability to produce discourse that expressed his ideas in a coherent manner. In describing his experience of tipping in the U.S., S9, ideally, intended to say the waiter took receiving tip money for granted which he did not like nor wanted to comply with. Not being able to present his thoughts as a connected whole, whether he ended up paying the tip or not was not made clear. This discontinuity only created confusion for the interlocutors who signaled non-understanding with constant questions. While S9 provided responses engaging in a negotiation process, his answers did not seem to address the core of the breakdown, which was whether he paid the tip or not despite his disapproval of the waiter's attitude. This exchange with the

negotiation process of a trigger, indicator, and response, unfortunately, ended in an unsuccessful negotiation, as can be judged from S7 switching to her agenda without further efforts to clarify the issue at hand (line 14).

3) The cause of breakdown is not perceived by learners and no negotiation takes place. Hence, no resolution is achieved.

Of the 95 instances, 3.2% of breakdowns resulting from the causes of lexical and discourse features were analyzed as not perceived by the learners, hence resulting in no negotiation. In these exchanges, the learners in the course of the interaction were not able to notice that a non-understanding had occurred. The learners not being able to realize the non-understanding present, then, did not take any initiatives to address the source of breakdown in their communication.

As shown in Table 2, these instances were not observed frequently in the interaction data. Worthy of mention, however, is that the breakdowns that the learners could not perceive, and therefore could not address were focused on problems arising from causes at the lexical and discourse level. Example 10, showing a breakdown occurring from a lexical cause, fits this category.

Example 10

1 S4: What is shape?
2 S3: Good shape good body.
3 S1: Body line?
4 S3: You can lose weight and be in good shape by exercise exercising.
5 S4: Umhm.

The learners in this exchange were talking about how one could lose weight and stay in shape. In the process, S4 inquired what the word *shape* meant, and S3 answered a good shape meant a good body. This answer in turn stimulated a question from S1 indicating that S3's answer has created a problem in his understanding (line 3). S1's question as a signal, however, was not apparent to S3, the producer of the disturbing utterance. Instead of providing any responses to help S1, S3 carried on with his ideas precluding any possibilities for a negotiation process (line 4).

The findings on how the L2 learners deal with breakdowns in communicative interactions among themselves are promising, for the majority of the breakdowns (77.8%) were found to be subject to a meaning negotiation process accomplishing successful comprehension. At the same time, the analysis that breakdowns of lexical and discourse origin were the most difficult for the L2 learners to settle warrants careful consideration.

The learners' incompetence in the lexical and discourse knowledge led to the most number of breakdowns, which, interestingly, were also sources of breakdowns most likely to be treated. Nonetheless, the results showed that these domains were also the two most likely areas which were either perceived and negotiated without success or not apparent to the learners leading to no negotiation process at all. For these L2 learners, it seems, lexical and discourse features of the target language were largely manageable, yet still remained a shaky area in need of further practice and improvement.

V. CONCLUSION

This study examined why breakdowns may arise in adult English learners' discussion interactions in the L2 classroom, and explored whether and how a negotiation of meaning process unfolded to address such failures in connection to the causes of breakdowns. The results revealed that the breakdowns learners encountered arose from troubles with lexical, grammatical, pronunciation, discourse, factual knowledge, and non-hearing features of the target language. Among these types of causes, non-understanding due to problems at the lexical, discourse and non-hearing level comprised the main causes of comprehension difficulties for the learners.

When examined for the process of how the breakdowns were treated by the L2 learners, the analysis of data showed that the majority of the non-understandings were perceived by the learners, taken up for meaning negotiation, and successfully resolved. This finding suggests that the English learners in this study were largely capable of recognizing a failure in the course of their communication and could proceed through a meaning negotiation process for successful comprehension. Specifically, among the causes of breakdowns found, the three main causes of breakdowns, that is, breakdowns due to lexical, discourse, non-hearing problems were also cases most likely to be treated through the process of being perceived, negotiated, and resolved.

