백채널 토큰 *uh, um(uhm), and, hm* 이 제2외국어 학습에서 미치는 순기능의 연구

Investigating the Function of Backchannel Tokens, *uh, um(uhm), and* and *hm* as a Positive Influence in Second Language Learning

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요약

본 연구는 비 원어민 화자의 영어발화시 나타나는 백채널 토큰 *uh, um(uhm), and* and *hm* 의 현상과 기능에 대하여 분석하고 가능성 있는 학습 전략의 현상으로 제안하였다. 특히 기존의 한국인 영어 학습자의 백채널 토큰 연구에 대한 결과들을 고찰하고 본 연구에서 얻은 결과들과 비교 분석하였다. 선행 연구의 결과들을 토대로 전통적인 담화 분석 기법을 응용하여 채집된 자료를 분석한 결과 모국어 발화에서 나타나는 토픽 마커 '은'(-*un*), 과 '는'(-*nun*) 이 초급과 중급 수준 영어 화자의 발화에서도 전이되어 나타났고 제2외국어에서 백채널 토큰 은 오직 명사 앞에서만 나타나는 것으로 분석되었으며 모국어로 회귀하여 번역될 때에도 '은'(-*un*), 과 '는'(-*nun*)이 나타났다. 마지막으로 한국인 영어 학습자들을 위하여 백채널 토큰 분석 결과를 토대로 가능한 학습 전략을 논의하였다. 궁극적으로 백채널 토큰에 대한 향후 연구가 더 진행되어 백채널 토큰 현상이 영어 학습자에게 방해 요인이 아닌 영어 능력 향상 과정에서 나타나는 긍정적인 요인으로 이해되어지기를 제안한다.

■ 중심어 : | 백채널 | 헤지마커 | 담화분석 | 한국어 토픽마커 | EFL 학습자 |

Abstract

This study investigates non-native speakers(NNS) of English use of backchannels with beginner-intermediate learners' use of *'uh', 'um(uhm)', 'and'* and *'hm'* suggesting a view as a possible pedagogical implication. The initial aim of this study was to learn this phenomenon and observe their conversation patterns to compare with previous studies. Based on the previous findings, the analyzed data using conventional Conversation Analysis (CA) methods indicate the possible presence of L1 topic markers, *'-un'* and *'-nun'* in the form of L2 backchannel tokens when uttered by beginning and intermediate level speakers of English and the presences of L2 backchannel tokens appear only in front of noun phrases. Additionally, these same words with these tokens and when translated back to Korean also require topic markers of *'-un'* and *'-nun.'* Finally, This study discusses possible pedagogical implications with the initial analysis of backchannel tokens for Korean EFL learners. In addition, the ultimate goal of this study is to refine this analysis with follow up experiments to validate this investigation into a working hypothesis generating discussions of this backchannel phenomenon from being viewed as a hindrance to as an positive influence that needs to be understood.

■ keyword : | Backchannel | Hedge Marker | Conversation Analysis | Korean Topic Marker | EFL Learner |

I. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a greater interest in studying interaction in conversation. Then it should not be surprising to find an abundance of literature regarding conversation and, more specifically, conversation analysis (CA). At the same time, there has also been an increase in the interest of conversation analysis in the EFL scene as well. To be more specific, there has also been an increase in investigating the role of discourse markers in EFL situation in Korea[1-3]. Moreover, these studies involved the use of CA in their method to study the role of backchannel in Korean EFL learners.

One particular type of backchannel tokens of interest are 'uh huh' and 'mm hm' in Korean EFL learners, especially with lower and intermediate level speakers of English. This CA experiment describes and looks at backchannel tokens and the interactions that occurred in the conversation. In other words, backchannel tokens are looked through the lens of CA and in the process, it was discovered that there is the possibility of transference of L1 topic markers, '-un' and '-nun' to their L2 utterances of these backchannel tokens in function and prosody. Also, this study will not focus too much on explaining the collected data in terms of the previous findings but in terms of a possible alternative description of how certain backchannel tokens uttered by Korean EFL learners at the beginner and intermediate levels are from L1, Korean influence. Most of all, this proposes this alternative explanation in terms as an influence that needs to be understood rather than as an L1 interference that needs to be corrected. It is only after this realization can there be another way to look at this phenomenon. Ultimately, this study investigates some phenomenon of back channel tokens 'uh', 'um(uhm)', 'and' and 'hm' and suggest these be understood as an positive influence in the process of L2 learning.

