# 会話分析の分析単位に関する考察：Floor と Subfloor の区分を中心に

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# On Analytical Units in Conversation Analysis: How to Make a Distinction between Floor and Subfloor

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**Abstract**

Floor is beginning to be used in some research as an alternative research unit to conversational turn. Floor is defined as attention orientation between/among the participants (Hayashi, 1987), and it was Sakata (1998) who coined the term 'subfloor' to illustrate the local shift of the attention orientation in a conversation.

However, since only limited explanation was made about the subfloor, we may have some difficulty in applying the unit to actual analysis. Thus, in this paper some conversational fragments are carefully reexamined from the viewpoint of participants' attention orientations, and some key points in making a distinction between the main floor and the subfloor are finally presented.

## 1. Introduction

It may be commonly acknowledged by many language researchers that conversation analysis (CA) has been one of the driving forces to promote current language studies, especially in the field of pragmatics. For example, 'Turn Taking System' (Sacks et al., 1970), one of the major achievements in CA, enables us to illustrate how we organize a conversation and to teach learners how to organize it in an appropriate way. Of course, CA has made several contributions so far to language studies and language education, but there seem to be various conflicting opinions on how we should conduct the research.

For example, in most CA studies, turn has been used as the analytical unit. Of course, the unit can illustrate the local interaction systems or local conversational organizations, but it seems to have much difficulty in describing the global structures of conversations, such as conversational styles (Tannen, 1984). Schegloff (1972) and Coultard (1985) and extended the research unit and proposed to regard a set of some turn units as a sequence, but this also seems to have the same difficulty.

Floor, which is the main theme of the present discussion, was first shown by Sacks (1970) and is now generally acknowledged as 'the right to speak' (See Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary,1987 : 553). Edelsky (1981 : 405) redefined the term as "the acknowledged what's-going-on within a psychological time/space" between/among the participants and tried to make a distinction between the floor and the turn. Following this idea, Hayashi (1987) developed the definition, and said it is the communication attention orientation between the interlocutors that determines who holds the floor. In greater detail, Hayashi (1987) explains the idea as follows :

> Floor is ... defined with respect to who is orienting his/her attention in the on-going conversational content, who the central figure(s) of the on-going conversation is/are and is/are receiving the attention, and to whom and where the communicative territory belongs.
>
> (Hayashi, 1987 : 67)

Although turn sequence can illustrate several local interactional systems in discourse, we can reveal more global structural and interactional discourse systems by using this cognitive unit. As Hayashi (1991 : 5-6) mentions, floor is in primitive configuration at the beginning of interaction, but as interaction proceeds, it functions as a contextual and interactional framework and constrains turn taking skills such as when and how to take or yield a turn. It is therefore reasonable to assume that floor sketches the global interactional and contextual frames of conversations and largely constrains the local interactions, such as turn exchange.

Sakata (1998) applied this analytical unit, floor, to the analysis of English conversations between Japanese EFL learners and an English native speaker, and revealed some gender differences in listener response strategies among Japanese. He succeeded in illustrating that while male Japanese EFL learners are likely to take the floor by using more questions, female Japanese learners try not to interrupt the development of the floor by using more non-lexical backchannels. However, a question still remains as to his analytical method.

In his study, Sakata (1998) coined another term 'subfloor,' to illustrate the local shift of participants' attention, but he did not explain adequately how to identify the subfloor. Although we can expect that subfloor can describe the participants' attention orientation more in greater detail, the inadequate explanations may lead to some difficulties when we try to conduct research using the analytical unit.

The rest of this paper will discuss some key points in identifying the subfloor by referring to some conversational fragments. I would like to explain at first about the notion of subfloor based on the study conducted by Sakata(1998)and present a difficulty in subfloor identification. I will then move on to discuss some key points to make a distinction between the main floor and the subfloor.

