Korean University ESL Students' Perceptions of Their English Speaking

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my father, Joon Sang Yoo, who instilled in me the love for learning.
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ABSTRACT

KOREAN UNIVERSITY ESL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ENGLISH SPEAKING

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Ten Korean ESL students in a U.S. university English language institute were interviewed for their perceptions of their experiences with English (in particular, with English speaking) in Korea and the US, both in and out of school. This study was conducted to find the factors that led to the difficulties they encountered speaking English in and out of school in the US. Although they had studied English for many years in Korea, a majority of their English curriculum in school and in afterschool academies was preparation for the grammar and reading-based college entrance exam. Also, aspects of Korean classroom culture that they brought with them to the US appeared to inhibit them from utilizing ESL classrooms as a place to practice English speaking. Outside of school, they had difficulties making American friends who could help them improve English. This often led them to resort to the company of other Korean international students, further preventing them from improving English speaking although they had come to the US for that very reason.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Korean Education

Koreans are very interested in education; their literacy rate is 99 percent, the highest of any country at a similar level of economic development (Oh, 2012). However, the whole educational system from kindergarten to high school has been described as a preparation of college-ready students (Card, 2005; Seth, 2002). For Koreans, getting into what they consider to be a good college can improve their socioeconomic status, including even finding a suitable marriage partner in terms of social status and financial assets (Shin & Koh, 2005). In this context, the CSAT (College Scholastic Aptitude Test) that high school students in Korea take at the end of their senior year is extremely important, and English is one of the three most important subjects tested.

English Education in Korea

In the last several decades, learning English has been called a “mania” in South Korea (Park & Abelmann, 2004, p. 646). Especially in the last two decades, Koreans have invested tremendous amounts of time and money in learning English. In 1995, under President Kim Young Sam, English lessons were started four years earlier, in third grade in public elementary schools, than previously, in middle school. In addition, for faster acquisition of English, many students from kindergarten to university continued to take private English lessons outside of school or to even go abroad to study in English-
speaking countries such as the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. In 2005, according to the data from the Korean Immigration Office and the National Statistical Office, 222,605 people left Korea to learn English. In addition to the time investments, as of 2006, Koreans were spending about three to four trillion dollars on English education yearly (Bae, 2006).

Why is English this important to Koreans? First, a Korean who is proficient in English gains a global, competitive status within Korea. Dr. Pak, a sociologist at Kyunghee University (in Seoul) said that Koreans believe that globalization is the only method of survival in these multi-national times (Bae, 2006). Further, admission into the top Korean universities (such as Seoul National, Korea, and Yonsei Universities, the so-called “SKY” universities because they are so difficult to reach) and employment at major firms (such as Samsung, Hyundai, and LG) in Korea is often decided by an individual’s Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) scores.

However, all this fervor and effort have not resulted in the type of achievement many Koreans, including those who have studied English abroad, hoped for, as many still struggle to communicate orally in English. According to the data from the Educational Testing Service (ETS), which produces the TOEFL, South Korea ranks 93rd out of 226 countries in the world and 16th among Asian nations for TOEFL scores, even though the country has the largest number of TOEFL exam takers. In the test of spoken English, Korea placed 105th out of 108 countries (Jung, 2006).

Why is learning English, especially English speaking, so difficult for Koreans?
Could it be because English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) in Korea? There is a shortage of resources, such as well-trained EFL teachers and time to practice speaking English outside of the classroom (Li, 1998). In addition, the Ministry of Education (MOE) of Korea has been criticized for its ambivalence in pursuing two different paths in its English curriculum (“Koreans Still,” 2006). According to the 7th National Curriculum, the most recent curriculum for Korean public schools, although the national English goals emphasize communicative competence, grammar and reading skills are the focus of the CSAT and other assessments in middle and high school English programs. These opposing goals may make teaching communicative English a vague and unrealistic objective for English teachers in Korea (Eun, 2001).

**English in the US**

However, teaching communicative English seems to be more than an EFL problem in Korea as Koreans studying English abroad as ESL students continue to experience difficulties learning to speak or actually speaking English. Are Korean students anxious about speaking English because of their Confucian heritage (Woodrow, 2006)? Could their shyness be an effect of their perception that English has a higher status in comparison to their first language (Bikle, Hakuta & Billings, 2004)? Or, are their difficulties in speaking a result of an education emphasizing lecture-type classes (Bae, 2006)?

Much research has been conducted on the reticence of East Asian students in English academic settings in Hong Kong (Flowerdew & Miller, 1995), Australia (Littrell, 2006), and the United States (Chen, 2003). Many Korean students have written
dissertations on topics related to oral communication problems for Korean students. In addition, many U.S. teachers have commented that East Asian students are passive in classroom participation (Lee, 2004). These studies have identified potential cultural, affective, instructional, and personality factors that may impact Korean students’ reticence in the English classroom.

