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A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE VERBAL INTERRUPTIONS BY SPEAKERS OF  
ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA (ELF) AND SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH AS A  
NATIVE LANGUAGE (ENL)

LI YUEYUAN

MPHIL

LINGNAN UNIVERSITY

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ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA (ELF) AND SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH AS A  
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by  
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## ABSTRACT

### A Comparison between the Verbal Interruptions by Speakers of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and Speakers of English as a Native Language (ENL)

by

LI Yueyuan

Master of Philosophy

Previous research focused primarily on how interruptions vary according to social factors in situations where English is the native language for all speakers (see Menz and Al-Roubaie, 2008; O'Reilly, 2008; West and Zimmerman, 1983; Zimmerman and West, 1975). Little has been done on interruptions in situations where English is used as a lingua franca. The purpose of this research is to 1) provide conversational evidence on how experienced ELF speakers make interruptions, 2) explore functions of interruptions in ELF communication; 3) compare the types and functions of interruptions in ELF communication with those in ENL communication; 4) compare the types and functions of interruptions across genres.

An interruption is a type of turn-transition where one speaker verbally prevents another speaker from completing her turn. It is composed of three parts: the base part, the interrupting part and the post-interruption part. The research examines interruption based on theories of turn-organizations (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974) and sequence organizations (Schegloff, 2007). Interruptions are classified in terms of the completion of the interrupting part, overlapping speech, matching in topic between the base part and the interruption part, matching in topic between the interrupting part and the post-interruption part. Comparisons are made of interruption types across three genres: question-and-answer sessions, seminar discussions and conversation. The data comes from interactions of experienced ELF speakers from the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE) and those of native speakers of English from Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) and Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (SBCSAE).

The quantitative study of ELF and ENL interruptions reveals that interruptions occur slightly less frequently in ELF than in ENL communication. ENL speakers are on the whole more successful than ELF speakers in making interruptions; however, ELF speakers are more cooperative than ENL speakers in terms of interruptions. The qualitative study reveals that ELF speakers employ interruption more often to deal with language problems while ENL speakers make interruptions more often to give

information or express opinions. In addition, the study has found that the frequency and types of interruptions vary across genres: interruptions occur far more often in conversation and seminar discussions than in question-and-answer sessions and misaligned interruptions occur far more often in seminar discussions than in question-and-answer sessions.

## DECLARATION

I declare that this is an original work based primarily on my own research, and I warrant that all citations of previous research, published or unpublished, have been duly acknowledged.

\_\_\_\_\_Li Yueyuan\_\_\_\_\_

( LI Yueyuan)

Date September 17, 2010

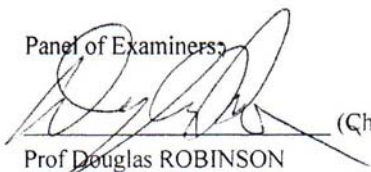
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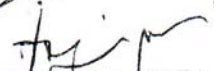
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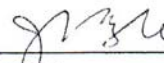
Master of Philosophy

Panel of Examiners:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Chairman)  
Prof Douglas ROBINSON

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(External Member)  
Prof Andy KIRKPATRICK


  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Internal Member)  
Prof Andrew GOATLY

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Internal Member)  
Dr Judy HO

Supervisor:

Prof Andrew GOATLY

Approved for the Senate:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Prof Jesús SEADE  
Chairman, Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee

06 OCT 2010

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|                              |     |
|------------------------------|-----|
| Adjacency Pair               | AP  |
| First Pair Part              | FPP |
| Second Pair Part             | SPP |
| Turn-constructional Unit     | TCU |
| Transition Relevance Place   | TRP |
| Interrupting Part            | IP  |
| Base Part                    | BP  |
| Post-interruption Part       | PP  |
| Sequence Closing Thirds      | SCT |
| English as a Lingua Franca   | ELF |
| English as a Native Language | ENL |

## TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| S1, S2...      | Speakers are generally numbered in the order they first speak. The speaker ID is given at the beginning of each turn.                         |
| SS             | Utterances assigned to more than one speaker (e.g. an audience), spoken either in unison or staggered, are marked with a collective speaker   |
| SX             | Utterances that cannot be assigned to a particular speaker are marked <b>SX</b> .   |
| SX-f, SX-m     | Utterances that cannot be assigned to a particular speaker, but where the gender can be identified, are marked <b>SX-f</b> or <b>SX-m</b> .   |
| SX-1, SX-2     | If it is likely but not certain that a particular speaker produced the utterance in question, this is marked <b>SX-1</b> , <b>SX-2</b> , etc. |
| ?              | Words spoken with rising intonation are followed by a question mark “?” .   |
| .              | Words spoken with falling intonation are followed by a full stop “.” .  |
| ...            | If an utterance is not hearably complete, it is followed by “...”   |
| Capitalization | If a speaker gives a syllable, word or phrase particular prominence; this is written in capital letters.                                      |
| (.)            | Every brief pause in speech (up to a good half second) is marked with a full stop in parentheses.   |
| (2)            | Longer pauses are timed to the nearest second and marked with the number of seconds in parentheses, e.g. (1) = 1 second, (3) = 3 seconds.     |
| <1>            | Overlaps<br>Example:<br>S1: it is your best <1> <b>case</b> </1> scenario (.)<br>S2: <1> <b>yeah</b> </1><br>S1: okay                         |
| =              | Other continuation marker   |



Example:

S1: what up till (.) till twelve?

S2: **yes=**

S1: **=really.** so it's it's quite a lot of time.

: lengthening

Example:

S1: you can run faster but they have much **mo:re** technique with the ball

@ Laughter

Example:

S1: in denmark well who knows. @@

S2: <@> yeah </@> @@ that's right

Utterances spoken laughingly are put between <@> </@> tags.

<L1ger> Words surrounded by the brackets are in German.

<L1ita> Words surrounded by the brackets are in Italian.

<pvc> Striking variations on the levels of phonology, morphology and lexis as well as 'invented' words are marked <pvc> </pvc>.

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# Introduction

## 0.1 Aims and reasons for the study

This study focuses on verbal interruptions. A verbal interruption takes place when a speaker starts to talk before the current speaker has completed his/ her speech; as a result, the current speaker is prevented from completing his/ her speech. The study compares interruptions made by speakers of English as a lingua franca (ELF) and speakers of English as a native language (ENL) in three genres: casual conversation, question-and-answer sessions and seminar discussions.

Verbal interruptions represent a unique type of turn-transition. They are violations of turn-transitional rules (Zimmerman & West, 1975) and therefore carry special implications in communication. Earlier studies on the influence of gender on interruptions interpreted interruptions as the evidence for male dominance (Zimmerman & West, 1975, West & Zimmerman, 1983); later studies tended to explain interruptions in relation to power/ social status (Menz & Al-Roubaie, 2008). The present study investigates the types and functions of interruptions to examine the roles they play in different types of communication.

As a rising academic discipline, English as a lingua franca (ELF) concerns the study of the English used by speakers as an international language (Seidlhofer, 2005). It is claimed by many researchers to be effective and cooperative (e.g. Kirkpatrick, 2007; Deterding & Kirkpatrick, 2006; Pitzl, 2005, Seidlhofer, 2005, etc.) though some others also regard it as 'abnormal' (e.g. Firth, 1996). This study compares interruptions in English as a lingua franca (ELF) with those in English as a native language. It aims to find out the ways ELF speakers make interruptions and how they differ from ENL speakers in terms of frequency, types and functions of interruptions.

Previous studies of verbal interruptions have always been limited to one genre. Little has been done to investigate how types, frequency and functions interruptions vary according to genres. As interruptions are related to power, speaker roles and institutional settings, it is hypothesized that patterns of interruptions would vary

according to genres. Therefore, this study attempts to analyze how genre may affect interruptions.

In order to achieve the goals, this research develops a framework taking advantage of the findings in conversation analysis. The definition of interruption is based on the organization of turn-taking (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974) and the sequence organizations (Schegloff, 2007) which provide the most fundamental concepts for describing interruptions. As a novel feature of the framework, a tripartite model is proposed to account for the relation among speaking turns in an interruption. The study employs a comprehensive classification system for describing the linguistic features of interruptions and the interpersonal relation among speakers. A corpus-based study is then carried out to test how the following variables influence interruptions: whether the interlocutors are ELF or ENL speakers and what the genre is that the communication takes place in. The data come from interactions of experienced ELF speakers from the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE) and those of native speakers of English from Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) and Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (SBCSAE). Attempts have been made to ensure that the sections of the corpora are not only comparable for ELF communication and ENL communication each as a whole but also in terms of each of the three genres.

## **0.2 Findings and significance of the study**

The study has found that frequency and patterns of interruptions vary according to what genres they appear in. Interruptions are found to appear far more often in seminar discussions than in question-and-answer sessions because in seminar discussions free exchange of views is encouraged while in question-and-answer sessions the order of speaking is strictly controlled. The frequency of interruptions in casual conversation varies a great deal depending on the interactivity level.

Patterns of interruptions also vary according to whether they take place in setting of English as a lingua franca or English as a native language. ELF interruptions are found to be more cooperative than ENL interruptions because ELF speakers align with one another more often than ENL speakers.

Furthermore, this study analyzes the relation between interruption and politeness. Though interrupters in both ELF and ENL communication seldom apologize for their interruptions, they mitigate the negative effect of interruptions by following the politeness maxims of agreement, approbation, obligation and sympathy.

This study carries various implications. Firstly, it provides conversational evidence for the relation between genres and patterns of interruptions; secondly, this study has provided evidence for the cooperative nature of interruptions which is often neglected by many researchers. Thirdly, the comparison between ELF and ENL interruptions highlights the similarities as well as differences between ELF and ENL communication, thus contributing to a growing literature on the features of ELF communication.

### **0.3 Structure of the thesis**

There are a total of nine chapters in the thesis. Chapter One contains a review of previous studies important to this study as well as a list of hypotheses and research questions for the study. Chapter Two presents the theoretical framework. Chapter Three contains the methodology of data analysis. From Chapter Four to Chapter Six, interruptions are analyzed in three genres: casual conversation, seminar discussions and question-and-answer sessions. In Chapter Seven, interruptions in the three genres are compared to find the genre differences in interruptions. Chapter Eight contains a comparison between the ELF interruptions with ENL interruptions. Finally, Chapter Nine discusses several key issues in the thesis and concludes the study by reference to Pinchevski (2005).

# **Chapter One**

## **Literature Review and Research Questions**

This chapter reviews the previous studies on two topics: verbal interruption and English as a lingua franca (ELF). It consists of five sections: definitions of interruption; classifications of interruptions; empirical studies of interruption, interruption in conversation analysis and ELF studies. This chapter concludes with a summary of the literature review.

### **1.1 Definitions of interruption**

#### **1.1.1 Dictionary definition of ‘interrupt’**

According to Collins’ Cobuild Dictionary, if somebody ‘interrupts’, s/he ‘start(s) talking so that they cannot continue with what they were saying.’ Interruption is the process of interrupting. This definition highlights our non-linguistic conception of interruption: a ‘non-current’ speaker prevents the current speaker from completing his/her speech. The dictionary definition serves as a basis for understanding the technical linguistic definitions of interruption.

#### **1.1.2 Linguistic definitions**

This section surveys previous linguistic definitions of interruption which are categorized according to three criteria: the morphosyntactic criterion, social-contextual criterion and a combination of the two above. In addition, naïve encoders’ perception of interruption will be introduced to illustrate the complexity of criteria involved in identifying interruption.

##### **1.1.2.1 Definition by the morphosyntactic criterion**

In West and Zimmerman’s studies on the relation between gender and interruption, interruption was defined as ‘a violation of a current speaker’s right to complete a turn’ (West & Zimmerman, 1975: 123). Specifically, an interruption ‘penetrates the boundaries of a unit-type prior to the last lexical constituent that could define a possible terminal boundary of a unit type’ (Zimmerman & West, 1983: 104). In other

words, for West and Zimmerman, interruption was a type of turn transition that took place before what Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) termed a transition-relevance place (TRP), the place where a turn constructional unit (TCU) reached completion. An interruption was to be distinguished from an overlap as the former made a 'deep incursion' into the morphosyntactic structure of an utterance while the latter was only a brief error in turn transition and could do no harm to the current speaker's turn (West & Zimmerman, 1977: 523). In an attempt to measure the length of incursions, the authors found that interruptions were typically initiated more than two syllables before either the start or ending of a TCU (West & Zimmerman, 1983).

Although West and Zimmerman's definition offers many advantages (chief of them a definite criterion for systematic measurement of interruption), it also faces a number of problems. First of all, turn-constructional unit-types are not always predictable (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974: 702). When the boundary of a turn-constructional unit is not clear, it is not possible to determine the length of the incursion into a unit type. Secondly, West and Zimmerman's definition focuses exclusively on the role of the interrupter, and overlooks the role of the interrupted speaker. This study emphasizes interruption as collaboration (in the sense that it requires two people to make an interruption); the choice of the interrupted speaker also plays a crucial role in distinguishing an interruption from simply parallel speech.

#### **1.1.2.2 Definition by the social and contextual criterion**

Unlike West and Zimmerman, Murray refused to posit an absolute acoustic criterion for making or analyzing interruptions. He simply defined interruption as a violation of the 'completion right' (Murray, 1985), the right for the current speaker to complete his/ her turn. This is a right based not only on the turn-taking system but also on social status and context. It is related to factors such as how long a speaker has been talking, how often she has spoken, how many points she has made, whether the speaker or others have special claims to be heard, etc. As these factors vary greatly from culture to culture, Murray's definition allows gender and cultural variation in the way interruptions are made. In short, by sacrificing the clear-cut morphosyntactic criteria, Murray introduced a large number of variables into the definition. On one

hand he broadened the scope of interruption studies; on the other, the large number of variables made a systematic study of interruption difficult.

### **1.1.2.3 A meta-study on West and Zimmerman and Murray's definitions of interruption**

West and Zimmerman and Murray differ in terms of the criteria they used in defining interruptions. West and Zimmerman applied an absolute syllabic criterion in identifying interruption, but Murray allowed contextual and social variations. Okamoto, et al. (2002) carried out an experiment to test the compatibility of the two prevailing definitions. The authors employed a number of people to identify instances of interruption in 8888 utterances using West and Zimmerman and Murray's definitions separately. In the first case, research assistants were employed to identify interruptions, and in the second case, cultural experts were asked to judge whether a vignette contained interruption. To their surprise, they found the numbers of interruptions generated by the two definitions were in fact very similar: there were 254 and 256 interruptions out of 8888 utterances respectively. Though cultural experts' judgments varied from one another, statistical tests showed that the data were still consistent enough to be valid. Furthermore, correlation tests showed that data obtained by using Zimmerman and West's syntactic method and Murray's cultural method were related to each other. Therefore, this study suggested that both definitions have captured the underlying construct of interruption. Though the two definitions were vastly different from each other, they should be equally effective in identifying interruptions.

### **1.1.2.4 Definition by the two criteria combined**

Like West and Zimmerman, Gibson (2005) also defined interruption on the basis of Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson's theory of turn-taking organizations in conversation. However, he brought into his definition a new element which allows social and contextual variations. For him, interruption occurred when somebody started speaking before the prior speaker has completed his TCU and the prior speaker was actually prevented from completing that TCU (Gibson, 2005). Gibson interpreted TCU as speech that did not "project" itself into the future"; in other words, a TCU should not make people anticipate any unspoken part of the speech (Gibson, 2005).



The very interpretation of TCU set this definition apart from that of West and Zimmerman, for it created space for social and contextual variation in interruption. Anticipation would arise not only because an utterance was syntactically incomplete, but because it was regarded as incomplete in certain contexts or in certain societies. The author gave the example of *it goes without saying*. Though the utterance is syntactically complete by itself, in certain contexts it could still raise anticipation, such as *it goes without saying that cats feed on rats*. On the other hand, it could also elicit no expectation at all, like in the example “Cats feed on rats. It goes without saying.”

In summary, Gibson’s definition is superior to either Murray or West and Zimmerman’s definitions. It has provided a structural basis for defining interruption which makes systematic studies possible; it has also introduced contextual and social variations into the definition.

#### **1.1.2.5 Definition based on Naïve encoder’s perception of interruption**

With so much said about the linguistic definition of interruption, what would people generally classify as interruption? To find out, Coon and Schwanenflugel (1996) asked a group of American undergraduate students who had no prior knowledge in linguistic studies of interruption to watch segments of political talk shows; the students were then asked to decide 1) whether a vignette contained interruption, 2) what the reasons were for labeling a vignette as containing interruption and 3) how prototypical the interruption was. The researchers compiled a list of eight possible determinants of interruption: floor change, rapport, TRP, topic change, the number of syllables that overlap, line of regard, gender of the interrupter, and gender of the prior speaker, in addition to another three proposed potential moderators: overlap pile-up, interruption acknowledgement, and moderator process-relevant speech. Out of these eleven possible determinants, the three most important reasons for labeling an interruption were found to be TRP, overlap and rapport. This means a naïve encoder is most likely to identify an interruption when 1) the previous speaker fails to reach a transition relevance place (TRP), 2) there is overlapping speech of more than two syllables, or 3) the interrupter is arguing against the first speaker. In addition, a naïve encoder is more likely to identify an interruption when 1)

overlapping speech piled up, or 2) a speaker acknowledged interruption verbally.

The findings of this interesting study echo the previous linguistic definitions of interruption. First, interruptions take place before the previous speaker reaches a TRP; secondly, West and Zimmerman's operational definition of interruption accords with the perception of general speakers; therefore their operational definition is to a large extent valid. Thirdly, interruptions are mostly perceived as a conflict or violation instead of cooperation, and most linguistic definitions equal interruptions as violations. The present study, however, intends to illustrate the cooperative nature of some interruptions.

## **1.2 Classifications of interruption**

### **1.2.1 Beattie's classification**

According to Geoffrey Beattie (1983), there were three types of interruptions, simple, silent and butting-in interruption. Figure 1.1 illustrates the procedures Beattie took in identifying the type of interruption.

Beattie asked four questions in order: 1) does a speaker attempt to make a speaker-switch; 2) is the speaker-switch successful; 3) is simultaneous speech present in speaker switch and 4) is the first speaker's utterance complete. According Beattie, in order to make interruptions, the interrupter has to first make an attempt at speaker switch; if the attempt is successful and the prior speaker's utterance is incomplete, the interrupter makes either simple or silent interruptions depending on the presence or absence of simultaneous speech. However, if the attempt fails and simultaneous speech is present, the interrupter then makes a butting-in interruption. One advantage of this classification is that non-interruptive turn transitions can be easily distinguished from interruptions. For example, supportive feedbacks such as "yes, right, mm" are not attempts at speaker-switch and therefore should not be counted as interruptions. Another advantage is that this classification is simple, straightforward and readily applicable in data analysis. However, it fails to capture various aspects of interruptions, such as rapport, repetition of interruption attempts.

### 1.2.2 Roger, Bull and Smith's classification

Roger, Bull and Smith (1988) devised a system for classifying interruption called Interruption Coding System (ICS). One criterion for interruptions was that the interrupters should succeed in preventing the prior speaker from completing the turn; therefore, the butting-in interruption in Beattie's classification did not enter the coding system here. Figure 1.2 on page 10 illustrates the procedures for identifying interruptions. It is a simplified version based upon Roger, Bull and Smith's original chart.

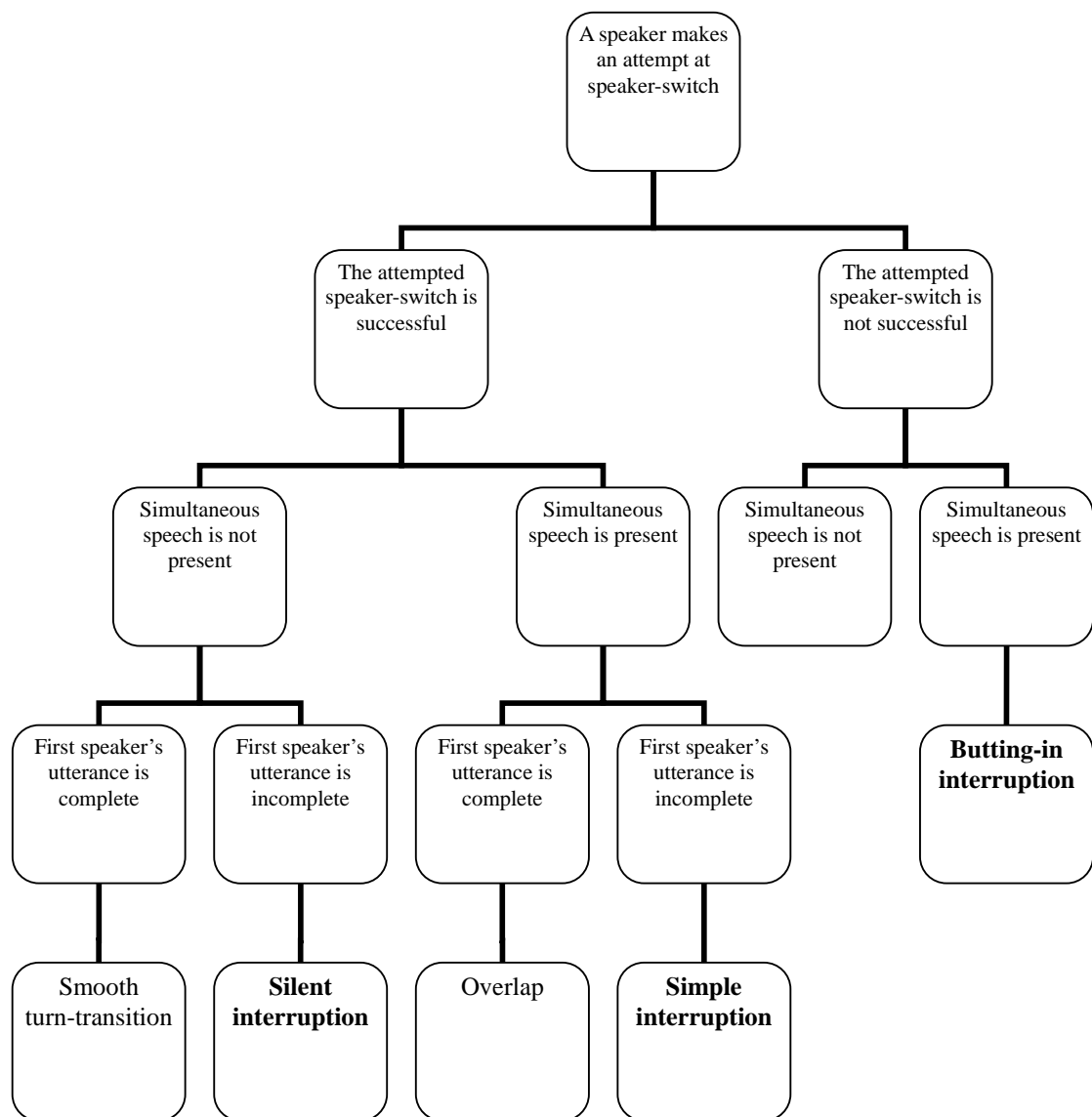


Figure 1.1 Beattie's classification of types of interruptions

According to the chart four types of interruptions can be identified: successful single interruption, unsuccessful single interruption, successful complex interruption, unsuccessful complex interruption. The advantage of Roger, Bull and Roger's classification over Beattie's is that it incorporates the criteria of completeness of the interrupter's speech and the repetition of interruptions. However, it overlooks the criterion of simultaneous speech.

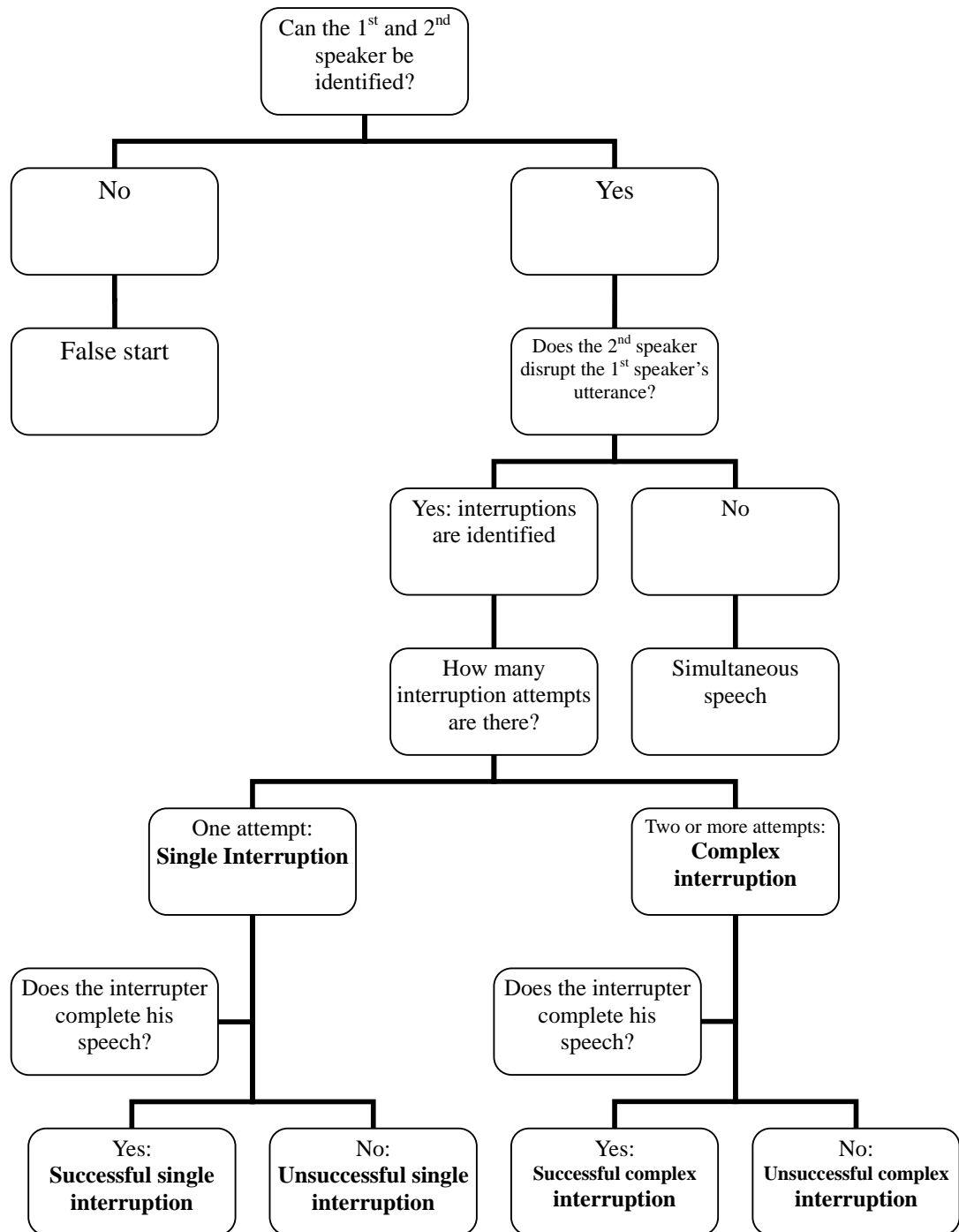


Figure 1.2 The Interruption Coding System (ICS) by Roger, Bull and Smith

## **1.3 Empirical Studies of Interruption**

### **1.3.1 West and Zimmerman's study on relations between interruptions and gender**

West and Zimmerman carried out a number of studies on interruption and gender in 1970s and 1980s, taking advantage of major breakthroughs in conversation analysis. They found that men dominated and controlled women overwhelmingly in conversation; one of the evidences was men's interruptions of women. In a study of cross-sex conversation in casual public places, Zimmerman and West (1975) recorded 31 conversation segments that took place in public places. Each of these conversations involved two speakers only, who were acquainted with each other.

They found that in cross-sex conversations, men consistently interrupted women throughout the talk, while in same-sex conversations, interruptions occurred in occasional clusters only, and were distributed almost evenly between the first and second speakers. Most of the women in the study were found to pause for around 3 seconds after being interrupted, possibly because they needed time to recollect the interrupted topic. In a later study, West and Zimmerman (1983) examined conversation between unacquainted people. They found a smaller percentage of male-initiated interruption than the first study, but the conclusion was essentially the same: men deliberately dominated women by denying their right to speak in conversation, and this, along with other conversational practices, reflected the male-dominance in society. West and Zimmerman stated strongly in following words:

Men deny equal status to women as conversational partners with respect to rights to the full utilization of their turns and support for the development of topics....just as male dominance is exhibited through male control of macro-institutions in society, it is also exhibited through control of at least a part of one micro-institution. (Zimmerman and West, 1975: 125)

Even though interruptions do often reflect power relations, I think it would be better to examine individual cases of interruptions before reaching an overarching conclusion. Closer examinations would reveal interruptions as more than power struggles; in fact many interruptions are cooperative to different extents.

