

## Task-in-process During Information-gap Activities in Korean Middle School English Classrooms\*

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A growing number of task-based learning (TBL) research has employed a process-oriented research framework to analyze second language data in L2 classrooms using a task-in-process vs. task-as-workplan dichotomy (e.g., Seedhouse, 2004). Adopting the task-in-process framework, the current study analyzes how students in Korean EFL classrooms interact during information gap task activities. How do sequences of interaction during information gap tasks differ from the task-as-workplan? What are the specific institutional goals that the participants orient to while completing these tasks? This article attempts to answer these questions by analyzing the interactions that occur during a series of information gap tasks performed by different groups of Korean middle school students. The findings show how information gap tasks create minimized and truncated sequences that are different from the task-as-workplan as well as from how people would interact in ordinary conversation. Rather than promoting more talk by engaging in negotiation of meaning, learners engaged in a series of completion-oriented sequences to find the correct response in the most efficient way possible. The paper ends with suggestions for improving the design of tasks in pedagogical settings.

**Key words:** task-in-process, information gap activities, conversation analysis, Korean EFL learners, task-based learning

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, tasks have obtained an important status in L2 teaching, serving as an important foundation for classroom teaching, social interaction as well as language

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development (Jackson & Burch, 2017; Nunan, 1989; Robinson, 2001, 2011). A large body of task-based learning (TBL) research has investigated the effectiveness of various task types using both etic and emic perspectives (Bygate et al., 2009; Hauser, 2005; Hyun & Lee, 2018; Jenks, 2009; Kim et al., 2017; Long, 2015; Seedhouse, 2005; Skehan, 1998). While traditional studies have treated teacher-fronted interaction and varying types of peer interactive tasks as distinct, classifiable constructs, recent line of research on tasks-based learning are beginning to describe the participants' converging, or diverging, orientations towards particular types of tasks and activities in progress (Mori, 2004; Ohta, 2001; Richards & Seedhouse, 2016; Seedhouse, 2004). This study focuses on information gap tasks to investigate the sequences of action occurring between participants engaged in these tasks using a task-in-process framework (Breen, 1987; Seedhouse, 2004, 2005). Information gap tasks, which promote more opportunity for language learners to notice their problematic utterances by negotiation for meaning (NfM), are most widely researched and employed in TBL research (Pica, 2005; Pica et al., 2006).

This article will investigate how participants interact during information gap tasks by analyzing different sequences that are employed during task-in process. The findings will then show how information gaps orient to specific institutional goals that result in interactional constraints for the students in this setting. In analyzing sequences that occur during information gap tasks, conversation analysis will be the main and most important methodological tool. The majority of discourse analysis studies in applied linguistics employ one of two qualitative research methodologies: conversation analysis (CA) or ethnography of communication. Between these two traditions, conversation analysis examines naturally occurring talk in order to determine what is being accomplished for the speakers involved. The central question asked is – why that now? What is getting done by virtue of that bit of conduct, done that way, in just that place? (Schegloff, 2007). CA has been used as an important methodological tool to analyze a variety of interactions including classroom interaction (Jenks, 2009; Lee, 2007; Markee, 2015; Mori, 2004; Park, 2013; Seedhouse, 2004; Wong, 2000). The current study will try to continue the methodological discussion regarding contributions that CA can make towards the existing body of SLA (second language acquisition) and language pedagogy literature (Kasper & Kim, 2015; Markee, 2000). CA offers an appropriate, alternative methodology to the product-oriented approach typically adopted in TBL literature (Jenks, 2009, p. 192). In what follows, we first provide the landscape of past work on task based learning and information gap tasks before reporting the findings of the study.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Task-as-workplan vs. Task-in-process

In traditional task-based language (TBL) research, learning is viewed as an internal, intramental, cognitive process (Jenks, 2009). The definition of task as “an activity which requires learners to use language, with an emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective” (Bygate et al., 2009, p. 11) itself, focuses on the product (i.e., task-as-workplan) rather than the process (i.e., task-in-process). Therefore, in-depth analysis and discussion of the social interactional components of language learning have not been emphasized in the majority of TBL research. Instead, there has been a methodological preference to isolate and quantify meaning negotiation and to analyze and discuss social interaction in reference to statistical measures. For example, TBL research has investigated what task design maximized interaction and learning (Ellis, 2000; Jung, 2016; Skehan, 2003). Many of these studies used Robinson’s (2001) triadic component framework (i.e., task complexity, task condition, task difficulty) to study the quantitative effects of these categories on task performance (Hyun & Lee, 2018; Robinson, 2007). Task completion was exclusively investigated and characterized according to second language acquisition theories and hypothesis (Gass, et al., 2005). The underlying assumption was that task design is closely related to task completion and task completion can be manipulated by modifying the design of the tasks. In particular, information gaps were shown to have quantitatively more episodes of meaning negotiation than other task types (Pica et al., 2006).

Breen (1987) employed the terms “task-as-workplan” and “task-in-process” to explain the interactional and interpretive difference between a task’s expected pedagogical and linguistic outcomes and what actually occurs during task completion. These terms were taken up by Seedhouse (2004) to show a mismatch between intended and actual pedagogy. The intended pedagogical approach may be “communicative tasks” that build communicative opportunities and those that focus on meaning but the task-in-process may not support these goals. Seedhouse argued that such mismatches are inevitable if there is an etic, top-down processing of pedagogy with no corresponding emic, case-by-case analysis of the discourse data before quantitative treatment. He argued that SLA studies frequently use interactional data to find a concept or construct specified in terms of task-as-workplan but data that are actually gathered from the task-in-process, which may be rather different (Seedhouse, 2004, p. 251). The following is an example of such a mismatch. The task-as-workplan is to discuss “paintings” but the students have gone off-task and the task-in-process has no connection with “paintings.”