**Researcher Identity: ESL/EFL Teacher**

As an ESL and EFL teacher for 21 years, I have also witnessed this passivity in the majority of my Korean students in both the US and in Korea. I tried to help my students overcome this passivity through engaging them in discussions of books, often challenging them to participate. I wielded the power of the oral participation grade until they started taking the initiative for their own learning. Even though I was able to observe my Korean students’ English speaking behavior and adjust my teaching accordingly, I never formally asked them what they were thinking when they were not speaking English in my classroom. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore holistically 10 Korean ESL students in a U.S. university English language institute in their journey with English speaking from their experiences starting in Korea to their present life in the US to find out how they perceive issues and difficulties related to their ability to speak English.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. Why did these 10 Korean ESL students come to the United States?
2. What are the students’ perceptions of their English speaking and learning in Korea, in class and out of class?
3. What are the students’ perceptions of their English speaking and learning in the United States, in class and out of class?

4. What do the ESL students think they could do – what would help them – to improve English speaking in the United States?

5. How have their culture and experiences influenced their perceptions of learning English, especially speaking?

**Statement of the Problem**

It is important to learn more about Korean students’ perceptions of their English speaking because even after many years of English education in Korea, these international students still have problems communicating orally. To understand the reasons for their difficulties with oral communication, it is important to explore how these students learned English in Korea for at least six years (in middle and high school). In addition to what the research says about Korean education, it is important to examine: 1) how these students perceived and experienced Korea’s English curriculum through their own eyes and words, 2) what English background and experiences they brought to the US when they came to study English, and 3) how their current experiences with English, as ESL students, unfolded in the US. Unlike previous research that has focused on Korean students in the English language classrooms, East Asian students learning EFL, and East Asian students learning ESL or content courses in the US, this study looks at Korean ESL students more holistically, in the classroom and outside the classroom in Korea and in the US to understand their English speaking experiences from their perspectives and to explore how those experiences may have affected their present
English behavior and thoughts.

**Significance of This Study**

This study of Korean university ESL students’ perceptions of their English speaking will lead to a better understanding of how these L2 (second language) students think and view their English surroundings, and how their views have affected their English speaking in and out of the classroom in Korea and in the US. The purpose of this study is to examine holistically the English journey of 10 Korean ESL students in a U.S. university English language institute from their first English exposures in Korea up through their present life in the United States to determine how they perceive issues and difficulties related to their English speaking that continue to affect their daily lives in English in the US.

This holistic study offers another new perspective on East Asian and Korean international students’ oral classroom participation. Participants in most previous studies were graduate students in content courses, but this study focuses primarily on undergraduate ESL students before they are mainstreamed. Furthermore, this study differs from previous studies in that it examines language learning in Korea and the United States, rather than only one or the other. Similarly, this study covers English speaking in school and out of school. In sum, this study combines the areas of research of many previous studies into one, to provide a fresher perspective on these ESL students, who are complex beings learning English as EFL and as ESL in school and outside of school. This research study could contribute to a more three-dimensional picture of these ESL students, who they are and where they are coming from, so that people like them,
both Koreans and other East Asians with similar cultural backgrounds, could achieve greater English fluency in the United States.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The conceptual model I used in this study has two parts: researcher identity and a literature review that covers three strands: 1) the importance of speaking the second language to improve the second language fluency; 2) background information on the Korean educational system in general and English teaching methods in particular, in Korea; and 3) studies of Korean (and other East Asian) students’ English speaking in the classrooms in the US and other English-speaking countries.

I have included researcher identity in the conceptual model because I, the researcher, became interested in the topic of Korean ESL and EFL students’ reticence in the classroom from my many years of experience as a classroom ESL and EFL teacher.

I designed the review of literature outlined below to fill any gaps in my understanding. First, I sought research on the importance of actually speaking the second language to learn and improve fluency in the language. Although it might seem obvious that to learn to speak one must speak, because this study is based on that principle, prior research validating this connection is critical to my study.

Part two of the literature review covers the background of the Korean educational system in general and English education in Korea in particular. This section provides background knowledge important to understanding how the interviewees were educated.
Lastly, part three of the literature review looks at the research on East Asian and, in particular, Korean international students’ classroom experiences in the United States, Canada, and Hong Kong. This section was designed to examine the current knowledge on Korean international students’ oral classroom participation.

In summary, the conceptual model includes my teaching experiences with Korean ESL/EFL students’ classroom behaviors and the literature review. The purpose is to understand the different puzzle pieces surrounding Korean students’ reticence in classroom participation: why speaking the second language is important for learning the second language; English education in Korea; and the state of Korean students’ classroom participation in U.S. classrooms (and in Canada and Hong Kong).

**Researcher Identity**

Through this research project, I wanted to know how Korean ESL students learned and thought about English, especially speaking. Since 1992, as an ESL teacher in the US and then as an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher in Korea from 1997 for six and half years, I observed many reticent Korean ESL and EFL students in my classes. More than other ethnic groups like Hispanics, or even other Asians like the Vietnamese, my Korean middle school ESL students in the US tended to flock together more and remained quiet without speaking English in the class, either as a group or as individuals. I understood it was natural for ESL students to seek a sense of security by staying with their own kind, but Korean students as a group seemed to show more collectivism and introversion than any other ethnic group in my multi-ethnic ESL classes.
In addition, when I started to teach EFL to university students in Korea, I noticed the same phenomenon. Most of my students were quiet, maybe unwilling or afraid to speak up in class. To encourage them to talk in class, I had to literally ‘force’ words out of their mouths by threatening them with participation grade points.