II. Literature Review

CA involves describing real human interaction through raw text, especially unprepared spoken text that is recorded and transcribed. Moreover, at the root of observing a conversation basically involves three concepts that are crucial for doing CA: Turn taking, Sequencing, and Repair[4]. By studying the nature of how people take turns in speaking, the ordering of turns, and the repairing of trouble, CA analysts can describe what can best be called the observable human social interactional phenomenon. This phenomenon is for all human beings and applies to any language spoken by people, which also necessarily entails some form of social organization in order for this occurrence to be realized and meaningful according to CA foundation.

Human nature or interaction in speech consists of turns and they are known as turn construction units (TCU). This is the unit of conversation that completes a turn. Related to TCU is also the transition relevance place (TRP) where actual turn takings are possible. In other words, TRPs allow for turn taking and in TRP is where CA looks for signs that make this turn taking possible. Next concept deals with sequencing that mainly deals with adjacency pairs that looks into the patterns of pairing of words that can explain how conversation starts, ends, and expands[4]. This last concept of repair is of importance in an EFL context. Original CA context saw repairs as an interactional phenomenon that needed to be explained in terms of who initiates repair, who resolves the trouble, and how repair unfolds in human interaction. However, in most EFL

context like Korea and many other countries, it will most likely be the native speaker of English who in most cases do the initiating, repairing, and controlling the repair process. This repair process plays a key role in EFL context because the CA method allows analysts to locate troubles and find ways to explain the troubles which can ultimately lead to its future correction. It is this process of locating and understanding this correction process that is of interest in this current investigation. One of the ways to examine this correction process in a conversation is by looking at backchannel tokens.

Backchannel is a subset of discourse markers. Discourse markers can best be described as "expressions like *'well', 'but', 'oh'* and *'y'know'* that function in cognitive, expressive, social and textual domains"[5]. Backchannel was originally coined by Victor Yngve in 1970[6] to denote speakership and further expanded by Schegloff[7] to add the continuation of speakership in relation to the role of repair. Therefore, expressions like *'oh', 'uh huh'* and *'mm hm'* aid in the repair and play a role in turn-taking and/or continuation of the talk. However, in more recent developments, backchannel also includes expressions like *'yeah'*[8] to describe the phenomenon of EFL learners whom they describe as just being "nonnative" in their competency. Finally, backchannels "can stand alone⋯are responses by another speaker...show in some way the stance the participant is taking to the talk which she is responding, usually the immediately prior talk"[9]. These responses by the other can take the form of acknowledging the continuation of the speaker and content. Moreover, the responses can also take the form of emotional empathy with the speaker which is crucial in any conversation. This ability to use backchannel tokens to show emotional solidarity and understanding exists with non-native speakers as

well[1–3][10].

Finally, this study also looks briefly at some interesting findings with Korean topic markers where Korean topic markers of '-*un*' and '-*nun*' analyzed through CA shows interesting function of tying and binding category membership. In other words, these markers also serve as discourse markers. In this research, backchannel tokens spoken by Korean EFL learners functioned a lot like Korean topic markers. First, a brief summary of the current backchannel investigations are in order.

2.1 Many uses of '*yeah*' and intonation problem

Park[8] investigated the use of '*yeah*' to expand and explicate findings from Woo's[3] study concerning the use of '*yeah*' with nonnative speakers of English in the Korean context. Her study consisted of studying the four interactional environment of '*yeah*' with Korean EFL learners: marking prior turn completion, acknowledging the continuer, being nonnative, and managing and participating in interaction. Within these conditions, her findings suggested four types of '*yeah*' usage in her study but perhaps the most interesting findings from her data is the freestanding '*yeah*' as turn exit. Namely, EFL learners have trouble finishing their turn when conversing with native speakers of English and the problem here seems to do with their use of prosody. More specifically the study finds that[8], "Nonnative speakers often end their grammatically complete unit with continuing intonation, rising intonation, or simply non-ending intonation, and thereby, not properly ending their turn intonation-wise." In other words, this finding is a great indication of how one's L1 (Korean) affects the uses of L2, especially with backchannel tokens like, '*yeah*' The main point here is that if the use of '*yeah*' is affected by L1 then it would seem probable to link

this phenomenon as an interference from L1. Again, a case will be made in the discussion section that this form of interference that occurs with L1-Korean speakers using English should be seen as an influence rather than a negative phenomenon like a disfluent use of English.

