Informed by Conversation Analysis (CA), this study explores online intercultural peer interaction and its potential contribution to second language (L2) learning. By focusing on participants’ engagement of interactional practices, the study examines how participants who are not physically co-present co-construct language learning opportunities when they encounter trouble in achieving mutual understanding in using English as a lingua franca (ELF). Findings indicate that when encountering trouble in producing a linguistic item that is unintelligible to continue their talk, the participants made use of various interactional strategies and resources to resolve trouble sources not only on their own but also in many cases with the assistance of chat room software tools and their peers, making language learning collaborative in nature. The study suggests that it is through the participants’ preference for both intersubjectivity and progressivity that enables them to stretch the boundaries of what they can do with language, which naturally generates language learning opportunities.

Keywords: L2 talk, conversation analysis, network-based language learning opportunities, online intercultural communication.

1 INTRODUCTION

The advancements in present-day communication technology have enabled geographically dispersed individuals to communicate over distances. Such a phenomenon has afforded second language (L2) users unprecedented opportunities to engage in authentic interactions where English is more often than not used as a lingua franca [1,2]. Although the use of English may be a precondition for engaging in such interactions, it can also be an objective for learning and acquiring the language. Previous studies looked into interactional failures caused by non-native speakers’ linguistic anomalies, viewing them as defective and disfluent communicators due to their inadequate communicative competence [3,4]. However, a growing body of recent research has shown that intercultural communication engenders language learning opportunities where L2 users can polish and experiment with their language use which leads to language development [5]. Building on and contributing to such literature, the present study investigates a network-based context utilizing local and global networks that offers authentic interaction. The present study examines a networked English language learning context among the three countries of South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan.

2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Since the mid-1990s, inspired by the seminal work of Firth et al. [3], research using Conversation Analysis (CA) as a research method flourished, despite the criticisms levelled against it as it differed from standard/traditional Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research. Taking the initiative in re-conceptualizing fundamental aspects of SLA research, Firth et al. [3,4] argued for the importance of studies of naturally occurring foreign language interaction. They claimed that the field of SLA is in danger of losing contact with research on language and social interaction. Such a view gave rise to CA-for-SLA which focused more on the social aspects of language acquisition (Kasper et al. [6]). Studies revealed that language learning is found to be an interactional achievement (Hall [7]). Wong et al. [8] suggested that CA has great potential for showing evidence of language learning, which is often ignored by researchers applying traditional SLA methods.

Moreover, with recent years witnessing increased research interest in English as a lingua franca (ELF) interactions using CA (Kaur [9]) it comes to the authors’ attention that few studies examined ELF interactions taking place synchronously online. To this end, the present study reports on how ELF talk affords moments of potential language learning and how ELF users actively co-construct L2 learning opportunities with available resources at hand in talk in real time interaction.
3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Site and Data Collection

The data used in the analysis come from an English-mediated undergraduate course in spring 2016 called the Cross Cultural Distance Learning Project (CCDLP). The CCDLP is a cross-institutional project jointly operated by Korea University (KU), Waseda University (WU), and Tamkang University (TU). It is designed to allow university students to develop intercultural communicative competence by providing them with opportunities to engage in real time student-led online discussions with students from different lingua-cultural backgrounds (Refer to Lee & Kim’s paper in this volume entitled ‘Acquiring Intercultural Communicative Competence in an Asian Networked Language Learning Context’ for an overview of the project). Participants from all three universities gave their consent to be recorded and were notified of the purpose of the study. To guarantee their privacy, code numbers and pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity. Two joint sessions were observed in this particular study. Groups consisting of 4-5 participants from the three universities participated in online group discussions on designated topics, which lasted for 30-50 minutes. Fig 1. shows an exemplar of how online intercultural interaction took place.

![Online Discussion](image)

3.2 Conversation Analysis as a Research Framework

The study focused mainly on occasions that showed relevance to co-constructed language learning and were transcribed following the conventions of CA as conceived by Gail Jefferson. CA provides an analytical framework which has been considered to be one of the most powerfully developed data-driven research methodologies that focuses on how talk-in-interaction works by taking the participants’ perspective into account (Sacks et al. [10]). CA studies show naturally occurring interactions sequentially and socially co-constructed, as they occur in real time on the basis of turn-taking. Unlike traditional SLA studies that take pre-established external factors (e.g., age, nationality, gender) into account, CA, which is rooted in ethnomethodology (Garfinkel [11]) and interaction order (Goffman [12]), follows a strict emic approach (see ten Have [13]). Instead of relying on data elicitation, interviews, and experiments, which are data sets produced for researchers, the researchers observed authentic data from the participants’ perspective on language learning in real time.