The breakdowns resulting in no resolution were cases in which the learners were aware of a breakdown but could not settle even after a negotiation process or did not perceive the problem and accordingly initiated no negotiation. Interestingly, the lexical and discourse causes, the two most common sources successfully identified and negotiated, turned out to be the types of breakdowns that led the learners into these paths of recognition, negotiation, yet failure of resolution or no recognition, and therefore, no negotiation. Evidently, for these L2 learners, the lexical and discourse aspects of the target language English posed the greatest difficulty, which although were manageable to a considerable degree, still remained challenging to handle on their own.

The findings from this study uncover some issues for consideration. The adult English learners in the present study were capable of successfully addressing breakdowns of lexical and discourse origin, the two main types of communication troubles for them. However, the fact that these types of breakdowns comprised the two main causes of communication problems that remained unable to be resolved entails that while the lexical and discourse features in the target language are areas manageable to a good extent, they are areas that require constant training and practice for the L2 learners. In particular, as with lexical knowledge, an important and difficult part of L2 learning is acquiring culturally and linguistically appropriate discourse style in the target language (Kang, 2004). The L2 learners in this study displayed the need to polish their knowledge and skills of expressing their thoughts coherently at the discourse level in English for better communication outcomes. As Kim (2008), citing Nakahama et al. (2001), pointed out, L2 research should take caution not to be preoccupied with repair negotiations at the expense of discourse features indispensable to natural communication. Accordingly, L2 education in the classroom needs to move beyond the focus on discrete linguistic items and put to the fore the learning and teaching of discourse skills, as is supported by research claims that "aspects of discourse competence can be explicitly taught" (Riggenbach, 2002, p. 11).

Given the findings of this study, more cautious attention should be given to L2 learners' interactions to help them develop their L2 communication abilities in general and their lexical and discourse knowledge specifically when engaged in communicative interactions among themselves. Teachers can make sure to clearly address the relevant lexical and discourse features necessary for successful communication before going into the learners' interaction activities. Learners can also benefit from learning about the processes and strategies involved in successful negotiation. Promoting learners' communication for meaningful purposes is one of the key goals of the CLT approach (Savignon, 2001). While increasing opportunities to engage in such communicative interactions is important for L2 development, equally important is understanding the needs and complexities learners encounter in the process. Examination of why communication breakdowns may occur in L2 learners' interactions and the unfolding meaning negotiation process of the breakdowns can help better pinpoint and address such learner needs and challenges for more successful results of learners' negotiation interactions.

The learners in this study carried on discussion interactions on general communicative activities normally found in their textbook. It is acknowledged that the particular types of tasks may have influenced the outcome of this study. Therefore, future studies may expand the analytical focus to look into negotiation processes of causes of communication breakdowns in relation to features of different types of tasks. In addition, the data came from a class of a single level of proficiency. Future studies can add to our knowledge of this topic by exploring the issues across different proficiency levels and settings. Such

informed understandings of L2 learners' communication interactions can, ultimately, contribute to realizing learners' meaningful L2 communication both inside and outside the classroom.

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APPENDIX

Transcription Conventions

(Adapted from Jefferson, 1979, cited in Schiffrin, 1994)

[	utterances starting simultaneously, a single bracket is placed in front of each of
[	the two lines that start simultaneously
[ ]	indicates the beginning and end part of overlapping utterances that do not start simultaneously
=	indicates no interval between adjacent utterances, the second being latched immediately to the first
(2.0)	intervals in the stream of talk timed in seconds and represented in parentheses
:	indicates an extension of the sound or syllable it follows
.	shows a stopping fall in tone, not necessarily the end of a sentence
,	represents a continuing intonation, not necessarily between clauses of sentences
?	indicates a rising inflection, not necessarily a question
-	indicates a halting, abrupt cut off
_____	indicates emphasis or stress
(( ))	items in double parentheses describe some phenomenon of the talk such as details of the conversation or conversational scene
( )	items enclosed in single parentheses are in doubt
→	indicates occurrence of the phenomenon under discussion, arrow is placed in the left-hand margin of the transcript
/ /	represents phonetic transcription

Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: College/Higher

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