## 2. Subfloor Identification and its Difficulty

### 2-1. What is Subfloor?

As Hayashi (1987, 1991) mentions, floor is the cognitively interactional and contextual frame of conversation which largely constrains the local turn-taking systems. But even though a person retains the floor for a considerably long

time, it sometimes happens when another party temporarily takes over the floor by drawing other parties' attention and initiates the subfloor (Sakata, 1998). Fragment 1 illustrates an example :

Fragment 1 :

A : Dakedo/ (1)
But/
are atsuryoku ga tsuyoi n da yo ne hora/ (2)
there's great pressure/
hoogakubu jan./ (3)
'cause (I'm graduating from) law school./
(B : Aa sooka hoo ka uun./) (4)
(B : Oh, I see, I see./)
Dakara/ (5)
So/
mottainai to ka iwarete sa./ (6)
I'm told that it's not good enough for me./
B : A mawari kara ne./ (7)
You mean (you hear that) from people around you./
Oya kara sureba (8)
From your parents' view,
kodomo ga sureba iya *hahahahaha*./ (9)
if the child does *hahahahaha*./
(A : Soo soo soo soo./) (10)
(A : Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah./)
A : Demo oya oya wa ne moo saikin soo mo/ (11)
But nowadays parents don't/
(B : Soo./) (12)
(B : I see./)
iwanaku-natta kedo/ (13)
say those things./
Tomodachi toka wa sa (14)
The way my friends look at it, they say things like,
mottainai yoo toka sa/ (15)

"It's not good enough for you."/
(B : Un./) (16)
(B : Uh huh./)
issho-ni sa hora/ (17)
You see, we're all together,/
nihongo kyoushi no yoosei no kurasu no sa/ (18)
In the same Japanese language teacher training class./
(B : Un./) (19)
(B : Yeah./)
(Maynard, 1989 : 164-165)

In Fragment 1, A initiates the talk by saying, 'Dakara (So),' in Line 1 and starts to talk about the pressure he feels in deciding his future occupation. Person A succeeds in gaining the attention of the other party (B) in Line 1 and retains the attention up to Line 6 until B inserts the supplementary and supportive statement in Line 7, 'A mawari kara ne. (You mean you hear that from people around you).' B holds the attention by presenting a new but relative topic about his pressure, 'Oya kara sureba kodomo ga sureba iya (From your parents' view, if the child does.),' but he quickly shifts his attention to A and allows him to develop his talk from Line 11.

As shown in Fragment 1, the subfloor emerges when the current floor supporter temporarily draws the attention of the main floor holder. But such temporal shifts also appear when the current floor holder yields his/her attention to the opposite party (Sakata, 1998). Fragment 2 will illustrate an example :

Fragment 2 :
A : Wakannai kedo sa nenpi ga ii toka warui toka (1)
You know, I really don't know, I don't even understand
saemo wakannnai. (2)
things like good mileage or bad mileage.
Daitai nihon no kuruma de (3)
I can't even tell
dore ga dore daka wankannai-shi sa./ (4)

which Japanese car is which.

(B : Un./) (5)

(B : Uh huh./)

Soara Soara toka sa/ (6)

Something called Soara./

anna no shika wankannnai-shi./ (7)

I know only that kind./

Nenpi ga ii toka wakannai-shi./ (8)

I don't understand what it means by good mileage./

Aitsu wa moo toshi da-shi (9)

That guy is getting old,

oretachi yori toshiue desho?/ (10)

you know, he is older than us./

B : Un dakedo/ (11)

Yes, but/

heiki na no? sonna ikura mo moratte./ (12)

is it all right, to earn so much money?/

A : Un maitsuki nanjuuman totte-ru to ka itte sa./ (13)

Yeah, he earns several hundred thousand yen a month./

B : Heiki na no ka ne gakusei de?/ (14)

Is it all right, he's just a student?/

A : Heiki na n ja-nai no./ (15)

I think that's all right.

Saikin sawagareteru jan/ (16)

You know they talked about this thing recently./

chotto shirabeta kedo./ (17)

I looked into it a bit./

Nihon Amu Bii Sha to ka itte./ (18)

It's called Japan Amu Bii Company./

(Maynard, 1989 : 87-88)

In this fragment, A initiates the talk about a car and holds the floor from Lines 1 to 10. While A is developing the floor as the main floor holder, B is in a supportive role as seen in a backchanneling cue in Line 5. In Line 9, A starts to

talk about their common acquaintance and makes a confirmation question to B in Line 10 to make sure the person in question is senior to them. This confirmation question that A makes functions to release the floor to B, and this consequently creates temporal floor space for B. As seen in the fragment, even after B makes a prompt reply to the confirmation question, B succeeds in keeping the attention of A by inserting 'dakedo (but)' and presents another relevant topic about the money A received from B in Line 12. The question utterance that B makes in Line 14 functions to yield the floor back to A, and when A makes a reply to the question in Line 15, the subfloor is discontinued with A regaining central attention.