2.1.1 Disfluent use of backchannel

There is an excellent overview of backchannel study done by Kim[10]. This study neatly organizes and summarizes the use of backchannel tokens in Korean EFL context and its significance of yeah usage in terms of: turn-initial continuer, answering yes/no questions, turn-initial tendency for speakership. Kim's[10] study also picks up and continues the theme of learners not being fully competent with the target language but nonetheless are able to "…manage the language behavior of back-channeling with what resources they have." However, the more interesting aspect of this study concerns the possibility of [10] "The use of mm can be understood with relevance to the learners' L1, Korean." Kim also indicates that '*mm*' can be used as a continuer in Korean. In effect, what Kim notes as "disfluent" use of supposedly English backchannel tokens like '*mm*' can and do arise from the learners' L1, Korean. This is an example where one's L1 is not seen in a negative light but as a phenomenon with deeper roots.

2.1.2 Possible L1 transference of '*so*'

'*So*' functions as a self-repair initiator and as an indicator of turn completion. In other words,[2] "'*so*', pre-repair initiator, occurs only in TRP, the position where the prior TCU ends." This is important in that these backchannel tokens not only occur in the initial-turn phase but also in the medial-position as well. More importantly, this study based and focused

some of its foundations on earlier investigations concerning discourse markers.

2.1.3 Multifunctional possibilities of '*and*'

One of the more common backchannel token used by EFL learners is the word '*and*.' Also it is not surprising to find '*and*' as perhaps as one of the most common '*and*' frequent word in the English language corpus. This particular word used as a backchannel token has been recently investigated. Woo[3] summarizes the functions of '*and*' as a turn-initial backchannel into four categories: sequence marker, boundary marker, hesitation marker and as an additive. Moreover, Woo states the "multifunctional" roles of '*and*' in this study. The interesting part with these various purposes of '*and*' is also their hybridity of functions. In other words, Woo's[2] data showed samples with '*and*' occurring with only other phrases and clauses. The question is what happens when '*and*' is combined with other backchannel tokens like '*yeah*' and '*uh huh.*' Does it still retain these neat categorical functions or do they merge into a hybrid function? More importantly, does the backchannel token '*and*' also exhibit possible intonation errors, disfluent use, and L1 carryover? What are the implications if these are also possible with 'and?'

2.2 L1 Korean topic markers

This last study deals specifically with L1, Korean use of '*-nun*' and '*-un*' as topic markers. Following the above review of literature regarding the precarious nature of backchannel usage among Korean EFL learners, one would have to consider the real possibility of L1 interference which does not necessarily always have to be considered in a negative light. If prosodic elements of L1 affecting intonation and disfluent use of L2 target are due to L1 forms, then it would seem possible that one would

also need to combine the two elements to look for a possible alternative. This alternative is perhaps the effect of Korean topic markers, '*-nun*' and '*-un*', on English backchannel tokens like '*uh*', '*mm*', '*yeah*', and '*and*.' However, a word of caution is advised regarding this very heated topic among various Korean linguists. The intention here for this current investigation is only to offer a possible alternative explanation, in a non-negative light, regarding the English usage of backchannel tokens by Korean EFL learners.

2.3 Topic markers bound by category

Kim's study[11] nicely summarizes the current situation regarding the usage of topic markers in the Korean language. This study describes the function of Korean topic markers as a tying device that is category bound following on the work of Harvey Sack's study[12] concerning category memberships. Tying device or better known as cohesion allows the text to maintain a coherent meaning within the broader text. More specifically in this study by Kim, he utilized Sacks' work on Membership Categorization Devices (MCD) and Standard Relational Pairs (SRP) to describe '*-nun*' and '*-un*' topic markers in terms of boundedness to a category and pairings related to the category at hand. In other words,[13] "… any member of any category is presumptively a representative of that category for the purpose of use of whatever knowledge is stored by reference to that category." In other words, this referential feature, cohesion, is what makes a group of words in a text coherent. This makes sense in that Korean topic markers do in fact pair a member (topical word attached with the marker) to the population (the whole context of the clause or sentence which are bound contextually and in meaning). In addition, the very fact a member is

bounded to a particular category can also produce pairings that also occur within the bounded category as well. In other words, the topic at hand, according to Kim[11], evokes the function of '*-nun*' and '*-un*' and they are "warranted" due to the shared membership of MCDs. Without getting too immersed with Sack's MCD rules, the rule of consistency and economy warrants such functions described by Kim's 2001 study[11]. Furthermore, the most interesting aspect of this study is that Korean topic marker '*-nun*' and '*-un*' also[11] "…tends to project an extended turn constructed by more than one turn-constructional unit." That is to say, these topic markers may in some indirect manner function like English backchannel continuers.