4 DATA ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

This section describes how participants oriented themselves to language learning in the light of achieving mutual understanding in and through interaction taking place online. The following examples from the data serve to illustrate how opportunities for language learning arose as participants took part in online talk.

Extract 1 illustrates the protracted nature of negotiating the act of doing pronunciation (Brouwer [14]) where the participants revolve around a word that is not intelligible. The following extract is from a part of a talk where participants are discussing the topic of ‘receiving love from someone important for you’ and WU01 brings up the word “marriage” in lines 4-5 to relate to what TU01 said in lines 01-03. However, TU01 displays difficulty in understanding the mispronounced word “marriage” uttered by WU01.
Extract 1

[CCDL1_160415_1 Happiness Factors 00:09:26]

01 TU01: But I think it's it is very good to have (. ) uh someone (.2)
02 know uh understand you and: to be your company (.5) That's all.
03 Thanks.
04 WU01: Ah Thank you. Ur:: Okay. In my ( ) what is ( ) is I think
05 the MALiedge
06 (1.2)
07 TU01: Mali[e:: Sorry?
08 WU01: [yeah yeah yeah I mean MArish? (. )To Mali, to mali someone
09 is important. I ju[st
10 TU01: [Ma::li::
11 WU01: To mali someone. To mali to someone
12 (1.0)
13 TU01: Is that a (. ) person or::
14 WU01: Ah nononono sorry. Ah
15 TU01: How do--=
16 WU01: =Okay I just chat on the box.
17 ((WU01 types the word 'marry' in the textbox))
18 WU01: mali? ((the word 'marry' appears on the screen))
19 →TU01: AH MArry.
20 WU01: sor[ry for my pronunciation but.
21 ( ): [okay
22 TU01: It’s okay=
23 WU01: I- I think that you want to say that malidge is important for
24 life: but: it’s not?
25 (2.0)
26 WU01: So:: wha- what do you (. ) guys think about the malidge. (. )
27 or::
28 →TU01: Oh you mean MArriage.
29 WU01: Yeah Sorry Marri- Marriage for my-
30 TU01: oh okay
31 ((20 lines of the transcript omitted)
32 KU01: marriage is important uh:: if you wanna have extra happiness
33 in your life.
34 WU01: Ah Okay. And I agree with Sang and I really think that
35 malid- marriage is very important in life. I want to find a
36 cultural differences here because in Japan now the peoples
37 say that marriage is not necessary in life. =Many people say
38 so as Sally says

As shown above, WU01’s linguistic deficiency is topicalized and the group’s discussion is put on hold. After WU01 mispronounces the word “marriage” in line 05, TU01’s other-initiated repair displays her uncertainty (line 7) about the word produced by WU01, which she finds trouble understanding after a 1.2 second pause. In line 08 WU01 tries to self-repair the trouble source by using the verb form of marriage through repetition with a try-marked intonation that indicates his uncertainty of the pronunciation. Not receiving an immediate uptake by TU01, he makes another attempt by putting the word “marry” in a sentence to assist TU01’s understanding. This evidences his effort to enhance TU01’s understanding. Nevertheless, TU01 still shows uncertainty as shown in her turn in line 10. WU01 repeats what he said previously in line 11 only to find TU01’s failure in understanding what he said when she says whether if that is a person. After several failures, WU01 decides to type in the word “marry” in the textbox, offered by the chat software program. This suggests that the role of the textbox was considered a meaningful resource for their imminent activity. As soon as the word “marry” appears on the screen, TU01 produces “ah”, a change-of-state token (Heritage [15]) followed by the standard pronunciation of the word “marry”. After seeing that TU01 finally understands what he said, WU01 apologizes for his incorrect pronunciation. This places TU01 in an expert position where she evaluates WU01’s mispronunciation, which consequently invokes a local language expert-novice asymmetry with regard to differential language expertise. This asymmetry is once again shown in line
27 when TCU01 corrects WU01’s pronunciation of the word “marriage” and line 28 where WU01 corrects his pronunciation after producing an excuse for his mispronunciation. WU01’s intelligible pronunciation is again displayed in line 53 which did not receive any further correction by his group members. This shows that his pronunciation has been intelligible and accepted by his group. This also shows an instance of language polishing, which itself is learning. In summary, TU01 provided WU01 with a valuable opportunity which he could exploit in his course of building a turn that is intelligible for the discussion in progress.