### **1.3.2 Anderson and Leaper's meta-analysis of interruption studies**

In a meta-study of gender and interruption, Anderson and Leaper (1998) carried out a summary study of 43 existing studies on the relation between gender and interruptions. The researchers investigated a number of possible moderator variables in the findings reported by these studies, and then tried to determine the effect of each in modifying gender-interruption relations. The moderator variables included operational definitions of interruption, publication year, the subjects' gender composition, subject characteristics (such as the age of group members, the number of group members, familiarity between group members); characteristics of activity setting (whether it takes place in laboratories or in natural settings). The authors found that on the whole, men were more likely than women to initiate interruptions; however the magnitude of gender difference was found to be insubstantial. In intrusive interruptions (interruptions that were meant to disrupt the first speaker's turn), the following factors moderated relation between interruption and gender: i) the later was the year of publication, the smaller was the gender difference in interruption; ii) if the first author was a woman, she was more likely to report men interrupting women than vice versa; iii) the longer was the length of the talk, the greater was the percentage of the interruptions are; iv) in groups of three or more, men-to-women interruptions were more likely to occur than in one to one talks; v) familiarity was not a significant factor in shaping interruption; vi) in instrumental activities interruption and gender difference relation was unclear; but in unstructured talks, men to women interruption was significant.

The study found that in reporting the relation between gender and interruption, researchers were under the influence of a number of factors resulting from the setting of the study itself. Chief of them were the year of the study and the gender of the researcher(s). One possible reason may be researchers gradually shift away from a feminist focus to concerns over power relations in general.

### **1.3.3 Interruptions in specific social settings**

The following section reports studies on interruptions in four different settings, television fiction, discussion groups, family therapeutic sessions and medical

interviews.

### **1.3.3.1 Zhao and Gantz's study on interruptions in television fiction**

In their study on stereotypes of interruptions in media, Zhao & Gantz (2003) focused on cooperative/ disruptive interruptions made by male and female characters in prime-time television fiction. The authors distinguished two types of interruptions: cooperative and disruptive interruptions. Cooperative interruptions referred to those that express agreement and help complete the interrupted speaker's turn. They also included requests for clarification and collaboration. Disruptive interruptions referred to those that expressed disagreement or disinterest in the topic and caused abrupt topic changes. The distinguishing criteria were interpersonal relations and topic shift. The cooperative interruptions enhanced affinity between speakers and facilitated the pursuit of the current topic; but the disruptive interruptions chilled the relation between speakers and led to breaking down of the topic. It was found that in Prime-time TV shows, men were more likely to use disruptive interruptions, while women were more likely to use cooperative interruptions. This difference, however, was significant only in work settings where interrupters had a higher status than interrupted speakers; in more equal communicative settings the gender factor were found to be insignificant in determining the types of interruptions.

This study is interesting because it provides a new stratification of interruptions: cooperative and disruptive interruptions. Previous classifications of interruptions were based on linguistic features of interruptions such as simultaneous speech, completion of the interrupter's turn (See Beattie, 1983; Roger, Bull & Smith 1988). For the first time, this classification uses interpersonal and topic criteria for classifying interruptions. The advantage of this classification is that it allows us to observe the effect of interruptions on interpersonal relations and topic change; the disadvantage is that the classification is not refined enough and each type subsumes a variety of sub-interruption types. In fact, some sub-categories were problematic. For example, not all requests for clarification are cooperative; some of them could be done to undermine the current speaker's topic. Nevertheless, the classification is valuable because it provides a basis for developing a more refined system in the present dissertation.

### **1.3.3.2 Ng, Brooke and Dunne's study on interruptions in discussion groups**

Ng, Brooke, Dunne (1995) investigated the relation between interruption and perceived social influence in discussion groups. Group discussions may contain interesting examples of interruptions because participants tend to compete through interruptions for speaking turns in order to gain influence over other group members. The paper dealt with the three following issues: first, whether interrupting turns were related to high social influence; second, how interrupted speakers dealt with interruptions; whether overcoming interruption entailed high social influence and yielding to interruption entailed low social influence; third, what types of speech acts might enhance the success of an interruption attempt. The authors asked six groups of university students to watch a debate on euthanasia and then discuss the debate they watched. After the discussion was over, group members were asked to rank the influence of all members (including themselves) in the discussion. The authors found the gender factor had varied effects on interruptions in the four discussion groups; therefore no consistent conclusion could be drawn on the relation between interrupter's gender and interruptions in newly-formed discussion groups as a whole. However, female students tended to yield to interruptions more often than male students. Furthermore, it was found that speakers were perceived more influential who gain more turns through interrupting other group members. The authors borrowed Thomas, Roger and Bull (1983)'s classification of proactive speech acts (those that speakers use to retain speaking turns for themselves such as speech acts of disagreement or offer) and reactive speech acts (those that speakers use to give the floor to another speaker such as speech acts of agreement or responses to offer). It was found that interruption attempts with proactive speech acts were more likely to succeed than reactive speech acts, but this applied to high-ranking influential speakers only. The study also distinguished some cooperative functions of interruptions, such as interruptions as 'rescuers' and interruptions as 'promoters' (Ng, Brooke & Dunne, 1995: 378).

Ng, Brooke & Dunne's study illustrates the positive relation between the perception of power and interruptions in competitive discussions. However, the present research intends to find out, in more cooperative discussions, whether there is a similar relation between interruptions and power as in Ng et al's study. The present research



also follows up their study by examining in greater details both the cooperative and disruptive functions of interruptions.

### **1.3.2.3 O'Reilly's study on interruptions in family therapeutic sessions**

In a qualitative study on interruptions in therapeutic sessions, O'Reilly (2008) examined the interruption strategies by family therapists to parents and children. The author recorded and transcribed 22 hours of family therapy and analyzed how interruption strategies varied according to status of interrupters. Some major patterns were: first, therapists' interruptions of parents were accompanied by apologies for or acknowledgement of interruption as an impolite speech act; second, therapists' interruption of children were accompanied by neither apologies nor acknowledgement; third, children made apologies for interrupting therapists. The author suggested that the reasons for these patterns lay behind the nature of the institutional talk: family therapists regarded parents as clients and therefore would use mitigation strategies in making interruptions in order to preserve the positive face of clients; therapists' unmitigated interruptions of children only reflected their low status in communication in general.

O'Reilly's study points out that the use of politeness markers correlates with power and status in an institutional setting. The present study aims to investigate the relation between politeness and interruption in other institutional settings, such as seminar discussions and question-and-answer sessions. In addition, O'Reilly examined only clearly verbalized politeness markers in interruptions, the present study aims to examine both verbalized and non-verbalized politeness strategies using politeness principles (Leech, 2003) and the politeness theory (Brown and Levinson, 1978).

### **1.3.2.4 Menz and Al-Roubaie's study on interruptions in medical interviews**

Like O'Reilly, Menz and Al-Roubaie (2008) studied interruptions in medical communication, but in a somewhat different setting: medical interviews. The authors compiled a considerably large corpus of 576 medical interviews. They carried out a quantitative study on the relation of gender and social status with interruptions, and selected 48 interviews for a qualitative analysis. The authors distinguished two types

of interruptions: supportive and non-supportive. It was found that supportive interruptions functioned as clarifications, completions, or lexical corrections; non-supportive interruptions functioned to bring about subject change or addressee change. The study also found that in medical interviews, the status determined the frequency of interruptions: senior doctors made interruptions more frequently than intern-doctors, and doctors were more successful in making interruptions than patients, especially in making non-supportive interruptions. In addition, gender also played a small part in deciding the type of an interruption: female doctors and patients were found to produce more supportive interruptions than male doctors and patients. Interestingly, the study found that the more interruptions that took place, the longer an interview would last.

The finding on the duration of talk with frequency of interruption suggests that, far from enhancing efficiency of communication, interruptions in medical interviews can often threaten the efficiency, or even defeat the major purpose of communication. The present study aims to explore in more details both functions of interruptions and the roles they play in communication.

The study has found that the frequency and types of interruptions could vary according to the relative status of interrupters and interrupted speakers. The present research also aims to investigate the relation in institutional settings such as question-and-answer sessions.

The distinction between supportive and non-supportive interruptions is similar to Zhao and Ganz (2003)'s classification of cooperative and disruptive interruptions. Menz and Al-Roubaie's classification is better because non-supportive interruptions are not always disruptive. However, either Menz and Al-Roubaie nor Zhao and Ganz recognized the different levels of non-supportiveness in an interruption. The present study aims to distinguish complete disruptive interruptions from partially disruptive interruptions.

#### **1.4 Summary of interruption studies**

Every study reviewed above based its conceptual definitions of interruption on the

framework of the organization of turn-taking (it will be introduced in detail in the very next section), though operational definitions vary from one another. The divergence mainly lies in whether interruption exists as an objective category or, to some extent, a subjective/ contextual one. West and Zimmerman (1975, 1983) favored the former while Murray insisted on the latter. In my opinion, Gibson (2005)'s definition united the two by proposing the concept of psychological and contextual 'projectability'. The current study follows this definition.

The two systematic classifications of interruptions by Beattie (1983) and Roger, Bull and Smith (1988) highlighted some salient structural features of interruption, especially overlapping speech and completion of interrupter's turn. The former could indicate the length of struggle between interrupters and interrupted speakers for the next speaking turn; the latter signals the success of interrupters in making interruptions. Other authors (Menz and Al-Roubaie, 2008; Ng, Brooke and Dunne, 1995, Zhao and Ganz, 2003) proposed classifications based on the effect of interruptions on interpersonal relation between interrupters and interrupted speakers, retaining of speakership and topic changes. These context and topic based classifications are complementary to structurally based classifications as each indicates a different aspect of interruptions. The classification system employed in this research combines and refines the existing classifications to develop a more comprehensive system of interruption types.

The empirical studies on interruptions mainly focused on three issues: the relations between gender and interruption, the relations between status / institutional settings and interruption and the relations between interruptions, politeness and efficiency of communication. The relation between interruption and gender were found to be extremely varied, though Anderson and Leaper (1998) found in a meta-study that male interruption of female was still significant across 43 studies. The tendency to interpret interruptions as signs of male dominance was disappearing. Instead, researchers tended to interpret interruptions and interruption type variation as resulting from status in institutional talks. The current research examines two factors related to speaker status: how the genre of an institutional talk affects interruption and how having native speaker status affects interruption. Like O'Reilly, it also investigates relations between politeness and interruption strategies.

## 1.5 Interruptions in conversation analysis

### 1.5.1 The organization of turn-taking

All the linguistic definitions of interruption so far have rested on Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson's organization of turn-taking (1974). The organization of turn-taking explains why overwhelmingly one person speaks at a time. It consists of two conversational components and turn-transitional rules:

- (1) The turn-constructive component. A turn is composed of turn-constructive units; they could be sentences, clauses, phrases, and words. A turn-constructive unit could have the feature of projectability, but not necessarily so. In other words, from the beginning part of the turn one may be able to predict the type of unit the turn consists of, though there are times when a turn-constructive unit cannot be identified thus. A transitional-relevance place occurs after the completion of the first constructive unit in a turn.
- (2) The turn allocation component. There are two ways of turn allocation: either a turn is allocated by the current speaker, or it is allocated through self-selection. In the first case, the one receiving the turn could be the current speaker or another person.
- (3) Turn transitional rules. At the first TRP, either the current speaker appoints the next speaker, or the current speaker self-selects or another speaker self-selects; if none of the above options occur, speakers do not have the obligation to continue.

The same turn transitional rules apply again at the next TRP.

(Adapted from Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974: 703-704)

This set of rules provided all the basic terms for describing an interruption. A turn-constructive unit, though not always definite, provided a criterion for judging the completion of a speaker's turn; the turn-selection mechanism provided a creditable framework for identifying 'abnormal' turn selections. The definition of interruption in this study is also based on the framework.

### 1.5.2 Sequence organization

Like the organization of turn-taking, sequence organization is a type of sequential organizations that deals with the order or position of speaking turns (Schegloff, 2007). The turn-taking organization governs the ordering of turn-constructural units and speakers, but the sequence organization is concerned with the ordering of actions that are done through talk. A basic unit in sequence organization is the adjacency pair<sup>1</sup>. An adjacency pair consists of two turns respectively called the first pair part (FPP) and the second pair part (SPP). FPP and SPP together enact such actions as question and answer, ordering and taking orders, requests and responses, etc. Whatever FPP is, SPP should be a response to it. In a large sequence, the core action is enacted by the base adjacency pair.

There are three ways a sequence can be expanded on the basis of a base adjacency pair: a) pre-expansion, b) insert-expansion and c) post-expansion (Schegloff, 2007).

a) Pre-expansion refers to sequences that come before and pave the way for the first pair part of a base adjacency pair. Pre-expansion could be designed by the FPP speaker of the base adjacency pair to avoid a dispreferred response from the SPP speaker. Based on the base adjacency pair type, we have many types of pre-expansion, such as pre-invitation, pre-request, pre-question, pre-offer, pre-announcement, etc.

b) Insert-expansion refers to the expansion initiated by the SPP speaker of the base adjacency pair. It is called 'insert-expansion' as it is typically 'inserted' between the base FPP and SPP. A frequent type of insert-expansion is repair sequence, which 'repairs' the FPP. It should be noted that in multi-speaker interaction, the insert-expansion need not take place between FPP and SPP by the SPP speaker. It can be done by a third speaker inserting utterances into a FPP or SPP. Take the following extract for example:<sup>2</sup>

(VOICE EDcon250: 318-327; *S2, S4 and S5 are acquaintances having lunch*

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted however, that adjacency pair is not the basic unit for all sequence constructions. For detailed explanation of the types of sequence construction please refer to Schegloff (2007).

<sup>2</sup> For a list of transcription conventions please refer to Page xi and xii.

*together at a restaurant in Vienna. S2 is a native speaker of English and German, S4 is a native speaker of Slovak, and S5 is a native speaker of Turkish. They are talking about the differences between German German and Austrian German.)*

| Line no. | Speaker labels | Speaking turns  | Comments                       |
|----------|----------------|---|--------------------------------|
| 318      | S5             | <4>and i- er </4> is there any difference (.) on language? (.) between austrian (.) german and (.) <5> german </5> german                         | FPP main sequence              |
| 319      | S2             | <5><smacks lips>well </5>   | SPP main sequence              |
| 320      | S2             | probably like czech and slovak <6> er it i- there </6> is like people can UNDERSTAND each other but sometimes you have different <7> phrases </7> | SPP main sequence cont'd       |
| 321      | S5             | <6>hm:</6>  |                                |
| 322      | S4             | <7>words </7>   | FPP insert sequence            |
| 323      | S5             | Yeah =  |                                |
| 324      | S2             | = or different <8> words </8>   | SPP insert sequence            |
| 325      | S4             | <8>and pronun</8>ciation =  | FPP insert sequence 2          |
| 326      | S2             | = pronuncia<9>tions </9>  | SPP insert sequence 2          |
| 327      | S5             | <9>pronunciation </9> yeah <soft> okay okay <1> i understand </1></soft>  | SPP main sequence cont'd; SCT. |

In this excerpt, S5 asked his friends about the language difference between Austrian German and German German. As S2 takes up the task of answering the question, S4 initiates repair sequences twice at L322 and L325 within S2's answer.

c) Post-expansion refers to the expansion of the base adjacency pair after its completion. It could be monosyllabic sequence closures such as "oh", "ok" (they are named sequence closing thirds, or SCT), but it could also involve more than one adjacency pair

In the excerpt above, EDcon250: 318-327, S5 (L327) makes the post-expansion that

contains repetition of part of S2's answer, sequence closing thirds (SCT), and a token of understanding.

The concepts of adjacency pair and sequence construction have provided a framework for allocating the place of an interrupting turn in a sequence. An interrupting turn can either be a FPP or SPP of an adjacency pair in either a main sequence or an expansion sequence. The position of an interrupting turn in a sequence will help to determine the purpose of an interruption as an action and the relation between interrupters and interrupted speakers.

## **1.6 Studies on English as Lingua Franca (ELF)**

### **1.6.1 Definitions of English as a lingua franca (ELF)**

One of the earliest and frequently quoted definitions was proposed by Firth (1996). According to him, English as lingua franca referred to a “‘contact language’ between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication (Firth, 1996: 240)”. This definition pointed out several essential characteristics of ELF. Though ELF speakers come from numerous different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, they share one common goal, which is to establish communication. Therefore, most ELF studies maintain a functional focus on how ELF enhances or impairs communication. In addition, ELF is categorized as a contact language, and an inevitable consequence a contact language is that non-native speakers will contribute to the language change as much as native speakers (Seidlhofer, 2005). A few questions also arise from the definition. First, are native speakers of English also potential ELF speakers when they communicate with non-native speakers in English? Second, when a native speaker of Australian English talks with a native speaker of Canadian English, are they also called ELF speakers? Unfortunately Firth did not elaborate on his pioneering definition.

### **1.6.2 Salient features of English as a Lingua Franca**

#### **1.6.2.1 Common features of English as a lingua franca**

In his study of management personnel talk, Firth (1996) found that Danish export managers and their international clients employed many strategies to make the communication appear 'normal'. They did so by avoiding confronting directly the mistakes and inappropriate expressions that frequently occurred throughout their talks. They were able to strategically overlook insignificant mistakes or wait for further contextual cues to understand a vague expression. Sometimes, they rephrase an inappropriate expression to redress the 'abnormality' in ELF talk. Firth argued that these were the strategies that made the mistake-ridden ELF communication appear unproblematic.

Unlike Firth, many other researchers were careful in declaring a non-standard feature as an anomaly. Without his predisposition of equating the standard form with the correct form, they were much more ready to recognize the constructive features of ELF communication. They claimed that ELF speakers used English quite effectively in communicating with each other. It was found that ELF speakers' violation of certain phonological and syntactic rules in English posed few problems in communication (Seidlhofer, 2005); still more surprising is that some of the shared non-native features could even enhance communication (Deterding & Kirkpatrick, 2006). For example, in their research on the prosodic features of ASEAN speakers, the authors found that among the many shared pronunciation habits, using full vowels in function words and pronouncing the triphthong in 'our' as two syllables could enhance the intelligibility among ASEAN speakers. In addition, some non-native rhythmic features of ELF could also enhance intelligibility.

In terms of communicative strategies, ELF speakers in Europe were found to be creative in solving problems in communication (Pitzl, 2005). In a study on ELF in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Kirkpatrick (2007) found that the speakers regularly employed a number of communicative strategies that would ensure the smoothness of conversation; moreover, these strategies echoed those found in European ELF speakers in studies by Firth (1996), Seidlhofer (2004) and House (2006).

### **1.6.2.2 Communicative strategies of ELF speakers**



In a study of ELF communication in ASEAN, Kirkpatrick (2007) identified a number of communicative strategies typical in cross-cultural communication. They included lexical anticipation, lexical suggestion, lexical correction, requesting repetition, requesting clarification, “don’t give up” strategy, “let it pass” strategy, focusing on the message, spelling out the word, signal topic change explicitly, participant paraphrase, avoid using local terms.

Interruptions in ELF communication could be related to the general communication strategies of ELF. Strategies such as lexical suggestion, lexical anticipation, correction, asking for clarifications could be employed by making interruptions. This study aims to find out how closely interruptions are related to the general communication strategies of ELF and whether they also reflect the general friendliness and cooperativeness in ELF communications.

### **1.6.2.3 Interruption and understanding in ELF communication**

In a study of non-understanding in ELF in a business context, Pitzl (2005) examined how ELF speakers resolved non-understanding. Non-understanding is a point in conversation where the listener fails to make sense of an utterance, or part of an utterance. Non-understanding could be a lack of understanding at different levels and to different degrees. The study used Vasseur, Breoder & Roberts’s (1996: 77) model of indicating non-understanding. According to the model, the speaker with implicit/indirect and unspecific non-understanding display symptoms such as over-riding, lack of uptake and minimal feedback.

Pitzl’s study has important implications for the relation between interruption and non-understanding. Though interruptions are not necessarily made to resolve non-understanding, they are nevertheless important ways to express and deal with non-understanding.

### **1.6.3 Summary of ELF studies**

The theoretical and empirical studies on English as a lingua franca are related in many ways to my study of ELF interruptions. It adopts the definition of ELF by Firth

with slight modifications, but rejects Firth's stance of regarding non-standard usages as anomalies. Though the common syntactic and prosodic features of ELF often seem to be related to the development of ELF as a regional English variety, conversational strategies seem to be more universal. The present study explores strategies ELF speakers employ in making interruptions and how they might be related to other characteristics of ELF.

## **1.7 Summary of literature review**

This chapter reports research on three subjects: interruption, its relation with conversation analysis and English as a lingua franca. These are also key concepts of the current study, which aims to compare interruptions by ELF speakers with those made by native speakers. Like previous studies, the theoretical framework for interruption is grounded on theories in conversation analysis. This study develops its own definition and classification of interruption as well as the interruption variables on the basis of previous interruptions studies. Finally, ELF studies have provided the theoretical and empirical foundation for comparing ELF with English as a native language (ENL).

## **1.8 Hypotheses and research questions**

### **Hypotheses**

1. ELF speakers are less successful than ENL speakers in making interruptions.
2. ELF speakers are more cooperative than ENL speakers in making interruptions.
3. Interruption types vary across genres; more interruptions appear in conversation than in seminar discussions and more in seminar discussions than in question-and-answer sessions.
4. ENL speakers might use more politeness strategies in making interruptions than ELF speakers.

### **Additional Research Questions**

1. How do ELF and ENL interrupters mitigate the negative effects of interruptions?
2. How do ELF and ENL speakers avoid interruptions?

## **Chapter Two**

### **Theoretical Foundation**

This chapter introduces the theoretical background of the research. It deals with the central theoretical issues of the research: the definition of interruption, the structure of interruption, taxonomies of interruption, interruption and the theory of conversational implicature, interruption and politeness and finally interruption and genres.

#### **2.1 Defining interruptions**

Previous researchers have defined interruptions from at least three perspectives: acoustic, contextual and psychological (notable researches have been done by West & Zimmerman, 1975, 1983, Murray, 1985 and Gibson 2005). While all agree that 'to interrupt' is to prevent by verbal means an on-going utterance from reaching completion, they differ as to when an on-going utterance is counted as complete as well as where the dividing line is between overlap and interruption. This study basically adopts Gibson (2005)'s definition because, in the author's opinion, it beautifully combines the acoustic and contextual criteria of two previous definitions. Like all the previous studies, the definition of interruption in this study is also based on Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson's (1974) theory on turn-organization: an interruption is a type of turn-transition where the first speaker's turn is made incomplete by the second speaker who verbally intrudes into the turn. The speaker who intrudes into the first speaker's turn is called the interrupter, and the speaker whose utterance is prevented from completion is called the interrupted.

An on-going turn is interrupted if it raises listeners' 'anticipation of a yet-unspoken portion' (Gibson, 2005: 317). It is important to point out here that anticipation concerns the on-going utterance only; in other words, it is about whether a listener considers an utterance complete or not. The term does not apply to the interlocutor's expectation of more talk on the same or similar topic.

There are several possible indicators for an interrupted turn. The first is the syntactic incompleteness of the on-going utterance. If the utterance is syntactically incomplete, it is often the result of an interruption, unless of course the speaker withholds on purpose the floor in the middle of an utterance. In the following extract of talk from the VOICE, we have an example of an interruption. <sup>3</sup>

(VOICE EDcon250:11-13; *S1 is an Italian waitress; S3 is a German-speaking student; S4 is a Slovak-speaking student; they are eating in an Italian restaurant with others. S4 is making an order in a restaurant.*)

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription  | Comment                  |
|----------|---------------|--|--------------------------|
| 11       | S4            | e:r pizza toscana but i: want to ask er: is it very BIG or   | Syntactically incomplete |
| 12       | S3            | <b>i- (.)</b> <sup>4</sup>                                   | Interrupting turn        |
| 13       | S1            | Yeah yes it's not very big but (1) <8> we </8> have only (.) |                          |

Here, S4 (L11) <sup>5</sup> stops at “or”, which should always be followed by a phrase or a clause. As S3 (L12)’s speech is a direct cause of the incompleteness, S3 (L12) therefore interrupts S4 (L11). The unspoken portion of S4’s utterance is probably something like ‘is it very big or not?’ As S4 (L11)’s utterance is highly predictable in terms of information, the effect of this interruption is minimal.

Sometimes an utterance could still create anticipation even when it appears to be syntactically complete. This happens when an on-going utterance is cut short at the end of a clause. If the on-going speaker is cut short before she completes her part in an adjacency pair or a sequence, then an interruption has occurred. Take the following excerpt for example.

<sup>3</sup> For a complete list of transcription conventions for VOICE please refer to the VOICE mark-up and spelling conventions [2.1] available at [http://www.univie.ac.at/voice/page/transcription\\_general\\_information](http://www.univie.ac.at/voice/page/transcription_general_information).

<sup>4</sup> The interrupter’s utterance (or the interrupting part as explained in section 2.2 below) is bolded for the sake of prominence.

<sup>5</sup> The letter ‘L’ refers to Line; therefore ‘S4 (L11)’ refers to S4 who makes an utterance at line number eleven.

(VOICE EDcon250:57-67; S5 is a native speaker of Turkish; S3 is a native speaker of German. S5, an exchange student from Turkey is asking S3, a Ph.D. student from the University of Vienna the location of the latter's department building.)

| Line no. | Speaker | Transcription  | Comment                     |
|----------|---------|--|-----------------------------|
|          |         | <b>Label</b>   |                             |
| 57       | S5      | were i- where is your building here  | FPP: main sequence/question |
| 60       | S3      | er: (.) it's =   | SPP: main sequence/answer   |
| 61       | S5      | = <b>i- in the (.) center of (.) university of vienna in schottentor? Or in &lt;2&gt; another &lt;/2&gt;</b> | FPP: insert sequence        |
| 62       | S3      | <2>yeah do </2> you it know it a little bit? Er: =   | SPP: insert sequence        |
| 63       | S5      | = yeah i know er the center of university of Vienna i went there. (.) two times i think                      |                             |
| 64       | S3      | i mean there is the MAIN building? <3>that's directly</3> on the schottentor.=                               | SPP: main AP cont'd;        |
| 65       | S5      | <3> yeah schottentor</3>   |                             |
| 66       | S5      | = <b>in schottentor?</b> =   | Interrupting turn           |
| 67       | S3      | = but then you have a hu:ge university campus? (.)   | SPP: main AP cont'd;        |

In this excerpt, the main adjacency pair is a question and answer adjacency pair (AP) between S5 (L57) and S3 (L60). First, S5 asks S3 to explain the location of her department building; then S3 (L60) gives a long and somewhat complicated explanation starting from Line 60. Here, S3(L60) cuts off S5 (L57) to give him the

answer, and therefore S3 (L60) has interrupted S5 (L57). Before S3 could complete her answer to S5's question, she is interrupted by an insertion sequence initiated by S5 (L61). Briefly after being interrupted, S3 (L64) resumes the interrupted SPP of the main adjacency pair. At Line 66, S5(L66) again cuts in, this time to suggest a repair for S5's misused preposition ('in the schottentor' instead of 'on the schottentor', since Schottentor is a place in Vienna). S3 (L67) ignores S5 this time and immediately resumed her unfinished SPP of the main sequence. The first two interruptions by S3 at Line 60 and S5 at Line 61 are similar to the previous example; the second illustrates the interruption of an utterance that is syntactically complete. Though S3 (L64)'s utterance is complete in term of syntax, it nevertheless creates anticipation since she apparently has not finished her second pair part (SPP) of the main adjacency pair.

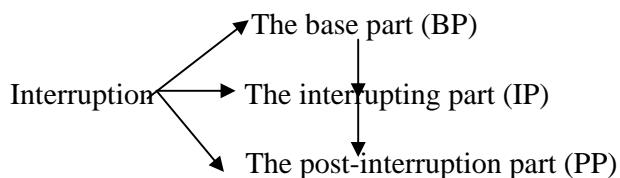
The two indicators are still not enough to determine interruption. An utterance is interrupted only if the next turn has made it incomplete. Therefore, an utterance voluntarily withdrawn should not be counted as interrupted. However, how can one decide whether an utterance is withdrawn voluntarily or interrupted? A sign for an utterance withdrawn is a pause. If the next speaker speaks after a lengthy pause that follows an incomplete turn, the speaker is not considered to be making an interruption. This is because the silence (without voiced hesitation indicating that the speaker still holds on to the turn) indicates that the previous speaker has relinquished the turn on his/ her own initiative and also that the next speaker has given space for the previous utterance to complete.

Last of all, I would like to caution the readers that an interruption is not a clear-cut category. There is not a mathematical formula for filtering interruption. However, we do have a clear prototype of interruption: an interrupter must, first of all, intrude into the current speaker's turn and he must also prevent the utterance from reaching completion.

## **2.2 Analyzing interruptions**

In this section I would like to propose a simple tripartite model to capture the basic

structure of an interruption. The following figure illustrates the model.