## Extract 1. Seedhouse (1999, p. 454)

- 01 L1: *skal vi synge en sang? vi synger den derre Fader Jakob*  
 02 ((tra.: Shall we sing a song? Let's sing "Frere Jacques"))  
 03 L2: *Hae?* ((tr.: what?))=  
 04 L1: =Fader Jakob ((Tr.: Frere Jacques))=  
 05 L3: =NO=  
 06 L2: =on English, I can't sing that song in English,  
 07 L1: yes,=  
 08 L2: =no (.)

Here, the students have gone completely off-task and begin to sing a song ("Frere Jacques") instead of engaging in the task. Using the task-in-process framework, Markee (2000) shows how learners go more off-task as the teacher moves away and more on-task as the teacher approaches. He goes on to argue that task-oriented interaction is problematic because of the lack of systematic teacher supervision. Mori (2004) studied how learners carried on interactions in a series of classroom tasks, demonstrating their orientation to a different type of speech exchange system than what was intended by the instructor. Instead of imposing the researchers' definition of learning or learning opportunities on the data, she investigated how learners themselves demonstrate their orientation towards particular types of activities. Lee and Burch (2017) employed CA to examine the decision making process of three university ESL learners as they prepared for a presentation task. The authors argued that the learners had different orientations to task completion, task interpretations, and concerns with extracurricular practicality which complicated the distinction between task-as-workplan and task-in-process. These micro-analyses of interactions have helped develop our understanding of how constructs such as learning and competence are realized in task-based interactions.

More context-sensitive work such as these would be helpful in examining how participants co-construct meaning during task based learning, especially in the Korean EFL setting, which affords a very different setting from ESL contexts. Using a dynamic systems theory (DST) framework, Kim et al. (2017) was able to examine the perspectives of one Korean university student (named Miran) over three instructional units of task-based instruction and showed how fluctuating trends led to a more positive disposition towards task experiences. Korean middle school students' experiences with task-based learning have not been examined as much although this context provides an interesting contrast to other settings. Many middle school students in Korea have very low spoken English proficiency and share an L1 (Korean), which they can easily turn to when they encounter any language problems. Classroom demographics are also relatively homogenous in terms of reasons for learning English (i.e., to pass the college entrance exam) and topical interests

(i.e., movie stars, idols and teenage culture). This study will focus on the task-in-process by addressing how students in the Korean EFL middle school context complete information gap activities using an emic, procedural approach to interaction by employing CA.

## 2.2. Past Research on the Information Gap Task

Information gap tasks have played an important role in applied linguistics research (Doughty & Pica, 1986; Mackey & Gass, 2005; Nunan, 1989; Ur, 1988) and quantitative research has shown that information gaps are beneficial to language learning (Pica et al., 2006). Information gap refers to the existence of lack of information among students working on a common problem. Examples of information gap tasks include activities that ask learners to find differences between pictures, to order sentences into stories (jigsaw task), and to restore parts of incomplete maps. While students carry out these tasks, they are thought to engage in meaning-focused interaction through negotiation of meaning (Long, 1980). As learners repeat and rephrase utterances to make sure that their information is accurate and understood, they can also draw attention to the forms that encode these utterances. According to Doughty and Pica (1986), features of modified interaction include clarification requests (e.g., What do you mean by xxx?), confirmation checks (e.g., Mexican food have a lot of ulcers – “Mexicans have a lot of ulcers? Because of the food?”), and comprehension checks (e.g., Do you know what I mean?).

In a critique of this line of reasoning and traditional TBL research, Jenks (2009) provides an analysis of learners engaged in two-way information gap tasks. By looking at sequences of action during information gap activities, he shows how the fluidness one would expect to see and experience in more open ended tasks (Nakahama, Tyler, & van Lier, 2001) is temporarily put on hold until both participants deal with the missing information. See the following extract for an example.

### Extract 2. (Jenks, 2009, p. 189)

01 S1:	draw:: two arrows on your left hand side
02	of the you know (.) draw two
03	arrows um: (0.2) which are pointing at
04	the dog (0.6) two arrows (0.6)
05	two arrows (0.7) from the bottom of
06	t- the oval (0.6) you know
07	draw: (0.5) two arrows
08 S2:	arrows, (.) what do you mean (0.2)
09	arrows=
10 S1:	=arrows (0.5) arrows (0.9) arrows (0.2)

11	A-double R-O-W ((spelling the word))
12	(0.9) arrows (0.5)
13 S2:	arrows?
14	(0.4)
15 S1:	arrows (0.6) arrows (1.2) arrows
16 S2:	two arrows
17 S1:	yeah two arrows=
18 S2	=like this?

Here, two participants are completing a drawing task where one participant is describing a picture to another participant who does not have the picture. When S2 displays trouble (lines 5-6) following S1's description of two arrows, S1 repeats and spells out the missing information ("arrows arrows arrow A-double R-O-W"). S2, however, still has trouble understanding this description. S1 repeats "arrows" three times and S2 verifies the object to be drawn. This sequence shows that participants engage in minimal talk while making sure they understood the information correctly. Jenks (2009) argues that these meaning negotiation sequences limit interactional possibilities because they occur as a result of the lack of comprehension of one participant (the participant without the missing information). Because the sequences in information gap tasks are all anchored to missing information, both participants are constrained to interact in a particular way. Jenks (2007) reported that this constraint leads to a tightly structured two-part sequence. In this two-part sequence, the director provides information or directions in the first part sequence and the student with the missing information becomes the navigator who needs to signal incomprehensibility.