Likewise, subfloor emerges when the current floor supporter temporarily draws the attention of the floor holder or, when the floor holder temporarily yields the floor to the current floor supporter. However, there are several difficult cases to identify the subfloor in analyzing conversations.

2-2. Difficulties in Subfloor Identification

It may seem easy to identify the subfloor only by referring to the conversational fragments shown in the previous section. But following Fragment 3 will demonstrate a difficulty in subfloor identification :

Fragment 3 :

| | |
|---|---|
| G : ...Actually that's where is gets really | (1) |
| interesting because as of this month/ | (2) |
| Microsoft/ | (3) |
| is ah getting involved in this/ | (4) |
| and they announced something called the "X Box"/ | (5) |
| which is kind of a/ | (6) |
| sexy PC designed for the home/ | (7) |
| that can play games ; very fast/ | (8) |
| action oriented games./ | (9) |
| And it's/ | (10) |
| aimed directly at Play-Station 2./ | (11) |
| So over the next couple years, | (12) |
| we're going to see a good fight/ | (13) |

between ah the game makers, traditional game makers (14)
like Sony/ (15)
and Sega and Nintendo/ (16)
and Microsoft/ (17)
the ah current leader of the PC world./ (18)
L : Well, those of us who use PCs that run Microsoft Windows/ (19)
I think, would agree that/ (20)
often they can be somewhat annoying/ (21)
in the sense that you have to turn on the the (22)
(G : *Hhh./*) (23)
computer whenever you want to use it and (24)
it takes about a minute ah/ (25)
to boot/ (26)
and once it has done so/ (27)
often times, especially if you have a lot of programs (28)
running at the same time, they crash, (29)
(G : Hnn./) (30)
you may have to start it again./ (31)
Is Microsoft doing anything to address these/ (32)
issues or problems when it builds this new game machine? (33)
G : Microsoft/ (34)
is doing something ah to address those problems and basically/ (35)
the industry/ (36)
as a whole/ (37)
understands that the personal computer as it exists today/ (38)
is not a very user-friendly/ (39)
piece of machinery.... (40)

(Landers and Guth, 2000)

Fragment 3 is a part of an interview about SONY's Play Station 2 and its impact on the future IT revolution. The interviewee (G) holds the floor from Lines 1 to 18 and presents his own perspectives on coming fierce competition among game companies. From Line 19, the interviewer (L) starts to talk about the common troubles concerned with Microsoft Windows and draws the

interviewee's attention from Lines 19 to 31. The interviewer presents another topic about what Microsoft is doing to resolve the troubles and releases the floor to the interviewee in Lines 32 and 33.

The question to be considered here is whether to recognize the interviewer (L) as the main floor holder or as the subfloor holder during his talk in Lines 19 to 33. Considering the backchanneling cues (Yngve, 1970) by the interviewee (G) in Lines 23 and 30, it seems reasonable to regard the interviewer as holding the main floor, since backchanneling cues can be considered as a kind of discourse marker to communicate that the interviewee is paying attention to the interviewer (Kendon, 1967 ; 1977 ; Dunkan and Fiske, 1977), tries to let the interviewer continue and supports the current talk (See Maynard, 1989). But a problem arises when we think of the definition of the subfloor ; that is, as mentioned earlier, subfloor emerges when the current floor supporter temporarily takes over the attention of the floor holder. Considering this definition, we can also regard the interviewee (G) in Lines 19 to 33 as receiving the central attention and holding the main floor.

## 3. Some Key Points in Subfloor Identification

### 3-1. Floor Size

Making a distinction between the main floor and the subfloor is a very complicated problem. However, reflection on the case analyses in the last few sections will indicate that it is the floor size given to a person that largely determines whether the person holds the main floor or the subfloor. For example, in Fragment 1 the floor supporter (B) temporarily takes over the attention from the main floor holder (A) and initiates the subfloor, but a marked difference between them is how much floor space is apportioned to each person. Let me first illustrate the notion of 'demand ticket' that Nofsinger (1975) presented and then move on to the discussion about what determines the floor size by referring to a conversational fragment.