This problem of Korean ESL students’ refusal or inability to speak in English concerned me tremendously. Part of my frustration might have come because we were both Koreans. “Why don’t they raise their hands? Why can’t/won’t they participate in discussions and share what they are thinking? If they don’t practice speaking English in the EFL class, where will they get the practice to speak English? Why are they so afraid? What is barring them from speaking in class?” Their lack of participation led me to judge them as passive students. However, this image proved wrong when I saw their written work in English. I realized they had a great deal that they could have shared orally but did not, maybe because they could not. Only I, the teacher who read their writing, knew that these “passive students” had great ideas that would remain silent and unknown to their classmates. In my opinion, in American society, or in the competitive global society of today, a person’s verbal communication skills are more than an asset; it is a must. No matter how good students’ writing may be, their inability or the refusal to participate verbally in the English classroom could prove detrimental (Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Flowerdew & Miller, 1995; Turner & Hiraga, 1996) to their development into good second language communicators who can connect to the society and become leaders.

This frustration with Koreans’ passivity in English speaking led me to ask: “Why don’t they speak in English? Is it because they have too many other Koreans around them
in the class? Is it too awkward to use English in front of other Koreans? Do they need more time? Will they eventually emerge from their shells once they are ready? Are they still immersed in the Korean educational culture where students just listen and take notes while the teachers lecture? Are they constrained by the hierarchical mechanisms of Korean culture? Is the face-saving culture (“chaemyun” in Korean) of Korea at play in ESL and EFL classes?”

As I approach this study of what Korean students think about speaking in English, I began with these theoretical lenses: interpretivism (Boas, 1940) and critical theory (Freire, 1968/1970; Giroux, 1988). I used interpretivism to find out what the students were thinking as I listened to their stories during the interviews, told in their own words. Critical theory, especially critical pedagogy (Freire, 1968/1970; Giroux, 1988) allowed me to empower the students, to give them a voice with which to describe their experiences as second language learners. By the same token, using this lens, I was aware of my own preconception, formed over my 21 years of experience as an ESL/EFL teacher of Korean students, that my participants would not be very verbal, at least in the classroom. I went into the interviews fully aware of these preconceptions. I felt that my awareness of this strong teacher persona would help me be a more objective interviewer/researcher than if I considered myself to be perfectly neutral. Because I was aware of my strong researcher identity, I was very conscious throughout the interviews and the data analysis of the importance of remaining neutral and refraining from putting words in my interviewees’ mouth. Instead, I hoped my background as an ESL teacher and former ESL student myself would help me empathize with the students throughout the
study, from the interviews until I was finished with the data analysis.

The first theory, interpretivism, is based on Franz Boas’ cultural anthropology of going to the natives to hear their stories. I wanted to hear the stories from my “natives,” the students themselves, from their own level. What did English mean to them? What was going on in their heads when they were asked to discuss in class? What were the cultural, educational, and psychological factors at play in the ESL classroom? What exactly was barring them from talking? I wanted to stop seeing them from the teacher’s perspective and to start seeing the classroom or the world through their eyes, as described in their own words: What did they think of English? How difficult was it to start talking in the classroom or out in the real world? What was the cause of their silence in the class? By discovering the reasons for their behavior, I felt that in the future, as a teacher and a researcher, I could learn to help people like them become more confident and better English speakers.

Secondly, I began with a critical theory framework. As a teacher, I used to share with my students that they, either as ESL or EFL students, needed to become more vocal in the classroom and outside if they wanted to be seen as someone with ideas and thoughts which would translate into a voice and power (Freire 1968/1970; Giroux, 1988). I used to lecture them on the importance of being able to express themselves in the target language if they wanted to have some power in the new culture and language. In western society, being vocal in the language is equated with power and is encouraged by society. However, for the purposes of this study, I was no longer a teacher but an objective researcher. I could not lecture these interviewees about the need to be vocal in English
and to make an imprint in the English-speaking society that they were a part of.

Nevertheless, I still felt that critical theory played a role in this research as I was giving these Korean students a voice (Freire, 1968/1970; Giroux, 1988) with which to express their thoughts and ideas on their own experiences and education with this new language that has long been a part of their lives. Even though this voice was not generally heard in a classroom setting, it was still a voice that could be heard by the vehicle of my dissertation.

As discussed above, I was clearly aware of my own identity as I approached this study and the necessity of not imposing myself as a teacher on my interviewees. Fully conscious of the theories that had influenced me as a teacher, I could be more vigilant about my own objectivity as I listened to the interviewees’ responses to my semi-structured, yet guided, questions (See the Threats to Validity section in Chapter 3 for more information on researcher identity).

Next, the following literature review will be in three strands: 1) the importance of speaking the second language to improve the second language; 2) background information on Korea’s English teaching methods; and 3) studies on Korean (and other East Asian) students’ English speaking in the classrooms in the US and other English-speaking countries.

**Part I: Importance of Speaking the Second Language to Improve the Second Language**

Several scholars have addressed the question of how speaking leads to improved language acquisition. The output hypothesis (Swain, 1995) claims that language output is
product plus process. According to Swain (1995), second language students go through three stages as they try to produce more accurate language: noticing/triggering function, hypothesis-testing function, and the metalinguistic (reflective) function.