*Figure 2.1 The tripartite model of interruption*

Basically we classify the utterances related to an interruption into three parts: the base part (BP), the interrupting part (IP) and the post-interruption part (PP). The base part is the on-going speaking turn that is prevented from completion. The interrupting part is the turn that usurps the turn of the base part through interruption. The post-interruption part contains feedback to the interrupting part. The three parts of an interruption are interdependent. Now let us look at the three parts one by one.

### **2. 2.1. The base part of an interruption**

The base part (BP) is so named because it is a turn that serves as a basis for an interruption. A base part could be a speaking turn that accomplishes such actions as making orders, answering questions, asking questions, making announcements etc. There does not seem to be a turn type restriction for the base part. In the following excerpt of talk, we could observe three BPs, each of them belonging to a different type.

There are three instances of interruption in the extract. The three BPs are each marked BP1, BP2 and BP3 in the first comment column.

*(VOICE EDcon250:11-21; S1 is a waitress whose native language is Italian. S3 is a student whose native language is German; S4 is an exchange student in Vienna whose native language is Slovak. S3, S4 and others are eating at an Italian restaurant with friends. S1 is dealing with an order from S4. )*

| Line no. | Speaker      | Transcription | Comment |
|----------|--------------|---------------|---------|
|          | <b>Label</b> |               |         |



|    |      |  |     |     |
|----|------|--|-----|-----|
| 11 | S4   | E:r pizza toscana but i: want to ask er: BP1<br>is it very BIG or          |     |     |
| 12 | S3   | <b>i- (.)</b>  | IP1 |     |
| 13 | S1   | Yeah yes it's not very big but (1) <8> BP2<br>we </8> have only (.)        |     |     |
| 14 | S4   | <8>so </8>   |     |     |
| 15 | S1   | BP1 big pizza. We have no small BP2<br>cont'd                              |     |     |
| 16 | S4   | <b>Okay so just the half. (1) of (.)</b>                                   | IP2 |     |
| 17 | SX-6 | Medium   |     |     |
| 18 | S4   | can I get. or a medium (.) or is it <2> BP3<br>possible </2>               |     |     |
| 19 | S1   | <2>one okay </2> one <L1ita><br><b>Toscana &lt;/L1ita&gt; medium? Okay</b> | IP3 | PP2 |
| 20 | S3   | @ @ <3> @ @ </3>   |     |     |
| 21 | S4   | <3>okay thanks @ @ </3>  |     | PP3 |

Here, the base part of the first interruption (BP1) is S4's question at line 11. S4 (L11) is interrupted by S3 at line 12. The base part of the second interruption (BP2) is S1's answer to S4's question which starts from line 13 and ends at line 15. S4 is interrupted by S4 making an order at line 16. The base part of the third interruption (BP3) is S4 (L18)'s revised request for a medium-sized pizza. S4 (L18) is interrupted by S1 (L19) who repeats and confirms S4 (L18)'s order.

### 2.2.2 The interrupting part of an interruption

The interrupting part (IP) immediately follows the base part. It plays a central role in interruption, for this is the turn where an interruption takes place. The interrupting part could be many types of turns, such as making orders, taking orders, asking questions, answering questions, making comments, and occasionally even minimal responses.

In the excerpt analyzed above (VOICE EDcon250:11-21), the corresponding

interrupting parts of the three base parts are labeled respectively as IP1, IP2 and IP3 in the second comment column. The interrupting part of the first instance of interruption (IP1) is S3 (12)'s brief utterance, which is likely a false start. The interrupting part of the second interruption (IP2) is S4 (L16)'s response to S1 (L13, 15)'s confirmation that the restaurant sells only big pizzas. The interrupting part of the third interruption (IP3) is S1 (L19)'s confirmation of S4 (L18)'s order. Interestingly, it signals the closing of an order-dealing sequence.

Minimal responses do not usually count as interruptions, as they are believed to be inserted skillfully into pauses of the current speaker (Fishman, 1973), and they usually serve to maintain rapport and facilitate the turn of the current speaker. However, a minimal response can be an interruption when it discontinues the on-going speaker's turn. In the extract of talk above (VOICE EDcon250:11-21), S4(L16)'s interrupting turn (IP2) starts with a minimal response "OK", which functions to close the previous turn rather than support it.

It should be noted however that the interrupting part need not be an utterance. An interrupting part could sometimes comprise certain paralinguistic features such as laughter, coughing, sneezing, etc. Take the following extract of conversation for example.

(VOICE EDcon250:37-40; *S4 is a female exchange student in Vienna and a native speaker of Slovak; S5 is a male exchange student and a native speaker of Turkish; S6 is a male exchange student and a native speaker of Slovak. They are eating at an Italian restaurant with other friends. S6 jokes about S4 eating very little, because S4 orders only half of a pizza. S4 protests by declaring that an entire pizza is too big.*)

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription                           | Comment |
|----------|---------------|---|---------|
| 37       | S6            | women in slovakia are always on diet    |         |
| 38       | S5            | @@@ <10> @@@ </10>                      |         |
| 39       | S4            | <10>no it's very </10> big and I always | BP      |
| 40       | S5            | @@@@                                    | IP      |

Here, S4 (L39)'s protest is prevented from reaching completion by nothing more than a peal of laughter from S5 (L40). Paralinguistic features, however, are always interruptions: they count as interruption only if they discontinue the utterance of the on-going speaker.

### **2.2.3 The post-interruption part of interruption**

The post-interruption part (PP) is the response from the interrupted to the interrupter. It could be verbalized or silent depending on circumstances. When verbalized, it could either expressively indicate the interrupted speaker's acknowledgement or denial of the interruption, or resume the turn either accepting or rejecting the interrupting turns made by the interrupter. When PP is silent, the interruption sequence ends at the IP. In the previous extract on dealing with orders in a restaurant (VOICE EDcon250:11-21), there are three interruptions. In the first one, S3 (L12) interrupts S4 (L11). S4 the interrupted speaker does not respond to S3 (L12). Therefore, the post-interruption part of the first interruption is silent. In the second interruption, S4 (L16) interrupts S1 (L13, 15), however, S1 does not respond to S4's interrupting turn until several speaking turns later at Line 19. In the third interruption, S1 (L19) interrupts S4 (L18) to take and confirm S4's order. Here, the post-interruption part (it is marked PP3 in the third comment column of the table) is S4 (L21) acknowledging and thanking S1 (L19). The first post-interruption part is silent, and the others verbalized. Both the verbalized post-interruption parts are cooperative in the sense that they interrupt to speed up the order dealing sequence.

It should be noted that BP, IP and PP are relative terms. When one interruption becomes intertwined with another, the IP of one interruption could also be the BP of another and the PP of one interruption could be the IP of another. In the previous example (VOICE EDcon250:11-21), the post-interruption part of the second interruption also happens to be the interrupting part of the third interruption. Here is another example of intertwined interruptions. Two instances of interruption take place here.

(VOICE EDcon250:57-64; *S3 is a PhD student whose native language is German; S5 is an exchange student whose native language is Turkish. They are eating at an*

*Italian restaurant in Vienna with other friends.)*

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription  | Comment |                         |     |     |
|----------|---------------|--|---------|-------------------------|-----|-----|
| 57       | S5            | were i- where is your building here  | FPP     | main sequence           |     |     |
| 60       | S3            | er: (.) it's =   | SPP     | main sequence           | BP1 |     |
| 61       | S5            | = <b>i- in the (.) center of (.) university of Vienna in schottentor? or in &lt;2&gt; another &lt;/2&gt;</b> | FPP     | insert sequence         | IP1 | BP2 |
| 62       | S3            | <b>&lt;2&gt;yeah do &lt;/2&gt; you it know it a little bit? Er: =</b>  | SPP     | insert sequence         | PP1 | IP2 |
| 63       | S5            | = yeah I know er the center of university of vienna i went there. (.) two times i think                      |         |                         |     | PP2 |
| 64       | S3            | i mean there is the MAIN building? <3>that's directly</3> on the schottentor.=                               | SPP     | main sequence continued |     |     |
| 65       | S5            | <3> yeah schottentor</3>   |         |                         |     |     |
| 66       | S5            | = <b>in schottentor? =</b>   |         |                         |     |     |
| 67       | S3            | = but then you have a hu:ge university campus? (.)   | SPP     | main sequence continued |     |     |

This sequence is structured around a main adjacency pair (AP) which is an exchange of a question and an answer. S5 (L57) makes the first pair part (FPP) of the main AP and S3 (L60) provides the second pair part (SPP). Before the main SPP could reach completion, S5 initiates an insertion sequence; S5 (L61) makes the FPP and S3 (L62) provides the SPP of the inserted sequence. The insertion sequence is made through interruption. It occurs as S5(L61) cuts off S3(L60)'s answer at the first few syllables to ask if the school is in Shottentor. S5(L61)'s interrupting part is in turn interrupted by S3(L62)'s answer to S5(L61)'s inserted question. Therefore, S5(L61)'s interrupting part (IP1) becomes the base part of the next interruption (BP2). As S3(L62) provides the post-interruption part (PP1) to S5(L61)'s earlier interruption, she interrupts S5(L61)'s previous interrupting part (IP2). Therefore, the post-interruption part of one interruption (PP1) becomes also the interrupting part of the next interruption (IP2).

### **2.3 Identifying alignment/ misalignment between the interrupter and**

## **the interrupted**

### **2.3.1 Definition of alignment and misalignment**

Pomerantz (1984) originally used the terms ‘alignment’ and ‘misalignment’ to refer to how a second pair part stands in relation to its first pair part. Some second pair parts are preferred by first pair part speakers, such as those expressing agreements and acceptances; some are dispreferred such as those expressing disagreements and refusals. The preferred SPP aligns with the FPP and the dispreferred SPP misaligns with the FPP.

Here, ‘alignment’ and ‘misalignment’ are used to refer to more general relations between one turn and the next. A speaker would usually prefer the next speaker to take up their current topic and disprefer the next speaker changing the current topic abruptly<sup>6</sup>. The next turn that matches the previous turn in topic aligns with the previous turn; the next turn that does not match the topic of the previous turn misaligns with the previous turn. The next turn that aligns with the previous turn observes the maxim of relation in Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975) and the next turn that misaligns with the previous turn breaks the maxim of relation. The current study uses ‘alignment’ and ‘misalignment’ to describe the match/ mismatch in topic between the base part, the interrupting part and the post-interruption part.

### **2.3.2 The alignment relation between an interrupting part and its base part**

The alignment relation between an interrupting part and its base part concerns the matching in topic between the interrupted speaker and the interrupter. This study distinguishes three types of alignment between the base part and the interrupting part. They are complete alignment, complete misalignment, and micro-misalignment with macro-alignment.

#### **2.3.2.1 Complete alignment between an interrupting part and its base part**

---

<sup>6</sup> There are exceptions of course. During a long silence, abrupt changes of topic are more welcome than complete silence.

If an interrupting part completely aligns with its base part, the topic of the interrupting part matches that of the base part, and the interrupting part supports the base part. There are three ways that the interrupting part completely aligns with the base part. First of all, the interrupting part may cooperate with the base part in completing an utterance. Take the following piece of talk for example:

(SBCSAE02: 255-259; *Miles, Harol and Jamie are talking casually over ice-cream in Harol and his wife Jamie's apartment. A few turns before the following extract begins, Miles heard music coming from another room. He thought there was a live band playing outside, but he was told that the music actually came from Harol and Jamie's stereo.*)

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription                      | Comment |
|----------|---------------|------------------------------------|---------|
| 255      | MILES         | You must have good stereo .        |         |
| 256      | MILES         | Cause I feel like I'm hearing ...  |         |
| 257      | HAROL         | (..) We have .                     |         |
| 258      | HAROL         | These are like ...                 | BP      |
| 259      | JAMIE         | <b>the world's worst speakers.</b> | IP      |

When Miles (L255, L256) marvels at the quality of the stereo, Harol (L257, L258) tries to comment that theirs (He and Jamie's) is the worst stereo ever. Before he finishes, Jamie (L259) cuts in to complete Harol's utterance for him. Based on their shared experience as a couple, Jamie knows best what Harol thinks of their stereo. To prove that Jamie's utterance is just what Harol intended, Harol repeats several lines later that 'these are the shittiest speakers on earth '. As Jamie interrupts to complete Harol's intended utterance, her interrupting part is cooperative and therefore completely aligns with Harol's base part.

Secondly, the interrupter may cooperate with the interrupted speaker in completing an adjacency pair by providing a second pair part to the first pair part made by the interrupted speaker.

(SBCSAE02: 238-246; *Miles, Jamie and Pete are friends and they are chatting casually over ice-cream in Jamie and her husband Harol's apartment. As the following piece of talk begins, Miles just notices music coming from outside and he tries to ask if there is a live band playing. This extract of conversation takes place*

*several turns before the previous extract.)*

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription                       | Comment   |
|----------|---------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| 238      |               | (MUSIC_BECOMES_AUDIBLE) .           |           |
| 239      | MILES         | (..)(glottal stop)                  |           |
| 240      | MILES         | is that that ?                      |           |
| 241      | MILES         | (..) Or <1> is that a real <1> +... | BP        |
| 242      | JAMIE         | <1>Yeah                             | IP        |
| 243      | JAMIE         | That's a <1> tape .                 | IP cont'd |
| 244      | JAMIE         | That's a tape .                     |           |
| 245      | MILES         | Where's it coming from .            | PP        |
| 246      | JAMIE         | (..) @@@ .                          |           |
| 247      | PETE          | The speaker over there.             |           |

Here Miles notices music coming from outside the room and he apparently wants to ask at line 240 and 241 whether there is a live band playing outside. Jamie, anticipating his question, cuts him short and answers that the music came from a tape. Here, Miles and Jamie cooperate to complete a question-and-answer adjacency pair. Even though Jamie cuts short Miles's question, she does so to enhance the efficiency of the communication by omitting the information already known between the interlocutors. Therefore, Jamie completely aligns with Miles in her interruption.

Thirdly, the interrupter may cooperate with the interrupted speaker in completing a complicated sequence. In the following excerpt which also appeared in section 3. 2.1, the speakers interrupt each other to cooperate in completing the sequence of dealing with orders.

*(VOICE EDcon250:11-16; S1 is an Italian waitress, S3 is a PhD student whose native language is German; S4 is an exchange student whose native language is Slovak. S3 and S4 are eating in an Italian restaurant in Vienna with a group of friends.)*

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription  | Comment |
|----------|---------------|--|---------|
| 11       | S4            | e:r pizza Toscana but i: want to ask er: is it very BIG or   |         |
| 12       | S3            | i- (.)   |         |
| 13       | S1            | yeah yes it's not very big but (1) <8> we </8> have only (.) |         |
| 14       | S4            | <8>so </8>   |         |

|    |              |   |     |
|----|--------------|---|-----|
| 15 | S1           | Big pizza. We have no small                                   |     |
| 16 | S4           | <b>okay so just the half. (1) of (.)</b>                      | IP1 |
| 17 | <b>S X-6</b> | <b>Medium</b>   |     |
| 18 | S4           | can I get. or a medium (.) or is it <2> possible<br></2>      |     |
| 19 | S1           | <b>&lt;2&gt;one okay &lt;/2&gt; one &lt;Llita&gt; toscana</b> | IP2 |
|    |              | <b>&lt;/Llita&gt; medium? Okay</b>                            |     |
| 20 | S3           | @@ <3> @@ </3>  |     |
| 21 | S4           | <3>okay thanks @@ </3>  |     |

This is a sequence of dealing with orders in a restaurant. S4 (L16), the customer, interrupts S1 (L15)'s answer to make the order. Instead of undermining effective communication, the interruption speeds up the sequence, enhances the efficiency of the action, and is cooperative in completing the order-dealing sequence. Therefore, S4(L16)'s interrupting part completely aligns with the base part.

### 2.3.2.2 Complete misalignment between an interrupting part and its base part

If an interrupting part completely misaligns with its base part, the interrupting part does not match the topic of the base part and does not support the base part. An interrupting part may misalign with the base part by ignoring the interrupted speaker's topic and switching to an entirely different topic. There are only a few examples of complete misalignment between an interrupting part and its base part. The following is one of them.

<SBCSAE02:1314-1324; Miles, Pete, Jamie and Harol are four friends talking and eating ice-cream with each other in Jamie and Harol's sitting room. Jamie and Harol are married. At the beginning of the excerpt, Jamie tells Harol her husband about her lambada dancing.>

| <b>Line no.</b> | <b>Speaker Label</b> | <b>Transcription</b>   | <b>Comment</b> |
|-----------------|----------------------|--|----------------|
| 1314            | JAMIE                | <2> Remember a few months <2> ago I used to go out dancing ? |                |
| 1315            | JAMIE                | (.) every now and then ?                                     |                |
| 1316            | HAROL                | Hmm  |                |
| 1317            |                      | I don't remember .   |                |
| 1318            | MILES                | (..) Well the thing that gets me                             |                |
| 1319            |                      | (..) I meet <3> this: <3>                                    | BP             |
| 1320            | JAMIE                | <3> to Caesar's <3>  | IP             |



1321                    **and stuff ?**  
 1322        MILES    (..) (SNIFF CLICK CLICK CLICK) (.) I meet    PP  
                          this  
 1323                    psychotherapist .  
 1324        MILES    (..) who tells me she's addicted to this dance .

At the beginning, Jamie (L1314) is telling her husband Harol that she used to go to Lambada dances, and Harol (L1316) responds that he doesn't remember anything about it. Miles (1318) changes the topic to tell an anecdote about a psychiatrist he knows who is addicted to Lambada dances. Before Miles (L1319) could finish his utterance, Jamie (L1320) cuts him short to return to her previous topic with Harol. As Jamie does not support Miles' topic, Jamie's interrupting part completely misaligns with Miles' base part.

### **2.3.2.3 Partial alignment or micro-misalignment with macro-alignment between the interrupting part and the base part**

Partial alignment or micro-misalignment with macro-alignment is somewhere between complete alignment and complete misalignment. The interrupting part micro-misalign-macro-aligns with the base part when the interrupting part matches the base part in the big topic but nevertheless expresses disagreement with the base part. In fact most interruptions belong to this category. There are several ways an interrupting part may micro-misalign-macro-align with the base part. First of all, an interrupting part is often made to challenge the opinion of the interrupted speaker. Take the following excerpt for example.

<MICASE SEM485SU111; *S1 is the professor, S3 is a student in her class; they are holding a seminar discussion on politics in higher education. At the beginning of the talk S3 comments that since the state legislature does not govern the percentage of out-state students in the university; it must be the university itself that makes the decision.* >

| <b>Speaker<br/>Label</b> | <b>Transcription</b>   | <b>Comment</b> |
|--------------------------|--|----------------|
| S3                       | they can't write a law so it's like i guess we chose to<br>but, do.- | BP             |

|     |                             |    |
|-----|-----------------------------|----|
| S1  | <b>Ah did we choose to?</b> | IP |
| S4  | No,                         |    |
| S7  | there's the                 |    |
| S4  | Pressure                    |    |
| S13 | We got pressure             |    |
| S3  | pressure, yeah poli- yeah   | PP |

Here S1 the professor challenges S3's opinion that the university decides upon the percentage of the out-state students. Since S1 has prevented S3 from expressing her opinion in full, she has made an interruption. S1's interruption pursues the shared topic of their discussion, that is, the percentage of out-state students in the University of Michigan. However, as S1 disagrees with S3's opinion by asking a rhetorical question, S1 micro-misaligns and macro-aligns with S3. S1's interruption is cooperative on the whole because she stays on topic and actively responds to S3's comment. What's more, her interruption could help S3 think better by pointing out the weaknesses in her argument as they occur. Therefore, S1 micro-misaligns and macro-aligns with S3.

The interrupting part also micro-misalign and macro-aligns with the base part when the interrupter takes away the floor from the second pair part speaker. Take the following excerpt for example.

(VOICE EDsed31: 1038-1045; *S1 is the seminar leader and S7, S10 are two students attending the seminar. At the beginning of the excerpt, S10 raises a question to S1, and later S7 joins in the discussion.*)

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription   | Comment |
|----------|---------------|---|---------|
| 1038     | S10           | And do you think it is better for e:r exch- exchange student to go: alone in a s- er in a lesson (.) er if you are a lot of erasmus students the austrian people say only no no thank you er but if you are alone then it is <1> e:r </1> more easier to to s- to e:r (.) |         |
| 1039     | S1            | <1>mhm </1>   |         |
| 1040     | S10           | Talk <9> with (them) </9>   |         |
| 1041     | S1            | <9>mhm </9>   |         |
| 1042     | S7            | Why? (.)  |         |
| 1043     | S1            | <smacks lips>   |         |

|      |     |  |    |
|------|-----|--|----|
| 1044 | S10 | e:rm i'm not <2> sure but i </2>   | BP |
| 1045 | S1  | <b>&lt;2&gt;as a as a &lt;/2&gt; as a group as a group of international students you develop some kind of group culture (.) and the austrians are outside of the group culture</b> | IP |

Here S1 interrupts S10 at line 1045. Before S1 could answer S10's earlier question at line 1038, S7 (L1042) puts a question to S10 asking him why he thought that Austrian students would be friendlier to one single foreign student than to a group of foreign students. S7 (L1042)'s question is addressed to S10, so S10 (L1044) attempts to answer the question. However, before he could finish, he is interrupted by S1(L1045), who takes over the floor to answer both S7 and S10's questions. Though S1 (L1045)'s interrupting part is disruptive, she nevertheless stays on topic and answers the questions of S7(L1042) and S10(L1038). Therefore, S1 (L1045) micro-misaligns and macro-aligns with S10 (L1044).

### **2.3.3 Alignment relation between a post-interruption part and its interrupting part**

The alignment relation between a post-interruption part and its interrupting part concerns the interrupted speaker's response to the interruption. To simplify matters, this study does not further distinguish complete alignment from partial alignment under the category of alignment. This is because the present study is only interested in whether interrupted speakers actively support the interrupting parts or not. Therefore, only two types of alignment relations are proposed here: alignment and misalignment.

#### **2.3.3.1 Alignment between a post-interruption part and its interrupting part**

When a post-interruption part aligns with its interrupting part, the post-interruption part matches the interrupting part in topic. In other words, the interrupted speaker pursues the topic of the interrupter.

In the following example the post-interruption part aligns with the interrupting part by helping the interrupted speaker continue his speech.

(VOICE EDcon250:441-448; S3 is a PhD student whose native language is German and S6 is an exchange student whose native language is Slovak. They are talking and eating in a restaurant in Vienna with other friends.)

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription  | Comment      |
|----------|---------------|--|--------------|
| 441      | S3            | And in slovakia (.) you learn english erm in school already? (.)   |              |
| 442      | S6            | <6>yeah </6>   |              |
| 443      | S3            | <6>i mean </6> can you start   | BP           |
| 444      | S6            | <b>Er we (.) er actually (in) &lt;un&gt;&lt;soft&gt; xxx &lt;/soft&gt;&lt;/un&gt; (.) is grammar schools? (1) we have the opportunity to learn two or (.) three languages (.) then er in (.) in other schools i think there is only ONE foreign language (1) which is erm necessary</b>  | IP           |
| 445      | S3            | Uhu. (.) uhu?  |              |
| 446      | S6            | <b>That's (.) that's &lt;7&gt; not &lt;/7&gt;</b>  | IP<br>cont'd |
| 447      | S3            | <7>depending </7> on the focus yeah (.)  | PP           |
| 448      | S6            | it's not (.) very much (okay?) (.) because if there is only ONE language (.) (you) cannot focus (.) e:rm directly on it because er in these schools (.) if there is only one language they (take it) (.) oh (there's) one language i will (.) er finish it (.) as soon as possible and then (.) i won't have to do anything with that language |              |

S3 (L443) tries to ask S6 whether students in Slovak could start using English in class. Her question is cut short by S6 (L444). S6 (L444) has therefore interrupted S3 (L443). S3 indicates her attention to S6's interrupting part by providing minimal feedback at line 445. When S6 (L446) shows signs of difficulty in completing his interrupting part, S3 (L447) supplies him with the expression 'depending on the focus'. S3's post-interruption part aligns with S6's interrupting part because she actively follows S6's topic and even tries to complete S6's interrupting part for him.

### 2.3.3.2 Misalignment of a post-interruption part with its interrupting part

When the post-interruption part misaligns with the interrupting part, the topic of the post-interruption part does not follow that of the interrupting part. In other words, the

interrupted speaker does not continue the topic of the interrupter. She may switch to another topic or simply fall silent.

In the following example, the interrupted speaker does not support the interrupter's topic.

< MICASE COL140MX114 S7 is an audience member and S2 is the presenter. S7 is relating her own experience of Peking opera before S2 interrupts her:>

| <b>Speaker Label</b> | <b>Transcription</b>  | <b>Comment</b> |
|----------------------|---|----------------|
| S7                   | is- we should remember i mean i'm not, well educated in this but thirty years ago when i was here Professor Jone, who drew, large crowds for his annual <1>demonstrations and<1>, @@@ | BP             |
| S2                   | <1>uh, and i <1> and i hear he sings in classes sometimes as well.  | IP             |
| S7                   | <soft>(well,) no he he did i (mean)   | PP             |
| S2                   | Professor Zhang Tushu.  |                |

Here S2 cuts short S7's utterance. S2's interrupting part is marked IP in the comment column. When being interrupted, S7 is slightly confused. She tries to protest against S2's interruption, telling S2 that she did not mean what S2 just said. S7's response to the interruption is marked PP. S7's post-interruption part does not support the topic of S2 the interrupter. Therefore, S2 misaligns with S7's interrupting part.

This section has summarized the relations of alignment/ misalignment among the base part, the interrupting part and the post-interruption part. This categorization provides an objective basis not only for identifying the role of an interruption in the talk but also for understanding how well an interruption is received by the interrupted speaker.

## 2.4 Categories of interruption types

This study uses four criteria to classify interruptions: whether the interrupting part is complete or not; whether overlapping speech exists between the interrupting part and the base part; whether the interrupting part aligns with the base part; whether the post-interruption part aligns with the interrupting part.

Table 2.1 below summarizes all the interruption types classified according to the four criteria.

Table2.1 Taxonomies of interruption types

| Criteria                        | Types of interruptions |   |                       |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| Completion of IP                | IP complete            | IP incomplete   |                       |
| Overlap between IP and BP       | with overlaps          | without overlaps  |                       |
| Alignment between the IP and BP | Complete alignment     | Partial alignment or micro-misalignment-macro-alignment | Complete misalignment |
| Alignment between PP and IP     | Alignment              | Misalignment  |                       |

The completion of the interrupting part indicates the success of the interrupter. If the interrupting part is complete, it is a successful interruption. If the interrupting part is incomplete, either because the interrupter withdraws the turn, or because someone else interrupts the interrupter, it is an unsuccessful interruption. (Roger, Bull and Smith, 1988) Overlapping speech between the interrupting part and the base part indicates the extent of struggle between the interrupter and the interrupted in ‘fighting for’ speaking turns. As mentioned in the previous section, alignment between the interrupting part and the base part indicates shifts in topic as a result of interruptions; alignment between the post-interruption part and the interrupting part indicates the interrupted speaker’s response to the interruption.

The taxonomies proposed here have captured two aspects of interruption: the structural and the contextual aspects. The classifications based on alignment have refined the dichotomies of supportive / non-supportive and cooperative/ disruptive interruptions by Menz and Al-Roubaie (2008) and Zhao and Ganz (2003). The distinction between partial alignment and complete misalignment refines Menz and Al-Roubaie’s category of non-supportive interruption and Zhao and Ganz’s category of disruptive interruption.

## **2.5 interruptions and the theory of conversational implicature**

Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature aims to explain the logic behind conversation. It claims that interlocutors explicitly or implicitly follow the cooperative principle and the four maxims, which generates conversational implicatures. This study attempts to use the theory to explain how interruptions break or adhere to the maxims of cooperation.

Grice's theory (1975) is stated as follows:

### **The cooperative principle**

Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

### **The maxim of quality**

- (i) Do not say what you believe to be false.
- (ii) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

### **The maxim of quantity**

- (i) Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
- (ii) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

**The maxim of relation:** Be relevant.

**The maxim of manner:** Be perspicuous.

- (i) Avoid obscurity of expression.
- (ii) Avoid ambiguity.
- (iii) Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)
- (iv) Be orderly.

(Quoted from Huang, 2007)

An interrupter may either force the interrupted speaker to observe a maxim or simply break a maxim. First of all, interrupters often force the interrupted speakers to observe the maxim of quantity; they may also challenge interrupted speakers' adherence to the maxim of quality or manner.

By preventing the current speaker from completing her utterance, the interrupter may make the interrupted speaker observe the maxim of quantity. In the following example, the interrupter makes the interrupted speaker observe the maxim of quantity by preventing the interrupted speaker from giving redundant information.