Using a word that is only used in one’s country or region, that is a different variety of English, can also cause non-understanding. Another language learning opportunity occurs when TU01, a Chinese student from Indonesia studying at Tamkang University, talks about what Taiwanese like to eat as shown in Extract 2 below.

Extract 2
[CCDLJ_20160513_Food 00:28:01]
01 TU01: Steam boat. Taiwanese love steam boat.
02 KU01: Pardon?
03 TU01: Steamboat.
04 KU02: Can you type [it in
05 KU01: [Steam ROse?
06 TU01: Ah yeah. Steam boat. I- I type.
07 TU01: Steam boat ((TU01 searches for the textbox and starts typing the word in the textbox))
08 ((the word steamboat appears in the textbox))
09 TU01: STEAM BOAT?
10 TU01: Yes.
11 TU01: Is that a soup?
12 TU01: Uh nono
13 TU02: Steamboat?
14 TU01: It’s kind of like:::: I will show you that picture.
15 KU01: [okay
16 KU02: [Ah okay
17 ((TU01 provides a website link in the textbox and each student in different second moments clicks on the link to see the picture))
18 KU02: A:H::
19 TU01: What you guys call it in Korean or Japanese?
20 KU01: Ah::
21 WU01: O:H::
22 TU01: Steam boat=
23 TU02: =HOT POT
24 TU01: =HOT POT huhuhuh
25 COHORT: ((laughs throughout ))
26 TU01: Ah. hahaha but I call it steam boat in Indonesia.
27 TU01: We call it hot pot in Taiwan.

After TU01 produces the word “steam boat” in her turn, KU01 gives another-initiated repair displaying that she does not know the word “steam boat”. Although TU01 repeats the word no one in the group understands the word. Upon KU02’s request to type the word so that he can see the word, TU01 uses the textbox to type the word. However, no one in the group seems to know the word. TU01 orients to the absence of an uptake which signals that there is a problem in understanding. TU01 then searches for an image of the food online and shares a website link on which all participants can click and see the image of what TU01 provided. She does so with a desire to enhance communicative clarity of the word she said. As soon as they click on the link, all members use “ah” and “oh” to show that they have undergone a change of state from not-knowing to knowing (Heritage [15]). In line 20, TU01 once again produces the word ‘steam boat’ to show that this was what she meant. TU02 immediately produces the word “hot pot” to show that “steam boat” is not a word used in Taiwan to refer to the name of the food. TU02’s alternative word is readily adopted by TU01 where
she repeats “hot pot” in her subsequent turn. This is then treated as laughable by all the participants. The analysis also shows that participants invoke a momentarily asymmetrical alignment with regard to differential language expertise.

These extracts clearly show instances where learning occurs in the contingency of talk in light of achieving intersubjectivity and progressivity. They also show that intercultural communication provides opportunities that are facilitative for learning to take place. Moreover, it was with the help of the Internet and the chat room software tool that enabled participants to arrive at not only mutual understanding but also language learning in the midst of online intercultural interaction. It could be argued that engaging in such practices increases the saliency for noticing one’s lack of linguistic knowledge (Schmidt [16]) in perceiving a difference in pronunciation and lexical knowledge. This also allows participants to become sensitive to their zones of proximal development (Vygotsky [17]). This indicates that language learning itself is a social accomplishment that takes place through co-constructing linguistic knowledge in collaborating with and gaining assistance and linguistic support from others, which makes language learning collaborative in nature.

5 CONCLUSIONS

In accordance with the methodology of CA, the extracts examined in this study illuminated what it is that characterizes language learning opportunities in the course of online intercultural interaction. The present study described how the participants themselves oriented to opening up a local language learning situation as a side sequence where they co-constructed what the object of language learning was for them in situ by utilizing the Internet and online devices available to them and receiving language support from their peers in order to achieve mutual understanding and to proceed with their task. The extracts show that participants are skillful in their use of strategies in achieving mutual understanding. Despite the participants’ varying levels of competency in English, participants in the study were found to be interactional competent individuals who are capable of compensating for the lack of linguistic competence with the use of interactional practices. They were taking charge of their own learning as agents while bringing about achieving mutual understanding with their peers and making progress in their task at hand. The study demonstrated how participants provided assistance to each other during their group work and that they were able to go beyond what they can achieve on their own, which made online intercultural interactions meaningful in terms of language learning.

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