In the 1980s, the dominant second language acquisition theory was Krashen’s i+1 (1982) of comprehensible input. Krashen believed that if learners are at stage i (with i being their knowledge level), then they could comprehend a little more (1) than i. But this theory came into question through data from French immersion programs in Canada (Swain, 2005) when the students who were immersed in the second language produced speaking and writing different from that of francophone students even though the immersion students had received plenty of comprehensible input in the second language. These immersion students were taught all or some of their curriculum in the second language. To explain why the language production of immersion and native speaker students of French differed, other theories were sought. It was found that the immersion students did not actually use much French in the French portion of the class and that their teachers did not accurately correct their grammar or sociolinguistic use (Swain, 2005).

The output hypothesis “claims that the act of producing language (speaking or writing) constitutes, under certain circumstances, part of the process of second language learning” (Swain, 2005, p. 471). As students try to speak to others or speak to themselves in the second language, they may notice what is incorrect or what they do not know about their language production. However, as they talk to native speakers, they notice that what they have said is incorrect and are pushed to correct their incorrect language in the stage called hypothesis testing. Next, they experience what is called reflection where they learn
the rules of the new language (previously unknown to them). In a case study, Swain & Lapkin (1998) studied a pair of eighth-grade male and female French immersion students who were using dialogues in both L1 (the native language) and L2 (the target language) to solve problems to produce a writing piece. The results showed that dialogues served as a means of communication and as a cognitive tool to aid the students’ L2 learning. The pair’s task was to write a story line with a series of pictures. In the midst of writing their story, the pair encountered linguistic problems. To solve the problems, the pair resorted to both L1 and L2 dialogues to produce their writing.

Similarly, Murphy (1991) discusses the ESL teacher as the native speaker who helps ESL students. ESL teachers can serve as models of ‘conventional language’ when they correct students’ speech by ‘rephrasing these into linguistically accurate target language patterns’ (p. 65). Such corrections could help the students who are “affectively” ready to accept the input.

In another study of high school ESL students in a mainstream social studies class in Canada, Duff (2001) determined that to succeed in content classes, ESL students have to participate in a variety of classroom discussions and reading and writing activities. Further, to be successful in a learning community, students needed to learn the discourses associated with that community (Duff, 1996).

Pica, Lincoln-Porter, Paninos, & Linnell (1996) found that interactions between two L2 students provided some input and feedback on their language production, but not as much modified input and feedback as occurred in interactions with native speakers. In addition, Fillmore (1991) said that L2 children can acquire English successfully when
they are frequently and directly interacting with people who know the language well and whose language usage demonstrates how the language works and can be used.

Some studies discuss what university professors expected from ESL students in terms of language skills. In a study by Ferris & Tagg (1996), many college professors mentioned the ESL students’ need to overcome cultural inhibition/shyness to speak up in class to learn to ask and answer questions and to communicate more with native English speakers and less with students of their own culture.

The second reason that actually speaking the second language is important is related to cognitive abilities. Language is a tool for communicating with society and that communication sharpens the speaker’s understanding of his environment (Vygotsky, 1986). According to Vygotsky, language is the tool through which the user understands his world and society made up of others. By communicating with the world using language, a psychological tool, a picture of the world forms in the person’s consciousness. For Vygotsky, a person’s world was made by interactions with others using language, a tool, in order to make “individual consciousness” (p. 24). People’s ‘higher mental functions must be viewed as products of mediated activity….and the role of mediator is played by psychological tools and means of interpersonal communication” (p. 24). The interaction between native speakers and non-native speakers could be viewed as that of adults and children. In Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development, children’s “weakness of spontaneous reasoning are compensated by the strengths of scientific logic” (1986, p. 35). The organized schema of adults’ knowledge helps order the disorganized understanding of children. Likewise, by interacting with the knowledgeable native
speakers, non-native speakers could notice and correct their mistakes in the second
language (Pica et al., 1996; Swain, 2005).

The third reason actually speaking the second language is helpful for the second
language learner is that it gives the speaker a voice. While second language learners are
not “silenced” in the way that Paulo Freire (1968/1970) describes the illiterate workers of
Brazil who did not have the “words to read the world,” not being able to express their
thoughts in the second language is also a form of being “silenced.” By saying words and
sentences, second language learners can express who they are to the world, starting with
their teacher and classmates in ESL or content classes. In a world where the ability to
express oneself is an asset, they need to show everyone that they can speak and share
their thoughts. According to Giroux (1988), schools are little models of society. As in
society, in schools there are dominant voices, those of the teachers and the students of the
dominant culture. For second language learners, especially those from collectivist
cultures or from places where classroom discussions are not promoted, speaking up in
class can be challenging. But if they do not speak, their voices could be silenced by the
dominant culture, which has a loud voice. It is vital that these ESL students take part in
the struggle for influence using the tools recognized by the dominant culture, the spoken
language. If they make themselves heard, they will not be judged as having no ideas to
share. According to Giroux, schools are “sites where the culture of the dominant society
is learned and where students experience the difference between those status and class
distinctions that exist in the larger society” (p. 5-6). Therefore, to compete with the
dominant culture, ESL students must use the tool, English, that promotes that dominant
Finally, English is a global language (Park, 2009) and also the language of business. For Korea, whose main business is exports, it is vital that its citizens, especially the employees of global companies such as Samsung and Hyundai, be able to communicate in English. Despite the stated goal of the national curriculum that Koreans be able to communicate in spoken English, the majority of Koreans, even after at least six years of English education in public schools and many years of extra classes outside of school in hakwons (private institutions of supplemental education) (Park, 2009), cannot communicate effectively by speaking English.