Despite the calls for broadening the scope within information gap research, there is still much to be done with regard to investigating whether meaning negotiation is influenced by other potentially important task design and interactional issues (Ellis, 2000). Product-oriented approaches tend to overlook potentially important process-oriented issues, such as the social interactional characteristics of meaning negotiation (Hauser, 2005). Recently, there have been an increased interest in process studies that focus on the task-in-process operations that teachers need to carry out during task operations (Jenks, 2009; Samuda, 2015; Seedhouse & Almutairi, 2009) A recent study by Shintani (2016) examined classroom processes and learning outcomes together by analyzing Japanese children's learning of English through task-based language teaching. TBL studies have also investigated participant differences, such as those in NS-NNS and male-female dyads (e.g., Gass & Varonis, 1986), as well as the interactional roles that manifest as a result of information gaps (e.g., picture describer vs. picture drawer); however, the sequences that occur during information gap tasks have received little attention throughout the literature. By expanding on Jenks' (2009) idea of the two-part sequence in information-gap activities,

this article will analyze task-in-process sequences employed by Korean EFL middle school students engaged in information gap activities to show how the institutional setting and goals of students can have important implications for classroom practice in the Korean context. The research questions for this study could be summarized into the following two points:

1. Do the sequences of interaction during information gap tasks differ from the task-as-workplan for these group of students?
2. What are the institutional orientations and goals that appear in the interaction as these students engage in information gap tasks?

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Participants

The main source of data for this study came from video-recorded middle school EFL lessons located in Seoul, Korea. In total, eight after-school English lessons were videotaped between the years 2016 and 2018 from three different (7<sup>th</sup> grade) middle school contexts. The learners spoke Korean as their first language and joined the class on a voluntary basis. The lessons were taught by two nonnative English teachers in training using the TBL approach. One of the teachers taught at two separate middle schools (comprising a total of 6 lessons) while the other teacher taught at the remaining one (2 lessons). Each after-school English class had from five to ten students (with a total of 22 students), which made it easier for the teacher to video record and manage using a TBL framework. The participants were mostly female with the exception of 2 male students. In task-based language classrooms, tasks define all lessons and its development, spanning needs analysis, task selection, materials development, classroom teaching, and learner assessment (Long, 2015). The aims of the after-school EFL lesson was to develop one's speaking proficiency in contrast to the more traditional English classrooms which tend to focus on developing students' reading skills (Lee, 2007). The lessons contained a variety of tasks including information gap activities.

All classes held a monolingual policy where the teachers enforced exclusive, or at least maximum, use of English. The students indicated their respect for the policy in front of the teacher (e.g., by using a whispering voice, by covering their mouths). All recordings were transcribed using the common CA system (Appendix 1) developed by Gail Jefferson (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; ten Have, 2007). All identified sequences underwent rigorous analysis employing CA methodology. Due to the indexical nature of task-based interaction

(Seedhouse & Almutiri, 2009), non-verbal communication, task-sheets and performance of the task through talk were analyzed holistically using the Transana software ([www.transana.org](http://www.transana.org)).

### 3.2. Task and Procedure

The students engaged in various task-based activity throughout the afternoon classes they attended. The focal tasks for the current study were information gap activities, which required the students to exchange missing information. The activities were all two-way information gap tasks, which led to the exchange of information among all participants, each of whom possess some piece of information not known to, but needed by, all other participants to solve the problem (Doughty & Pica, 1986, p. 307). During the after-school classes, three information gap tasks in total were performed by the students in the three locations, which included a map completion task, a story-strip completion task (jigsaw tasks), and a guess-my-sentence task. The goals were to find out the location of places without looking at each other's map which contained different information (pair work), to complete a story using picture strips (group work) and to guess a sentence that is described by one student (group work). By keeping with guidelines (Loschky & Bley-Vroman, 1993), tasks were designed so that the information gap required a specific form that was essential for completing the task. For example, if learners needed to obtain directions to a location and must exchange information to do so, the content to fill their information gap were phrases that included prepositions of place (e.g., in front of, next to). It was also necessary to choose forms that learners were developmentally ready to begin learning or were on their way to mastering (e.g., am going to) (Pienemann, 1981). According to Pienemann's teachability hypothesis, learners' readiness for forms that emerge in a syntactic sequence would be revealed through the researcher's examination of contexts for their use. Good candidates would be forms that are difficult for learners to perceive in the input or that lack transparency of function or meaning. For the locations task, these could include pronouns (e.g., Where is it? - It is on 2nd street), articles, and determiners for reference to place names (e.g., Wang's Chinese Restaurant). The English curriculum for the 7th grade class was consulted in locating the target grammar and vocabulary level when designing the tasks.

Students were grouped into self-selected quadriads, triads, and pairs. Once students completed the task, the teacher checked the outcome and gave feedback. The researcher took observation notes that focused on the level of engagement in the task including any salient features of the interactions. Among the stages in completing the task -- pre-task, task cycle, and language focus (Willis, 1996), this study focused on the interaction generated during the task cycle. The pre-task stage was also consulted when locating the



task-as-workplan.

## 4. RESULTS

Results showed that the students engaged in developing turn-taking systems which were appropriate to the accomplishment of the task and that the nature of the information gap task and the classroom setting itself constrained the patterns of interaction produced. First, the question answer sequences employed by the students to complete the task followed the task-in-process (e.g., identifying the blank first and filling it in) rather than the task-as-workplan, which was to practice what people would normally do in ordinary conversational settings. Second, students used minimum language to arrive at the correct answer which led to an elaborate guess-what-I'm thinking sequence and a succession of single turn question answer sequences (e.g., walk? - no. - see? - no). First, the mismatch between task-as-workplan and task-in-process is showed through examination of the talk that occurred during information gap activities.

### 4.1. Mismatches Between Task-as-workplan and Task-in-process

There was an overall mismatch between task-as-workplan and task-in-process primarily due to an excessive orientation to task-completion (i.e., finding the correct answer) rather than resolving any misunderstanding. There were extreme cases to less extreme ones, but in general, it appeared that the students were more motivated to finish the task correctly in the least amount of time rather than to engage in any substantial meaning negotiation that might lead to more opportunities to practice the English language (cf. Pica et al., 2006).

The following is an example of the type of interaction that students employed in order to complete a given task. Here, two students (S1 and S2) are engaged in an information gap activity where they have to ask each other for directions to a specific location (e.g., Chinese restaurant, pharmacy) and then write down the name of the store on a blank space in their map (e.g., Wang's Dynasty). Each map contains different missing information, which needs to be filled out by questioning each other. The task-as-workplan that was provided in the task sheet asked the students to proceed in the following steps (first, provide the name and second, describe the location) using preposition phrases of locations (e.g., next to, in front of).