#### 3-1-1. Demand Ticket and Floor Apportionment

Nofsinger (1975) coined the term 'demand ticket' to analyze some opening interactions and described how we pass the floor and switch the speaker's role

to our opposite party. He concentrated on utterances with unidentified statement, such as "Guess what?" and "Yuh know something?" He explained that those utterances are the manifestation of the utterer's intention to take the floor back from the opposite party and obligate their initiator to make some statement in the subsequent floor space (See Nofsinger, 1975 : 3). Fragment 4 will illustrate an example :

Fragment 4 :

A : Yuh know what? (1)
B : What? (2)
A : Uuh, what was it now? (3)
(A pause) (4)
Oh, ya! Know what? (5)
At school we were... (6)

(Nofsinger, 1975 : 2)

In Line 1, A takes the floor and produces a question utterance with unidentified statement, "Yuh know what?" The opposite party (B) utters a question in Line 2 and tries to clarify his unidentified statement, but it is also clear that B quickly returns the floor to A and allows him to continue the talk from Line 3. Although A takes back the floor from B and develops his talk from Line 3, we cannot see any reasonable motives for why B does not insert any utterances after the questions in Lines 3 and 5. From a theoretical viewpoint, as Stubbs (1983) notes, the next turn slot is given to the opposite party after a question utterance to accomplish a question-answer adjacency pair. Moreover, the brief pause in Line 3 can be thought as a turn transition-relevance place (Sacks et al., 1974) and this makes it possible for the opposite party to insert an utterance. Following these ideas, the floor should be passed to B and a turn slot should be given to B, but no turn transition can be observed in the fragment.

But thinking of the attention orientation between the two interlocutors, we may be able to explain the reason why the opposite party (B) passes up the opportunities to insert an utterance. The initiator of the conversation (A) succeeds in drawing the attention of his opposite party (B) in Line 1 by leaving the main statement unsaid. However, since this unidentified utterance may

endanger the forthcoming interaction unless B has a clear understanding of what his opposite party wants to mean. Therefore, B quickly returns the floor to the initiator (A) in Line 2 and gives him some floor space so that he can explain his intention in the subsequent floor space. In Line 3, A makes a question to himself to remember what he is going to talk about, but since this question is made to A himself, the main attention is still given to A. Even though B has a chance to take over the attention during the brief pause after Line 3, since B knows that A is still in the center of attention and holds the current floor space, B refrains from inserting an utterance during the pause.

A noticeable point in this explanation is that some floor space is reserved for the initiator of the unidentified utterance. It may be very reasonable to assume that such unidentified utterances not only draw the attention of the opposite parties and determine who attends to whom, but they also serve to retain the attention orientation until the initiator starts to explain the unidentified statement. Thus, here we can see that as long as a person can retain the attention orientation, the person has the priority in getting some floor space in the forthcoming interaction.

### 3-1-2. What Determines Floor Size?

Even though some floor space is given to a person, for example, by using an unidentified utterance, without receiving enough attention from the opposite parties and without trying to extend the given floor space, the person will be able to gain only limited floor space. Fragment 5 will illustrate an example :

Fragment 5 :

D : ...Ahh and you may have heard something about this from (1)
Mr. K/ (2)
(W : Yes./) (3)
but we run some programs for ah foreign students in Japan/ (4)
↑ (W : Yes./) (5)
who are learning Japanese./ (6)
(W : Uh huh./) (7)
And we ah urgently need/ (8)
Ahn some Japanese advisers, because we don't/ (9)

W : ↑ Rai, what?/ (10)
What what do you mean, Rice?/ (11)
D : Advisers./ (12)
W : Ahhhhhhh/ (13)
what what what does that mean?/ (14)
D : Oh it means just like the people to help (15)
the Japanese speakers to help us with the program./ (16)
↑ (W : Ah ahhh./) (W : Ahhh./) (17)
So that the foreigners/ (18)
(W : Nh huh./) (19)
can get practice in Japanese./ (20)
(W : Nh huh./) (21)
Ah/ (22)
so *** let me tell you... (23)

Fragment5 is a telephone conversation between an American native speaker of English (D) and a Japanese EFL learner (W). Prior to collecting this conversation, D was asked to invite W to a bowling meet at a bowling alley and later at a Japanese language camp in Beppu City as a Japanese language adviser. From Lines 1 to 9, D explains the Japanese language programs and starts to make an inquiry whether W will join either of the two activities. Considering the three backchanneling cues in Lines 3, 5 and 7, we can see that it is D who holds the main floor, and W is joining the talk as the floor supporter. The current floor supporter (W) inserts a clarification request in Line 10 and takes over the attention of the floor holder (D), but the question is how much attention the floor supporter receives and how much he tries to extend the given floor space.