<VOICE EDcon250: 182-185; S2 is a native speaker of English and German; S5 is an exchange student from Turkey and a native speaker of Turkish. They are chatting in a restaurant in Vienna. At the beginning of the excerpt, S2 is asking S5 whether there are many Erasmus students in his university.>

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription   | Comment |
|----------|---------------|---|---------|
| 182      | S2            | Are there MANY at your university (.)   |         |
| 183      | S5            | er (1)  |         |
| 184      | S2            | Many erasmus =  | BP      |
| 185      | S5            | = er there a:re er: <b>thirty-five or &lt;2&gt; thirty-six</b><br></2> <b>student erasmus students in my university</b> | IP      |

S5(L185) interrupts S2(L184)'s question. As the unfinished part of S2 (L184)'s utterance is highly predictable and therefore carries little new information, S5's interruption forces S2 to observe the maxim of quantity by preventing her from providing more information than is required. Based on her implicit knowledge of the maxim, S2 could infer from the interruption that S5 has predicted the rest of the utterance and therefore she chooses to quit her turn.

A speaker may interrupt to challenge another speaker in terms of the maxim of quality. Take the following talk for example which also served as an example for partial alignment in section 2.3.2.3.

< MICASE SEM485SU111; S1 is the professor, S3 is a student in her class; they are holding a seminar discussion on politics in higher education. At the beginning of the



talk S3 comments that since the legislature cannot decide the percentage of out-state students in Michigan University, it must be the university that makes the decision. >

| Speaker Label | Transcription   | Comment |
|---------------|---|---------|
| S3            | They can't write a law so it's like i guess we chose to but, do.- | BP      |
| S1            | <b>ah did we choose to?</b>                                       | IP      |
| S4            | no,   |         |
| S7            | there's the   |         |
| S4            | Pressure  |         |
| S13           | we got pressure   |         |
| S3            | pressure, yeah poli- yeah   | PP      |

S1, the professor, interrupts S3, a student. S1 observes the maxim of relation since she stays on the same topic as S3. S1's interruption also follows the maxim of quantity because she prevents S3 from being more informative than required. However, S1's interruption challenges the validity of S3's comment and forces the interrupted speaker to reconsider her utterance in terms of the maxim of quality.

An interrupter may also challenge the speaker's adherence to the maxim of manner. In the following excerpt the teacher interrupts to correct a misused word form by a student.

<VOICE EDsed31:341-343; S1 is a teacher and the seminar leader, and S11 is the student in S1's class.>

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription   | Comment |
|----------|---------------|---|---------|
| 341      | S11           | = young(er) people not always er especially in e:r in the (.) courses we (.) hh we <LNger> besuchen {attend} </LNger> | BP      |
| 342      | S1            | <L1ger>(wir haben besucht) {we attended} </L1ger>   | IP      |
| 343      | S11           | <LNger><@>ja {yes} </@></LNger>   | PP      |

In this excerpt, the teacher interrupts to correct the misused word form 'besuchen' into the correct one 'wir haben besucht'. In this way, the interrupter forces the interrupted speaker to observe the maxim of manner of avoiding obscurity in expression, because the misused word form 'besucht' could cause misunderstanding.

Secondly, an interrupter may simply break a maxim herself. There are a number of ways to break the maxims by interruption: violation, flouting and infringement. The interrupter may violate a maxim on purpose; for example, he may violate the maxim of relation in order to avoid a topic he is not interested in. The interrupter may flout a maxim to convey an implicature; for example, he may flout the maxim of quality to warn fellow speakers to stop talking at someone's back. Finally, the interrupter may infringe on a maxim because he is lacking the language proficiency.

An interrupter may violate the maxim of relation by abruptly changing the topic of the interrupted speaker if she is not interested in what the interrupted speaker is talking about. In (SBCSAE02: 255-259), which is given as an example for complete misalignment between the base part and the interrupting part in section 2.3.2.2, Jamie interrupts Miles in a conversation to switch back to a completely different topic between Jamie and her husband Harol before Miles' started to talk. Jamie's interrupting part completely misaligns with Miles' base part, and yields the implicature that Jamie wants Miles to stop the present topic and return to the previous one.

An interrupter may violate the maxim of relation if she fails to understand the current topic. Take for example the following excerpt from VOICE.

<VOICE EDcon250: 204-210; S3: German; S5: Turkish; S4: Slovak; S6: Slovak; setting: an Italian restaurant in Vienna; action: eating while talking.>

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription  | Comment |
|----------|---------------|--|---------|
| 204      | S3            | I always feel (.) really ashamed when i cross the border and then i can't speak i can't speak any slovak because i mean it's really a SHAME you know it only takes an hour (.) |         |
| 206      | S3            | or s- or not EVEN and then suddenly <1> you're in a different world and hh </1>  |         |
| 207      | S4            | <1>yea:h but you know </1> it's very different language and (.)  | BP      |
| 208      | S6            | <b>But a beautiful one</b>   | IP      |
| 209      | S4            | It seems yeah real beautiful but (.) it seems to be...   | PP      |

S3 (L204), an Austrian PhD student comments that she feels ashamed for not speaking any Slovak, even though Bratislava is so close to Vienna. S4 (L207), a Slovakian exchange student, suggests that few Austrians could speak Slovak because Slovak is a very different language from German. At this moment, S6(L208) interrupts to declare that Slovak is a beautiful language. Though S6's (L208) comment still concerns the language of Slovak, it is heading in a very different direction from S3 and S4's discussion. This is probably because S6 does not completely understand the discussion between S3 and S4. He has probably misunderstood S4(L207)'s comment as implying that Slovak is inferior to German, and therefore becomes unnecessarily sensitive because of his patriotism.

## **2.6 Interruption and politeness**

This section discusses the relation between interruptions and politeness. Interruption markers such as 'excuse me', 'sorry for interrupting' bear witness to the effort made to mitigate the effect of an interruption. This section aims to explain why interruptions are commonly believed to be disruptive and why some interruptions are more polite than others. The face theory and the theory of politeness are used to explain politeness in making interruptions.

Brown and Levinson (1978)'s politeness theory centered on the concept of face, which was first proposed by Goffman (1967). Face means 'the public self-image that every speaker wants to claim for himself' (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 61). The theory assumes that face is what every speaker would desire. There are two types of face, the positive and the negative face. The former refers to the individual's need for their action to be approved of by others; the latter refers to the individual's desire for their action to be unimpeded by others. An interruption is disruptive because it threatens the negative face of the interrupted speaker by preventing her utterance from reaching completion.

Even though interruptions threaten the negative face of interrupted speakers, they can also enhance their positive face. This is because interruptions witness the interrupter's effort to actively involve in the communication (c.f. Pinchevski, 2005),

and the involvement implies that the topic of the interrupted speaker is worth pursuing. Interrupting parts that completely or partially align with the base part actually enhance the positive face of the interrupted speaker because interrupters make efforts to involve in the communication.

In addition, some interruptions can be seen as helpful and friendly, because they observe some of the politeness maxims proposed by Leech (1983, 2005). Leech's (1983) theory of politeness comprises the politeness principle and six politeness maxims. Later, the politeness theory is revised and renamed the grand strategy of politeness, and the six maxims have been re-categorized and increased into eight (Leech, 2005: 12-17).

The revised theory is reprinted as follows.

**Grand Strategy of Politeness:**

In order to be polite, *S* expresses or implies meanings which place a high value on what pertains to *O* (*O*= other person[s], [mainly the addressee]) or place a low value on what pertains to *S* (*S* = self, speaker).

Table 2.2 Maxims of politeness

| <b>Constraint</b>   | <b>label for this constraint</b>     |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| (1)place a high value on <i>O</i> 's wants                  | Generosity                           |
| (2) place a low value on <i>S</i> 's wants                  | Tact                                 |
| (3)place a high value on <i>O</i> 's qualities              | Approbation                          |
| (4)place a low value on <i>S</i> 's qualities               | Modesty                              |
| (5)place a high value on <i>S</i> 's obligation to <i>O</i> | Obligation(of <i>S</i> to <i>O</i> ) |
| (6)place a low value on <i>O</i> 's obligation to <i>S</i>  | Obligation(of <i>O</i> to <i>S</i> ) |
| 7)place a high value on <i>O</i> 's opinions                | Agreement                            |
| (8)place a low value on <i>S</i> 's opinions                | Opinion-reticence                    |
| (9)place a high value on <i>O</i> 's feelings               | Sympathy                             |
| (10)place a low value on <i>S</i> 's feelings               | Feeling-reticence                    |

The interruption in the following example is seen as helpful because it observes the politeness maxims of generosity and sympathy.

<VOICE EDsed31:703-706; S1 is the seminar leader, and S16 and S19 are students in S1's class. At the beginning the the excerpt, S19, who is Italian, is making a comment on the cultural difference between Italy and Austria. >

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription   | Comment |
|----------|---------------|---|---------|
| 703      | S19           | and er in italy is not e:r quite erm (.)                        | BP      |
| 704      | S16           | <soft>possible </soft>  | IP      |
| 705      | S1            | <5>accepted or </5>   |         |
| 706      | S19           | <5>e:rm possi</5>ble <8> @@@ <@> acceptable (also) </@></8> (.) | PP      |

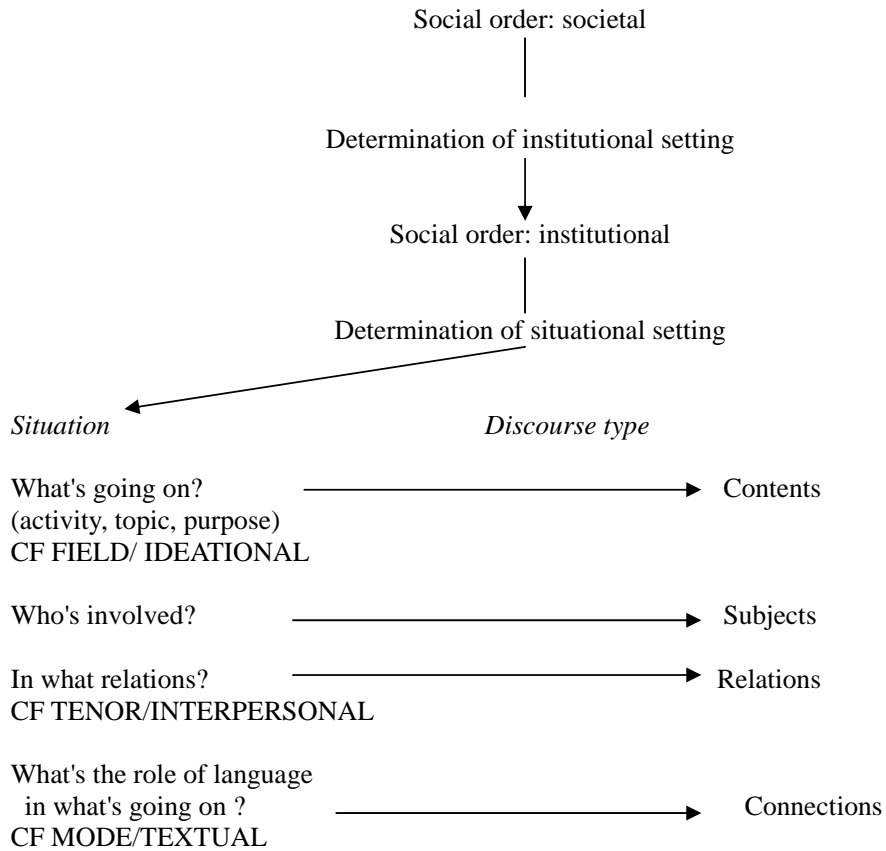
S19 (L703) is making a comment when she encounters difficulty in finding a word to express herself. However, she still indicates her desire to hold on to the floor by making hesitation markers. Here S16(L704) interrupts to help her out by supplying her with a word. Such interruptions have the function of lexical suggestion. As S16's supply of words maximizes the benefit to S19 at the expense of his own effort, S16 (L704) is seen as generous. As S16 (L704) has to think in S19's shoes in order to help her, S16 (L704) implicitly observes the maxim of sympathy.

In addition, the maxims of reticence have important implications on interruptions. Opinion-reticence and feeling-reticence are 'negative-politeness constraints' (Leech, 2005, p19) which place a low value on either the opinion or feeling of the speaker. Following the maxims of reticence, a speaker may refrain from making interruptions. He may withhold his disagreement entirely to avoid violating the negative face of the other speaker. He may also mitigate his disagreement with softened expressions such as 'I suppose', 'I kind of think.' In such cases however, interruptions are less likely to occur. When they do occur, speakers tend to align (either completely or partially align) with an interruption so as to place a high value on the opinion or feeling of others and a low value on the opinion or feeling of themselves.

## 2.7 Interruption and genres

Genre refers to 'a collection of communicative events' that shares the same 'set of communicative purposes' (Swales, 1990: 46). For example, seminar discussions in university classrooms are a genre because a seminar leader and its participants carry

out in-depth discussions on an academic topic. One of the hypotheses of this study is that interruptions would vary according to genres. The following diagram from Goatly (1997, adapted from Fairclough 1989/2001 (figure 6.2)) could be used to explain the major factors that affect patterns of interruptions.



*Figure 2.2 : Discourse type and social context*  
(from Goatly 1997, which is adapted from Figure 6.2. in Fairclough 1989: 146)

This diagram allows us to describe a discourse type, a synonym for genre, in the social context. The upper section of the figure concerns the interpretation of social context. Societal practices determine types of institutional settings, and institutional settings determine types of situation. The lower section of the figure concerns the description of a discourse type at four levels. Firstly, we should examine the content of a discourse, such as what activity is going on. Secondly, we configure a discourse type according to the positions the subjects take. Thirdly, we examine the connections between utterances to reach a coherent interpretation. Fourthly, we have to work out the structure of a text. By investigating the four levels of situational

dimensions as well social contexts, we complete the interpretation of a discourse type.

The type and frequency of interruptions are likely to be related to the discourse type they occur in, for some situational settings seem to contain fewer interruptions than others. In question-and-answer sessions for example, interruptions would occur less frequently than in seminar discussions. This is to do with the social context that determines that speakers have to observe a pre-determined procedure for turn-taking in question-and-answer sessions. Bound by the rules, they have little freedom to decide when to initiate a turn.

Interpersonal relations or roles of speakers could also affect interruptions. Differences in subject positions can determine the types and frequency of interruptions. Previous studies have confirmed that speakers who are in subject positions of higher power/ status are far more likely to interrupt those of lower power/ status. For example, senior doctors interrupted their patients more often than intern doctors did (Menz and Al-Roubaie, 2008); psychotherapists interrupted children much more often than parents (O'Reilly, 2008). Speakers of higher power/ status are more likely to make disruptive interruptions to speakers of lower power/ status than vice versa. For example, doctors were found to be more successful than patients in making disruptive interruptions in medical interviews (Menz and Al-Roubaie, 2008).

It is important to note here that casual conversation is not a genre, since its participants do not share similar purposes. (Henceforth, the term 'conversation' used in this thesis specifically refers to 'casual conversation.')

In fact, speakers seldom have any definite purposes in mind when they start a conversation. This type of communicative event is given the name 'pre-genre', to distinguish it from 'genre' (Swales, 1990: 59). Fairclough pointed out that field (as shown in Figure 2.2 right under the 'activity, topic, purpose' of a discourse type) is a feature unique to genre; a 'pre-genre' does not have a field because it allows for many diverse purposes and frequent switches of topics. Therefore, misaligned interruptions are likely to appear more often in conversation than in "real" genres, as speakers are not obliged to stick to one topic. In addition, as conversation is not governed by rigid rules of turn taking,

speaker in conversation have much greater freedom to initiate or terminate a turn as they like. In a word, conversation is not a genre because it is very free in terms of content, turn-taking rules and other linguistic choices such as tones, tense, sentence length.

## **2.8 Summary**

This chapter has dealt with the central issues of this study. First, it provides a framework for analyzing the structure of interruptions and a set of taxonomies for categorizing interruptions. Then it analyzes the relation between interruptions, politeness and cooperation. Finally, it discusses how interruptions might vary according to genres. The discussions will provide a theoretical basis for discussing examples in actual data analysis.



## Chapter Three

### Methodology of data analysis

#### 3.1 Data Source:

The speech events analyzed in the paper come from three corpora, two native speaker corpora and one English-as-a-lingua-franca corpus. They are Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE), Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (SBCSAE) and Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE).

These three corpora were chosen because 1) they provide contemporary data for the spoken English used by ELF or ENL speakers; 2) they contain detailed transcriptions at least at the morphological level; 3) sections of the three corpora are comparable in terms of speech event types.

The following speech events in the three corpora were chosen for analysis.

Table 3.1 speech events chosen for analysis

|                              | ELF speech events | ENL speech events  |
|------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Conversation                 | VOICE EDcon250    | SBCSAE 02          |
| Question-and-answer sessions | VOICE PRqas407    | MICASE COL140MX114 |
|                              | VOICE PRqas409    | MICASE COL425MX075 |
|                              | VOICE PRqas495    | MICASE COL605MX132 |
|                              | VOICE PRqas224    | MICASE COL999MX040 |
| Seminar discussions          | VOICE EDsed31     | MICASE SEM475JU084 |
|                              |                   | MICASE SEM485SU111 |

In order to ensure the comparability of the ELF and ENL speech events, I have tried to minimize the effect of intervening variables such as power and solidarity on interruptions. First, I selected speech events of similar interactivity level. Most of the

extracts I selected are marked by the corpora compilers as either mostly interactive or highly interactive. Secondly, for each genre I compare, whenever I can, I selected speech events in which speakers have similar acquaintance level. Thirdly, I have chosen those speech events in which there are similar numbers of speakers and these speakers have similar roles and social status. Fourthly, for the speech events chosen in each genre, I have done my best to make sure that they follow similar patterns. Reasons for selecting the data in each of the genres will be given in detail in the following.

For speech events in conversation, I chose EDcon250 from VOICE and SBCSAE02 from SBCSAE. They are the two most comparable conversations from the corpora as they have similar settings, number of speakers and activity. EDcon250 contains a conversation in which a small group of friends chat over lunch in a restaurant. SBCSAE02 contains a conversation in which four friends chat over ice-cream. One problem with EDcon250, however, is that it also contains sequences of dealing with orders, which does not belong to the activity of conversation. I had to delete these sequences to ensure comparability between the speech events.

For speech events in question-and-answer sessions, four sections each were chosen from VOICE and MICASE. All of them involve at least one presenter, a chairperson and audience members. The four speech events from VOICE come from the domain of professional research. Unlike VOICE, MICASE does not give a separate section to question-and-answer sessions; so the four speech events from MICASE were cut out from the end of large colloquiums. These speech events were chosen based on their interactivity levels. As the frequency of interruptions is directly related to the interactivity of participants, only the highly interactive ones were chosen. It should be noted here that patterns of question-and-answer sessions vary greatly from culture to culture (Taib, 1999). In order to minimize the cultural factor, the speech events I selected all follow the same pattern: all of them occur after a formal presentation by professionals either in conferences or major seminars in universities.

For the section of seminar discussions, I chose one very long seminar discussion from VOICE and two shorter ones from MICASE. They share similar patterns as all of them involve a seminar leader and a group of university students who actively

enter into discussions. The speech events were also chosen based on their interactivity levels. All of them were marked as highly interactive.

## **3.2 Method of data analysis:**

### **3.2.1 Categorizing interruptions**

Four stages were involved in processing the data: interruption identification, segmentation, scheme design and coding. The entire process of data analysis was carried out with the help of the Systemic Coder, version 4.68, designed by Michael O'Donnell. It was originally designed for coding corpora in systemic linguistics but here I use it to code and categorize interruptions. Its advantages are 1) it prompts the user to code each of the segments by each level of the coding system; 2) it presents its statistical results in three different formats, one by segments, another by categories and still another provides comparisons between categories. The software is available for download at <http://www.wagsoft.com/Coder/>.

Firstly, texts were analyzed to find out instances of interruptions. Interruptions were selected using the definition discussed in the Theoretical Foundation.

Secondly, texts were segmented according to the boundary of the sequences that contain interruptions.

Thirdly, a coding system was designed to categorize the interruptions. The system contains six tiers, they are:

1. whether the segment in question contains a native speaker interruption (represented in the scheme as 'ns interruption'), ELF speaker interruption (represented in the scheme as 'elf interruption') or no interruption (represented in the scheme as 'none interruption');
2. whether the interruption in question is found in seminar discussions (represented in the scheme either as 'elf seminar discussion or 'ns seminar discussion'), question-and-answer sessions (represented in the scheme either as 'elf question-and-answer session' or 'ns question-and-answer

- session'), or conversation (represented in the scheme either as 'elf conversation' or 'ns conversation');
3. whether the interruption in question contains a complete interrupting part (represented in the scheme as 'ip complete') or an incomplete interrupting part (represented in the scheme as 'ip incomplete');
  4. whether the interruption in question contains overlap between the interrupting part and the base part (represented in the scheme as 'bp overlap') or no overlap between the interrupting part and the base part (represented in the scheme as 'bp non-overlap');
  5. whether the interrupting part of the interruption in question completely aligns with the base part (represented in the scheme as 'ip align'), misaligns with the base part (represented in the scheme as 'ip misalign'), completely misaligns at the micro level and aligns at the macro level (represented in the scheme as 'ip mic-misalign-mac-align'), or its alignment with the base part is unclear (represented in the scheme as 'ip align unclear');
  6. whether the post-interruption part aligns with the interruption part (represented in the scheme as 'pp align'), misaligns with the interrupting part (represented in the scheme as 'pp misalign') or its alignment with the post-interruption part is unclear (represented in the scheme as 'pp align unclear').

Figure 3.1 on the following page is a section of the interruption scheme used to classify and code interruptions.

This section of the scheme shows the third, fourth and fifth level of coding. It begins with interruptions in seminar discussions in which the interrupting parts are complete. Depending on whether the base part overlaps with the interrupting part, there are interruptions with overlaps and without overlaps. Depending on the alignment relation between IP and BP, there are interruptions whose IP align with BP, misalign with BP, micro-misalign-macro-align with BP and finally interruptions in which the alignment relation is unclear.

As the entire scheme is too large to be printed on paper, it is saved as Appendix One

in the memory discs attached to the end of the thesis.

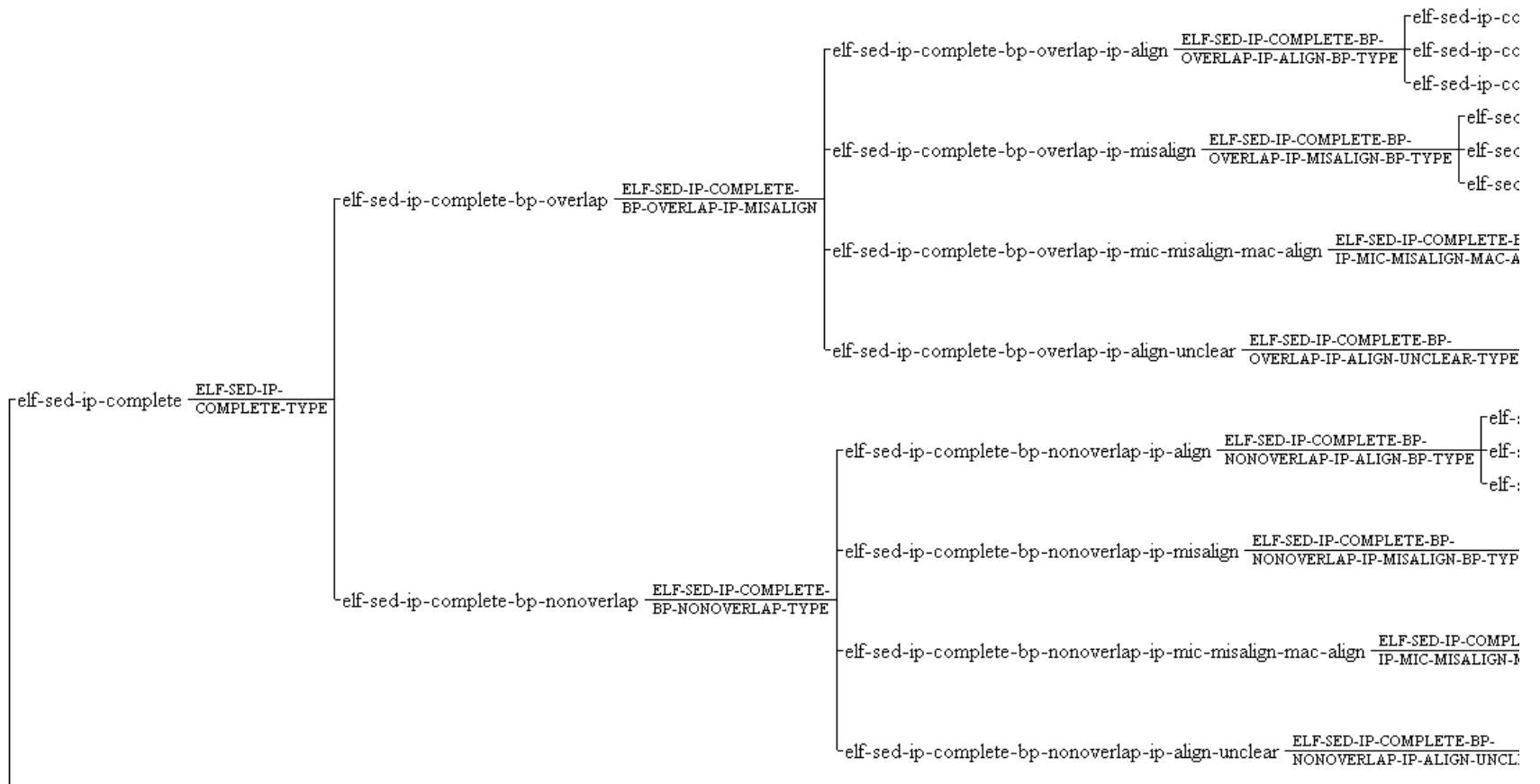


Figure 3.1 A section of the interruption coding system

Finally, segmented texts were run through the Systemic Coder.

### **3.2.2 Data analysis**

After coding the data, I obtained four files of coded interruptions. They were labeled as 'ELF & ENL conversation', 'ELF seminar discussions', 'ENL seminar discussions' and 'ELF & ENL question-and-answer sessions.' These files have been placed in the compact disk at the end of the thesis as Appendix Two. In order to read the files, one has to first install the software 'Systemic Coder 4.68', which can also be found in the folder 'Appendix Two' in the compact disk.

Four steps were taken to analyze the files.

Firstly, I performed a descriptive analysis of the data I obtained. Descriptive analysis gives the number and percentage of interruptions by each category in the coding scheme. In this way, I obtain the number and percentage for each of the six categories of interruption types: ELF/ ENL interruptions; IP complete/ incomplete interruptions; overlapping/ non-overlapping interruptions; IP-aligned/ IP-misaligned/ IP micro-misalign and macro-aligned/ IP align unclear interruptions; finally, PP-aligned/ PP-misaligned/ PP-align unclear interruptions.

It has to be noted here that a small number of the interruptions fall into the category of unclear IP alignment. This is either because the transcription of the interrupting part is incomplete or that it is impossible to determine the meaning of the interrupting part. A small number of interruptions fall into the category of unclear PP alignment either because the transcription of the post-interruption part is incomplete, or that the interrupted speakers are prevented by other speakers to give a response.

Secondly, I carried out a cell analysis to examine the examples of each type of interruptions as categorized by the interrupting coding scheme.

Thirdly, I compared ENL interruptions with ELF interruptions by combining the statistical results of the three genres I analyzed.

Fourthly, I calculated manually the percentage of interrupting turns in each of the three genres. The percentage of interrupting turns refers to the number of interrupting turns in each genre divided by the total number of speaking turns in that genre.

Through the four steps, I obtained the number and percentage of each interruption type in each genre, the number and percentage of interruption types in ENL and ELF settings and finally the number and percentage of interrupting turns of each genre.

### **3.2.3. Limitations of the data**

In analyzing the data, sound files have been used to determine an interruption. They are available for both the MICASE and SBCSAE, but not for VOICE. Though the VOICE team has agreed to send the writer the relevant sound files of the speech events selected, they never arrived. The lack of sound files has an unfavorable impact on my data analysis. This is because the intonation of an utterance has to be used to determine the completeness of a speech. For example, in extract <EDcon250:11-21> which appeared earlier in section 2.2.1, S1 (L15) said ‘we have no small’. This utterance could either be complete or incomplete depending on the intonation. If

‘small’ were spoken with a falling tone (SMALL), it is most likely complete. If ‘small’ has no clear intonation on it, the tone unit would be incomplete as a nuclear tone is lacking here. Therefore the incompleteness of a tone unit implies the incompleteness of the utterance. Though VOICE transcription uses a full stop ‘.’ to indicate words spoken with a falling tone, and ‘?’ to indicate words spoken with a rising tone, not all utterances are thus marked. Sound files would be much more helpful in determining the completeness of an utterance.