To summarize Part I of the literature review, a language learner must speak in the second language to improve language proficiency and cognitive abilities, establish status and power in school and the outside world, and to find a good job, as well as for other practical reasons. By saying words and sentences in the second language in interactions with native speakers who “push” students to use correct forms of the language, students can improve their language output (Swain, 2005). According to Vygotsky (1986), a person’s consciousness is formed and sharpened by interacting with society using language. In addition, according to the Zone of Proximal Development, knowledgeable experts—adults or teachers—can help organize the disorganized idea world of children. Likewise, the incomplete second language knowledge and usage of non-native speakers could be improved with native speakers’ help via interactions using the second language (Swain, 1995). Also, it is vital that second language learners speak the language in order not to be “silenced” (Freire, 1968/1970) and deemed powerless. By speaking the
language of the dominant culture, the second language learner has a means to establish status and share the power in the classroom. Lastly, Korean students have to learn and speak English to increase their chances of being accepted into universities and hired by companies upon graduation. This very practical need is a dire reality for young Koreans in Korea (Park, 2009).

**Part II: Context for English Teaching in Korea**

Part Two of the literature review covers the state of education in Korea in general and that of English education, in particular, to understand the English experiences that the interviewees had in Korea.

**Korea’s Obsession With Education**

Koreans are very interested in education. In fact, Seth (2002) describes Koreans’ view of education as a “fever” (p. 1), and Park & Abelmann (2004) describe it as a “mania” (p. 646). For example, many children under three years of age attend private hakwons (academies for supplemental education, usually held after school) to get an educational advantage even before they formally start school. According to a survey by the state-run Korea Institute of Child Care and Education of 2,523 households, 41.9 percent of children under three years and 86.8 percent of children between three and six attend private hakwons in addition to kindergartens, nurseries, or pre-school (“Most Kids Under 3 Sent to Private Crammers,” 2012). Maybe this educational fever has led to Korea’s high literacy rate. In 1945, a few years before the Korean War (1950-1953), only 22% of Koreans were literate (Seth, 2002; Sorensen 1994), but currently, six decades later, the literacy level is at 99 percent, the highest of any country at a similar stage of
economic development (Oh, 2012). This preoccupation with education may have originated with Confucianism, which is characterized by a high regard for learning and social status, and which has prevailed over Korea for thousands of years (Seth, 2002). During the Chosun Dynasty (1392-1897), Confucianism became the state religion and started to influence Koreans’ lifestyle and thoughts. A current example of the possible influence of Confucianism is that, at present, the quickest and surest method for social mobility in Korea is graduating from a top university (Sorensen, 1994).

Additionally, the whole Korean educational system is programmed to prepare students to perform their best on the College Scholastic Aptitude Test (CSAT) taken at the end of 12th grade (Card, 2005; Seth, 2002). For Koreans, admission to a good university improves their socioeconomic status and even provides a better chance for finding a more suitable marriage partner in terms of social status and financial assets (Shin & Koh, 2005). Therefore, on the day of the test, airports and work places adjust their schedules to reduce traffic and noise while the students take the CSAT. Policemen on motorcycles stand ready to escort any students who have overslept to the appropriate testing center.

**Entering College**

As mentioned before, all Korean education can be viewed as a preparation for entering a prestigious university (Seth, 2002). People admitted to the top three universities—Seoul National University (SNU), Korea University, and Yonsei University ("SKY" because they are at the top and very difficult to reach)—make connections that lead to the most prestigious jobs in the country. However, getting into these top schools, or any other university, is very competitive. For example, in the 1989–1990 school year,
800,000 students took college entrance examinations for fewer than 200,000 college places (Shin & Koh, 2005). Those who do not attend the top schools cannot procure a job with the most sought-after employers, such as Samsung and Hyundai. Korean students also compete for the highest ranked universities because alumni connections influence employment opportunities (Lee & Brinton, 1996). A recruitment portal, Job Korea, asked 1,155 workers in their 20s and 30s what the most important criteria for success were; 23.4% said educational background was the most important (“Educational Background Vital in Social Success, Poll Says,” 2011). This survey shows young salaried workers’ belief that a degree from a prestigious university is the most important factor for success. Previously, when Job Korea surveyed 2,042 salaried workers about their regrets in the economic recession, 15.3% answered lacking a degree from a prestigious university (“English Deciding Factor in Success of Office Workers,” 2010). Despite about 50 years of school reform discussions by the national government and the public to improve the educational system from being a mere preparation for the university examination, the competition has gotten worse (Seth, 2002).

After College

Even after college, students have to worry about competing in the job market with their English proficiency. They must show their credentials which include English proficiency test scores such as TOEIC (Test of English as International Communication) and TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). Having high scores on those tests or having been overseas to study foreign languages can give job seekers a better chance of finding a good job (“English Grades Depend on Parents' Income,” 2012). TOEIC scores
of university graduates had been found to correlate with study abroad and the level of their parents’ education. Many companies, such as Samsung and Hyundai, interview potential employees in English or other foreign languages as part of the application process.