As Schiffrin (1987 : 82) notes, "clarification sequences vary in degree of specificity : some requests merely mark a prior utterance as in need of repair ; others query a particular item or suggest a specific replacement." Here, no one may dispute the idea that the clarification request that W makes in Line 10, 'Rai, what?,' can be thought as a kind of the specific query for his listening trouble ; he mistakes 'adviser' for 'rice.' Considering this specific query from the viewpoint of attention orientation, we can assume that since this kind of

local query does not require much elaborate repair, the current floor holder does not attend to the request so much and provides only limited floor space to the request initiator. Looking at the other clarification request in Line 14, 'What what what does that mean?,' more elaborate repair seems to be needed, but this also functions only to provide limited floor space to the floor supporter, since the request in Line 14 neither requires such elaborate treatment nor draws the full attention of the current floor holder. Consequently, although the second clarification request functions to extend the floor space created by the first request, these two requests do not draw much attention from the floor holder, so only limited floor space is given to the floor supporter.

Moreover, we can see another reason behind this concept of extending given floor space. Of course, it may be safe to assume that the fundamental function of a clarification request is to interrupt the speaker's talk and to secure some discourse space for clarifying what is uncertain for the listener in a preceding utterance. But once the task is accomplished, the forthcoming interaction temporarily loses its object, and participants are required to seek for another goal to achieve (See Sakata, 2000). Following this line of thought, we can expect that though attention is given to the initiator at the beginning of the request sequence, when the clarification sequence ends, the attention orientation is temporarily reset to its initial condition and participants are required to decide to whom they will attend in the forthcoming interaction. In the given fragment, the clarification sequence is discontinued in Line 17 when the floor supporter utters two backchannels, which indicates that the clarification task ends there. A temporal objectless situation emerges and the participants' attention orientation is reset to its initial condition when the sequence ends, but the floor supporter passes up the opportunity to insert utterances to extend the floor space, though he has a chance to do so.

So far, we have discussed what determines the floor size apportioned to a person. As we have discussed in this section, as long as a person can continue to hold the attention of the other participants, that person maintains the right to the subsequent floor space (See Sacks, 1974). But the floor size is determined according to how much attention he receives and how much he tries to extend the given floor space. Thus, it may be reasonable to assume here that if a person cannot gain enough attention from the other parties and does not make

enough effort to extend the given floor space, the person will consequently lose the central attention in the ongoing conversation and will be regarded as the subfloor holder.

3-2. Relevance and Floor Connection

Even though we can identify a limited floor space in a given conversation, if we cannot recognize any relevance with the main floor, and if nobody clearly attends to the floor initiator, the floor should be regarded as a 'non-propositional floor' (See Edelsky, 1981 ; Shulz et al., 1982 ; Hayashi, 1991). Hayashi (1991 : 9) explains as follows :

> There are moments when a speaker is absorbed by his/her own thoughts and momentarily creates a highly self-preoccupied floor which has nothing to do with the on-going floor, so that nobody else joins in or pays attention to the speaker.

But when we analyze some multiparty conversations, there appear some cases in which some participants constitute a relevant but independent floor in parallel with the ongoing main floor. This type of floor should be regarded as a 'side floor' (Hayashi, 1991 : 8-10). The following explanation of a conversation among Carole, Len and Sally will illustrate a good example :

> In the midst of the report she [Carole] began to recount papers sorted into various categories. That her silence and counting did not change the official what's-going-on can be seen ... L [Len] and S [Sally] took turns : that is, they made on-record comments addressed to the whole group, but they used low voices as a show of "respect" for the fact that Carole was still controlling the floor even though she was not taking a turn.
>
> (Edelsky, 1981 : 406)

Considering the floor size apportioned to a person is very useful in examining whether to regard a floor as the main floor or the subfloor. But as mentioned in this section, we also have to pay attention to how much relevance

the limited floor has with the main floor.