## Chapter Four

### Data Analysis and Discussion of ELF and ENL conversation

#### 4.1 Data for analysis

The ENL conversation comes from speech event SBCSAE 002 from The Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (SBCSAE). The ELF conversation comes from speech event EDcon250 from The Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE). The processed files are available in Appendix Two under the name of 'ENL and ELF conversation'.

#### 4.2 The comparison between the percentage of interrupting turns in ENL and ELF conversation

The table below presents the percentage of interrupting turns in ENL and ELF conversation.

Table 4.1 frequency of interrupting turns in ENL and ELF conversation

| Speech event Type | No. of speaking turns | No. of interruptions | percentage of interrupting turns |
|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| ELF Conversation  | 953                   | 58                   | 6.1%                             |
| ENL Conversation  | 1010                  | 26                   | 2.6%                             |

The table above presents the number of interrupting turns per hundred turns in ELF and ENL conversation. While there are 6.1 interrupting turns in every one hundred turns in ELF conversation, there are only 2.6 interrupting turns in ENL conversation. The percentage of the interrupting turns in ELF conversation is more than twice as many as that in ENL conversation. As each interruption contains only one interrupting turn, the percentage of interruptions are exactly the same as that of interrupting turns. So far as my data shows, ELF conversation contains many more interruptions than ENL conversation, and ELF conversation is much denser than

ENL conversation in terms of interruptions.

In order to find out the reasons behind the disparity, the following section will examine the number and percentage of interruption types of ELF and ENL conversation.

### 4.3 The comparison of interruption types between ENL and ELF conversation

Table 4.2 presents and compares the number and percentage of interruption types in ELF and ENL conversation.

Table 4.2 The comparison between interruption types in ENL and ELF conversation

| Taxonomies of interruptions in conversation |  | ELF interruptions |            | ENL interruptions |            |
|---|--|-------------------|------------|-------------------|------------|
|   |  | No.               | Percentage | No.               | Percentage |
| IP completeness                             | IP complete                            | 46                | 79.3%      | 23                | 88.5%      |
|   | IP incomplete                          | 12                | 20.7%      | 3                 | 11.5%      |
| Overlapping speech between IP and BP        | IP overlap with BP                     | 18                | 31.0%      | 11                | 42.3%      |
|   | IP does not overlap with BP            | 40                | 69.0%      | 15                | 57.7%      |
| Alignment between IP and BP                 | IP align with BP                       | 35                | 60.3%      | 8                 | 30.8%      |
|   | IP misalign with BP                    | 4                 | 6.9%       | 2                 | 7.7%       |
|   | IP micro-misalign-macro-aligns with BP | 19                | 32.8%      | 16                | 61.5%      |
|   | PP misaligns with IP                   | 5                 | 8.6%       | 7                 | 26.9%      |
|   | PP alignment unclear                   | 4                 | 6.9%       | 2                 | 7.7%       |

Figure 4.1 illustrates the data above more vividly.

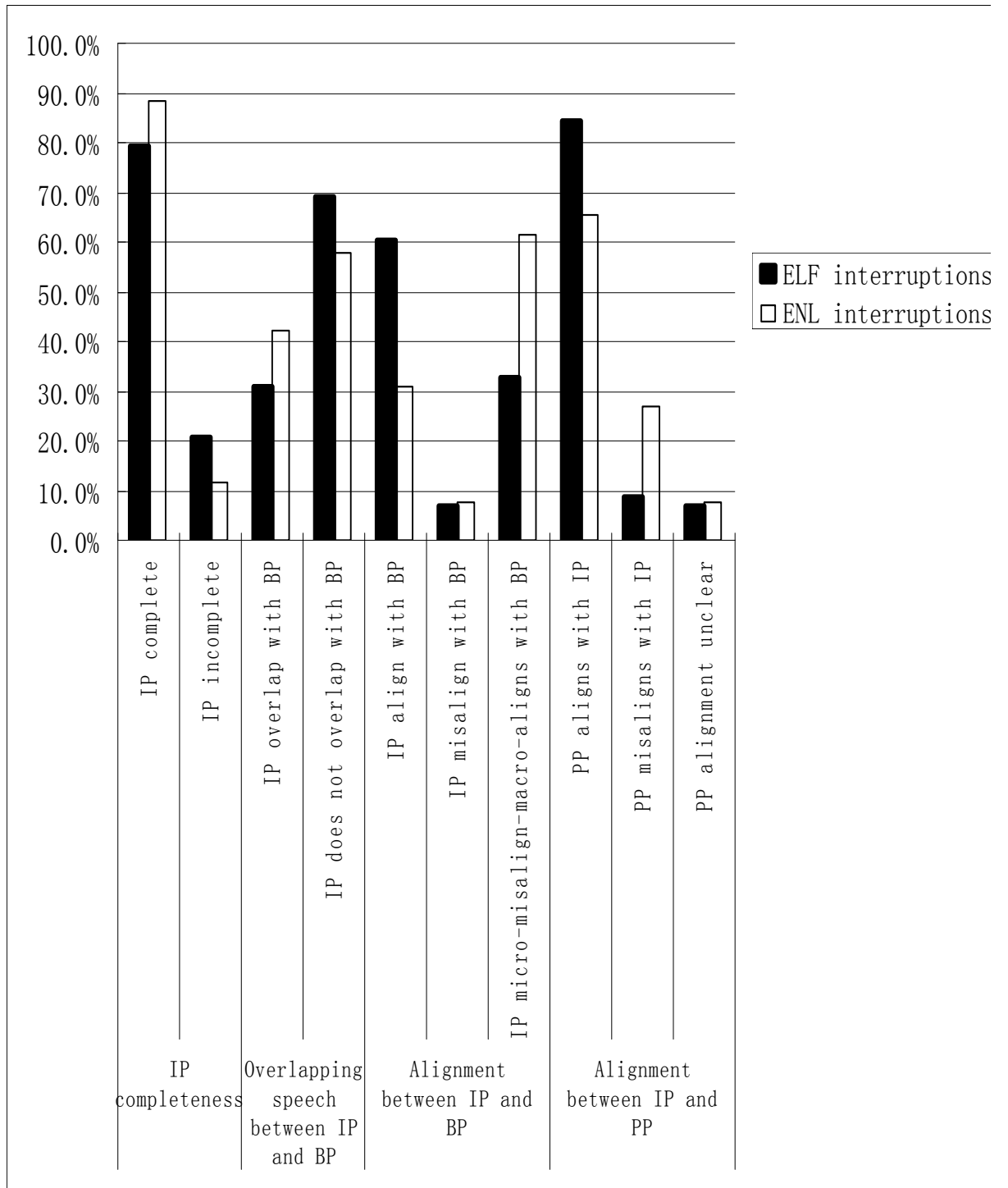


Figure 4.1 The comparison between interruption types in ELF and ENL conversation

I would like to discuss the similarities and differences between ELF and ENL interruption types according to the order of the interruption types along the horizontal axis starting from left to right.

**4.3.1 The comparison between interruptions in ENL and ELF conversation in terms of IP completion.**

As shown in Figure 4.1, in both ENL and ELF conversation, interruptions with complete interrupting parts (IP) far outnumber those with incomplete interrupting parts. The percentage of interruptions with complete IP is higher in ENL interruptions than in ELF interruptions by around 10%. In other words, the percentage of interruptions with incomplete IP is lower in ENL interruptions than in ELF interruptions by about 10%. As the completion of interrupting parts indicates the success of the interrupter in making interruptions, the data suggests that both ELF and ENL interrupters are generally successful, but ENL speakers have greater success than ELF speakers in completing an interrupting part.

Success in completing an interrupting part is often related to the interrupter's confidence in making the interruption. If the interrupter falters or hesitates, he is likely to be interrupted by another speaker. This is true for both ELF and ENL speakers. In the following example, the ENL interrupter fails to complete the interrupting part due to his hesitation in making the interruption.

*(SBCASE002:969-982; Jamie and Miles are friends. They are talking and eating ice-cream together with Harol and Pete in the apartment of Jamie and Harol. They are now talking about Lambada teacher.)*

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription                              | Comment   |
|----------|---------------|--|-----------|
| 969      | JAMIE         | (..) They haven't done anything recently   | BP1       |
| 970      |               | (hh) I                                     |           |
| 971      |               | I can't remember if they're going to .     |           |
| 972      | MILES         | Cause                                      | IP1   BP2 |
| 973      |               | (.) like                                   |           |
| 974      |               | Sue Swing taught that class for two months |           |
| 975      |               | (..) May and June                          |           |
|          |               |  |           |

|     |       |   |     |
|-----|-------|---|-----|
| 976 |       | (..) and uh                               |     |
| 977 | JAMIE | <b>Is she a good (.) lambada dancer ?</b> | IP2 |

There are actually two interruptions in this short excerpt, but we are going to focus on the second one. Jamie begins by commenting that her teachers have not taught her much recently. Her utterance is interrupted by Miles who comments that his teacher, Sue Swing takes two months to teach the same class. Jamie then interrupts Miles's utterance at Line 977. The second interruption takes place when Miles (L976) pauses and utters the hesitation marker 'uh.' Miles' hesitation makes it easier for others to interrupt him. Consequently, confident interrupters are more often successful in making interruptions than less confident ones.

Success in completing an interrupting part is also related to the interactivity level of the conversation. Mutual interruptions often occur when speakers discuss interesting topics and cannot wait to share their knowledge or express their views. In the following excerpt which also appears in the Theoretical Foundation, many mutual interruptions occur as a result of the high level of interactivity.

*(VOICE EDcon250:57-64; S5 is a native speaker of Turkish; S3 is a native speaker of German. S5, an exchange student from Turkey is asking S3, a Ph.D. student from the University of Vienna the location of the latter's department building.)*

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription  | Comment |
|----------|---------------|--|---------|
| 57       | S5            | were i- where is your building here  |         |
| 60       | S3            | er: (.) it's =   |         |
| 61       | S5            | <b>= i- in the (.) center of (.) university of vienna in schottentor? Or in &lt;2&gt; another &lt;/2&gt;</b> | IP1     |
| 62       | S3            | <b>&lt;2&gt;yeah do &lt;/2&gt; you it know it a little bit? Er: =</b>  | IP2     |
| 63       | S5            | <b>= yeah i know er the center of university of Vienna i went there. (.) two times i think</b>               | IP3     |
| 64       | S3            | i mean there is the MAIN building? <3>that's directly</3> on the schottentor.=                               |         |

As discussed in the Theoretical Foundation, this short excerpt is organized around a main adjacency pair of question-and answer. S5 initiates the first pair part and S3 attempts to give the second pair part. Here at least three interruptions take place one after another before S3's second pair part is complete. First, S5 (L61) interrupts

S3(L60) as he tries to anticipate S3's answer. Then, S5 (L61)'s interrupting part is interrupted by S3 (L62); S3 could already predict S5(L61)'s question, so she answers the question before it is complete. Afterwards, S5 (L63) interrupts S3 (L62), because S5 is eager to share with S3 his knowledge of the University of Vienna before S3 goes on with her explanation. In this example, interrupters are unsuccessful in completing their interruption because speakers are more than ready to interrupt each other.

This study has found that ELF interrupters are less successful than ENL speakers in completing interrupting parts in conversation. This is probably because the ELF speakers in my data are more interactive and more ready to interrupt each other than ENL speakers. Interestingly, the high level of involvement could also explain the high frequency of interruptions in ELF conversation.

#### **4.3.2 The comparison between interruptions in ENL and ELF conversation in terms of overlap between an interrupting part and a base part.**

In both ELF and ENL conversation, interruptions occur more often without overlap than with overlap. As Table 4.2 shows in the third row, the percentage of ENL interruptions with overlap is higher than that of ELF interruptions by over 10%. As overlapping speech indicates the extent of struggle for speaking turns, my data suggests that both ELF and ENL speakers generally avoid conflicts for speaking turns, and ELF speakers seem to be more ready to do so than ENL speakers.

Speakers may avoid overlaps in interruptions because of the need to be polite. According to Leech's politeness principles, in order to be polite, speakers are supposed to show generosity. It is therefore more polite to hand the speaking turn to the interrupter than to fight for it. It also enhances the positive face of interrupted speakers because it implies that their speaking turns are worth completion. Both ELF and ENL speakers may avoid overlap in interruption in order to be polite.

The ELF speakers in my data are recent acquaintances with each other but the ENL speakers are close friends with each other (two of the four ENL speakers are even a couple). As the interpersonal distance between ELF speakers in my data is much

greater than that between ENL speakers, the ELF speakers are under greater pressure to be polite than ENL speakers. Consequently, in order to be polite, the ELF speakers in conversation are more ready to accommodate interruptions than ENL speakers.

#### **4.3.3 The comparison between interruptions in ENL and ELF conversation in terms of alignment between an interrupting part and a base part.**

According to Table 4.2 (the fourth row), among the three types of alignment relation between IP and BP, the one with the highest rate of occurrence in ELF conversation is the IP-align-with-BP type, with a percentage of 60.3%. The IP-align-with-BP type of interruption occurs more than twice as often in ELF conversation as in ENL conversation. The most common type of alignment in ENL conversation is the IP-micro-misalign-macro-aligns-with-BP type, which is 61.5%, and the IP-micro-misalign-macro-aligns-with-BP type occurs more than twice as often in ENL conversation as in ELF conversation. The data shows that both ELF and ENL speakers are very cooperative in pursuing conversational topics but they do it in different ways. ELF interrupters are more ready to support the previous speaker's utterances, but ENL interrupters tend to express their own views.

There is one possible explanation here. As explained in the previous section, ELF speakers in my data are under more pressure to be polite to each other than ENL speakers. According to the maxim of sympathy in the theory of politeness, it is considered polite for speakers to show understanding. Helping the other speaker to complete the utterance as this indicates that the interrupter understands the interrupted speaker's thoughts and feelings. Therefore, in order to be more polite, ELF speakers tend to make interruptions in which IP completely aligns with BP.

The disparity in alignment type can explain the differences in the frequency of interruptions in ELF and ENL conversation. ELF speakers make many more interruptions than ENL speakers on the whole mainly because ELF speakers make many more interruptions in which interrupting parts completely align with the base parts. (The number of IP aligned interruptions in ELF is larger than that in ENL by 27.) This means that interruptions occur more frequently in ELF conversation because ELF speakers make more interruptions to establish rapport than ENL

speakers.

#### **4.3.4 The comparison between interruptions in ENL and ELF conversation in terms of alignment between an interrupting part and a post-interruption part.**

According to Figure 4.1, among the three types of alignment between IP and PP, the one with the highest rate of occurrence is the PP-align-with-IP type in both ELF and ENL conversation. However, the percentage of ELF interruptions in which PP aligns with IP is higher than that of ENL interruptions by almost 20%. The data means that while the interrupted speakers are generally very cooperative in both ENL and ELF conversation, ELF speakers are considerably more cooperative than ENL speakers in term of alignment with the interrupter.

This can again be explained by politeness. As ELF speakers are under greater need to be polite, they are more ready to accommodate interruptions and follow the topic of their interrupters than ENL speakers.

The comparisons above suggest that interruptions occur more frequently in ELF conversation than in ENL conversation because ELF speakers make many more interruptions to support each other and they are more involved/ interactive than ENL speakers. Interpersonal distance and the need for politeness are the major factors in determining different patterns of interruption types in ELF and ENL conversation. In addition, the level of interactivity or involvement is also an important factor in explaining the large number of incomplete interruptions in ELF conversation.

### **4.4. Functions and Features of interruptions in conversation**

In this section, we will examine the major functions and features of interruptions in ELF and ENL conversation.

#### **4.4.1 Major functions and features of ELF interruptions in conversation**

a) ELF conversation contains a large number of interruptions that are made to



establish rapport by providing the SPP before the FPP is complete. In the following example, the interrupted speaker provides a SPP to the FPP of a question-answer adjacency pair.

<VOICE EDcon250: 80-82. *S3 is a PhD student from Austria and S5 is an exchange student from Turkey. They are having lunch in a restaurant in Vienna.*>

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription  | Comment |
|----------|---------------|--|---------|
| 80       | S3            | so are you: are you: are you <11> studying </11>   | BP      |
| 81       | S5            | <11>i am erasmus </11> student here. (.) in fachhochschule {polytechnic} (.) do you know fachhochschule? {polytechnic} | IP      |
| 82       | S3            | yeah <6> but there are so </6> there are so many (.)   | PP      |

As S5 probably has guessed S3's question, he starts to give his answer before the question is even complete. His utterance overlaps and interrupts S3's, and S3 readily accepts the interruption. Interruptions of this kind demonstrate the affinity and mutual understanding between the ELF speakers.

b) Another way of establishing rapport through interruptions is to interrupt as other completions. This type of interruption occurs far more frequently in ELF interruptions than ENL interruptions. Take the following excerpt for example. Here the speakers are helping to complete each others' turns.

<VOICE EDcon250:421-428. *S2 and S3 are native speakers of Austrian German, and S2 is a native speaker of American English as well; S4 is a student from Slovakia; SS refers to speakers in general. S2, S3, S4 are eating in a restaurant together with other people.*>

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription   | Comment |
|----------|---------------|---|---------|
| 420      | S3            | <L1ger>der schmeckt irgendwie nach nicht sehr viel {that somehow doesn't taste of very much} </L1ger> (6) hi- we yeah ok- we're a bit better off the lasagne is a bit (.) |         |

|     |    |   |     |
|-----|----|---|-----|
| 421 | S2 | <b>a bit smaller?</b> @ =                                 | IP1 |
| 422 | S3 | = <@>a bit smaller </@> (3)                               |     |
| 423 | S2 | and if we're still hungry i'm sure @                      |     |
| 424 | Ss | @@@ <7> @@@ </7>  |     |
| 425 | S3 | <7> <b>we just grab</b> </7><1> <b>a couple</b> </1>      | IP2 |
| 426 | S2 | <soft><1> @@@ </1> @@@ <10> @@@@<br></10> @@@@ hh </soft> |     |
| 427 | S3 | <10><soft>pieces </soft></10>                             |     |
| 428 | S4 | you're welcome (16) {SS are eating}                       |     |

At Line 421, S2 supplies the words “a bit smaller” to S3; and at Line 425 and 427, S3 supplied S2 with the words “we just grab a couple pieces.” In this way, S2 and S3 complete each other’s utterances which demonstrate a high level of affinity between them. This is because, according to Leech’s politeness principles, the interrupter was not only generous in providing the line but also sympathetic in the sense she thought in the place of the interrupted speaker.

c) Interruptions are often made for purposes of clarification. In the following excerpt, the interrupter interrupted for the purpose of self-clarification.

<VOICE EDcon250: 93-109. S2 and S3 are native speakers of Austrian German, and S2 is a native speaker of American English as well; S5 is a student from Turkey; S2, S3, S5 are eating in a restaurant together with other people.>

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription  | Comment |
|----------|---------------|--|---------|
| 93       | S2            | so do you take your courses in german then? (1)  |         |
| 94       | S5            | a: little bit. only (.) two months i take (.) german language. (1) and it's =  |         |
| 95       | S2            | = okay =   |         |
| 96       | S5            | = and (.)finished (.) now. (.)   |         |
| 97       | S3            | and where did you take it? (1)   |         |
| 98       | S5            | in school. (.) only in school  |         |
| 99       | S3            | in the at the =  |         |
| 90       | S5            | = i i'm taking my course in english here. (.) not (.) german language <8> i: know </8> german (.)                                      |         |
| 101      | S2            | <8>oh okay </8>  |         |
| 102      | S5            | a little bit only. (2) not so much. (2)  |         |
| 103      | S3            | but but er but you did the the course did you do at the university as well or did you do it at another institution here in vienna. (.) |         |

|     |    |   |    |
|-----|----|---|----|
| 104 | S5 | i er =  |    |
| 105 | S3 | = <b>on german. (.) did you do a GERMAN course here no.</b> | IP |
| 106 | S5 | no <1> i don't do a </1> german course (.)                  |    |
| 107 | S3 | <1>ah no. okay </1>   |    |
| 108 | S5 | i had (.) only english course <2> here </2>                 |    |
| 109 | S3 | <2>okay </2> (.) yeah                                       |    |

In this excerpt S3 the German-speaking PhD student asks S5 the Turkish exchange student about the courses he takes in Vienna. At Line 105, S3 interrupts S5 to clarify an earlier question she asked S5 at Line 103. In S3's initial question at Line 103, she has not specified what course she is referring to; she subsequently interrupts S5's answer to specify the information in her question. Therefore, her interruption has the function of self-clarification.

#### 4.4.2 Major functions and features of ENL interruptions

a) Similar to ELF conversation, interruptions in ENL conversation are made to provide SPP before FPP is complete. As discussed above, such interruptions have the function of establishing rapport between speakers. Take the following excerpt as an example.

<SBCSAE02: 238-244; *Miles, Jamie, Jamie's husband Harol and another friend Pete were sitting at Jamie's sitting-room eating ice-cream. There is music coming from another room.*>

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription                       | Comment   |
|----------|---------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| 238      |               | (MUSIC_BECOMES_AUDIBLE) .           |           |
| 239      | MILES         | (..)glottal stop                    |           |
| 240      | MILES         | is that that ?                      |           |
| 241      | MILES         | (..) Or <1> is that a real <1> +... | BP        |
| 242      | JAMIE         | <1>Yeah                             | IP        |
| 243      | JAMIE         | That's a <1> tape .                 | IP cont'd |
| 244      | JAMIE         | That's a tape .                     |           |

In this example, Jamie answers Miles's intended question about whether the music is played by a real band. Jamie infers Miles's question from the context and provides

the answer before Miles even finishes the question. Therefore, Jamie is interrupting by providing the SPP to the question-answer adjacency pair.

b) In ENL conversation, interruptions are also made to complete the utterance of the previous speaker. Interruptions of this kind also have the function of establishing rapport.

<SBCASE02: 255-261; *Miles is commenting on the good quality of Harol and Jamie's stereo, and Harol and Jamie, who are a couple, tells Miles that theirs is the worst stereo on earth.*>

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription   | Comment |
|----------|---------------|---|---------|
| 255      | MILES         | You must have good stereo .                             |         |
| 256      | MILES         | Cause I feel like I'm hearing ...                       |         |
| 257      | HAROL         | (..) We have .  |         |
| 258      | HAROL         | These are like ...                                      | BP      |
| 259      | <b>JAMIE</b>  | <b>the world's worst speakers.</b>                      | IP      |
| 260      | MILES         | <1> Where is the other one <1> .                        |         |
| 261      | HAROL         | These are the <2> shittiest <2> (.) speakers on earth . | PP      |

At line 259, Jamie interrupts Harol to complete his turn for him. Jamie's other completion is accepted and confirmed by Harol at line 261.

c) In ENL conversation, the interrupter may want to help amend the interrupted turn by requesting the interrupted speaker to continue with the utterance.

< SBCSAE02:1151-1159; *Miles, Pete, Jamie and Harol were four friends talking and eating ice-cream with each other in Jamie and Harol's sitting room. Jamie and Harol were couples. Harol was suggesting that he should go lambada dancing with Miles when Miles started to talk about a woman he met once at a lambada dance.*>

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription   | Comment |
|----------|---------------|---|---------|
| 1151     | HAROL         | (..) Maybe I should go with Miles .                               |         |
| 1152     | MILES         | (.) Oh &did ? +...  |         |
| 1153     | PETE          | <1>@@@<1> .   |         |
| 1154     | JAMIE         | <1> <b>Yeah</b>   | IP      |
| 1155     |               | <b>You guys &lt;1&gt; &lt;2&gt; could &lt;2&gt; be partners .</b> |         |

|      |       |  |
|------|-------|--|
| 1156 | MILES | <2> did <2> +...                         |
| 1157 | JAMIE | (..) What ?                              |
| 1158 | MILES | Well I don't know if I told you          |
| 1159 |       | (.) told you that story about that woman |

In this example, Jamie cuts off Miles' utterance 'did I tell you the story about that woman', to answer to Harol's utterance at Line 1151. Here Jamie misaligns with Miles's utterance. Then she realizes that she is interrupting Miles, so she asks Miles explicitly to repeat the interrupted line by saying 'what' at Line 1157. As Jamie and Miles are friends, there is less need to show politeness to each other. Jamie's request is therefore made without any use of politeness strategies.

In summary, this chapter presents the results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of interruptions in ENL and ELF conversation. The quantitative analysis has found that 1) interruptions occur more often in ELF conversation than in ENL conversation; 2) interruptions in both ELF and ENL conversation are generally successful and cooperative; 3) interruptions in ELF and ENL conversation contain few overlaps, though more interruptions contain more overlap in ENL conversation than in ELF conversation; 4) A majority of ELF and ENL interruptions observe the maxim of relation; however, ELF interruptions tend to completely align with the interrupted speaker while ENL interruptions tend to micro-misalign and macro-align with the interrupted speaker; 5) ELF speakers are more ready to align with interrupters than ENL speakers. The two major factors in determining the patterns of interruption types in ELF and ENL conversation are interpersonal distance and the level of interactivity.

The qualitative analysis has identified a number of outstanding functions of interruptions in ENL and ELF conversation. In both cases, interruptions are often made to establish rapport by providing SPP and completing other speaker's utterances. However, ELF interrupters tend to do it far more often than ENL interrupters. This corresponds to the quantitative finding that in ELF conversation, IP-aligned interruptions occur far more often than in ENL conversation. The function of self-clarification in ELF conversation seems to be particularly linked with ELF speaker's awareness of her interlocutors' competence in English. It witnesses ELF speakers' efforts to ensure mutual understanding.

## Chapter Five

### Comparisons of ELF and ENL interruptions in seminar discussions

#### 5.1 Data for analysis

The data for seminar discussions come from speech events from two corpora: VOICE and MICASE. They are MICASE SEM475JU084, MICASE SEM485SU111 and VOICE EDsed31. The files are available in Appendix Three, 'texts for analysis'. The results of the analysis are available in Appendix Two under the name of 'ELF seminar discussions' and 'ENL seminar discussions.'

#### 5.6 The comparison of the percentage of ELF and ENL interruptions in seminar discussions

The table below presents the percentage of interruptions in ELF and ENL seminar discussions

Table 5.1 the number and frequency of interruptions in ELF and ENL seminar discussions

| Speech event type       | No. of speaking turns | No. of interruptions | Percentage of interrupting turns |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| ELF Seminar discussions | 1674                  | 76                   | 4.5%                             |
| ENL Seminar discussions | 1127                  | 128                  | 11.4%                            |

From the table we can see that the number of interruptions in ELF seminar discussions is much smaller than that of ENL seminar discussions; the percentage of interruptions in ELF seminar discussions is less than half that of ENL seminar discussions. Therefore, in my data, interruptions occur far more frequently in ENL

seminars than in ELF seminars. This is possibly because the speakers in the ENL seminar are more active than the speakers in the ELF seminar. In addition, there might also be cultural reasons behind the disparity: in American culture interruptions in seminars maybe more acceptable than in other (for example, European) cultures. Therefore, American students feel less inhibited about interrupting each other or even their professor in class.

### 5.7 The comparison between interruption types in ELF and ENL seminar discussions

The table below compares the number and percentage of interruption types in ELF and ENL seminar discussions.

Table 5.2 The comparison between interruption types in ELF and ENL seminar discussions

| Taxonomies of interruptions          |  | ENL interruptions |            | ELF interruptions |            |
|--------------------------------------|--|-------------------|------------|-------------------|------------|
|                                      |  | No.               | Percentage | No.               | Percentage |
| IP completeness                      | IP complete                            | 102               | 79.7%      | 58                | 76.3%      |
|                                      | IP incomplete                          | 26                | 20.3%      | 18                | 23.7%      |
| Overlapping speech between IP and BP | IP overlap with BP                     | 67                | 52.3%      | 49                | 64.5%      |
|                                      | IP does not overlap with BP            | 61                | 47.7%      | 27                | 35.5%      |
| Alignment between IP and BP          | IP align with BP                       | 41                | 32.0%      | 17                | 22.4%      |
|                                      | IP misalign with BP                    | 13                | 10.2%      | 13                | 17.1%      |
|                                      | IP micro-misalign-macro-aligns with BP | 73                | 57.0%      | 46                | 60.5%      |
|                                      | IP alignment unclear                   | 1                 | 0.8%       | 0                 | 0.0%       |
| Alignment between IP and PP          | PP aligns with IP                      | 91                | 71.1%      | 64                | 84.2%      |
|                                      | PP misaligns with IP                   | 37                | 28.9%      | 12                | 15.8%      |
|                                      | PP alignment unclear                   | 0                 | 0          | 0                 | 0%         |

Figure 5.1 illustrates the figures more vividly

### 5.7.1 The comparison between interruptions in ELF and ENL seminar discussions in terms of completion of interrupting parts

From Figure 5.1 we can see, the number of ENL interruptions with complete interrupting parts is slightly higher than that of ELF interruptions; according to Table 5.2 the percentage of ENL interruptions with complete interrupting parts is higher than ELF interruptions by around 4%. This means that ENL interruptions have a slightly higher success rate than ELF interruptions by a relatively small margin.