Financial Burdens of Education

To help children perform their best on the test (CSAT) that decides their future in Korean society, the whole family of the students, especially the mother (as the manager of the student’s time and activities), takes on the job of preparing the student (Card, 2005). Not trusting that the public schools could do an excellent job of preparing their children for the life-changing exam, the parents add on private lessons through hakwons (after school academies) or private tutoring to make their children more competitive, even if it means a huge expenditure from the family’s budget. In 1998, Koreans spent 2.9% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on private tutoring at the primary and secondary levels, while the total public education expenditure was 3.4% of the GDP (Kim, 2005). This meant that in overall spending, the parents’ portion was close to the amount spent by the government on children’s education. The Korean Educational Development Institute calculated the total private education costs to be 13.65 trillion won (about $15 billion) in 2004, the highest of all Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD) countries in private education tuition (Card, 2005). The Samsung Economic Research Institute estimates the amount Koreans spend on private English education to be at an annual average of 15 trillion won, three times more than in Japan (Chun & Choi, 2006). Between 2004 and 2005, Koreans comprised 19 percent of the number of total applicants
for the TOEFL, and more than 700 billion won (about 613 million US dollars) was spent on TOEFL and TOEIC tests. These figures do not include the money spent on overseas education. The number of schoolchildren who went overseas for study rose by 40,000 in five years, from 150,000 in 2001 to 190,000 in 2006 (‘Does Korea Gain from Being a ‘Republic of English’?’ 2007).

**English Education**

In this context of the Korean educational system with its main goal of preparing students to be admitted into the best Korean universities, English is one of the most important subjects studied. English is critical not only because of the Korean government’s desire to compete globally, but also because it provides a means of comparing Korean students to one another on the CSAT. According to Park (2009), Koreans have a “fetish” with English that needs to be understood in a global and local context. As an example in the local context for this English “fetish,” a website in Korea that provides prenatal English education has gathered more than 50,000 subscribers over the last two years (‘Does Korea Gain from Being a ‘Republic of English’?’ 2007). For some Korean children, English education starts even before they are born.

English has been taught for about 100 years in Korea (Chang, 2003). Historically, English has been taught in schools using the Grammar Translation Method (a method of translating foreign language passages using grammar rules) (Richards & Rogers, 1986), but this method was changed to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the 1990’s, starting with the 6th National Curriculum of Korea. Shifting to a goal of communicative competence was, in part, a reaction to the fact that many Korean students, after six years
of English education from seventh grade to 12th grade, could not carry on a conversation in English. Chang (2003) found that the number of years students spent learning English did not correlate with improved communicative competence; in his study, Chang compared college students’ English to that of middle school students’ and found that the college students’ proficiency was no better than that of the younger students. More years of English instruction did not guarantee a higher English communicative competency. In September 2005, when a speaking section replaced the grammar component in the TOEFL exams, Korea’s rank dropped to 111th. In the speaking section, Korea ranked almost at the bottom, at 134th (“Does Korea Gain from Being a ‘Republic of English?’” 2007).

Another reason the Korean government is emphasizing communicative competence is to keep pace with the world. Since 1997, under President Kim Young Sam’s globalization campaign, English instruction in public schools has begun in third grade. However, globalization by learning English has a dual meaning for Koreans, globalization in localization. According to Park & Abelmann (2004), the meaning of being South Korean has changed to being South Korean in the world. This means that for South Koreans, English involved local projects within Korea such as school achievement, employment, and workplace success, independent of global benefits from knowing English as a world language (Park & Abelmann, 2004).

**Communicative Language Teaching**

In the midst of this fervor for acquiring English with pressure from all sectors of society including business, education, and homes, the government has tried to provide a
good English curriculum in the public schools, but has encountered many problems. First, many English teachers are native Korean speakers and not orally proficient in English (since they themselves learned English using grammar/reading methods when they were students); thus, their teaching is marked by poor pronunciation and fluency (Li, 1998). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a well-established model in English language teaching; however, some claim that it was developed for a native speaker teacher (Thompson, 1996). Additionally, Korean EFL teachers have had difficulties implementing CLT because of the differences between Korean and Western educational philosophies. In the Korean view, the teacher is the source of knowledge. However, in CLT, though the teacher’s role is crucial (Savignon, 1991), it is more as a facilitator than a traditional teacher. Most Korean teachers feel unprepared to take on the facilitator role, lacking confidence in their own English speaking skills (Yeom, 2004).

**Confucianism and the Ideal of the Quiet Student**

In the midst of this education fervor both public and private, it is important to note the kind of education Korean students receive in Korea. The teacher enjoys the same status as the father and the ruler according to Confucianism, the prevailing ideology for Koreans for thousands of years. Teachers are the sources of knowledge and they impart this knowledge to the students. Despite the recent reforms in the education system aimed at shifting away from the exam-oriented national curriculum spanning elementary education through college (Seth, 2002), rote learning still predominates (Shin & Koh, 2005). In typical Korean classrooms, the teacher lectures while the students take notes. In collective cultures, not many words are needed to convey nuances, and students can
understand a lot from the teacher’s eyes alone. Therefore, many Korean students get irritated when other students talk “too much,” wasting valuable class time. They believe that they should take as many lecture notes as possible during class. In Korean culture, silence is valued as deep knowledge. In other words, people who talk “too much” are not respected and are considered shallow and without substance. There is even a Korean proverb that says, “Empty carts are loud.” Given these cultural norms, many Korean students are reluctant to show what they know in front of their classmates as such actions could very likely be viewed as showing off. Bang (1999), who wrote a dissertation on factors that affect Korean students’ risk taking behavior in the EFL classroom, said that Korean students were not accustomed to participating in class and that “oral activeness” could be viewed as showing off by other classmates since silence was viewed as wisdom.