1. Q: Where can I rent a DVD?
2. A: At Starlight's video.
3. Q: Where is it?

4. A: It's on the first avenue next to the bank.

In the actual conversation (“task-in-progress”), however, instead of answering the question (line 01, “*Where I can rent a DVD?*”), S2 gives the location (lines 03-04, “*It's (2.0) on the first avenue a:nd next to the department store*”). This is not how the interaction proceeded in the worksheet or how people would interact in naturally occurring settings, yet, important here for completing the task; S1 needs to know the blank's exact location prior to filling it in with an actual place name. As soon as S1 locates the blank space next to the department store she asks for the name of that place (line 05 “*Wha: 's u::h.*” and line 10 “*What's name is?*”).

Extract 3. BP middle school #1

01 S1: -> My turn? Whe::re can I fi:nd the music CDs?  
 02 (2.0)  
 03 S2: -> M::mm (3.0) A^h. it's (2.0) on the first avenue?  
 04 a:nd next to the department store.  
 05 S1: Wha:t's, U^::H.  
 05 (5.0) ((S2 looks up towards the teacher))  
 07 S2: °um.°  
 08 S1: a^h::  
 09 S2: a^h::ehhhh ((laughter))  
 10 S1: -> What's name is?  
 11 (3.0)  
 12 S2: -> Ace mu::sic ehhh CDs hhhh

This interaction can be schematized in the following way. S1 first asks a wh-question, which sets up both a topic and action agenda (Heritage, 2010; Raymond, 2003) that asks for a location through a wh-question. The second turn fails to address the action agenda of the question (i.e., asking for a place name) although conforming with its topic agenda (i.e., by describing its location). The question in line 10 explicitly asks for the name of the place and line 12 provides the name. Again, the turns follow the task-in-process in which S1 (student with the missing information) is engaged in rather than the task-as-workplan. As shown in Figure 1 below, turns 2 and 3 act as an insertion sequence (Schegloff, 2007) that helps S1 first locate the place (# 12) prior to filling in the blank at turn 4 (task completion).



- 17 S1:                    [°tha:t's okay,°  
 18                    (0.4) ((S2 looks at the S1's paper and S1 nods head.))  
 21                    (0.2) ((S2 erases what she wrote and makes a correction))  
 23 S1:                    p, h, (.) a, r, (.) m, a, c, y.  
 26 S2:                    o:kay.  
 43 S1:                    °my turn°, mhmm where can I grab a burger?

Here, the nodding action (by S1) in line 2 is a nonverbal sign showing that S1 understood S2's question (*"where can I buy aspirin?"*) and is prepared to give her the missing information (*"uhm::, it's- (0.4) it's on the second avenue"*). In line 5, S1 peers over at S2 as S2 tries to locate the blank *"on the second avenue"* and *"next to the bus station."* In this way, S1 closely monitors S2's action in order to aid her in arriving at the correct answer. When S2 is unable to spell out the word *"pharmacy,"* S1 gives out the spelling for her twice (in line 14 and 23). When S2 tries to look at S1's map for help with the spelling, the teacher requests S1 not to show her paper to S2. S1, in overlap, whispers (line 17) that it's okay to look at her map (she also nods in approval). In an information gap activity, the key to a successful task is to negotiate the missing information through interaction (Pica et al., 2006); if students can easily look at each other's sheet, the task no longer serves as a productive activity that could lead to more learning opportunities. However, students seem to be more motivated to fill in their missing blanks with the correct term as quickly as possible, rather than to engage in additional opportunities for interaction through modified interaction (Doughty & Pica, 1986). For example, they do not ask each other clarification questions (e.g., *"How do you spell it?"* or *"What comes after Al?"*) but use non-verbal resources (e.g., looking puzzled, leaning over to see other students' texts). The following extract shows an extreme case where the turns are shortened to the extent that each turn contains only key words from the task sheet. Line 1 (*"pick up some milk."*) would be a truncated version of *"so where can I pick up some milk?"* S2 understands this as a question asking for location and provides an answer (*"It's next to the library"*) even though the pronoun *"it"* does not have a preceding noun to be linked with in the prior turn.

Extract 5. HY middle school #2

- 01 S1: -> °so° PICK up some MILK.  
 02                    (0.8)  
 03 S2: -> uhhh (.) mi:lk. (2.0) it's ne:xt to the library.  
 04 S1:                    li::brary, first avenue? ((traces the map with finger))  
 05 S2:                    yes.  
 06 S1: -> °yes°, what is NAME? (.)  
 07 S2:                    MARK's supermarket.

In only six very short turns, S1 and S2 are able to complete filling in one of the blanks from the sheet (with the name “Mark’s supermarket”). Although S1 does a confirmation check in line 04 by repeating S2’s explanation (“*li::brary, first avenue?*”), it is spoken to herself rather than directed at S1. It is also geared toward task completion (accompanied by a tracing action with her fingers) and is followed by a brief confirmation (“*yes*”). As such, the task-in-process shows that students are more focused on filling out the blanks (i.e., completing the task) and do not engage in question and answer sequences that is provided in the task-as-workplan or what one would normally find in ordinary conversation. Seedhouse (2005) also showed that learners appear to be so concentrated on completing the task that linguistic forms are treated as a vehicle of minor importance. His study focused on ungrammatical sentences produced by learners engaged in task-based interaction which included many information gap tasks. In the current study, however, students used as little language as possible to proceed with the task that ungrammaticality did not become a big issue. For comparison, look at the following conversation taken from a telephone conversation between close friends (Excerpt taken from Schegloff, 2007). Here, S and J take turns to locate and negotiate missing information about a place named “Bullocks” (line 36).

Extract 6. Schegloff (2007)

(Line numbers are revised).