The previous chapter mentions two possible reasons for an unsuccessful interruption: lack of confidence of the interrupter and high level of involvement which leads to mutual interruptions. Besides that the ENL speakers in my data are more interactive than ELF speakers, they are also better at holding on to the floor despite other speakers' interruption attempts.

Take the following excerpt for example.

<MICASE SEM485SU111: 41-42; *S1 is the professor of politics in higher education, and S3 is a student and coordinator of PowerPoint facilities in her class. At the beginning of this excerpt, S1 is giving instructions to S3 about whether and how to use Power Point facilities in class.* >

| Speaker Label | Transcription   | Comment      |
|---------------|---|--------------|
| S1            | okay so you need to make a decision, and if and once you <1>make a decision <1> | BP           |
| S3            | <1>yeah, yeah<1> how about yeah how about and then we                           | IP           |
| S1            | <2>take care of that, okay. <2>   |              |
| S3            | <2> can just, <2> coordinate a time with them.                                  | IP<br>cont'd |



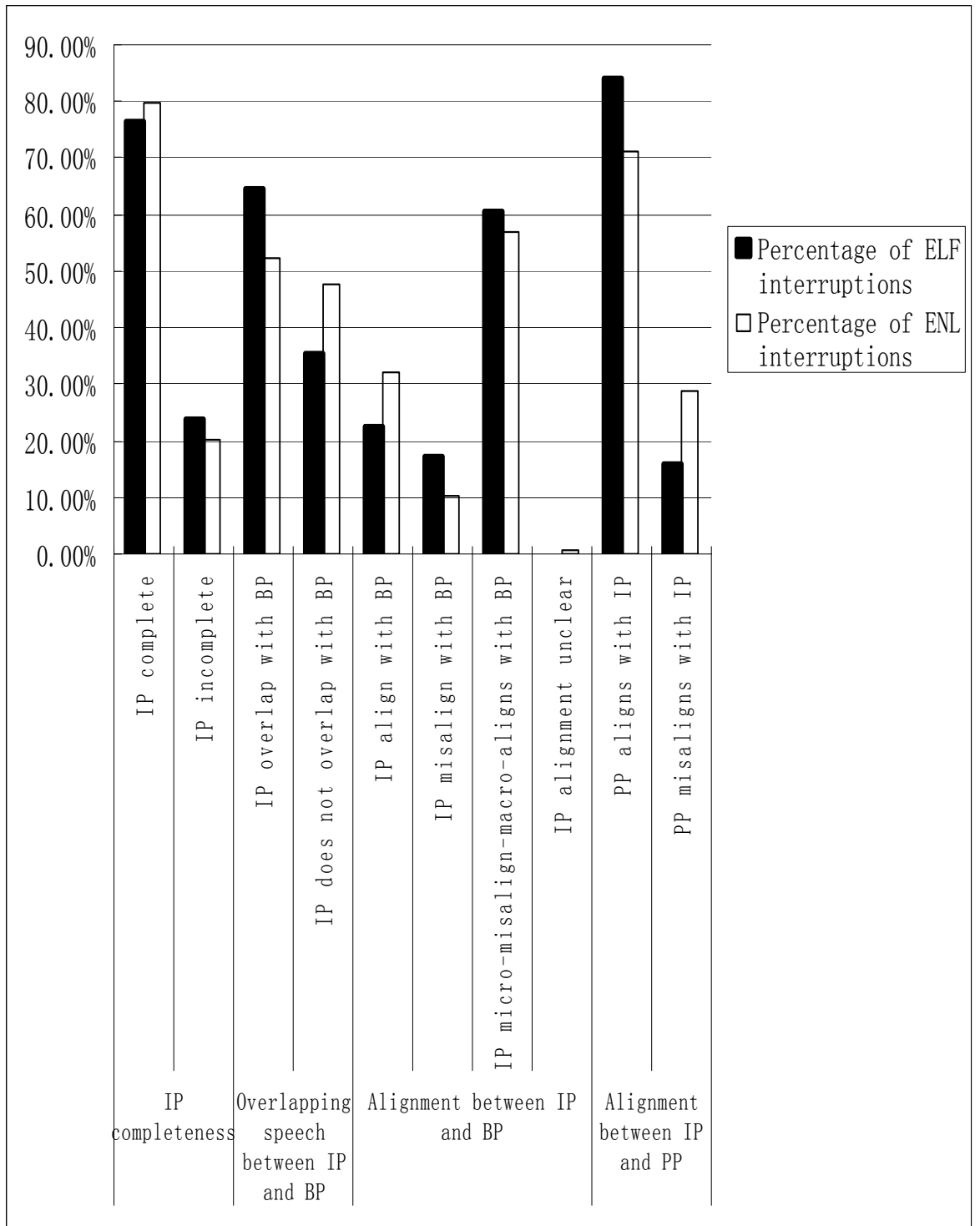


Figure 5.1 The comparison between interruption types in ELF and ENL interruption

As S1 gives instructions, S3 interrupts S1 to respond. Before S3 could finish, S1 makes a concluding remark ('take care of that, okay') which suggests that the current topic is over. However, S3 persists with her original speaking turn on the current topic and finishes it despite S1's attempt to cut her short. S3 does it by completing the rest of her speech very fast in a softer voice than before. In this way, S3 avoids offending S1 her professor by indicating that she is willing to give over her floor as soon as she finishes her turn.

### **5.7.2 The comparison between interruptions in ELF and ENL seminar discussions in terms of overlap**

According to Figure 5.1, in both ELF and ENL seminar discussions, interruptions occur more often with overlap than without overlap, though in ENL seminar discussions the number of interruptions with overlap is only slightly larger than that of interruptions without overlap. The number of ELF interruptions with overlap between base parts and interrupting parts is larger than ENL interruptions by 8%. Overlap occurs less frequently in ENL seminars than in ELF seminars.

As in seminar discussions speakers have to compete for the floor to express their views, there is a large number of overlapping interruptions which indicate speakers' struggle for floors. Overall speaking, ELF seminar discussions speakers are more actively involved in the discussion than ENL speakers, therefore, more overlapping interruptions occur in ELF seminar discussions than in ENL discussions.

### **5.3.3 The comparison between interruptions in ELF and ENL seminar discussions in terms of alignment between a base part and an interrupting part.**

According to Figure 5.1, the most common type of alignment between IP and BP in both ELF and ENL seminars is the IP-micro-misalign-macro-align type. From Table 5.2 we can see that 60.3% of ELF interruptions and 57% of ENL interruptions fall under this category. The next most common type of alignment is the IP-align type; 22.4% of the ELF interruptions contain interrupting parts that align with base parts; 32% of the ENL interruptions contain interrupting parts that align with base parts.

The data suggests that on the whole, both ELF and ENL interruptions in seminar discussions are very cooperative. However, ENL interruptions are more cooperative than ELF interruptions because more ENL interrupting parts completely align with their base parts.

This could be because ENL speakers in the seminar discussions are more ready to anticipate and complete the teacher's utterances. This feature is discussed in detail in section 5.4.2 under 'functions of interruptions in ENL seminar discussions.'

#### **5.3.4 The comparison between interruptions in ELF and ENL seminar discussions in terms of alignment between an interrupting part and a post-interruption part.**

For both ELF and ENL interruptions, more than two thirds of post-interruption parts align with their interrupting parts. According to Figure 5.1, the number of PP-aligned ELF interruptions is higher than ENL interruptions. This means ELF speakers are more ready to respond to an interruption than ENL speakers.

The figure suggests that in both ELF and ENL seminar discussions, the interrupted speakers are ready to cooperate with their interrupters in pursuing their topics. ELF speakers are more cooperative than ENL speakers.

### **5.8 Functions of interruptions in ELF and ENL seminar discussions**

#### **5.8.1 Functions of interruptions in ELF seminar discussions**

a) Teachers could interrupt to **prompt a student to talk** if he shows signs of difficulty. In the following example, S1, the teacher prompts student S3 to talk about his first language when S3 cannot remember what to say next.

<VOICE EDsed31:58-61; *S1 is a teacher and the seminar leader, and S3 is the student in S1's class. S3 was introducing himself when he ran into difficulty and was unable to continue.*>

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription   | Comment |
|----------|---------------|---|---------|
| 56       | S3            | <@>that's a big question </@>                           |         |
| 57       | S1            | @ @ @ hh (1)  |         |
| 58       | S3            | Erm (2)   | BP      |
| 59       | S1            | <b>okay &lt;4&gt; so swedish is &lt;/4&gt; your (.)</b> | IP      |
| 60       | S3            | <4>yeah what else </4>                                  | PP      |
| 61       | S1            | is your mother tongue (.)                               |         |

In this example, S1 takes over the turn when S3 shows signs of difficulty in continuing by the voiced hesitation 'erm' and the unvoiced hesitation of the two second's silence. S1's interruption serves to prompt S3 of what he is supposed to say next.

b) In a seminar, teachers may interrupt to **bring a student back to the topic** when she wanders off the topic.

<VOICE EDsed31:80-82; S1 is a teacher and the seminar leader, and S6 is the student in S1's class.>

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription   | Comment |
|----------|---------------|---|---------|
| 80       | S6            | i'm very was very interested to get to know the (.) different (.) er cultural differences in asia and (.) erm (.) i had this er kind of seminar in (.) germany about (.) <pvc> intercultural </pvc> differences and (.) yeah i'm very interested to (1) get to know some (.) something about the differences in here because (.) yeah normally people say ah this is the (.) yah austria germany (.) switzerland so (.) this is (.) yah (.) (erm) (.) not very not many differences but (1) yah if you go there you realize @ they're <2> very </2> | BP      |
| 81       | S1            | <b>&lt;2&gt;so &lt;/2&gt; you live in germany now</b>   | IP      |
| 82       | S6            | yeah normal- <L1ger> ja {yes} </L1ger>  | PP      |

In this example, the S1 cuts off S6's speech to clarify whether S6, an Indonesian German student, lives in Germany or not. S1 is also interrupting to prevent S6 from wandering off the topic and taking too much time for self-introduction. Such interruptions are used far more often by teachers to students than vice versa.

c) Teachers may make an interruption to **help a student continue** a turn when the student exhibits signs of difficulty in expressing herself due to her lack of competence in English.

<VOICE EDsed31:109-116; *S1 is a teacher and the seminar leader, and S11 is the student in S1's class. S11 was introducing herself when she failed to come up with an expression.*>

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription   | Comment      |
|----------|---------------|---|--------------|
| 109      | S11           | my name is [S11] (.) i come from italy (.) so my mother tongue is italian (.) e:r i'm twenty-two years old (.) and i am here in austria because e:r i: (1) i'm: with the: (.) erasmus e:r project (.) so: i have to sta:y here for one year (.) and e:r i: study in linz (.) because e:r i want (.) this er type of (.) <LNger> stipendium {scholarship} </LNger> @ in linz (.) and NOW we are here for (.) four days (1) and (1) that's al- i: er hh in italy i study: language (.) <soft><5><LNger> und {and} </LNger></5></soft> (1) | BP           |
| 110      | S1            | <5>mhm </5>   |              |
| 111      | S11           | and @ =   | BP<br>cont'd |
| 112      | SX-m          | = @   |              |
| 113      | S11           | it's @ (.)  | BP<br>cont'd |
| 114      | S1            | <b>and so this is your first (.) &lt;7&gt; longer stay in aust&lt;/7&gt;ria? =</b>  | IP           |
| 115      | S11           | <7>hh erm yah </7>  | PP           |
| 116      | S11           | = my first erm long and short. @ <8> my first time in Austria. @ </8>   |              |

In this excerpt, S11's difficulty in expressing herself is clear through her repetition of 'and' and her (probably embarrassed) laughter. S1 rescues the interaction by taking over S11's turn when she runs into difficulty. In this way, she avoids silence in the seminar and saves S11 from being embarrassed about not being able to talk on. This example is slightly different from <VOICE EDsed31:80-82 > in section a) because S11's difficulty lies in her proficiency in English while the interrupted speaker in <VOICE EDsed31:80-82 > has difficulty in remembering what to say next. Therefore, S1's interruption to S11 is made to save her face while S1's interruption to S3 is to remind him what to say next.

d) Interruptions may be made by a teacher to **correct a misused word** or word form by a student.

<VOICE EDsed31:341-343; *S1 is a teacher and the seminar leader, and S11 is the student in S1's class.*>

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription  | Comment |
|----------|---------------|--|---------|
| 341      | S11           | = young(er) people not always er especially in e:r in the (.) courses we (.) hh we<br><LNger> besuchen {attend} </LNger> | BP      |
| 342      | S1            | <L1ger>(wir haben besucht) {we attended} </L1ger>  | IP      |
| 343      | S11           | <LNger><@>ja {yes} </@></LNger>  | PP      |

S1, the native speaker teacher corrects the misused word form 'besuchen' (attend) in student S11's utterance to 'wir haben besucht'(we attended). S1's status as a teacher and native speaker makes her interruption readily accepted by the non-native student.

e) Interruptions are sometimes made to **suggest a word or phrase to the interrupted**. Interruptions have the function of lexical suggestion. In the following excerpt, several people suggest words for S19.

<VOICE EDsed31:703-706; *S1 is a teacher and the seminar leader, and S16 and S19 are students in S1's class.*>

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription   | Comment |
|----------|---------------|---|---------|
| 703      | S19           | And er in italy is not e:r quite erm (.)                        | BP      |
| 704      | S16           | <soft>possible </soft>  | IP      |
| 705      | S1            | <5>accepted or </5>   |         |
| 706      | S19           | <5>e:rm possi</5>ble <8> @@@ <@> acceptable (also) </@></8> (.) | PP      |

Here, S19 has difficulty coming up with the right word as shown by the hesitation marker 'erm'. Both S16 and S1 suggest a word for S19, and S16's lexical suggestion is actually done as an interruption, for he cuts off the original turn of S19. However, as S16's interruption attempts to complete and enhance S19's turn, S16's interruption

serves the function of lexical suggestion and therefore aligns with S19's turn.

#### 5.4.2 Functions of ENL interruptions in seminar discussions

a) The second speaker may make an interruption to **strengthen affinity** by providing the SPP of an adjacency pair before the FPP is complete. Such an interruption demonstrates the cooperativeness of the speakers, saves the time and energy of the first speaker, implies the shared knowledge between the speakers; however, the interrupter could also be perceived as too impatient to hear the first speaker out depending on the intonation of the interrupter. In the following example which appeared early in this chapter, S3, the student interrupts S1, the teacher, to provide the SPP of a direction-response adjacency pair.

<MICASE SEM485SU111: 41-42; *S1 is the professor of politics in higher education, S3 is a student and coordinator of PowerPoint facilities in her class.*>

| Speaker Label | Transcription   | Comment   |
|---------------|---|-----------|
| S1            | okay so you need to make a decision, and if and once you <1>make a decision <1> | BP        |
| S3            | <1>yeah, yeah<1> how about yeah how about and then we                           | IP        |
| S1            | <2>take care of that, okay. <2>   |           |
| S3            | <2> can just, <2> coordinate a time with them.                                  | IP cont'd |

In this example, S1 the professor is telling S3 the student to decide whether she needs PowerPoint facilities or not, and to make necessary preparations if she does need them. S3 cut short S1's utterance to respond to S1's direction, suggesting the procedures she intends to take as a preparation for using the PowerPoint facilities. S3's interruption is a cooperative SPP of the direction-response adjacency pair.

As is common in classroom discussions, a student's talk or presentation usually invites a comment by the teacher. According to Sinclair and Coulthard's (1992) analysis of the structure of classroom discourse, a teaching exchange includes moves such as the opening move, the answering move, the follow-up move. An interruption as one of these moves is perceived as cooperative since it aims to enhance the whole

exchange. The following excerpt contains an interruption of this kind.

<MICASE SEM485SU111: 238-239; *S1 is the professor of politics in higher education, and S9, called Vanessa, is a student in her class. In this seminar, S1 the professor asked students to talk briefly about what they wrote in their papers and then discussed the topics with her students. At the beginning of this excerpt, S9, or Vanessa, was talking about her paper before she was cut short by S1 the professor, who commented on her paper.* >

| Speaker Label | Transcription   | Comment |
|---------------|---|---------|
| S9            | ... um there's fewer students, to go around and so there's, almost, a recruitment aspect in who's gonna give you the best deal. (where to go to that) school, so. | BP      |
| S1            | <b>this was, this is an example, i don't want to embarrass Vanessa but of a very short paper that, was really, good.</b>  | IP      |

Here, S1 the professor is making a following-up move after S9 (Vanessa)'s answering move to S1's earlier elicitation in a teaching exchange. S1 the professor's follow-up move cuts short S9's oral presentation of her paper. This is not a severe interruption because it demonstrates the cooperativeness of the teacher.

b) The second speaker may **interrupt to anticipate** what the first speaker is likely to say next.

<MICASE SEM485SU111:195-198; *S1 is the professor of politics in higher education, and S4 and S5 are students in her class; they were having a discussion on medical professor's salaries.* >

| Speaker Label | Transcription  | Comment |
|---------------|--|---------|
| S1            | um, the salaries that are reported in the newspaper                          | BP      |
| S5            | <b>do those include outside, &lt;2&gt; i mean private practice &lt;2&gt;</b> | IP      |
| S4            | <2> are those correct, or are those <2> just estimates?                      |         |
| S1            | they are correct for what they are.  | PP      |

As S1 starts on the topic of medical professors' salaries, S5 immediately questions



the reliability of the figures reported in the news paper. S5 is not only trying to anticipate what the professor might be talking about in the following but also trying to direct the professor to focus on the reliability of the figures. S1's 'yeah' at line 196 could be interpreted as an encouragement to S5's question. Such interruptions reflect the active interaction between teacher and students.

c) Sometimes, the second speaker may **interrupt to make sure that she has understood** the previous speaker. Take the following excerpt for example,

<MICASE SEM485SU111; *S1 is the professor of politics in higher education, S4 is a student in her class; they are holding a discussion on the role of the interim vice president in the university.* >

| Speaker Label | Transcription   | Comment    |
|---------------|---|------------|
| S1            | she's within there. she is the interim, uh, vice president for student affairs.   |            |
| S4            | (Soft) student affairs  |            |
| S1            | who who reports, uh,  |            |
| S4            | <b>To</b>   | IP1        |
| S1            | well, <2> actually <2>  |            |
| S7            | <2> <b>director (xx) &lt;2&gt; yeah,</b>  | IP1 cont'd |
| S1            | <3> you're right. <3>   |            |
| S7            | <3>it's supposed <3> to be director of (xx)   |            |
| S1            | she report- no i take it back you're right, she's separate. she's a vice president that's been a very, uh actually, sorry, that's been a very, uh, controversial issue. |            |
| S7            | <4> right, right<4>   |            |
| S1            | <4>she actually reports <4> to the president. she's not within this at all, there's an <5> extra r- <5>   |            |
| S4            | <5> <b>so she's&lt;5&gt; not included in that, (that number) at all?</b>  | IP2        |

There are two interruptions here. The first one is made by S7 to complete S1's utterance; the second one is made by S4 to request confirmation. In the second interruption, the interrupter S4 repeats the point made by S1, the professor; S4 may interrupt to make sure that she understood the professor's point by paraphrasing the interrupted professor's speech 'she's not within this at all.' Here S4 partially aligns with S1 because she pursues S1's topic but does not support her utterance.

d) Frequently the second speaker interrupts to **challenge a point** made by the previous speaker. The following excerpt contains an interruption of this kind.

<MICASE SEM485SU111; S1 is the professor, S3 is a student in her class; they are in a seminar discussion on politics in higher education and they are talking about rules governing the percentage of out-state students in the University of Michigan.>

| Speaker Label | Transcription  | Comment |
|---------------|--|---------|
| S3            | they can't write a law so it's like I guess we chose to but, <1> do.-<1> |         |
| S1            | <1> ah <1> <b>did we choose to?</b>                                      | IP      |

Before S3 is able to complete his utterance, S1 interrupts to challenge S3's point that 'we chose to (do something.)'. We can notice S3's readiness to abandon her turn at the first sign of overlapping speech between her and S1. This is probably because S1 has a higher status than S3, and the social setting gives S1 the power to interrupt students as a way of helping them to learn.

## 5.9 Summary

In summary, the quantitative study of the interruptions in ELF and ENL seminar discussions has found that 1) interruptions occur far more frequently in ENL than ELF seminar discussions; 2) both ELF and ENL interrupters have a high success rate in terms the completion of interrupting parts, but ENL interrupters are slightly more successful than ELF speakers; 3) more than half of ELF and ENL interruptions contain overlaps, and more ELF interruptions contain overlaps than ENL interruptions; 4) Both ELF and ENL interruptions are very cooperative and both contain more micro-misalign-and macro-aligned interruptions than other types; 5) in both ELF and ENL seminar discussions, most interrupters align with the interrupted speakers.

The qualitative study has found the following functions for interruptions in ELF and ENL seminar discussions. Interruptions fulfill several major functions in ELF

communication, including interruptions to prevent students from wandering off the topic, interruptions as a prompt, interruptions as a rescue; interruptions as lexical suggestion; interruptions as correction and interruptions to establish rapport. In ENL seminar discussions interruptions fulfill the following functions including establishing rapport, anticipating speech, controlling class agenda, confirming a point, challenging a point and making sure that one has understood a point by rephrasing it.

In both ENL and ELF seminar discussions there are three types of interruptions depending on the roles of interlocutors: a teacher interrupting students, students interrupting students and students interrupting teachers. It is interesting to note that there is a much larger number of student-teacher interruptions in ENL seminars than in ELF seminars. This observation is confirmed by the functions of ELF and ENL interruptions. Five of the six functions of ELF interruptions are concerned with teachers interrupting students, while three of four functions of ENL interruptions are concerned with students interrupting teachers. This could be related to the previous suggestion that it is considered more acceptable for students to interrupting teachers in American culture than in other cultures.

The following table illustrates the differences in functions between interruptions of ELF and ENL seminar discussions

Table 5.3 The comparison between functions of interruptions in ENL and ELF seminar discussions

|                                   | <b>ENL interruptions</b>                      | <b>ELF interruptions</b>  |
|-----------------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| <b>Functions of interruptions</b> | Anticipate the content of upcoming utterances |                           |
|                                   | Provide related information                   |                           |
|                                   | <b>Challenge opinions</b>                     | <b>Challenge opinions</b> |
|                                   | <b>Establish rapport</b>                      | <b>Establish rapport</b>  |
|                                   |   | Lexical suggestion        |
|                                   |   | Lexical correction        |
|                                   |   | Prompt                    |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  |  | Prevent students from straying off topic |
|  |  | Clarification                            |

From the table we can see that ENL and ELF interruptions share two functions: challenging opinions and establishing rapport. The functions peculiar to ENL interruptions are anticipating the content of upcoming utterances and providing related information. The functions unique to ELF interruptions are lexical suggestion, lexical correction, prompt, clarification and preventing students from wandering off the topic. Based on the interruption functions, ENL interruptions are more closely related to ideas or opinions than linguistic forms. Interruptions are often made to challenge, confirm, or help support ideas by providing additional information. On the contrary, the functions of ELF interruptions tend to focus on the language form, such functions include interruptions for clarification, correction and lexical suggestion. They reflect ELF speakers' concern with their own or other speaker's use of the English language. In a word, in seminar discussions, ENL tend to make more interruptions focusing on ideas and ELF speakers make more interruptions focusing on language forms.

Most of the functions of the interruptions are related to interruptions in which interrupting parts completely or partially align with base parts. The functions of establishing rapport and lexical suggestions are related to completely aligned interruptions; the other functions such as prompting, anticipating the interrupted speaker's speech, controlling class agenda are related to partially aligned interruptions.

In summary, the interruptions in ENL and ELF seminar discussions are similar in that they are both very cooperative. This is confirmed by analyzing the important functions of these interruptions. A major difference is that ENL seminar discussions contain many more interruptions than ELF ones. Furthermore, in ENL seminar discussions students interrupt teachers far more often but in ELF seminar discussions, teachers interrupt students far more often. The study suggests that there might be cultural reasons behind the difference: students in the American culture have greater

freedom in interrupting than in other cultures.

## Chapter Six

### Data analysis and discussions of interruptions in ELF and ENL question-and-answer sessions

#### 6.4 Data for analysis

The data come from the following speech events from VOICE and MICASE. They are MICASECOL140MX114, MICASECOL425MX075, MICASECOL605MX132, MICASECOL999MX040, VOICE PRqas407, VOICE PRqas409, VOICE PRqas495 and VOICE RPqas224. The texts are available in Appendix Three and the results of analysis are available in Appendix Two under the name of 'ELF & ENL question-and-answer sessions.'

#### 6.5 The number and frequency of interruptions in ENL and ELF question-and-answer sessions

This section deals with the features of interruptions in question-and-answer session. However, as the number of interruptions found in my data is very small. It is difficult to generalize on the basis of the data.

Table 6.1 presents the number of interrupting turns per thousand speaking turns in ELF and ENL question-and-answer sessions.

Table 6.1 the number and frequency of interrupting turns in ELF and ENL question-and-answer sessions

| Speech event Type              | No. of speaking turns | No. of interruptions | Percentage of interrupting turns |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| ELF Question & answer sessions | 427                   | 12                   | 2.8%                             |
| ENL Question & answer sessions | 342                   | 11                   | 3.2%                             |

From this table we can see that the percentage of interruptions is 2.8% in ELF question-and-answer sessions and 3.2% in ENL question-and-answer sessions. The data shows that interruptions occur slightly more often in ENL question-and-answer sessions than in ELF question-and-answer sessions. However, as the total number of interruptions in ELF and ENL question-and-answer sessions is very small, the difference is insignificant.

## 6.6 The comparison of interruption types between ENL and ELF question-and-answer sessions

Table 6.2 presents and compares the number and percentage of ELF and ENL interruption types in ENL and ELF question-and-answer sessions.

Table 6.2 The comparison of interruption types between ENL and ELF question-and-answer sessions

| Taxonomies of interruptions in question-and-answer sessions |                                       | ELF interruptions |            | ENL interruptions |            |
|---|---------------------------------------|-------------------|------------|-------------------|------------|
|   |                                       | No.               | Percentage | No.               | Percentage |
| IP completeness   | IP complete                           | 11                | 91.7%      | 10                | 90.9%      |
|   | IP incomplete                         | 1                 | 8.3%       | 1                 | 9.1%       |
| Overlapping speech between IP and BP                        | IP overlap with BP                    | 6                 | 50%        | 8                 | 72.7%      |
|   | IP does not overlap with BP           | 6                 | 50%        | 3                 | 27.3%      |
| Alignment between IP and BP                                 | IP align with BP                      | 4                 | 33.3%      | 7                 | 63.6%      |
|   | IP misalign with BP                   | 2                 | 16.7%      | 1                 | 9.1%       |
|   | IP micro-misalign-macro-align with BP | 6                 | 50%        | 3                 | 27.3%      |
| Alignment between IP and PP                                 | PP aligns with IP                     | 11                | 91.7%      | 10                | 90.1%      |
|   | PP misaligns with IP                  | 0                 | 0          | 1                 | 0          |
|   | PP alignment unclear                  | 1                 | 8.3%       | 0                 | 0          |

The chart on the next page illustrates the table above

### **6.3.1 The comparison of interruption types in terms of the completion of interrupting parts**

A majority of interruptions in both ELF and ENL question-and-answer sessions have complete interrupting parts. In other words, most of the interruptions are successful in terms of the completion of interrupting parts, and the success rate of ELF interruptions are just as high as that of ENL interruptions. The figure means that in question-and-answer sessions, ENL and ELF speakers are equally successful.

One possible explanation for the figure is related to the nature of the genre. As related to Fairclough's analysis of genre, the type of genre is determined by the activity the discourse enacts. In question-and-answer sessions there is a strict rule for the order of turn-taking, and little free discussion is allowed in such a rigidly controlled speech event. As there is less need to fight for speaking turns, most of the interrupters are able to finish their interrupting parts.

### **6.3.2 The comparison of interruption types in terms of overlapping speech between interrupting parts and base parts.**

According to Figure 6.1, exactly half of the ELF interruptions contain overlapping speech between interrupting parts and base parts; about three fourths of the ENL interruptions contain overlapping speech between interrupting parts and base parts. The percentage of ENL interruptions with overlapping speech is higher than the percentage of ELF interruptions by 22.7%.

As overlapping speech between base parts and interrupting parts indicates struggles for the next floor between interrupters and interrupted speakers, ENL interrupters have to fight for speaking turns more often than ELF speakers.