There is a current debate regarding the nature of Korean topic markers or particles since the debate concerns the very notion of '*-nun*' and '*-un*' as topic markers according to a more recent study[14]. Moreover, related with this current investigation, Kim[14] poses an interesting question in terms of the contrastive function of '*-nun*' and '*-un*': if "…the contrastive topic [markers] in each language [Korean & English], such as morphology *-nun* or a rising pitch contour [English], are the sole element generating the propositional meaning thought to be derived from the contrastive topic." In other words, the contrastive function of '*-nun*' and '*-un*' with its morphology seem to do the same in English with its stress intonation. This statement challenges the readers to ponder on how two distinctly different languages share similar functional capabilities while also being distinctly different in almost every manner. Furthermore, it is interesting to also ponder in this same train of thought on how there are linguistic elements with completely different grammar, morphology, and phonology share similar function. Then again, if human beings' interactions can be

meaningfully described, regardless of language being spoken, the phenomenon in question will follow some universal pattern that explains such occurrences according to Harvey Sacks which he termed as the machinery.

In summary, let us briefly go over some of the main points from this literature. First, there is the possibility of incorrect usage of '*yeah*' due to intonation error as it was indicated by Park's study[8]. Second, there is the possibility of disfluent usage of mm as continuers due to its similar function in L1, Korean as it was shown by Kim[10]. Then Woo's study[3] showed multifunctional utility of '*and*' within clauses and sentences. Then the question was posed what kind of multifunction or hybrid function would arise if and were to be combined with other backchannel tokens? The above studies all based their theoretical foundation on solid ground that was paved by Harvey Sacks[12]. Moreover, their investigations have also shown how CA conventions even manifest themselves in English with EFL learners in Korea. The above mentioned works and many others have shown that CA methods in analyzing observable and documentable phenomenon are possible even in an EFL environment. Documentable and explainable relationship between native and nonnative speakers does exist when analyzed through CA methods.

III. Data & Method

3.1 Participants

The data for this investigation consisted of approximately six minutes of recording done in an adult conversation class at a language center. There were total of nine (four female, five male) participants but only three actually spoke during this audio recording. All of the participants were Korean adults ranging from early 30s to mid-40s with one participant who was of retirement age. They were placed in a low-intermediate conversation level class. In addition, none of the participants have had any extended overseas living experience excluding short term holiday vacation excursions.

3.2 Procedure

Consent was received from this group to do an audio recording about two weeks prior to the actual recording date. In addition, this request was made to another instructor who in turn received their consent. This current researcher did not teach nor officially had any of the participants as students during the time of recording. However, most of the participants are known by the researcher as they were his former students from previous semesters. The audio was recorded using a smartphone's record function. Next, the participants were in charge of the actual recording start and finish time. The instructor did not inform the participants of any guidelines in terms of the topic to be discussed and recorded. It was in the complete sense of the word, free discussion activity. Moreover, the instructor was not present in the classroom during the initial recording start time but came in after the recording had started.

In terms of transcription, the standard CA transcription method developed by Gail Jefferson method[15] was used. Moreover, to ensure transcription accuracy and validity, the native English instructor who taught the class also checked for transcription consistency after the initial completion.

Finally, Audacity, an open source program, was used for increasing sound gain and quality during the transcription process. In addition, AntConc. 3.4.1 was used to do the token count in this investigation in which total of 25 word types out of 225 were thrown

out due to Korean words being used in the final tally and coding symbols. In effect, there were total of 200 word types and 663 tokens in total. Most of all, this investigation will look at the top three most frequent backchannel tokens in relation to the collected data and look at them in light of plausible alternative explanation in addition to currently accepted CA conventions as they were offered in the above literature review section.

3.3 Analysing tool

For the analyses of corpus text data, AntConc 3.4.1 Open Source tool was used to get "Word List" frequency count. First of all, the original transcription was done on MS Word 2010 on a Korean Windows 7 environment. That file needed to be changed to plain "text" file in order for AntConc to read the file. So from MS Word, the file was saved as plain text. Secondly, the original transcription included almost all elements of pauses, stops, and incomplete syllables uttered by the speakers. For example, stuttering and uttering would be transcribed as "ddd" which the AntConc would include in frequency count while a similar stuttering carried over from incomplete syllable would be transcribed as "d" in order to capture the actual phonetic sound of the uttered stuttering. Then this "d" would also appear as a word count. In addition, one of the main speakers in the dialog is annotated as "D" in which case the AntConc program also included as a token count. The utterance of "b" was similar in that it was also transcribed as stuttering and transcribed as "b" to capture the phonetic sound. Finally, "Xb" and "Xc" can best be described as a conversion junk headers left by Ms Word 2010 in which the default save format is the ".docx" which is the XML standard adopted by most word processors. Observing MS Word binary data save file contains such header files

and during the conversion to plain text, it is best estimated that some of these "x" related characters also got saved as text. In the original transcription, there were no tokens that started with "Xb" or "Xc" in order to justify this other than a file conversion junk fillers leftover.