- 28 S: -> Well where can I find something like that. Jess.  
 29 I mean a good hat. yihknow I don't care  
 30 paying ten dolla:rs er so° er even more.  
 31 J: [(pt)  
 32 S: [Yihknow a good ha:t,[something that would look-  
 33 J: [(sigh)  
 34 S: something tha' I'd-[I'd have a variety 'a things[;,  
 35 J: [Why don't [Why  
 36 -> don't choo: go into Westwoo:d, (0.4) and go to Bullocks.  
 37 (1.2)  
 38 S: Bullocks? ya mean that one right u:m(1.1) rightby  
 39 thee: u:m (.) whazit the plaza? theatre::=  
 40 J: =Uh huh,  
 41 (0.4)

In the beginning of this excerpt, S asks J if she knows of a place where she can buy “a good hat.” (lines 28-34). In lines 35-36, J suggests a place called “Bullock” and S follows with a clarification of its location (“*you mean that one rightby the plaza theatre*”). J

confirms with “Uh huh” and this initially marks the end of this sequence. In this conversation, S is asking J for information about a good place to buy hats to which J responds with a name (“*Bullock*”) followed by a sequence clarifying its location. S’s relevant next action is to accept or reject that suggestion. It turns out that S later rejects “*Bullock*” as a good place and asks J for other suggestions. However, in information gap activities, contingencies such as this (i.e., rejection of a suggestion) is impossible to build in. Structured tasks with a correct response allow little room for any real world contingency to occur because once the missing information is uncovered the task is completed. The task-in-process, therefore, resembles a “searching for a correct answer” activity through a series of known-answer questions. This is different from real life questions that ask each other for genuine information that allow for built-in contingencies (Ford, 2004; Schegloff, 1987). In the next section, the institutional setting (classroom) will be examined as another constraint that drives participants to engage in information gap tasks through restricted and truncated talk.

In other information gap activities such as the Jigsaw task, as well, learners tried to complete the task sheet via the minimal number of turns as possible to arrive at the correct response. The students seemed to go through the task with little enthusiasm and completed it as a matter of duty as shown below. In this information gap task, students are describing their pictures to the group members.

Extract 7. BP middle school #11

- 01 S2: My picture is also rabbit and turtle an::  
 02 Rabbit is faster than turtle.  
 03 (2.0) ((S2 looks at S3 and nods))  
 04 S3: My picture is. (0.2) Rabbit is sleeping.  
 05 S2: -> I think this is the first one.  
 06 (2.0)((places her picture on the desk))  
 07 S2: -> And then this is second. ((takes S1’s picture))  
 08 S3: -> And this is. (0.2) ((S3 gives her picture to S2))  
 09 S2: -> third >and this is fourth.<  
 10 (4.0) ((S2 looks up and smiles at teacher in front))  
 11 T: Okay are you done? So (.) please write down the  
 12 sequence and then? You have to make one conclusion.  
 13 (5.0) ((Ss look at each other and smiles//S1 shrugs her  
 14 shoulders))

Here, S2 takes complete charge and places the picture strips in the correct order without negotiating the story line with her group members (lines 5-9, beginning with “I think this is

the first one”). S3 hands her picture over to S2 and other students simply observe. The teacher tries to engage the groups in further talk by asking them to be creative and make one conclusion (lines 11-12), which shows her orientation to the task-as-workplan (i.e., create a story by ordering the pictures into a sequence). However, the students maintain their gazes at the teacher and do not engage in further discussion. Other groups show a similar pattern. After each student takes turn explaining their pictures, one (or two) student(s) take(s) charge and order(s) the pictures in a particular order.

In this section, data examples were taken to show the mismatch between task-as-workplan and task-in-process by going through interactions primarily based on a map completion task. The mismatch was most apparent in the question-answer sequences that appeared in succession. Whereas the task-as-workplan was to engage in a series of naturally produced question answer adjacency-pair sequences that made room for plenty of negotiation of meaning or modified interaction to occur, the task-in-process showed that the students engaged in question-answer sequences, suited for the purposes of effectively completing the task (e.g., first locating the blank and second filling in the blank). The resulting conversation was a stilted and minimized one with the most economical and efficient of language usages. Jigsaw tasks showed a mismatch by being oriented to completing the task rather than interacting with others. As soon as students finished describing their pictures, one student took charge and placed the pictures into a specific order.

In the following section, different types of information gap tasks will be analyzed to show that the interactions that occur during task activities are institutional in nature and would not be correctly understood without its orientation to the institutional goal and constraints of the language classroom in the Korean EFL context.

#### 4.2. Institutional Goals and Constraints in Task-based Learning Through Information Gap Activities

Although task-based language learning occurs in a specific institutional context (i.e., classroom setting), the aim of information gap tasks is to give learners as many opportunities to engage in meaning negotiation through modified interaction for L2 learning and ultimately second language acquisition (Doughty & Pica, 1986; Pica et al., 2006). The current study shows that the institutional setting of the classroom constrains the interaction to such a degree that the achievement of this goal becomes very difficult if not impossible to attain. According to Heritage (2004), institutional talk can feel irksome and constraining because it shows a reduction in the possible contributions allowed by its participants. In the previous section, the constraining nature of information gap tasks was apparent in the turn allocation system where students would take turns answering each other's questions (i.e., to fill out a blank) or take turns explaining their pictures (i.e., to

make a story). Jenks (2009) has showed that information gap activities assign learners to a particular interactional role (i.e., participant with missing information vs. participant with given information) and argued that these roles influence their opportunity to engage in meaning negotiation.

The following interaction from an information gap task (i.e., Guess what I am doing activity) shows that these students prefer a quick resolution when they encounter a given task either by asking the teacher for a direct answer (lines 1-2) or engaging in an extensive series of short question answer sequences instead of the information holder trying to explain the sentence she is holding through negotiation of meaning. The asymmetry between the teacher and students as well as between a more knowledgeable peer and a less knowledgeable one present in the institutional setting shapes talk in this way. The classroom context also builds in an expectation towards efficiency and reduction while valuing a quick resolution over any extended opportunities to speak. In the following, S1 has only provided a single sentence “I’m excited” to explain her sentence card (line 05) after which S2 (and S3) gives out a series of guesses in questioning intonation (lines 6, 8, 14, “*You are going to picnic?*”, “*You are going to go school?*”. “*You are going to play game?*”) to be confirmed via a simple “yes” or “no” by S1 (the information holder). S1’s turns are marked with arrows in the following transcript.

