Pauses in Korean-accented conversational English*

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Lee, Yongeun. 2011. Pauses in Korean-accented conversational English. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*. 19(4). 149-171. The current study investigates the characteristics of speech disfluencies (i.e., silent and filled pauses) produced by Korean learners of English. Unlike previous studies that focused on speech disfluencies in read English speech by Korean talkers (e.g., Lee, 2007; Yom, 2006; Cha, 2005), this study gathered English disfluency data uttered by Korean speakers in a more naturalistic setting referred to as the Diapix task in the literature (Kim et al., 2011; Van Engen et al., 2010; Baker & Hazan, 2010) where two talkers were involved in a spontaneous dialogue to achieve a common goal. One central finding of the current study is that Korean learners of English produce pauses to a greater extent when their conversation partner is another non-native speaker of English than when their partner is a native speaker of English. We put forward a hypothesis that can account for this finding: pauses serve as a facilitatory perceptual cue for Korean learners of English, independent from their more typical role as repairing errors (Levelt, 1983; Kormos, 1999). Additional implications that the current findings have for the studies of speech disfluencies in foreign-accented conversational English are discussed.

**Key Words:** Speech disfluencies, Filled pauses, Silent pauses, Diapix task, Non-native English.

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1. Introduction

This paper reports hesitation disfluencies (i.e., silent and filled pauses) produced by Korean learners of English when they interact with another English-speaking talker in a goal-oriented non-scripted conversation setting. Most previous studies of pauses and other speech disfluency phenomena evident in Korean-accented English speech production have been based on recordings of read speech made under essentially de-contextualized settings (Lee, 2007; Yom, 2006; Cha, 2005). The findings have been used to infer processes involved in Korean speakers' planning and interpreting certain types of English phrases and sentences.

However, since it is well-known that read speech has acoustic-phonetic (Ryan, 2007) and, specifically, prosodic characteristics different from those found in spontaneous speech even in L1 (Blauw, 1994), it is quite possible that speech disfluencies occurring in non-native spontaneous speech will have different characteristics from those found in non-native read speech. Of particular interest to the current study is that even though the study of speech disfluencies such as pauses has constituted an important part of speech production (e.g., Kormos & Dénès, 2004; Olynik, D'Anglejan, & Sankoff, 1987), few studies have explored the precise nature of speech disfluencies made by learners of English when they interact with another talker (native- or non-native speakers of English) in a conversational setting.

In light of this, the current study focuses on exploring the following two questions. First, how do the pauses made by learners of English compare to those made by native speakers of English. For example, do native speakers on average make more or less pauses than non-native speakers when talkers interact in a conversational setting? Do the types of pauses differ between the two types of speakers? Second, how does the presence or absence of a native speaker of English in a conversation affect the number and types of pauses made by Korean-learners of English? For example, do Korean talkers make more pauses in a conversation where their interlocutor is a native speaker of English compared to a conversation where their conversation partner is another non-native speaker of English? Before I present findings related to these questions, I first describe the overall design of the current study used to elicit the findings.