Ⅳ. Results

The top three most frequent backchannel tokens were '*uh*', '*um*', and '*and*' from this data set. By far uh was the most frequent token in this data where speakers were low-intermediate level. Uh was first in terms of absolute rank which occurred 31 times followed by um with an absolute rank of second with 25 occurrences. Now the only word that came in absolute third place was the with 22 occurrences. Finally, and had an adjusted rank of sixth with nine occurrences after throwing out coding symbols and document folder attribute fillers like "d", "b", "xc", "xb" and "xa" from the rank structure.

The following excerpts were spoken primarily by three male students from a class of nine students in an intermediate-level conversation class. Speaker D is in his 40s, speaker B is the retired worker, and speaker L is one of the youngest in the class in his low 30s. However, speaker L hardly spoke and his utterances were not used in my analysis. Also, the other members of the class did not participate in terms of speaking. However, these silent members primarily showed moral support in terms of group laughter and/or through other non-verbal support since the conversation lasted almost six minutes.

(1) '*Uh*' Instance

In the following excerpt, we can already see that these participants are having some difficulties with

expressing their ideas. Immediately, the use of '*uh*' in line 18 signals trouble by speaker B.

```
16 D: What (3.0) What^ is subject
17 (1.5)
18 →B: uh (1.5) I think uh (2.0) in this
   time is uh topic (2.0) many people
19 is thinking topic is Sewol (tanker)
    disaster
20 D: Sewol
21 B: ○OK○ Two years ago
```

According to the current literature[1][8][10], the instance of '*uh*' in line 18 should typically signify continuer or marking a completion of a turn. The only other explanation is that the '*uh*' is functioning as a hesitation marker or what is called the speaker is being nonnative like. This six-minute recording only started a few lines prior line 18 and this is basically the beginning of this conversation and it is also the first instance of '*uh*' being used so it really is neither a turn completion nor a continuer. In this excerpt, the first '*uh*' can be explained by speaker incipiency[10] and the only difference in this data is that the speaker prefers '*uh*' or '*yeah*' to claim speakership. Next the two '*uhs*' are difficult to explain other than the speaker is hesitating and buying time and this cannot be readily explained as a same-turn repair since no trouble has been committed. However, the alternative is that these utterances of '*uh*' are L1 vocalic resemblance of '*-un*' topic marker that is being vocalized into English sound of '*uh.*' Words before these two '*uhs*' are think and time. These two words in Korean both require '*-un*' topic marker due to their ending vowel sound with a consonant ending. Moreover, the reverse reading of the above excerpt into Korean can lead to speaker B to formulate his thoughts with these topic markers. Moreover, perhaps they are due to anxiety and hesitation in which case

these two '*uhs*' serve dual roles of acting as hesitation marker and L1 transference when uttered in English.

In the next clip, speakers B and D are still on the same topic of Sewol Ferry disaster but it seems like speaker B is definitely experiencing troubles due to his lack of English lexical inventory. However, in this series, it will become evident that speaker B is not only experiencing English competency difficulties but it is done with a purpose.

```
89 →B: First is (2.0) uh why why (1.0)
      Sewol ferry (1.0) happens the big
  90 accident
91 D: uhm
92 →B: (2.0) Why? (.) and the second uh
   (2.0) during the disaster time (1.0)
93 uh (.) uh (2.0) they had uh (2.0)
   uh:::m sure (1.5) I'm sure they uh (.)
94 they had a golden time
95 D: uhm
```

In line 89 and 92, there are instances of speaker B referring to ordinal numbers first and second and they are immediately followed by '*uh*' Remember this speaker is low intermediate level and the speaker does not have much command of lexical inventory at his disposal which explains the long gaps between words and thus these '*uhs*' and gaps are functioning as hesitation markers. What cannot be argued is that in both instances after an ordinal number, '*uh*' was used after these ordinal number words. In Korean, ordinal representations like first and second are attached with topic marker '*-nun.*' Again, number marker used with Korean words end with a vowel and a vowel sound thus requiring the '*-nun*' marker. The possible alternative here with this particular data can best be explained as something along the lines of L1 transfer like the previous example '*and*' what Kim [10] called disfluent usage that is carried over to L2.