Extract 8. [11:50-29:20] y-s1, g-s2

- 01 T:           Yeah, if- this case it’s similar so it’s correct.  
 02               so move on to next one right?  
 03 S1:          Okay  
 04               (0.4) ((S1 picks up a card.))  
 05 S1: ->      I’m excited. hhh  
 06 S2:          You are going to picnic?  
 07 S1: ->      No.  
 08 S2:          You are going to (0.2) sch- go school?  
 09 S1: ->      I am going to play with my friends=  
 10 S2:          =where?  
 11 S1:          A::t  
 12               (0.4) ((thinking face.))  
 13 S1:          ur: House? O [r::  
 14 S2:                               [YO:U ARE going to play game?=  
 15 S1: ->      =No. hhh  
 16 S2:          Uhh- It’s game?  
 17 S1: ->      No?  
 18 S3:          You are uh:: (0.4) watch the movie?



- 19 S1: -> N[o.  
 20 S2: [Pa:jama party?  
 21 [(G points at Y with her pen.)  
 22 S1: -> O::H IT's ve:ry similar. Hhh  
 23 S2: Party. ((G glances at the teacher.))  
 24 (0.2)  
 25 S1: -> Ma:ke a sentence.  
 26 S2: Yo:u YOU are going to (.) do- ah-  
 27 going to(.) go party.  
 28 [(G points at Y with his pen.)  
 29 S1: -> [Yes. hhhh  
 30 ((S1 nods head and S3 stares at S2 in amazement.))

Engaging in Q-A sequences in this way represents the students' orientation to the institutional goal (e.g., completing the task) occurring in the classroom context where resources are readily available (i.e., the teacher, a more knowledgeable peer). In the previous example, S1 needs to explain to her group members what she is "doing" after picking up a sentence from a pile of cards and the members should ideally guess the sentence after listening to S1's description. Here, the target sentence was "I am going to go to a party." However, S1 does not have a chance to explain anything other than that she is "excited" (line 5) and that "she is going to play with her friends" (line 9). She is quickly given the role of confirming a series of yes/no questions raised by her peers. Why does this happen and how does this show an orientation to the classroom institutional context? Let's refer to an additional example that shows how tasks are seen as objects to be completed rather than as an opportunity to practice English by exchanging information. The following interaction is taken from a jigsaw task (i.e., a picture strip activity) where each student has two pictures strips (six in total) and need to first explain their pictures to their friends prior to completing a story.

#### Extract 9. W\_E middle school

- 01 S2: >Me first?< Picture is. (.)  
 02 This picture is grandmother?  
 03 Bake. (.) Cookie. Uh::.  
 04 (1.0) ((stares at her picture))  
 05 S2: this scene is. She hold this cookie? a::nd?  
 06 In front of oven?  
 07 (1.0) ((S1 nods at S2))  
 08 S2: Ye [s.

- 09 S1: [and the other one? ((gestures with hand))  
 10 S2: and the other one is:: grandfather and grandmother  
 11 is chasing cookie:: and also pig, dog is chasing  
 12 cookie.  
 13 (0.2) ((S3 and S2 both look at S1))  
 14 S1: my picture is. (.)  
 15 grandfather and grandmother is chasing  
 16 the cookie. A::nd. (0.5)  
 17 S1: another one is::, the gingerbread. (.) man?  
 18 cookie is on the do::g's head.  
 19 And dog is in the water.  
 20 (0.2)  
 21 S2: Your: ((points to S3))  
 22 S3: grandmother (.) is cooking.  
 23 S2: Yes?  
 ((7 lines omitted))  
 31 S2: -> I know. First scene is baking cookie.  
 32 S3: Yes. ((S2 places S3's picture on desk))  
 33 S2: -> And then? She:: she will bake.  
 34 (0.2) ((places her own picture on desk))  
 35 And. Yours is next.  
 36 (0.2) ((Takes S3's picture))  
 37 S2: -> And chasing just grandfather and grandmother.  
 38 ((takes S1's picture))  
 39 S2: -> and next is:: Pig and dog. And last one is::  
 40 ((places her second picture on the desk))  
 41 S2: -> >this one.< F(hh)INI(hh)SHED. ((raises both hands))

In this task, S2 takes charge of lining up the story strips in correct order, which is similar to what happened in Extract 8. Only minimal talk describes each of the pictures using the target form (i.e., present progressive forms such as “A is -ing”). It is notable how the students would announce that it is the next student’s turn as soon as they finish describing their own pictures (line 21 “Your:” and line 13 gazing at the next speaker). Learners are aware of their roles in these information gap tasks and orient to them explicitly (through verbal and nonverbal means). After everyone has done taking turns, between lines 33 to 40, S2 places her friend’s pictures along with her own in the correct order on the desk in front of her. She loudly announces that her group is “FINISHED” after completing this task individually rather than as a group. Picture strip activities are proposed to be a great way to

engage in extensive negotiation over which picture comes first in the story (Willis, 1996). The story may lead to different outcomes depending on the creative imagination of the students. However, the students in the current data orient to the institutional goal (i.e., task completion) rather than the task-as-workplan (i.e., practice speaking in English using picture strip tasks). Frequently, one proficient member of the group takes the leader role and finishes lining up the story. This study suggests that the premise of research on the information gap task might need to be reframed as students, at least in the Korean EFL context, do not orient to these tasks as an opportunity to engage in meaning negotiation but rather as test questions to be solved in competition with other groups, which is what is usually expected in the Korean classrooms. The institutional constraints of the classroom is so overarching that no matter what kinds of tasks are given, the students showed a tendency to orient to them as a test question or a known-answer question rather than as an opportunity to learn or practice the language.