3-3. Topic

3-3-1. Consecutive Topic Initiator

Initiating a topic is a good and effective means to get the attention of other participants. In analyzing some conversations, we can see some cases where the floor supporter inserts topics consecutively, for example, by using question utterances, and tries to extend the given floor space. But the person who initiates topics consecutively does not necessarily hold the main floor (See Hayashi, 1991 : 3). Fragment 6 will illustrate an example :

Fragment 6 :

D : ...And then we ahn stay overnight/ (1)
ah take a bath and have some games something like that/ (2)
and then we come back (3)
the next following evening/ (4)
(T : Uh huh./) (5)
and have a reception back in Kokura./ (6)
T : Ah yes/ (7)
ah but I'm sorry ah we have ah fre we have/ (8)
a fresh ah welcome for freshman party on twentieth on May/ (9)
so we can't go ah I cannot go to hot spring/ (10)
(D : Uh huh./) (11)
in Beppu./ (12)
But ah I can maybe I can participate ah (13)
bowling party/ (14)
(D : Uh huh./) (15)
bowling on ah ternty eighth on May./ (16)
↑ (D : Uh huh./) (D : Uh huh./) (17)
Then ah/ (18)
what ah where should ah where should I go on *** ah (19)
twenty-eighth May?/ (20)
D : Ahh, well, do you know Orio Star Lane?/ (21)
T : Ah yes, I know./ (22)

D : OK., before ah one o'clock/ (23)
(T : Uh huh./) (24)
p.m./ (25)
(T : Uh huh./) (26)
And ah/ (27)
then/ (28)
so that's where we'll meet, ya, one o'clock there./ (29)
T : Ahh hnnn/ (30)
then what do I have to/ (31)
nhhh take ahh/ (32)
do I have, do I have, what do I have to take/ (33)
(D : Uh huh./) (34)
to the/ (35)
Orio Star Lane?/ (36)
D : Ah/ (37)
T : Nothing?/ (38)
D : Nothing particular, no./ (39)
Just yourself./ (40)
T : Then/ (41)
ah/ (42)
what does it cost?/ (43)
D : Ahm/ (44)
ah/ (45)
T : Ah not *** or something? (46)
D : ↑ well I/ (47)

Fragment 6 is a telephone conversation collected in the same situation as in Fragment 5. The native speaker (D) develops the conversation as the main floor holder, but in Line 7 he yields the floor to the Japanese EFL learner (T) to allow T to make a reply to his inquiry and to explain why he can/cannot join the language programs. The Japanese speaker (T) gains some floor space when he starts to make a reply in Line 7, and he tries to extend the floor space by presenting a relative question about a Japanese language program from Lines 18 to 20 'Then, where should I go on May twenty-eighth?' Since neither

of the participants has talked about where they will meet until this question appears, this question utterance can be considered to function as a topic initiator as well as a confirmation request. Similar questions can be also seen from Lines 30 to 36 and from Lines 41 to 43.

Once a new topic is initiated by the current floor supporter, it temporarily draws the attention of the floor holder, but this does not affirm the provision of wide floor space to the floor supporter. As for topic development, Hayashi (1987 : 113) mentions, "topic continuity and discontinuity are determined by the interactants' motivation in orienting their attention to the topic presently shared." This indicates that without getting the attention of the other participants, it is impossible for a person to continue the initiated topic and to gain wide floor space as the main floor holder.

Looking at the topic initiators in Fragment 6, we can see that the Japanese participant (T) fails to develop each topic and gain central attention. As mentioned earlier, when a given task is accomplished, a temporal objectless situation emerges and participants are required to reconfigure their attention orientation for the forthcoming interaction. In this fragment, the floor holder pays attention to the floor supporter when a new relevant topic is initiated, but this attention orientation is reset to its initial condition when each confirmation sequence ends. Thus it may be reasonable to consider in this case that the floor holder regains central attention at the end of each confirmation sequence. This is because the floor holder has much more knowledge (expertise) about the topic content, namely the Japanese language activities, and because the caller, in this case D, gains central attention in the case of telephone conversations in general. Therefore, although the floor supporter (T) tries to expand the floor space by making some questions consecutively, it seems better in this case to regard those question sequences as a series of independent subfloors.