(2) *'Um (Uhm)'* Instances

In this next exchange, there are multiple occurrences of *'uhm'* in which they are behaving very much according to previously predicted patterns without many deviations.

```
38 D: An:d yea (.) and any other and uh so
   many things (.) and have some
39 →problems (.) so many govmant uhm
      govamant system
40 B: Uhm (1.0)
41 B: pamily^ (2.0) uhm (1.5) family
   members pamily members Sewol (.) Sewol
42 family members
43 D: uhm
44 B: uhm (1.0) members (0.5) argued uh
   (1.0) argued uh = government has
45 the
46 D: =uhm
```

In this clip, *'uhm'* is functioning in predictable manner like uh. Speaker D uses *'uhm'* twice in lines 45 and 46 in a typical manner of using it as a continuer and as a display of agreement with Speaker B[1]. Also, line 40 is a bit of interest here in that instead of being used with *'yeah'* as Kim's study [10]showed with speaker incipiency, this data shows the same phenomenon with *'uhm'* in lines 40 and 41 where *'uhm'* functioned to buy time as well as to garner continued speakership. However in this current clip, line 39 is somewhat of an anomaly here. The difficulty lies in the fact that this occurrence is sandwiched between the words government. Is this a same-turn repair mechanism where *'uhm'* is corrected for the word "system" that follows "government" the second time? In Kim's study[2] *'so'* functioned as a same-turn self-repair initiator but this time *'uhm'* has replaced so to do this repair function. Does this mean, *'uhm's'* actual L1 meaning is that of *'so?'* However,

reverse translation of this exchange makes little sense in Korean with *'so'* or *'geureo-pattern.'* However, it can make more sense in Korean if this particular instance of *'uhm'* with its near vocalic equivalent sounds more like the Korean '‑*nun.'* Furthermore, even in Korean meaning with the word "government", the topic marker '‑*nun'* is a better fit in meaning as well as prosody.

Thus far, the data has shown that *'uh'* and *'uhm'* in their near vocalic equivalence to '‑*un'* and '‑*nun'* seem to follow some form of noun and noun phrase boundary and are functioning as a cohesion device which Kim[11] calls tying devices within the same clause. Appearance of Ns and NPs seem to activate these *'uhs'* and *'uhms'* to function like '‑*un'* and '‑*nun'* in this data set.

(3) And plus one or more backchannel instances

In the following segment, there is an instance of and combined with two other backchannel tokens. This phenomenon was very common in this data recording. There seems to be multiple ways to interpret this current exchange.

```
30  B: Why Sewol ferry disaster is
   occ::red (1.0) at that time (3.0).
    It's
31 (4.0)
32 D: Uhm
33→B: And ah uhm (4.0)The government (.)
   the government has a (rate) of (2.0)
   rate of recovery (1.0) system
```

Again, it seems obvious that the speakers are having difficulties using English. Also, on the surface level, the multiple gaps of silence are clear dead giveaway. Similar to the previous excerpt regarding *'uhm'*, in line 32 seems to be functioning as a continuer only after speaker D waited for 4 seconds.

However, it can also be argued that speaker D's use of 'uhm' here is a mis-cue for speaker B's turn completion because speaker B in line 30 initiates this exchange with a question that is only followed by an incomplete utterance of *'it's'* at the end of the line with 4 seconds of delay. This leads to the main issue at line 33 where *'and'* and *'ah uhm'* occur together. According to Woo's study[3], the only possible function of *'and'* in this exchange can either be acting as hesitation marker or in an additive manner. However, the additive function argument is hard to make here due to the gap in 31 and speaker D's interjection of *'uhm'* can only be explained as either of agreement or his attempt to speak. Due to the two long gaps of 4 seconds each, the better explanation of the two is that of hesitation. However, and here is accompanied by two additional tokens which make the arguments for additive and hesitation a not likely candidate. Moreover, the stronger of the two arguments of being a hesitation marker is also problematic in this current data set because the *'and'* token does not appear in isolation but it is always accompanied by additional backchannel tokens. The alternative explanation falls along the lines of *'and'* working as a topic marker plus *'uhm'* working as a reflexive continuer. In other words, *'and'* is functioning as a topic marker for *'it's'* from line 30 and *'uhm'* by the same speaker in line 33 is used to buy additional time or as a continuer where speaker D has already uttered *'uhm'* for speaker to continue.