### **6.3.3 The comparison of interruption types in terms of alignment between interrupting parts and base parts.**

According to Figure 6.1, the most frequent types of alignment between the



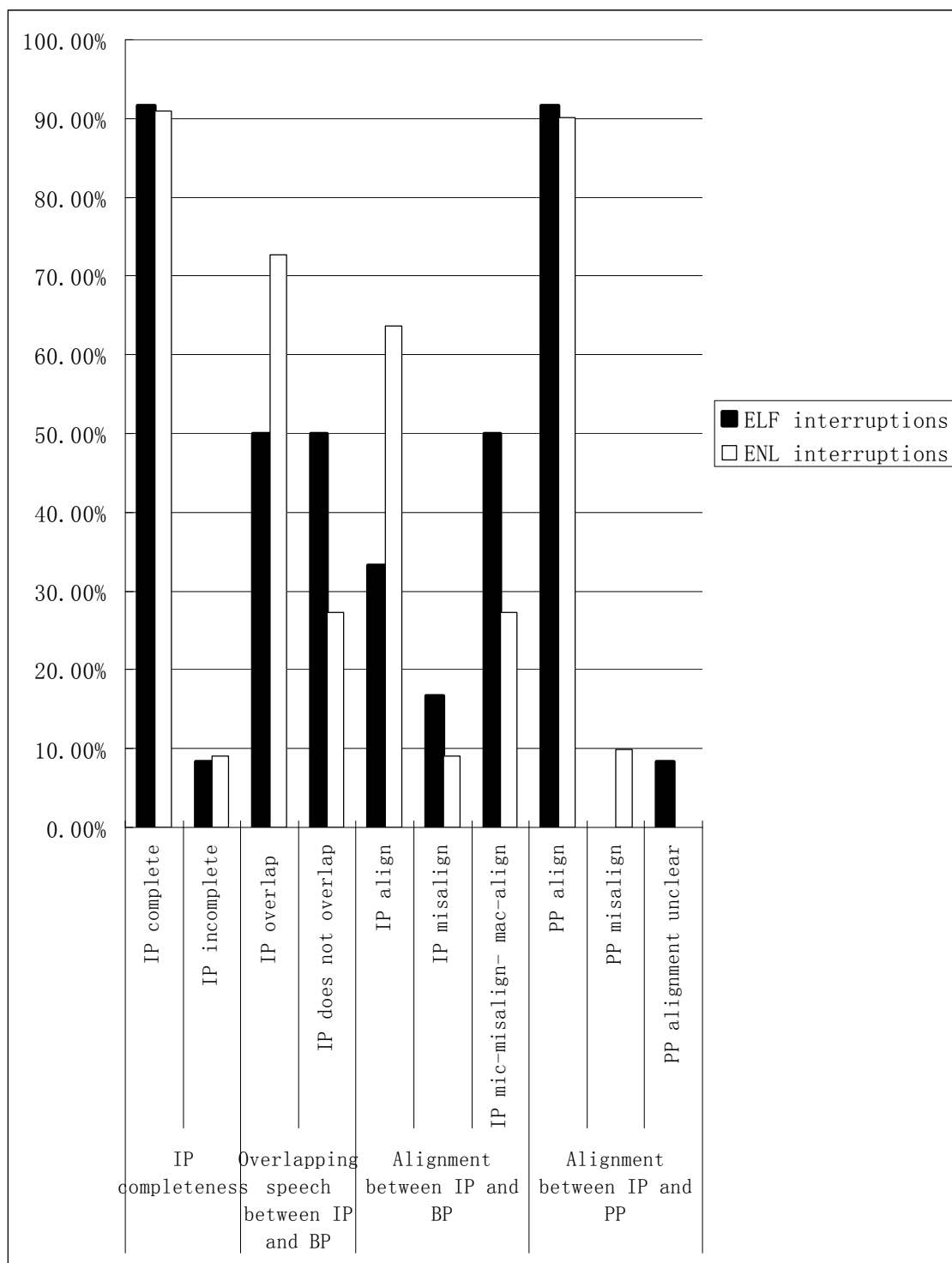


Figure 6.1 The comparison of interruption types between ENL and ELF question-and-answer sessions

interrupting part and the base part in ENL and ELF question-and-answer sessions are the IP-align-with-BP type and the IP micro-misalign and macro-align type; a majority of the interruptions belong to either of these types. The most frequent type of alignment in ELF question-and-answer sessions is the IP-micro-misalign-macro-aligns-with-BP type; the most frequent type in ENL question-and-answer sessions is the IP-align-with-BP type. The number of ENL interruptions in which interrupting parts micro-misalign-macro-aligns with base parts is smaller than that of ELF interruptions. There is a relatively small percentage of misaligned interruptions.

The data suggest that while both ELF and ENL interruptions are very cooperative, ENL speakers seem to be more cooperative than ELF speakers in making interruptions. Interestingly, similar patterns of IP alignment were found in seminar discussions: in both genres ELF speakers are more cooperative than ENL speakers.

#### **6.3.4 The comparison of interruption types in terms of alignment between interrupting parts and post-interruption parts.**

As to alignment between interrupting parts and post-interruption parts, almost all the post-interruption parts in ELF and ENL interruptions align with their interrupting parts. In only one ENL interruption the post-interruption part misaligns with its interrupting part; the alignment of one ELF interruption is unclear.

As alignment between post-interruption parts and interrupting parts indicate the interrupted speaker's response to interruptions, the figure suggests that both ENL and ELF speakers are quite ready to accept the interruptions and pursue the topics of their interrupters.

### **6.4 The relation between speaker status and interruption types in question and answer sessions**

In this section we will investigate how speaker status may affect the types of interruptions they make. According to what Fairclough (1989), there are three types

of subject positions in question-and-answer sessions: the presenter, the chairperson and the audience member. Consequently there are six possible relations between the interrupter and the interrupted speaker. They are: presenter interrupting audience member; audience member interrupting presenter; presenter interrupting chairperson; chairperson interrupting presenter; audience member interrupting chairperson; chairperson interrupting audience member. The following table presents the relation between speaker status and interruption types.

Table 6.3 the relation between speaker status and interruption types in ENL question-and-answer sessions

| Taxonomies of interruptions              | Presenter/<br>audience | Audience/<br>presenter | Presenter/<br>chair | Chair/<br>presenter | Audience/<br>Chair | Chair/<br>Audience |
|--|------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| IP complete                              | 9                      |                        |                     | 1                   |                    |                    |
| IP incomplete                            |                        | 1                      |                     |                     |                    |                    |
| IP align with BP                         | 3                      |                        |                     |                     |                    |                    |
| IP misalign with BP                      | 0                      |                        |                     | 1                   |                    |                    |
| IP micro-misalign-macro-align<br>with BP | 6                      | 1                      |                     |                     |                    |                    |
| PP aligns with IP                        | 8                      | 1                      |                     | 1                   |                    |                    |
| PP misaligns with IP                     | 1                      |                        |                     |                     |                    |                    |
| Total                                    | 9                      | 1                      |                     | 1                   |                    |                    |

From the table we can see that of the eleven ENL interruptions, nine are made by the presenter to an audience member. One is made by an audience member to the presenter and one is made by the chair to an audience member. Therefore, interruptions are overwhelmingly made by speakers of higher status to speakers of lower status than vice versa.

According to the table, presenters and chairpersons are always successful in interrupting audience members. However, the only audience member who interrupts the presenter is unable to complete his interrupting part. Therefore, speakers of higher status are much more successful in making interruptions than vice versa.

Now let us look at the relation between speaker status and interruption types in ELF

sessions.

Table 6.4 the relation between speaker status and interruption types in ELF question-and-answer sessions

| Taxonomies of interruptions           | presenter /audience | audience/ presenter | presenter / chair | chair/ presenter | audience/ chair | chair/ audience | presenter/ presenter |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| IP complete                           | 1                   | 4                   | 1                 | 2                | 1               | 1               | 1                    |
| IP incomplete                         |                     | 1                   |                   |                  |                 |                 |                      |
| IP align with BP                      |                     | 2                   |                   |                  | 1               | 1               |                      |
| IP misalign with BP                   | 0                   | 1                   |                   | 1                |                 |                 |                      |
| IP micro-misalign-macro-align with BP |                     | 3                   | 1                 | 1                |                 |                 | 1                    |
| PP aligns with IP                     |                     | 5                   | 1                 | 2                | 1               | 1               |                      |
| PP misaligns with IP                  | 0                   |                     |                   |                  |                 |                 |                      |
| PP alignment unclear                  |                     |                     |                   |                  |                 |                 | 1                    |
| Total                                 | 1                   | 5                   | 1                 | 2                | 1               | 1               | 1                    |

From the table we can see that unlike ENL interruptions, the role relations between interrupters and interrupted speakers in ELF interruptions are extremely varied. Of the twelve interruptions, five are made by audience members to presenters. Only one interruption is made by the presenter to an audience member. Only one is made by the chair to audience members.

In ENL question-and-answer sessions, a majority of interruptions are made by presenters to audience members. It is exactly the opposite in ELF

question-and-answer sessions. Only one out of twelve interruptions is made by presenters to audience members. In ENL question-and-answer sessions we can observe the clear pattern of speakers of higher status interrupting those of lower status, but in ELF question-and-answer sessions such a pattern is not at all clear. In addition, ELF interrupters are just as successful as ENL interruptions, even though most ELF interrupters are of lower status than their interrupted speakers. There could be many possible reasons behind it. Though the presenters in ELF question-and-answer sessions have higher status in theory, the audience member may be of higher academic standing than the presenters. In addition, other factors such as age, personality may be behind the pattern.

On the whole, the chairpersons in ELF question-and-answer sessions play a much more important role than those in ENL question-and-answer sessions. As chairpersons' interruptions are mostly misaligned interruptions, there are consequently a higher percentage of misaligned interruptions in ELF question-and-answer sessions.

## **6.5 The comparison between features and functions of interruptions in ENL and ELF question-and-answer sessions**

### **6.5.1 Functions of interruptions in ENL question-and-answer sessions**

a) One of the functions of interruptions in ENL question-and-answer sessions is to **suggest an improvement of expression**. Take the following excerpt for example.

*<MICASE COL140MX114: S5 is an audience member and senior faculty member in the University of Michigan; S2 is the presenter of the colloquium. S5 is making a comment on S2's presentation before S2 interrupts; S5 continues after the interruption. >*

| <b>Speaker Label</b> | <b>Transcription</b>  | <b>Comment</b> |
|----------------------|---|----------------|
| S5                   | Yeah uh, it seems to me that there's two separate issues here. one is the issue of, appealing to a current generation, uh of a Chinese audience | BP             |

|    |  |           |
|----|--|-----------|
| S2 | <1> mhm <1>  |           |
| S5 | <1>and the <1> other is the tourist,   | BP cont'd |
| S2 | Mhm  |           |
| S5 | Performances. it's seems to me that, uh, eh Peking opera may be doomed in terms of the indigenous audience it may have, its time may be over. and of course this happens to, art forms all the time, | BP cont'd |
| S2 | Mhm  |           |
| S5 | uh they they become out of sync.   | BP cont'd |
| S2 | Mhm  |           |
| S5 | uh <2>th-<2>   | BP cont'd |
| S2 | <2> <b>they&lt;2&gt; get museumified &lt;3&gt;or whatever &lt;3&gt;</b>  | IP        |
| S5 | <3> yeah <3>@@@  | PP        |

In this example, S2 cuts off S5's unfinished utterance to insert a comment which is related to S5's earlier expression 'they become out of sync'. Therefore, S2 has interrupted S5. In fact, 'museumified' is a more vivid and precise expression than the phrase 'out of sync.' S2 the presenter is interrupting to suggest a better expression for the interrupted relying on his expertise. The suggestion is then readily accepted by S5.

Interruptions of this kind are both cooperative and polite. This is because the interrupter observes the politeness maxim of generosity by providing a better expression at the expense of her effort, and the maxim of sympathy by thinking in the interrupted speaker's place.

b) Interruptions can also be made by a presenter to **provide additional information on a certain topic.**

< MICASE COL140MX114 S7 is an audience member and S2 is the presenter. S7 is relating her own experience of Peking opera before S2 interrupts her.>

| <b>Speaker Label</b> | <b>Transcription</b>  | <b>Comment</b> |
|----------------------|---|----------------|
| S7                   | is- we should remember i mean i'm not, well educated in this but thirty years ago when i was here Professor Jone, who drew, large crowds for his annual <1>demonstrations and<1>, @@@ | BP             |
| S2                   | <1> <b>uh, and i &lt;1&gt; and i hear he sings in classes</b>   | IP             |

**sometimes as well.**

S7 <soft>(well,) no he he did i (mean) PP  
S2 professor Zhang Tushu.

It is difficult to tell from the context whether Professor Jone and Professor Zhang Tushu refer to the same person. However, they possibly do since S2 used ‘as well’, meaning Professor Jone/ Zhang Tushu used to sing at his annual demonstration as well as in classrooms. While S7 is relating her experience of Peking Opera, S2 cuts her off before she could finish her comment. S2’s interruption is an attempt to provide additional information on Professor Jone/ Zhang Tushu’s performance of Peking opera.

Such interruptions could also be seen as polite. As mentioned in Theoretical Foundation, even though the interrupter threatens the negative face of the interrupted speaker, he also enhances the positive face by his active involvement in the conversation; he follows the politeness principle of generosity in the sense that the interrupter provides information to the interrupted which is food for thought.

c) Interruptions may be made by a presenter **to challenge a point** of the audience member. Take the following excerpt for example.

<MICASE COL425MX075; *this is the question-and-answer session of a colloquium on ecology. S4 is an audience member and S3 is one of the two presenters at the colloquium. S4 is asking a question on the presentation before S3 interrupts his explanation at line 36.* >

| Speaker Label | Transcription  | Comment |
|---------------|--|---------|
| S4            | do you guys have enough information yet to know what the what the relative comparison is between the decrease in diversity from a from a forest, uh to a shade plantation and the relative increase going from a shade plantation in terms of coffee yield, to the high-yielding full sun varieties. because for example if if you can think of the trade-off if you just look at yield, even if you just kept yield the same, in the diversity it it might work out that it's better to put more of the shaded plantations into full-sun varieties and take that land and put it into, just let it return to natural forest. so if you get a, if you get a greater yield, per unit area, a a little bit greater out of that, then you get a species | BP      |

increase, and

S3 **and what you do with the all the people that depend on coffee** IP1  
**@@@ <1> for their survival?<1>**

S4 <1>well i i just <1> , well i'm just saying

S3 <2> that's where that's the other component <2>

S4 <2>you're s- producing <2> the same amount, i mean that <3>i i  
see your <3>

S3 **<3>yeah <3> but in terms of the amount of people that are** IP2  
**involved in producing and benefitting from this activity, it's**  
**much more reduced if you have an intensive coffee**  
**plantation. in terms of the amount of coffee that you**  
**produce, you're probably right. uh but then, you have to do**  
**something with the people that used to produce coffee and**  
**now there's a forest here that they cannot use.**

In this example, S3 the presenter abruptly cuts off S4's comment at the third line to challenge S4's suggestion that more of the shaded plantations could be put into full-sun varieties. S4 tries to respond to S3's challenge but he is interrupted again by S3 at the last line.

This type of interruption could be impolite because it violates the politeness maxims of modesty and agreement. The interrupter does not place a high value on the interrupted speaker's opinion; instead she values his own over the interrupted speaker's opinion. She also interrupts to express disagreement instead of agreement. However, it could still be relatively cooperative as the interrupted speaker observes the maxim of relation: she actively involves in the discussion and contributes to the discussion. In addition, S4's utterance is vulnerable to interruption because it is too long for a normal question. Through interruption, the presenter also tries to give other speakers an opportunity to ask questions and make comments.

d) Sometimes, the chairperson of a colloquium may interrupt in order to **control the agenda of the session**. In the following example, the chairperson interrupts an audience member to prevent him from asking more questions, which leads to an argument between them.

*<MICASE COL605MX132:27-32; S5 is an audience member; S2 is the chairperson; S1 is the speaker of the colloquium. S5 tried to comment on S1's presentation before he was interrupted by S2 the chairperson at Line 28. Dissatisfied with S2's*



*intervention, S5 interrupted S1 the presenter to argue with S2 about whether he could ask questions or not.>*

| Speaker Label | Transcription   | Comment |
|---------------|---|---------|
| S5            | as a Catholic, yeah i mean <1>you came here as a Catholic <1>   |         |
| S2            | <b>&lt;1&gt;excuse me i think there'll &lt;1&gt; be other_ i think there are other people that have questions that, &lt;2&gt;why don't we go to other people. &lt;2&gt;</b>                                   | IP1     |
| S1            | <2> right and and i, and i think i think that <2> that, raising children has got to be understood the decision to have and raise children has to be understood as a permanent commitment <3>of a covenant <3> |         |
| S5            | <b>&lt;3&gt;did you say &lt;3&gt;there's a long time for questions or or, short time for i got the impression there was something like thirty minutes for questions.</b>                                      | IP2     |
| S1            | <4>yeah but <4>   |         |
| S2            | <4> yes <4>but there're other people that had their hand up so let's go to somebody else and then we can circle back to you when other people have had a chance to speak.                                     |         |

In this example, two interruptions take place. The first one is made at the second line of the transcript by S2 the chairperson to S5 the audience member (the interrupting part is marked IP1). It is meant to stop S5 from taking too much time in asking questions and making comments, and to give the time to other audience members to interact with the presenter. This interruption done by the chairperson has the function of controlling the agenda of the question-and-answer sessions. The second interruption is made by S5 the audience member to S1 the presenter at the last line but two (the interrupting part is marked IP2). In fact he interrupts S1 in order to object to S2's 'interference'; because if he lets S1 speak on, he would lose the chance to make more comments. This interruption done by the audience member has the function of challenging opinions as discussed in the previous session.

Interruptions for controlling agenda misalign with the interrupted speaker. They are uncooperative and impolite because they neither follow the maxim of relation nor the politeness maxims of tact and obligation. Instead, interrupters change the topic entirely, place a low value on the interrupted speaker's wants and force the interrupted speaker to oblige the interrupter.

However, it is the genre itself that gives interrupters the power to make such interruptions. According to Fairclough's figure on discourse type and situational context, there are four dimensions of a situation: activity, subjects, relations and connections. In question-and-answer sessions, there are three types of subject positions: audience member who raise questions, presenters who answer questions, chairpersons who coordinate the sessions. The chairperson is given the authority and responsibility to allot or forfeit floors. The other speakers are supposed to accept the chairperson's decisions. Even though the speaker in the last example tries to dispute the chairperson's authority, he has to give up in the end. Interruptions of this kind are typical in question-and-answer sessions.

### 6.5.2 Functions and features of interruptions in ELF question-and-answer sessions

a) A speaker may interrupt to **ask for repetition** when he fails to understand the previous speaker. In the following example, an audience member interrupts the presenter to request the latter to repeat her previous utterance.

<VOICEqas224:19-23; S4 is a Russian presenter and S6 is a Spanish audience member. At the beginning of this excerpt, S4 was responding to a question S6 raised, before she (S4) was interrupted twice by S6. >

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription  | Comment |
|----------|---------------|--|---------|
| 19       | S4            | yeah. so (.) if i understand your e:r again your your question PROperly then (.) do i believe in e:r like (1) in e:rm e- er that science i- is international? (1) a- and er and the from this e:r i- i- if you if you are asking about THAT (.) because then i'm not sure if we are understanding each other <5> if yes </5> |         |
| 20       | S6            | <5>i- i know </5> my questions are always a bit difficult to understand <6> i (cannot cannot yeah i cannot) my que- </6> yeah (.)  | IP1     |
| 21       | S4            | <6>yeah because because if that's the point </6>   |         |
| 22       | S6            | say it again?  | IP2     |
| 23       | S4            | Yeah because if THAT's the point i do believe that...  |         |

As S4 the presenter responds to S6's question, she is first interrupted by S6's side

remark that her(S6's) questions are always difficult to understand. As S4 goes on with her explanation, she is again interrupted by S6 at line 22 because S6 wants S4 to repeat what she has been saying. The interrupter's way of interrupting is quite blunt here as she made no effort to use an indirect speech act.

Interestingly, the ENL interruptions in my data do not have this function. One possible reason is that as all of the speakers are native speakers in academic circles, they are competent in English in terms of both listening and speaking.

b) An ELF interruption can also be made to **establish rapport** by other-completing the previous speaker's speech.

*<VOICEqas407: 11-13; S3 is a Slovenian presenter, and S2 is an audience member whose first language is unknown. S3 was responding to a question raised by S2 before he is interrupted by S2 at line 12. >*

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription  | Comment |
|----------|---------------|--|---------|
| 11       | S3            | = er (.) but generally i think we are (witnessing) er i would say (.) restructuring of savings (.) also within this countries so savings are moving from (.) classical banking products to (.) er more interesting and maybe (.) of course RISKIER products. so (.) equities and so on. (.) and (.) some other product there was a colleague from (.) er insurance sector they're mentioned for example. (.) so er this er investments are getting its importance (.) so i think this er factors are quite important. i mean we could go er in elaboration more in details but er (.) maybe colleagues (from mine might add) something. (.) so i think this i-this convergence (.) and plus e:r LOCAL factors to this markets. (.) |         |
| 12       | S2            | <b>Mhm (.) certainly go (a)round (.) in future</b>   | IP      |
| 13       | S3            | To a <8> certain extent </8> er (.)  |         |

In this example, S2 the audience member interrupts at line 12 to complete what he thinks S3 might say. The interruption as other-completion serves the function of establishing rapport, because it demonstrates S2's cooperativeness with and understanding of S3 the presenter.

In fact, establishing rapport is a common function of interruption found in many genres and in both ELF and ENL speech events. It is a major function of interruptions in general and it witnesses the positive side of interruptions.

c) Interruptions may be made by an audience member to the presenter to **request for clarification**.

<VOICEPRqas495: 56-61; S3 is the presenter who is a native speaker of Chinese; S1 is the Chairperson whose native language is Spanish; S4 is an audience member whose native language is also Spanish. S3 the presenter was answering a question from S4 before he is interrupted by S1 asking for clarification.>

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription   | Comment      |
|----------|---------------|---|--------------|
| 56       | S3            | = from their living area you know even the(y're) excluded in a in a s- in in a small place you know er (1) this (1)   |              |
| 57       | S1            | <b>just &lt;1&gt; to &lt;/1&gt; clarify one (.)</b>   | IP           |
| 58       | S4            | <1>hm </1>  |              |
| 59       | S1            | <2>aspect </2> (.)  | IP<br>cont'd |
| 60       | S4            | <2>Mhm </2>   |              |
| 61       | S1            | er [S4] (.) thinks or: gets the conclusion from your words that (.) this concept of minority youth applies mainly or exclusively (.) to the young migrants. (.) but what i have understood from your presentation = |              |

In this example, S4 the Spanish audience member does not speak English very well and she needs a translator to understand S1's response to her question. In fact, S1's interruption at Line 57 is partly made on S4's behalf. S1 (L57) cuts off S3's utterance to ask for clarification on one aspect so as to address a gap between S4's understanding of S3's presentation and his own understanding. S1 makes the interruption partly to prevent misunderstanding between S3 and S4. This is especially important since S4 is not able to clarify misunderstandings herself; by the time S4 could speak through her translator the misunderstanding may have already been too deep to resolve. This interruption demonstrates the readiness of an ELF speaker to help another.

d) In ELF question-and-answer sessions, interruptions are also made by the chairperson to **control the agenda** of the session, just like in ENL questions-and-answer sessions. Take the following excerpt for example,

<VOICEPRqas495: 127-131; S6 is a German audience member; S3 is the Chinese presenter; S1 is the Spanish chairperson. S6 raised a question to S3. Before S3 could finish answering him, S1 the chairperson interrupts S3 to ask S6 whether he has second question.>

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription  | Comment |
|----------|---------------|--|---------|
| 127      | S6            | and what what about the percentage about <1> this </1>   |         |
| 128      | S3            | <1>no </1> the actual percentage i i i can't give you now but the perce- the (.) er i think is er (.) is quite high (.) that's why the government (is) also very concerned about this because you know to study in in china usu- er er to study in universities usually we we (is we've got) a very er (significant) (.) e:r (.) e:r e:r (.) things of the: family you know and the family invest a lot money for the child to go to the university because now is (.) many students have to pay themselves you know to go to university (.) in the past all of them (are) paid by the government but now they have to pay so they <un> xx </un> they have to (.) borrow money from (.) some of them huh? maybe (1) maybe of them huh? @ <@> have to </@> @@ have to borrow money from oth- their relatives friends and so on you know to go to university but afterwards you know they cannot find a job you know (.) so that's the problem er (.) so e:r it become (a) <un> xxxx </un> that's why i mentioned here you know (the) government (.) e:r (.) tr- try every effort (.) and to: er (.) to: to: e:r (.) to: er settle this issue (.) and another thing the government is to (.) to LIMIT now (1) they already yeah (.) to limit (.) the admission (1) of the: e:r quo- the QUOTA (.) of university students (.) they they said they must please stop and so now (.) if you have any new program on to (.) to open the university? (.) then (.) erm e:r it's not that easy now in the past it's quite easy for example er a university of in in america want to have a joint program but in a university <un> xx </un> in china (.) it's easier (.) and now it's more and more difficult (.) er (.) er (1) | BP      |

129 S1 **you have the second question <2> and </2> then IP**  
 [S7] (.)  
 130 S6 <2>yeah i've g- </2>  
 131 S6 i've got a second question

In this example, S1 the chairperson interrupts S3 the presenter before he finishes answering a question from S6. The purpose is to ask S6 to go ahead with the second question and then give the next opportunity for asking questions to S7. S1 as the chairperson makes the interruption to assign floors to participants in the session; he cuts off S3's utterance before the latter finished answering S6's question; this is probably because he takes S3's hesitation marker 'er...er...' and the one second's silence as signs that S3 no longer has any more points to make. Furthermore, as S3's answer is extremely long, S1 may also have interrupted to save time and give other people a chance to interact with the presenter.

In summary, the quantitative study of interruptions in ELF and ENL question-and-answer sessions has shown that 1) most of the ELF and ENL interruptions are successful in terms of the completion of interrupting parts; 2) ELF interruptions contain fewer overlaps between IP and BP than ENL interruptions; 3) both ELF and ENL interrupters are cooperative; 4) both ELF and ENL interrupted speakers are cooperative, but ELF interrupted speakers are more cooperative with the interrupter than ENL interrupted speakers.

The following table illustrates the overlap in the functions of interruptions between ENL and ELF question-and-answer sessions.

Table 6.5 The comparison between the functions of interruptions between ENL and ELF question-and-answer sessions

|                                   | <b>ENL interruptions</b>           | <b>ELF interruptions</b> |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Functions of interruptions</b> | Suggest improvement of expressions |                          |
|                                   | Provide additional information     |                          |
|                                   | Challenge a point                  |                          |

|  |                           |                           |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------|
|  | <b>Establish rapport</b>  | <b>Establish rapport</b>  |
|  | <b>Control the agenda</b> | <b>Control the agenda</b> |
|  |                           | Request for repetition    |
|  |                           | Request for clarification |

The qualitative study has found the following functions of interruptions. The functions for ENL interruptions include suggesting an improvement in expression, providing additional information on a topic, challenging a point, establishing rapport and finally controlling the agenda. The functions for ELF interruptions include establishing rapport, asking for repetition, requesting clarification and controlling the agenda of the session.

From the table we can see that ENL and ELF interruptions share the functions of establishing rapport and controlling the agenda. In both ENL and ELF question-and-answer sessions, speakers establish rapport with each other by interrupting to complete the other speaker's speech or to provide answers to questions. Chairpersons or sometimes presenters often interrupt to make sure that no one holds the floor for too long a time. The functions found only in ENL interruptions are suggesting improvement of expressions and providing additional information. The functions that appear only in ELF interruptions are requesting for repetition and requesting for clarification. The findings suggest that functions of ELF interruptions are more closely related to language forms while functions of ENL interruptions are more often associated with information and opinions. This could be related to the issue of language proficiency: ELF speakers are often less proficient in English than well-educated native speakers, and therefore they are more likely to encounter language problems in communication. However, as we can see from the discussions above, ELF speakers actively deal with these problems through interruptions.

The functions of interruptions agree with the considerably high degree of alignment in both ENL and ELF interruptions, as all the functions except controlling the agenda serve to pursue the current topic of discussion. They also support Kirkpatrick's (2007) finding of a generally high level of cooperativeness in ELF communication.

## Chapter Seven

### Comparisons between interruptions in conversation, seminar discussion and question-and-answer sessions

#### 7.1 Genres and the frequency of interruptions

The following table presents the percentage of interrupting turns according to the three genres.

Table 7.1 the comparison between the frequency of interruptions in conversation, seminar discussions and question-and-answer sessions

| Speech event type            | Percentage of interruptions for ELF speakers | Percentage of interruptions for ENL speakers |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| Conversation                 | 6.1%   | 2.6%   |
| Seminar discussions          | 4.5%   | 11.4%  |
| Question-and-answer sessions | 2.8%   | 3.2%   |

According to table 7.1, among the three genres in ELF, interruptions occur least often in question-and-answer sessions; they occur most often in conversation. In seminar discussions, the frequency of interruptions is only slightly lower than that of conversation. Of the three genres in ENL speech events, the highest frequency of interruptions is found in seminar discussions. The lowest frequency is found in conversation. Interruptions occur only slightly more often in question-and-answer sessions than in conversation.