### 3-2-2. Expertise on Topic

A major reason why the native speaker in Fragment 6 could take the main floor may be closely associated with how much confidence he had in their knowledge of the topic. As we can often experience in our daily conversations, wider floor space will be given to the person who is thought to have more expertise about the ongoing topic and will take the leading role as long as the

topic continues.

This is also true in EFL studies. In traditional EFL research, it is believed that "a NNS is at a social, cultural and linguistic disadvantage in interaction with a NS and thus performs in a reduced role" (Wells, 1996 : 74). However, Zuengler and Bent (1991) revealed that "differing levels of context expertise may affect the dominance pattern : whether NS or NNS, the self-rated 'expert' in topic content was able to participate more dynamically in the interaction" (Wells, 1996 : 74). Fragment 7 will illustrate a good example :

Fragment 7 :

N : So they call themselves bow-wow (1)
not wan wan *hahahahaha ha./* (2)
↑ (Y : *Hahaha bow-wow./*) (3)
Y : And about in nhn two years ago/ (4)
some American teachers/ (5)
(N : Uh huh./) (6)
from Indiana state/ (7)
(N : Alright./) (8)
came to came to Fukuoka and at that time/ (9)
ah that was the project of the Mr. I/ (10)
(N : Nhn./) (11)
and nn we students/ (12)
nnn/ (13)
students nnn went with ah went went with (14)
such teachers around Fukuoka Fukuoka City./ (15)
↑ (N : Nhn./) (N : Uh huh./) (16)
And at at that time we went to the/ (17)
Dazaifu./ (18)
(N : Nhn./) (19)
And at that time the/ (20)

Fragment 7 is a conversation between two Japanese EFL learners (Y and T) and a native speaker of English (N). Although T does not appear in this fragment, they were talking about the difference of animals' sounds in

Japanese and English prior to this fragment.

The noticeable point in this fragment is that the Japanese (Y) in Line 4 starts to initiate the topic about a tour he guided. As we can see in the frequent insertion of backchanneling cues by the native speaker (N), wide floor space is given to Y while he explains about the guide tour. Following the line of thought of Zuengler and Bent (1991), it is the Japanese (Y) who has more knowledge about this experience, so the native speaker (N) is obliged to take the supportive role while Y talks about his experience.

As discussed in this section, topic also provides a key in subfloor identification. Even though the current floor supporter tries to extend a given floor by initiating some topics consecutively, if s/he cannot gain central attention of the other parties, the floor supporter cannot extend the given floor space. However, when the floor supporter starts to talk about something that s/he is more knowledgeable about, wide floor space will be provided to the floor supporter.

### 4. Situational and Cultural Context

As well as topic expertise, situational context may provide a key to make a distinction between the main floor and the subfloor. For example, in the case of a lecture, since the audience is obliged to direct their attention to the lecturer, wide floor space is given to him, so that he can develop a talk freely for a long time as the main floor holder. On the other hand, in the case of our daily chats, we often experience instances in which, even while we are attentively listening to the talk of a person, another participant interrupts the talk and tries to develop it collaboratively (Tannen, 1991). In this case, although some floor space is given to the interrupter, only limited floor space is given to him/her to support the ongoing talk as the subfloor holder.

We can also see the effect of situational context as in Fragments 5 and 6. Before collecting those conversations, the native speaker (D) was asked to make a call to the Japanese participants. Usually, wide floor space is reserved to the caller when a telephone conversation begins, since the caller makes the call to the interlocutor for a certain reason. This situational context in collecting the data seems to have largely affected apportionment of the floor

and determine who holds the main floor in those conversations.

Moreover, we can also assume that cultural context may affect on apportionment of the floor. For example, when Fragments 5 and 6 were recorded, the native speaker was about 10 years older than the Japanese participants. Thus it may be possible to assume that this age difference allows the native speaker to hold the main floor. Thinking that Japanese are likely to yield the floor to the older and higher ranking people and wait until they voluntarily yields it (Fraida, 1973), we can expect that participants' age differences may affect their floor apportionment.

Some other contextual factors, such as gender and occupation, can affect floor apportionment among the participants present at the conversation. We should also take these things into consideration in subfloor identification.

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