Halliday's explanation[16] of textual cohesive role can perhaps shed some light on the way and is functioning across from line 30 with *'it's'* to line 33 due to English's "syntagmatic" ordering to the clause level which explains the role of *'and'* in connecting those two lines on the surface level. However, on a deeper inspection, the same thinking that connects the English word *'and'* on the surface can also be applied

on a deeper L1 level. To clarify, the word *'and'* is connected to *'it'* to form a textual cohesion on the surface level of English but at the deeper level, the same word and in L1 level is connected to the meaning of *'it'* from line 30 which in this case denotes to the ferry disaster. If this case can be made, then *'it'* stands in for ferry disaster and *'and'* functions as a topic marker at the L1 level. This line of thinking is also displayed in the following clip in lines 35 through 39.

```
35 D: uhm] (3.0)
   The gove::nat have nost^(most)(1.0)
   uh(1.0)ability(2.0)
36 →building that(.) that Sewol [ship
37 B: Uh]
38 →D: An:d yea (.) and any other and uh
   so many things (.) and have some
   problems (.) so many govmant uhm
   govamant system
```

Look at line 36 last word, ship, and line 38 where speaker continues with *'and.'* The argument can be made that this and in line 38 is functioning as a topic marker on a L1 level. This is the exactly the same process as the previous clip but this time this phenomenon is exhibited by speaker D instead of speaker B like the previous example. Finally, there is one more example from this data set to capture this argument.

```
96 B:Golden time (.5) usually people says
   is four^ (1) forty eight hours
97(2.0) forty eight (.) eight hours (0.5)
   and now (.) the governments uh
98 (1.0) spend a (2.0)and not worthless
   golden(0.5) time (2.0) if so uh
99 →(1.5) civic groups (1.0)
   civic groups (1.0) civicgroups(1.0)
100 D: uhm (1.0)
```

```
101 →B: and uhm (3.0)pamilymembry
       ((hissingbreath))
       un un pamilymembuhm
102 uhmyujog (유족*) (2.0) family members
       is  uh  (.)  insisted(3.0)government
 103(2.0)governments
       (1.0)gottheresponsibility
       (1.5)ofthat
104 (2.0)
 105 D: uhm (.)
```

Again in line 102, and does not appear in isolation but with another backchannel token. Following the same argument, the '*and*' in line 101 is functioning as a topic marker from line 99 for the words "civic groups." It seems as though in all three cases, and functions across time and lines to form cohesion at the textual level in L2 while in L1 and is used as a topic marker that serves as a "contextual link"[11] when bound by category membership and within the same syntactic boundary. In all three examples of '*and*', the link was formed with Korean topic marker at the deep level while its surface counterpart assured surface textual cohesion with the backchannel token.

V. Discussion & Implication

An attempt was made to cover the vast amount of literature surrounding this topic of backchannel tokens and journal articles mentioned in the literature review section have only scratched the surface of investigating the possible relationship between English discourse markers like backchannel tokens used by Korean EFL speakers and their L1 counterparts. Kim's study[11] continuing along the path of Harvey Sack's work[12] also showed that Korean topic markers do in fact conform to CA conventions of Membership Categorization Device. In

essence, Korean topic markers are constrained by MCD '*and*', moreover, they have characteristics similar to backchannel tokens in English. Second article by Kim[14] was interesting in the fact that a question was posed how Korean topic marker's contrastive function are also observable in English's use of intonation to fulfill the same function. In other words, how can two completely different languages share the same function when one uses morphology and the other phonology to do the same job to affect text? That sort of thinking opens up new ways of understanding how any language in the end ultimately fulfills the same goal to allow for humans to communicate.

Limitations of this current research done with a small sample and its insufficient amount of data is evident. More research, especially in terms of verification is needed. More specifically, verification in terms of verifying the uses of '*uh*', '*mm*', '*and*' and plus one more backchannel token in other samples taken from similar low-intermediate level EFL speakers. If more samples are shown to exhibit these sort of phenomena, then the interpretations of all previous findings can be further validated as well as even a greater possibility for the chance that these backchannel tokens used at this level of EFL speakers is indeed an L1 transference phenomenon. Once again, this current investigation does not question nor asks to invalidate previous findings but asks to see this phenomenon not as interference or being nonnative but an influence that needs to be understood.