Instead of generating more talk, the pre-allocation of turns (e.g., extract 4, line 43 “My turn”) also minimized the amount of talk produced by students as they did not feel the need to produce more talk after they had accomplished their role. It was also noteworthy that even though the students perceived themselves to have low English speaking proficiency, they were very good at following routine phrases and using formulaic phrases (i.e., “*your turn*”, “*my turn*”) to complete the task. These phrases were frequently truncated (i.e., Extract 9, line 21 “*your*”). Turns were allocated by specifically stating that it was somebody’s turn. The interaction proceeds through these type of pivoting practices - a practice through which a conversation partner initiates a shift in the current participation framework and a more symmetrical distribution of turns (Hauser, 2005).

Below is an additional example where even though the task (guessing-a-sentence) allows for many opportunities to negotiate meaning, the students ask the teacher directly if they are doing things correctly rather than asking her peers. In the following, S3 continuously turns to the teacher for confirmation of her and her friend’s actions even when the teacher is far away (lines 5, 15, 35). Here, S3 has trouble with the verb “bake” and thinks it has to do with “going to the bakery.” S3 initially explains her card (I am going to bake a cake) using a single word “*birthday*” (line 2). S1 gives a guess in line 12 (“*you are going to bakery?*”) and S3 confirms with a “*Ye:s*” even though this is not what was written on her card.

Extract 10. BP middle school jigsaw

- 01 (0.8)((S3 picks up a card from the pile.))  
 02 S3: b:irthday.  
 03 S1: You a:re going to cele:brate- ah (.)party?  
 04 S3: a- it’s not birthday.

- 05 ((S3 raises her hand and the teacher walks over.))  
 06 S1: pa:rtɪ?  
 07 (0.4)  
 08 S3: and go to baɪ-ba:ke:ri?  
 09 S1: AH, YOU: ARE GOING TO BU:Y a ca [ke.  
 10 S2: [A^H, YOU ARE GOING TO BU:Y a c[[ca:ke.  
 11 S3: N:o.  
 12 S1: uh, you are going to bakery?=  
 13 S3: -> Y:es.  
 14 S1: O::H.  
 15 S3: -> ((whispers to teacher)) °이거맞아요?아니예요?° ((tr. Is this right? Is it wrong?))  
 16 T: what was the sentence?  
 17 S3: you are going to bake a cake.  
 18 S1: Ah, ba: [Ke  
 19 S2: [bakery  
 20 S3: 아니야? ° ((tr. No?))  
 21 S1: next one.  
 22 (0.2)  
 23 T: Good job xxx ((S3's name)).  
 24 S3: O:^h. after school, we're class=  
 25 S1: you are going to study, you are going to  
 26 go to the academy.<=  
 27 M: =no. a:hh- arr  
 28 Y: you () play.  
 29 M: No.

The trouble with S3's understanding of "bake a cake" becomes apparent with S3's question to the teacher (line 15, "Is this right? Is it wrong?") and S1's change of state token "ah" (Heritage, 1984) after S3 reads her sentence out loud. S3 has mistaken the term bakery with "bake a cake" and confirmed S1's answer "You are going to the bakery" prematurely. However, neither the teacher nor S1 addresses this misunderstanding or clarifies it with S3 even though S3 asks for clarification (line 20 "ani-ya?") while looking around at her group members for help. S3's tone of voice and design of the question in negative interrogative displays the dis-preferred nature of this question (Pomerantz, 1988). However, instead of (dis-)confirming, S1 commands S3 to move on to the next sentence (line 21, "next one") and the teacher collaborates by saying "Good job xxx" (line 23) thereby effectively erasing the entire trouble. The teacher's compliment is puzzling as it is clear to everyone that S3's performance was far from being good.

In this section, the interactions collected by students engaged in information gap activities were analyzed by focusing on its institutional context. The classroom setting constrained the nature of interaction that occurred by being oriented to correctly completing the task as quickly as possible. Students appeared to think of information gap tasks as test questions with known answers and oriented to correctness and completion rather than learning or practicing English. Students' turns were truncated and constrained with a normative orientation to completing the task. For example, students took turns in an orderly fashion and regarded taking turns out of this normative order as dis-preferred (see Extract 10 for an example). There was also a density of repeatedly deployed particular conversational machinery (e.g., question-answer sequences, explicit orientation to taking ordered turns), which is a key characteristic of institutional talk (Heritage, 2004).

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The current study analyzed the task-in-process of information gap activities in Korean EFL middle school classrooms and found that these students engaged in talk that were different from the task-as-workplan and further detached from ordinary conversation. The mismatch between task-as-workplan and task-in-process (Seedhouse, 2004) was also explored by examining the institutional goals that the students oriented to while engaging in talk that was geared toward task-completion. Results showed that students viewed information gap activities as if they were solving an exam question by orienting to a quick and efficient solution whenever possible. Taking turns were done explicitly through vocal means (i.e., your turn, my turn) as well as embodied movement (i.e., nodding, eye gaze) which also showed an orientation to the task as an institutional one with special procedures and constraints on who has the rights to contribute. In the Korean EFL classroom, the institutional goal seemed to be a successful performance through a completed product, whereby product was given priority over the (learning) process itself. Completing or finishing the task was celebrated (e.g., Extract 9, line 41) and sometimes led to competition between groups on who finished the fastest.

Information gap activities have been regarded as an essential tool for TBL research and learning. However, when taking an emic approach through conversation analysis, we observed a mismatch between what the teachers believed should be going on (task-as-workplan) and what is actually going on (task-in-process). The advantages of employing information gap tasks might be more effectively realized through unstructured open-ended tasks, which do not have correct/known answers. Although not explored in this study, the following decision-making task collected from the same group of students gave rise to more talk that is less constraining in nature with more opportunities to practice L2 English.