Tests have been taken to measure the relation between the speaker type of a speech event and the type of genre this speech event falls under. It is found that the value of the chi-square for ELF/ ENL conversation is 14.763; the value for ELF/ ENL seminar discussions is 46.361; the chi-square value for ELF/ ENL question-and-answer sessions is 0.108. The data suggests that whether a speech event takes place in ELF or ENL has a great impact on conversation and seminar discussions, but for



question-and-answer sessions, it hardly has any impact at all. In other words, interruptions in question-and-answer sessions hardly vary according to the speech settings.

Despite differences in patterns, interruptions in both ELF and ENL settings occur more frequently in seminar discussions than in question-and-answer sessions. This could be explained by Fairclough's model for analyzing genres. The purpose of seminar discussions is for a group of people, usually a class, to exchange ideas on issues related to a certain topic. The two subject positions in a seminar discussion are the seminar leader and the students. The role of a seminar leader is not so much as to teach anything but to encourage discussions on various aspects of a topic. Consequently, seminar discussions are usually quite interactive. The purpose of question-and-answer sessions is for audience in a presentation to exchange ideas with presenters. The subject positions involved in a question-and-answer session are the presenter, the audience members and the chairperson. The role of a chairperson is exactly opposite to that of a seminar leader. Her role requires her to take control of the order of speaking. She alone has the power of allotting speaking turns; she could even terminate an on-going speaking turn if necessary. As a result, presenters and audience members have little freedom to alternate speaking turns as they like. As interruptions are directly related to the level of interactivity, there are consequently far fewer interruptions in question-and-answer session than in seminar discussions.

As mentioned in Theoretical Foundation, casual conversation "generally occurs outside specific institutional settings like religious services, law causes, classroom and the like (Levinson, 1983:284, quoted in Swales, 1990, 58)." In other words, casual conversation is not determined by the societal and institutional order according to Fairclough's figure on discourse type and social context. For this reason, casual conversation is considered to be a 'pre-genre' by Swales (1990:58) because of its freedom in turn-taking organization and freedom in the choice of topic. However, this does not necessarily mean that casual conversation should contain more interruptions than other genres. First of all, the level of interactivity in casual conversation varies according to situations; secondly, the frequency of interruptions in casual conversation depends on a number of other factors such as interpersonal relations, personality of speakers, etc. There is a much greater variability in

frequencies of interruptions in conversation.

## 7.2 Genres and interruption types

Though all the interruption types are found in all of the three genres, certain interruption types occur more often in particular genres. In particular, misaligned interruptions occur more often in seminar discussions and casual conversation than in question-and-answer sessions.

This is because in seminar discussions and in casual conversation, participants have greater freedom of turn alternation and interrupters are under far less pressure to align with the previous speaker. Consequently, they contain far more examples of misaligned interruptions than question and answer sessions.

In a conversation, the post-interruption parts frequently misalign with the interrupting parts. For example, the interrupted speaker frequently chooses to ignore the interruption by continuing with the interrupted utterance.

<SBCSAE02:1142-1149; *Miles, Pete, Jamie and Harol are four friends talking and eating ice-cream with each other in Jamie and Harol's sitting room. Jamie and Harol are married. Jamie is suggesting to Harol that he should come with her to the lambada dance.*>

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription                                      | Comment |
|----------|---------------|--|---------|
| 1142     | JAMIE         | h Maybe Harold you should come with me .           |         |
| 1143     | HAROL         | (..) Why .   |         |
| 1144     | HAROL         | (..) So I can find                                 | BP      |
| 1145     | JAMIE         | (.) learn some <1> lam (.) <1> lambada .           | IP      |
| 1146     | PETE          | <1>@@<1> .   |         |
| 1147     | HAROL         | (.) find some girls with empty chairs next to em ? | PP      |
| 1148     | JAMIE         | <2>@h<2> .   |         |
| 1149     | MILES         | <2>@h<2> .   |         |

Right before this excerpt, Miles told a story about a boy who sat on Miles' empty chair to flirt with the girl Miles brought with him to a Lambada dance. When Jamie

(L1142) suggests to her husband Harol that he should come with her to the next lambada dance, Harol asks why and suggests that maybe he could sit on somebody's empty chair and flirt with other people's girlfriends. Jamie interrupts Harol at Line 1145 to provide an early answer to Harol's question at Line 1143. Harol, however, does not respond to Jamie's answer to his question, but chooses to continue with his interrupted utterance. Harol's misalignment to Jamie's interrupting part is possibly because Harol regards his interrupted utterance as adding humor value to the conversation and his utterance deserves to be finished. Pete, Jamie and Miles's laughter at Line 1146, 1148 and 1149 proves the humor of Harol's utterance.

In the following example which occurs in the same conversation as the previous excerpt, the interrupter misaligns with the interrupted speaker, and the interrupted speaker in turn misaligns with the interrupter.

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription  | Comment  |
|----------|---------------|--|----------|
| 1303     | HAROL         | You were the:re before ?                                     |          |
| 1304     | JAMIE         | Yeah: .  |          |
| 1305     | JAMIE         | (.) I went out there before .                                |          |
| 1306     | HAROL         | (.) Oh .   |          |
| 1307     | PETE          | Without even telling Harol ?                                 |          |
| 1308     | HAROL         | (.) Without telling me ?                                     |          |
| 1309     | JAMIE         | You knew .   |          |
| 1310     | JAMIE         | (.)<1> I <1> was going out dancing ?                         |          |
| 1311     | HAROL         | <1> Oh <1> .   |          |
| 1312     | HAROL         | (.) Oh .   |          |
| 1313     | HAROL         | (.) <2> I did <2> ?  |          |
| 1314     | JAMIE         | <2> Remember a few months <2> ago I used to go out dancing ? |          |
| 1315     | JAMIE         | (.) every now and then ?                                     |          |
| 1316     | HAROL         | Hmm  |          |
| 1317     |               | I don't remember .   |          |
| 1318     | MILES         | (..) Well the thing that gets me                             |          |
| 1319     |               | (..) I meet <3> this: <3>                                    | BP1      |
| 1320     | JAMIE         | <3> to Caesar's <3>  |          |
| 1321     |               | <b>and stuff ?</b>   | IP 1 BP2 |
| 1322     | MILES         | (..) (SNIFF CLICK CLICK CLICK) (.) <b>I meet this</b>        | PP1 IP2  |
| 1323     |               | psychotherapist .  |          |
| 1324     | MILES         | (..) who tells me she's addicted to this dance .             |          |

At the beginning of this excerpt from Line 1303 to Line 1317, Jamie and Harol are talking about whether Harol knows that Jamie went lambada dancing a few months ago. Jamie insists that she did tell Harol about her dancing, but Harol says he could not remember that Jamie ever told him. As this is a rather sensitive issue between couples which could even lead to a row, Miles quickly cuts in at Line 1318 and 1319 to change the topic, and starts to talk about a psychotherapist he knows. Jamie, however, is not willing to leave off the topic. She cuts off Miles's unfinished utterance at Line 1320 to continue with her previous interrupted utterance. In short, Miles's interrupting part first misaligns with Jamie's base part, and then Jamie's continuation of her previous utterance after Miles's interruption misaligns with Miles's interrupting part. In this way, the two speakers misalign with each other. In fact, mutual misalignment of this type is common in conversation.

### 7.3 Genres and functions of interruptions

While certain functions of interruptions are found in all of the three genres, others are peculiar to one or two genres. The following table illustrates the overlaps between functions of interruptions across genres. The shared functions are highlighted in bold letters.

Table 7.2 The comparison between functions of interruptions across three genres

|                            | <b>ENL interruptions</b>                      | <b>ELF interruptions</b>                 |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Seminar discussions</b> | Anticipate the content of upcoming utterances | Lexical suggestion                       |
|                            | Provide related information                   | Lexical correction                       |
|                            | <b>Challenge opinions</b>                     | <b>Challenge opinions</b>                |
|                            | <b>Establish rapport</b>                      | <b>Establish rapport</b>                 |
|                            |   | Prompt                                   |
|                            |   | Prevent students from straying off topic |
|                            |   | Clarification                            |
| <b>Conversation</b>        | <b>Establish rapport</b>                      | <b>Establish rapport</b>                 |

|                                     |                                    |                           |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
|                                     | Change topics                      | Clarification             |
| <b>Question and answer sessions</b> | Provide additional information     | Request for clarification |
|                                     | Challenge opinions                 | Request for repetition    |
|                                     | <b>Establish rapport</b>           | <b>Establish rapport</b>  |
|                                     | <b>Control the agenda</b>          | <b>Control the agenda</b> |
|                                     | Suggest improvement of expressions |                           |

From the table we can see that establishing rapport is a universal function found in all the speech events analyzed in this study. Far from being disruptive to communication, interruptions are regularly employed to enhance the affinity and efficiency in communication.

The common function in seminar discussions is challenging opinions. As seminar discussions mainly concern the exchange of opinions, we would expect speakers to disagree and advance their views by making interruptions.

Controlling the agenda is a function peculiar to question-and-answer sessions. As discussed in the previous chapter, the major duty of chairperson is to make sure of the order of turn-taking. She has the power of allotting or forfeiting floors, and one way she exercises the power is by making interruptions.

## 7.4 Summary

This chapter has summarized the relation between interruptions and genres. It is found that interruptions occur more frequently in seminar discussions than in question-and-answer sessions. Misaligned interruptions occur most often in conversation and in seminar discussions; they rarely take place in question-and-answer sessions. As to the functions of interruptions, establishing rapport is a universal function in all the genres. Controlling the agenda is a function unique to question-and-answer sessions and the function of challenging opinions occurs most often in seminar discussions. These distinctions are mainly due to the purpose, activity and speaker roles of a particular genre. The findings of this chapter

confirm the hypothesis that the types and frequencies of interruptions vary according to genres.

## Chapter Eight

### Comparisons between Interruptions by Speakers of English as a Lingua Franca and English as a Native Language

#### 8.1 The comparison between frequencies of ELF and ENL interruptions

The following table presents the frequency of interruptions in ELF and ENL speech events.

Table 8.1 The comparison between ELF and ENL interruptions

| Speech event Type | No. of speaking turns | No. of interruptions | Percentage of interrupting turns |
|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| ELF speech events | 3054                  | 161                  | 5.3%                             |
| ENL speech events | 2479                  | 165                  | 6.7%                             |

From the table we can see that the percentage of interruptions in ELF speech events is slightly smaller than that in ENL speech events. It means that ELF interruptions occur less frequently than ENL interruptions. However, as the difference is relatively small, ELF and ENL speakers are similar in terms of the frequency of interruptions they make.

#### 8.2 The comparison between ELF and ENL interruption types

This section compares the interruption types between ELF and ENL speech events.

As we can see from Table 8.2 on the next page, both ENL and ELF speech events contain all the interruption types.

The percentage of ENL interruptions with IP complete is slightly higher than that of ELF interruptions. A chi-square test has been run to test the relation between IP

completeness and the speaker type (whether ELF or ENL) of a speech event. It is found that the value of chi-square is 0.457 and the value of probability is 0.49902937. This means that ELF and ENL settings have relatively little impact on the completeness of interrupting parts and ENL interrupters are only marginally more successful in completing interrupting parts than ELF interrupters by a small margin.

According to the third row of Table 8.2, ELF and ENL interruptions are almost exactly the same in terms of overlapping speech between interrupting parts and base parts. It is uncertain whether they might differ in terms of the length of overlapping speech. As the present study has not investigated this factor, it is hoped that future studies will fill up the gap.

Table 8.2 The comparison between interruption types in ENL and ELF speech events

| Taxonomies of interruptions          |  | ENL interruptions |            | ELF Interruptions |            |
|--------------------------------------|--|-------------------|------------|-------------------|------------|
|                                      |  | No.               | Percentage | No.               | Percentage |
| IP completeness                      | IP complete                            | 135               | 81.8%      | 115               | 78.8%      |
|                                      | IP incomplete                          | 30                | 18.2%      | 31                | 21.2%      |
| Overlapping speech between IP and BP | IP overlap with BP                     | 86                | 52.1%      | 73                | 50.0%      |
|                                      | IP does not overlap with BP            | 79                | 47.9%      | 73                | 50.0%      |
| Alignment between IP and BP          | IP align with BP                       | 56                | 33.9%      | 56                | 38.4%      |
|                                      | IP misalign with BP                    | 16                | 9.7%       | 15                | 13.0%      |
|                                      | IP micro-misalign-macro-aligns with BP | 92                | 55.8%      | 56                | 38.4%      |
|                                      | IP alignment unclear                   | 1                 | 0.6%       | 19                | 0.0%       |
| Alignment between IP and PP          | PP aligns with IP                      | 118               | 71.5%      | 124               | 84.9%      |
|                                      | PP misaligns with IP                   | 45                | 27.3%      | 17                | 11.6%      |
|                                      | PP alignment unclear                   | 2                 | 1.2%       | 5                 | 3.4%       |



According to the third row of Table 8.2, ENL and ELF interruptions are similar in term of overlapping speech between base parts and interrupting parts. The chi-square value is 0.139 and the probability value is 0.70927718. This means that the speaker type of a speech event has very little impact on the overlapping speech between BP and IP.

According to the fourth row of Table 8.2, a slightly higher percentage of ELF interruptions completely align with the base parts of interrupted speakers, and a higher percentage of ENL interruptions partially align with the base parts. The chi-square value for the category of alignment between IP and BP is 24.004 and the probability value is 0.00002493. The data means that the alignment relation between IP and BP is heavily dependant upon the speaker type of a speech event. Therefore, though ELF speakers make interruptions to support their interrupted speakers only slightly more often than ENL speakers, the different is very significant.

Finally, in terms of alignment relation between post-interruption parts and interrupting parts, ELF speakers make a higher percentage of PP-aligned interruptions than ENL speakers. A chi-square test has found that the chi-square value is 12.967 and the probability value is 0.00152845. The data suggests that the speaker type of a speech event has a great impact on the alignment relation between IP and PP. This means that ELF speakers are considerably more ready than ENL speakers to accept interruptions and follow the topics of their interrupters.

The study has found that the alignment relations are highly dependant on whether a speech event takes place in ELF or ENL settings. The finding confirms the hypothesis that ENL speakers are more successful than ENL speakers in making interruptions and ELF speakers are more ready to align with interruptions than ENL speakers.

### **8.3 The comparison between functions of interruptions**

The following table illustrates the differences in the functions of ELF and ENL interruptions.

Table 8.3 The comparison between the functions of ENL and ELF interruptions

|                                   | <b>ENL interruptions</b>                      | <b>ELF interruptions</b>                     |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Functions of interruptions</b> | <b>Control the agenda</b>                     | <b>Control the agenda</b>                    |
|                                   | <b>Challenge opinions</b>                     | <b>Challenge opinions</b>                    |
|                                   | <b>Establish rapport</b>                      | <b>Establish rapport</b>                     |
|                                   | Anticipate the content of upcoming utterances | Prompt                                       |
|                                   | Provide relevant information                  | Clarification                                |
|                                   | Suggest improvement of expressions            | Lexical suggestion                           |
|                                   | Change topics                                 | Lexical correction                           |
|                                   | Provide additional information                | Request for clarification                    |
|                                   |   | Request for repetition                       |
|                                   |   | Prevent students from straying off the topic |

The shared functions between ELF and ENL interruptions are controlling agenda, challenging opinions and establishing rapport. My study has found that, on the whole, ELF speakers more often make interruptions to establish rapport than to challenge opinions; ENL speakers more often make interruption to challenge opinions than to establish rapport. Another evidence for the finding is the higher frequency of complete alignment found in ELF interruptions and higher frequency of partial alignment, or micro-misalignment and macro-alignment in ENL interruptions.

On the whole, the functions of ENL interruptions are more closely related to giving opinions and information and the functions of ENL interruptions are more closely related to dealing with language forms. For example, in ENL speech events, anticipating the information of upcoming utterances, providing relevant information, suggesting a better expression are all related to the giving of information. Therefore, ENL interruption functions are mostly information oriented. In ELF speech events, interruption for lexical suggestion, correction and clarification are made to help a less

proficient English user to express successfully. The ELF interruptions are therefore more language oriented. It should be noted here that the ENL interruption function of 'suggesting a better expression' and ELF function of 'lexical suggestion' are different. The former function is used to provide a more accurate expression or a technical term to the interrupted speaker who is less accurate or professional. The interruption targets the information language carries rather than the form of language itself, for the interrupted speaker is still a competent English language user despite his lack of knowledge or expertise. The latter function is concerned with providing a word or expression to the interrupted speaker who is otherwise unable to express herself without help. The interruption concerns the language itself. Therefore, the former is information oriented while the latter is language oriented.

Some of the functions of interruption overlap with the ELF communicative strategies identified by Kirkpatrick (2007). Interruptions could be made as lexical suggestion, lexical anticipation, correction, requests for clarifications, which are communicative strategies Kirkpatrick has identified. As a strategy to ensure mutual understanding, ELF interruptions are regularly employed to solve problems in understanding.

## **Chapter Nine**

### **Discussions and Conclusions**

#### **9.1 Discussions of the study**

##### **9.1.1 Summary of the theoretical approach**

The theoretical foundation of the whole study mainly rests on findings in conversation analysis, especially the organization of turn-taking (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974) and sequence structures (Schegloff, 2007). Unlike previous studies, it does not focus exclusively on the interrupting turn but also on the relations between interrupting turns and other turns in the sequences they occur in. As a novel feature of the study, it has developed a tripartite model of interruptions to capture the relations between speaking turns in an interruption. In order to capture both the contextual and morphosyntactic aspects of interruptions, it has combined the definitions by Murray (1983) and West and Zimmerman (1983). In addition, it has improved the previous categorizations (c.f. Beattie, 1983; Roger, Bull and Smith, 1988; Zhao& Gantz, 2003 and Menz and Al-Roubaie, 2008) by incorporating the criteria of interpersonal relations between interrupters and interrupted speakers.

The theoretical framework allows us to examine an interruption in much greater details than previous studies. However, there are also limitations. First, it is not always possible to determine from the contexts whether an ‘interrupted speaker’ is prevented from completing his utterance or purposefully withholds the floor. It would help to know the intonations of the utterances, but unfortunately VOICE does not provide audio files. Secondly, it is not always possible to determine the alignment relation between interrupting parts and post-interruption parts. This is because interrupted speakers do not always have a chance to respond to their interrupters, and when they do not, it is difficult to decide whether they align or misalign. In such cases, I was obliged to put them under the category of ‘alignment unclear’. As there are neither sound files nor videos available for the speech events in VOICE, it is hoped that future researches will take intonation or eye contact into account in examining interruptions and provide a better classification system for categorizing

alignment between speakers.

The study raised three hypotheses and two questions concerning the relations between interruptions, genres, English as a lingua franca and politeness. In the following sections, I will summarize the findings in these areas and discuss their implications in detail.

### **9.1.2 Interruption and genres**

The finding of this study confirms the hypothesis that the frequency and types of interruptions vary according to genres to a certain extent. This study has found that interruptions vary according to genres in the following ways. Interruptions appear more frequently in seminar discussions than in question-and-answer sessions. The frequency of interruptions in conversation varies. Interruptions appear far less often in ENL conversation than in ELF conversation. This is possibly because ELF speakers in the chosen conversation are more interactive than ENL speakers. As to the interruption types, misaligned interruptions occur far more often in seminar discussions and conversation than in question-and-answer sessions. This is because seminar discussions and conversation involve free exchanges of opinions; in question-and-answer sessions, however, the speaking turns are strictly controlled.

As mentioned in the Literature Review, previous studies have disputed on the relation between interruptions and gender (c.f. West & Zimmerman, 1975, 1983; Anderson & Leaper, 1998, etc.). Based on the findings of the present study, it is suggested that these studies should take genre into consideration when reporting gender differences in interruption, for it is often the speaker roles and purposes of the activity that decide who makes interruptions. For example, this study has found that female chairpersons are just as ready to interrupt as male chairpersons in question-and-answer sessions. Consequently we cannot reach a conclusion about gender and interruption without first taking into account the genre factor. In addition, it is suggested that studies on gender differences in interruptions should examine how men and women employ different patterns of interruptions using the categories proposed in this thesis. After all, it would be more useful to examine patterns of interruptions than reaching an overarching conclusion on who is more likely to

interrupt whom.

One limitation of the genre analysis of interruptions is that the number of interruptions is too small in question-and-answer sessions, which makes it difficult to make any generalizations. It would greatly increase the credibility of the findings if more interruptions had been investigated in this genre.

### **9.1.3 Interruptions in English as a lingua franca**

One of the major objectives of this study is to find out differences between ENL and ELF speakers in terms of interruptions. The study has found that ELF speakers are on the whole more cooperative than ENL speakers, as they are more willing to align with interrupters than ENL speakers. In addition it is found that ELF interruptions are more often made to address language problems while ENL interruptions are more often made to provide information.

The findings have confirmed the hypothesis that ELF interruptions are more cooperative than ENL interruptions, in the sense that they are more ready to support and pursue each other's topics. They are also ready to solve problems in communication and help each other when anybody runs into difficulty in expressing himself, as confirmed by the functions of interruptions in my data. Despite the lack of proficiency in English for some ELF speakers, communication goes on quite smoothly. The study has confirmed Pitzl (2005)'s claim that ELF speakers are able to solve problems of non-understanding in communication. In addition, it has found that making interruptions embody a number of ELF communicative strategies identified by Kirkpatrick (2007). Therefore, making interruptions is related to the general communication strategies of ELF and they reflect the general cooperativeness in ELF communications.

### **9.1.4 Interruption and politeness**

As mentioned in the Theoretical Foundation, interruptions threaten the negative face of interrupted speakers by preventing them from completing their utterances. We would therefore expect interrupters to use politeness strategies to mitigate the

negative effect of interruptions. However, only a small number of speakers in my data use interruption markers (e.g. excuse me, sorry for interrupting) in making interruptions. When they do use these markers, it is often to soften the effect of completely misaligned interruption in relatively formal settings. Take the following excerpt for example.

<VOICE EDsed31: 1303-3106; *S18 is one of the students in the seminar and S1 is the seminar leader. S1 is making a comment on cultural differences between Austria and Italy. S1 the seminar leader cuts off S18's comment to ask him to give the floor to another speaker.* >

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription  | Comment |
|----------|---------------|--|---------|
| 1303     | S18           | in italy we have a a erm <1> a mo- a mo- </1>  | BP      |
| 1304     | S1            | <1>(he) wanted to </1> say i'm sorry but <@> she (wanted) to say something for a very long time now </@> | IP      |
| 1305     | SS            | @ @ @  |         |
| 1306     | S18           | oh excuse me   | PP      |

Here S1 interrupts S18 to ask him to give the floor to another speaker. S1's interruption completely misaligns with S18's topic, and it is a severe face attack to S18. In order to mitigate the effect, she makes the interruption with the interruption marker 'I'm sorry'.

Even though few interrupters use interruption markers, most of the interruptions analyzed in this study are not necessarily impolite. Most of the interruptions are cooperative in the sense that they follow the topic of the interrupted speakers. Through active involvement, the interrupters show their interest in the interrupted speakers' topics which, in a way, pays a compliment to the interrupted speakers. In addition, many interruptions are made to help the interrupted speakers, such as interrupting for lexical suggestions, prompt, etc. They are polite because they observe the politeness maxim of generosity and obligation. Other interruptions are made to enhance affinity between speakers, by showing them that the interrupter understood what is in the interrupted speaker's mind. On the whole, although interruptions are face-threatening acts, they are very often polite.

### 9.1.5 Dealing with potential interruptions

As mentioned in the Theoretical Foundation, interruption is collaboration, for it involves the decisions of two parties, the interrupted speaker and the interrupter. The interrupter has to decide to start an utterance and the interrupted speaker has to decide whether to withhold his turn or not. Though the interrupted speaker can decide to give up his turn, he could also hold on to it and thus avoid being interrupted.

<MICASE COL425MX075; S2 and S3 are co-researchers on a project. They have just made a joint presentation on their research and they are answering questions from the audience.>

| Speaker Label | Transcription  | Comment      |
|---------------|--|--------------|
| S3            | ...that, obviously, right now the way policies are written and all that, is, there's no incentive to do that kind of thing. the incentive right now is to produce as much as you can, in your plot, you know. fence-to-fence production as much as you can. and try to survive with that. You <1> you have any questions <1> |              |
| S2            | <1> <b>i think that i, yeah i w- &lt;1&gt; i would like to add to that. i think you also have to look at what causes that. and that's caused largely by political decisions. i mean the large grain companies an- a as a matter of fact are making out like bandits on the whole thing. ...</b>                              | Potential IP |

At the beginning of this excerpt, S3 is answering a question from an audience member. Before S3 actually completes her utterance, S2 cuts in to add a comment in answer to the question. Faced with a potential interruption, S3 does not give up his floor; instead, she holds on to her turn and finishes it despite simultaneous speech. When S2 realizes that he might be interrupting S3, he does not give up his turn either; instead, he makes a hesitation marker which helps to defer his turn till the simultaneous speech is over. This strategy is common for ENL speakers when they deal with interruptions. However, it is possible only when the interrupted speaker's unfinished utterance is not too long. Otherwise, the potential interrupter will have to either quit his turn or interrupt the on-going turn.



The interrupted speaker could also avoid an interruption by increasing the volume of his voice. This is a strategy often used by ELF speakers in my data. Take the following excerpt for example.

<VOICE EDsed31: 1225-1230; S7 and S11 are both students in a seminar discussion. They are talking about the custom of making friends in different countries.>

| Line no. | Speaker Label | Transcription  | Comment      |
|----------|---------------|--|--------------|
| 1225     | S7            | You no no but i mean no but i mean if you call your friend let's go out (1) will he understand that you want to go out and just talk to HIM <5> hh <loud> or do you </loud></5> have to make let's go out the TWO of us like (do) no |              |
| 1226     | S11           | <5>no i think </5>   | Potential IP |
| 1230     | S11           | i think that when when you have a friend   |              |

Before S7 (L1225) finishes, S11 cuts in to respond to S7's comment. However, S7 resists the interruption by raising his voice, which is marked by <loud> in the transcript. In this way, he is able to complete his turn, and S11 has to wait till S7 finishes.

The two strategies are both effective in fending off interruptions. The first one mainly concerns the interrupter and the second one the interrupted speaker. As in making interruption, avoiding interruption is also collaboration which requires the decisions of two parties.

## 9.2 Conclusion

The present study stresses interruptions as collaboration between speakers instead of a unilateral action on the part of the interrupter. In other words, both interrupters and interrupted speakers have a part to play: interrupters have to make the previous utterances incomplete and interrupted speakers have to be ready to withdraw their turns. It is exactly this collaboration that allows communication to move on more or less smoothly, otherwise, long stretches of parallel speech would make communication difficult.

Another insight of this study is that interruptions could be non-disruptive. In fact, interruptions are frequently cooperative, as a large number of aligned interruptions are made to pursue the previous speaker's topic/ purpose. What is more, completely aligned interruptions could even enhance the rapport between speakers. The idea of interruptions as cooperation is very different from the common perception of interruption, that interruptions are disruptive and lead to communication breakdown. This is because the everyday perception of interruption tends to focus on misaligned interruptions where interrupters/ interrupted speakers refuse to follow the topic/ purpose of their previous speakers. Despite the disparity, the linguistic definition of interruptions used in this thesis is still valid, for it is based on the structural feature of turn-transition, which is also the most essential feature of interruption according to the dictionary definition and naïve encoders (Coon & Schwanenflugel, 1996).

Why do people make interruptions? What is the place of interruptions in human communication? According to Pinchevski (2005), interruptions are essential to human communication, for they highlight the 'response-ability', or 'responsibility' of one language user to another speaker. Even though Pinchevski's reflections concern interruptions in general, they also apply to linguistic interruptions in particular. As stressed by the present study, interruption is collaboration exactly because it requires both speakers to make the appropriate response to the previous speaker. Without appropriate responses, interruptions could never take place and communication would inevitably break down. Therefore, interruptions are 'ruptures' only at the superficial linguistic level, while in fact they represent speaker's intention and commitment to carry on the communication. That is why, in a deeper sense, interruption as a token of response-ability is what makes communication take place.

## **Appendix One**

Appendix One contains the Interruption Coding Scheme used for processing the data. It can be found in the folder named 'Appendix 1' in the compact disk attached below.

## **Appendix Two**

Appendix Two contains the installation software for the Systemic Coder and the analyzed texts in the Systemic Coder format. They can be found in the folder named 'Appendix 2' in the compact disk attached below.

## **Appendix Three**

Appendix Three contains the texts for analysis in the Microsoft word format. They can be found in the folder with the name 'Appendix 3' in the compact disk attached below.

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