The quiet student norm in Korean classrooms could also be related to the idea of the CSAT as a tool of socialization that enforces discipline. According to Gray (1998), students are socialized to accept the values prized by society, the group, and the system. Education is embedded in the Confucian ideas of obligation, duties, and social harmony (Gray, 1998). According to Confucianism, teachers are like parents and should be respected by students (Bang, 1999; Huh, 2004). In Confucianist Korea, the academic success of the child brings honor to the whole family (Sorensen, 1994). Therefore, it is not surprising that Korean parents spend most of their earnings on educating their children (“Korean Parents Spend Too Much on Their Children,” 2012).

**Going Abroad to Study**

Many Korean students leave Korea either to take a short-term language course
(resulting in a language certificate) or to earn a degree from an international educational institution ("English Only," 2006). In 2007, 218,000 Korean students were studying abroad, and in the US, Korean students make up the third largest group of international students (McNeill, 2008). Some of the students who leave Korea belong to the “Kirogi [lonely wild goose] Fathers’ Syndrome” families. In kirogi families, the fathers usually stay behind in Korea to earn the tuition money while the wives and children go abroad for the children’s education. This phenomenon was named after wild geese because these birds mate for life and travel great distances to bring back food for their young, just like these dedicated fathers who forego the comforts and love of a family so the children can be educated in another country. Korean officials cannot say how many families are kirogi, but they know how many children leave the country: approximately 10,000 school-age children left to study overseas in 2002, up from 4,400 in 2000 (Ly, 2005).

Summary of Part II

Korea as a nation is very interested in the topic of education. Its literacy level is 99%, one of the highest when compared to countries at a similar stage of economic development. The whole system of education seems to be influenced by the concept of getting into the top universities to succeed in society in terms of a high-paying job, a good marriage partner, and a high level of social status. Therefore, the goal from the very earliest stage of a child’s life is admission into one of the best universities, the key to success in life. This education fever originates, in part, in Confucianism, which values education as embodied in the gentleman scholar and the all-knowing teacher who imparts knowledge to students who show the same filial piety to their teachers as to their parents.
and rulers. These beliefs and this cultural context promote quiet students who prove their abilities through rote memorization that serves them well on tests, especially the culminating test of their secondary education, the CSAT.

In the midst of this fervor for performing one’s best on the CSAT, English exists as one of the three most important subjects tested on the CSAT. However, the national government of Korea in its efforts to produce students who could communicate in English and to be more competitive as national leaders and as businessmen, promoted a communicative curriculum for English instruction. However, these two goals, producing communicative English speakers and good performers on the CSAT, did not go hand in hand. In addition, there were many problems related to providing a communicative English program in public schools when the realities of teachers with low English proficiencies, the high number of students in the classrooms, and the test that did not reflect the curriculum did not change.

This is the current status of English education and general education in Korea, and the situation is becoming more and more competitive. Thus, this is the environment in which the 10 ESL students in this study learned English prior to coming to the United States.

**Part III: Studies of ESL Students’ English Speaking in the Classroom**

**Surveys About Language Learning Beliefs and Language Anxiety: FLCAS and BALLI**

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) created a survey called the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) that measures a learner’s anxiety while learning a
foreign language. Students who scored high on the FLCAS reported that they were afraid to speak the foreign language in the classroom. The more anxious students avoided speaking difficult passages in the foreign language.

By replicating Horwitz et al.’s (1986) FLCAS and including interviews, Mak (2011) studied the English speaking anxiety of 313 Chinese freshmen in a Hong Kong university. The results showed that anxiety was related to five factors: speech anxiety over speaking English and fear of negative evaluation, feeling uncomfortable when speaking with native speakers, negative attitudes towards the English classroom, negative self-evaluation, and fear of failing the class. In addition, survey results showed that speaking in front of the class without preparation, teacher corrections of students’ speaking, short wait-time by the teacher, and not being allowed to use Chinese in the classroom all led to anxiety in speaking English. Mak suggested that language teachers work harder to produce a secure and safe classroom to reduce anxiety levels in speaking English not only for Chinese students but for all language students.

In addition to the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), Horwitz (1987) created the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) to measure students’ beliefs about second/foreign language learning. This survey instrument has 34 items to measure language aptitude, difficulty of language learning, nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivation and expectations.

Several studies have used this survey to study students’ beliefs about language learning. For example, using BALLI, Truitt (1995) studied a group of 204 Korean university EFL students. She found that most of the Korean students had strong
motivations to learn English, but not to use the language to get to know people who speak English. The Korean EFL students in her study reported feeling shy about using English. They considered culture and pronunciation to be very important in learning English. The BALLI results showed that the Korean EFL students were less confident than the American foreign language students that Horwitz (1988) had studied. The Korean students were also less confident than Chinese EFL students that Yang (1992) studied. In Truitt’s study, BALLI's two belief factors of self-efficacy/confidence in speaking and beliefs about the ease of learning English correlated with foreign language anxiety for Korean students. This meant that the more anxious students had less confidence and felt that learning English was more difficult.