Understanding this phenomenon has one major implication to EFL field. First, as stated above, one should not see the use of backchannel tokens just as being nonnative. There is no denying that gaps, hesitations, and disfluent usages are all indicators of being nonnative. However, these above observations of being nonnative have only looked at the effects of

this phenomenon and not from the causal side of this issue. It is this causal side that is and has been looked at as interference. If one looked at this from a neutral perspective as an influence, perhaps, there can be other avenues of possibilities. One of these other possibilities is to see this from the causal side which is how L1 is producing these sorts of gaps, hesitations, and disfluent use. At the fundamental root level of this issue is the SOV ordering of Korean as opposed to SVO ordering in English.

It is very difficult or almost rare to observe excessive use of backchannel tokens by advanced EFL speakers in Korea. From our experience and other recorded samples taken from advanced speakers, there were hardly any uses of excessive backchannel tokens at this level. Then this leads to one important question as to why this phenomenon cannot be observed with advanced learners while so prevalent with beginners and intermediate level speakers. Aside from the obvious reasons of studying for many years and improving their competency in English, there must be a reason that can explain how the leap was made from intermediate to the advanced level where they are no longer relying on the use of backchannel tokens as a crutch. That leap in some way or another must involve making the transition from SOV to SVO. Advanced learners due to a larger inventory of vocabulary, first and foremost, in addition to their grammar knowledge rarely use backchannel tokens as a crutch but beginners and intermediate learners do not share the above two attributes like the advanced learners.

Having a larger vocabulary and knowing more grammar are something many students and teachers have known for a long time. Moreover, no matter how much more vocabulary and grammar one learns, the leap from intermediate to advanced level seem like an unsurmountable gulf except for the very few courageous individuals who love to speak English in every chance that is available. Sadly, that is not the current reality for many students and learners. In order to change this sad reality to a better chance to make that leap will require one to see this phenomenon from a different perspective. In relation with other areas of learning, these analyses are also believed to provide some possible solutions for reading anxiety[17], college students' use of English[18], and influence of learner factors[19].

As stated earlier, L1 effects should be seen in a different light rather than seeing them as merely interferences but as an influence that needs to be understood, which is especially true for beginners and intermediate level students. First and foremost, this phenomenon needs to be explained to all learners so they can understand. Next, whenever learners are hesitating, pausing, and struggling to make their utterances, and especially if backchannel tokens are used, explain that this can be an automatic L1 transference of Korean topic markers. Moreover, at this beginning level, the utterance made with L1 topic marker/L2 backchannel tokens are initiated and sustained at the main clause level boundary as it was shown in the analysis section. Moreover, in the data set with this group, all the utterances made after backchannel tokens were nouns and within noun phrases. This phenomenon is what needs to be further studied and verified in order to add credence to our alternative view of backchannel tokens functioning also as topic markers.

VI. Conclusion

We are well aware of this limitation in this study. Moreover, the real core of the matter is are these learners really at the conscious or even unconscious

level transposing '-*un*' and '-*nun*' with backchannel tokens? We know many students intuitively know SVO ordering due to over ten years of formal schooling in English but the actual reality shows otherwise. Then it would seem as though the disconnect between their formal training and actual utterances is what is causing these hesitations, gaps, and disfluent usage and they are manifested as backchannel tokens. Again, proving this line of thinking is why more experiments would be needed to verify this disconnect and its manifestations. First of all, more CA data with more subjects are needed to verify these occurrences of backchannels functioning like Korean topic markers. Next, a syntactic structural analysis of the actual transcript would provide further cues about the nature of these occurrences and compare the structure with Korean structure. In other words, do the occurrences of backchannel and topic markers appear at the same deep level of grammar for both languages? Finally, this current research lacks a spectral wave analysis of backchannel tokens and Korean topic markers spoken by Korean learners. This sort of analysis can show at the sound level that the two possibly might share similar physical qualities. If these above mentioned limitations are understood then it does change the fact that we should see L1 causes as an influence that needs to be understood rather than an interference that needs to be rectified.

Finally, there needs to be more research to verify the phenomenon of these backchannel tokens with beginner and intermediate level learners. There also needs research to be done to do immediate reverse translation from English back to Korean to check if these backchannel tokens are in fact associated with Korean topic markers '-*nun*' and '-*un*.' And more research can be done to develop teaching methodologies involving utilizing learners' natural L1

tendency to topicalize and teach them to associate them as subjects and, most of all, teach them more verbs. It will probably be a revolutionary impact converting negative phenomena to positive factors in English education if some plausible teaching and learning approaches are developed to bring these backchannel tokens as an influencing factor for English learners. This way, there might be a chance to get these learners to talk more fluently (not necessarily accurately, yet), which is what we all want in the end for any learners studying English.

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