## Extract 11. W\_E middle school decision making task

- 01 S4: I think I agree with the: couple. Beca::use  
 02 Like even though they ha:ve too much gap of the:ir uh ages  
 03 a:nd >even no matter< has the children.  
 04 But they have they get along with them too.  
 05 So, I:: I think it's okay  
 06 ((S2 and S3 nod their heads.))  
 07 S3: I also agree with these couple. Because same as S4's  
 08 opinion. a::nd Uh: because her mom doesn't likes him. I  
 09 think she sh- Jie: should uh::  
 10 [((clinking noise as S2 drinks out of a can.))  
 11 [(2.0) ((S3 smiles at S4.))  
 12 SS: HAHAHA ((All students laugh))  
 13 S3: Uh:: tell her^ that >his boyfriend< is kind fo:r her  
 14 a::nd she:: t- She  
 15 S4: ( )  
 16 S3: yeah. A::nd Sh- she: [(3.0)  
 17 SS: [ehhh  
 18 S3: she is not separated of them.  
 19 She is like well together with them. So I think it is  
 20 good. They're- I am agreeing that couple.  
 21 S2: I agree with S3 and S4 opinion because  
 22 they sh-love together so=  
 23 SS: =ehhh((laughter))

Here, the students are engaged in a decision making task which asked them to write a letter of advice to a girl who is faced with the dilemma of marrying someone whom her mother disapproves of. S4 begins by stating that she agrees with the girl's decision ("*I think I agree the: couple*") and provides her own reasons. She is able to hedge her claims by employing "I think" and also gives a concluding remark that sums up her thoughts ("*So I think it's okay*"). This is followed by other students (non)verbal agreement (e.g., laughter) and further comments that repeat similar arguments (e.g., they love each other, her boyfriend is kind etc.). When compared to the same group's performance during an information gap task (see Extract 9), there is a huge difference in the length of the turns taken by students. Turns are not pre-set and talk proceeds in a contingent manner (e.g., we cannot be sure who will speak next).

In all the examples shown in this paper, learners complete the information gap tasks given to them in a collaborative manner, but this does not guarantee that more L2 learning

will occur when we compare these tasks with other types of tasks or even teacher fronted classes for that matter. For example, when students encounter a language problem (mostly regarding the meaning of vocabulary or recovering a lexical item), they would quickly turn to the teacher for help (referring to it as the ‘teacher chance’), or use their L1 (Korean). They rarely tried to resolve the problem through confirmation checks or meaning negotiation sequences as described in prior literature (Doughty & Pica, 1986; Pica et al., 2006). Although the issue of L1 Korean has not been explored in this study, students frequently resorted to Korean whenever a problem encounters. Another factor to consider may be the lack of motivation or interest in the task itself. Since the students are performing the tasks in a classroom setting, their desire to get them done as quickly as possible and to engage in small talk with their group members might be understandable. In a comparable study, Kim et al. (2017) showed that the university students in her study enjoyed tasks that matched their interests (e.g., tasks that had a travel theme or studying abroad) and this may lead to more learning opportunities to occur. In the current study as well, learners were more engaged in decision-making tasks that allowed them to express their opinion on matters connected to their interests (e.g., travel, decision, dating, pop-culture)

The task consists of participants coping with first, the task fulfilling requirements characterizing the particular task type (e.g., information gap, decision making task) and second, the variable circumstances peculiar to each group/pairing (e.g., close friends, same gender). The general mechanisms of talk-in-interaction are the tools that students and teachers employ to bring these two points into alignment. This alignment is often routinely achieved. At other times, its accomplishment tests the patience and interactional skills of both parties. In either case, the alignment of these points is the work that the talk performs. Because tasks occur in institutional settings, certain sequences may not occur (or be reduced or specialized in form) in the environments they ordinarily inhabit in everyday talk (Heritage, 2004). In the Korean EFL context, task related talk appeared to be reduced and truncated. In the end, there are less interactional contingencies to be dealt with which may be more important in real time speaking contexts (e.g., Extract 6). However, the students in this data did develop their own truncated sequence (Extracts 4-5) to complete these tasks, which shows that information gap tasks may nonetheless provide these students with an opportunity to practice L2 English.

One of the limitations of this study has to do with its participants. The students in this study chose to take these after-school classes in order to help improve their English speaking skills. Therefore, we can say that they have a more positive attitude to the tasks and high motivation to learn and practice the English language (when compared to students in regular English classrooms). The examples might not be representative of the Korean middle school student population. The groups were also made up of students with different

level of English proficiencies and this might have influenced the interaction that occurred during the TBL activities. However, if these students resort to completing the information gap tasks in this way, we can imagine that in the regular classroom students will be more attuned to regard these tasks as exam questions to be solved via minimal talk. Further studies may compare what happens in English classrooms using a task based learning framework following the national English curriculum of Korea.

Despite its shortcomings, this study may contribute to and continue the work on an empirically grounded theory of second language talk and learning (Cazden, 2001; Markee 2000; Kasper & Kim, 2015; Park, 2013; Pekarek Doehler 2010; Wong 2000) by examining what happens in a Korean EFL task-based learning classroom. Prior research has already shown how planned tasks resulted in entirely different activity sequences by learners (Lee, 2007; Mori, 2002; Ohta, 2001; Seedhouse 2004). This study was able to further support the value of an emic, procedural approach to studying TBL by examining EFL students in the Korean middle school setting.

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## APPENDIX. Transcription Symbols

(adapted from Atkinson and Heritage 1984, Schegloff 2007):

- [ ] overlap boundaries of talk  
 = contiguous utterances  
 (0.2) length of silence in tenths of seconds

(.)	micropause
./?/,	falling/rising/continuing intonation
::	sound stretch
-	cut-off or self-interruption
°..°	portions quieter than surrounding talk
WORD	increased amplitude or stress
> <	rushed speech
hh	hearable aspiration
.hh	hearable inbreath
(word)	indicated transcriber's uncertainty on the utterance
((word))	transcriber's commentary, description of events

Applicable levels: Secondary

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