In 1999, Horwitz did a review of the studies that have used BALLI to find differences among cultures. She concluded that the differences in the Korean group and the group of Turkish heritage learners might be due to learning circumstances more than to culture. Finch (2008) also used BALLI to study a group of Korean EFL university students to study attitude changes about language learning over three semesters and concluded that learning environment determines learning outcomes.

**Several Explanations for Why Speaking English in the Classroom Was Difficult**

Outside of the US, there have been several studies that investigated students’ English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) speaking difficulties in the content classrooms, especially at the high school level.

**Hong Kong EFL studies.** Some of these studies come from Hong Kong and Canada. For example, Lai (1994) surveyed 487 Form Four (equivalent to 10th grade in the
US) students in 11 secondary schools in Hong Kong. Ninety percent of Hong Kong secondary schools are "Anglo-Chinese," which means that English is the medium of instruction except for classes in Chinese language and Chinese history. The survey was distributed to a variety of schools including government schools and private schools and to students of varying levels of academic achievement. The issues studied were: 1) the availability of opportunities for meaningful communication in the English classroom as written on the Hong Kong syllabus; 2) learners' confidence level in using English in class; and 3) factors that accounted for different confidence levels. The results showed that the meaningful communication as specified on the Hong Kong syllabus was not occurring in the classroom; teacher talk dominated while students had few genuine communicative interactions. When asked about confidence in speaking English, the majority of students answered that they felt a lack of confidence (even though they had studied English for at least 10 years). The students who had low confidence perceived their own English to be poor, tended not to talk to English teachers, did not give long answers, did not express opinions, did not do group work, and refrained from discussions. The three factors for low confidence were: low self-esteem (apprehension about speaking in formal class settings, being the focus of attention, and losing face), language anxiety (feeling one’s ideas are foolish, fear over a low standard of English, and not knowing what to say), and little genuine communicative interactions in the English classroom. Lai suggested that opportunities for genuine communication are related to the confidence level of students and that teachers play key roles in student confidence and perceptions of English.

In another study in Hong Kong, Jackson (2003) studied business major students
in a university where the language of instruction was English. The students had to present cases as part of their business class. Many students felt inhibited, saying they were affected by the Chinese culture of modesty and group harmony. The students said that they wanted to participate more and that they would like the teachers to give them more time to answer questions. Also, they said that rehearsing their case presentations in small groups and in friendly atmosphere would help them.

**Canadian ESL studies.** Some studies from Canada were related to ESL students’ learning of the target language discourse. In Canada, Duff (2001) studied mainstreamed (ESL students who had exited from ESL programs) Canadian ESL high school students in a social studies class and found that ESL students, mostly Taiwanese and Hong Kong Chinese, remained “removed from open discussions” (p. 122) regardless of their proficiency level, motivation to excel in academics, or years of residence in Canada. The mainstreamed ESL students received average or above average grades in the class and were “diligent, resourceful, and privileged” (p. 122) with private tutors for extra English after school. However, these students still struggled to become full members of the Canadian discourse community. According to Duff (2001), becoming an active member of a discourse community requires learning its discourse and practices.

Also, in 2002, Duff wrote an article about discussions of pop culture in a 10th grade social studies class. Pop culture discussed in the class included newspapers, TV programs, movies, radio stations, or magazines that the local students had access to. When the teacher made connections from Canadian pop culture to his social studies lessons, the local students were enthusiastic and well versed in the topics. The ESL
students, however, mostly from Hong Kong or Taiwan, remained on the periphery and quiet most of the time. The speed of the discussions and turn taking made it almost impossible for these non-native students to participate in the discussions. After school, these ESL students spent time in extra English tutoring, music lessons, or watching TV programs or reading newspapers in their home language, not immersed in the local Canadian culture. Duff suggested that teachers try to find out what cultural capital these students are bringing with them so that they could be included in discussions happening in the classrooms and that these students’ affective concerns must continue to be researched.

**International graduate students’ perceptions.** There have been several studies on Asian graduate students’ perceptions about speaking English in the classroom. For example, Kim (2006, 2007) asked international graduate students in a U.S. university what they thought were the most important oral/aural academic skills needed to succeed in the classroom. Kim (2006) surveyed graduate students in non-science majors since classes in those majors usually require more oral classroom participation than classes for science majors. Respondents were mostly East Asian from China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. The survey asked about: 1) graduate students' views on academic listening/speaking required by professors in academic settings; 2) students’ difficulties in meeting these requirements; and 3) students’ perceptions of academic listening/speaking needed to succeed in graduate courses. Sixty-three percent of the respondents were doctoral students with average time of residence in the US of three years. The results showed that students felt participation in whole class and small group discussions, strong
listening skills, and ability to ask questions were the most required speaking/listening skills in academic courses. To the question of what difficulties they faced to fulfill these requirements, they answered that they were most concerned about leading class discussions, participating in whole-class discussions and small group discussions (even though they felt small groups were less difficult than whole group) and giving oral presentations. When asked what they saw as the academic speaking/listening abilities needed to succeed in graduate courses, they said formal oral presentation and strong listening skills were the most important. Kim (2006, 2007) suggested that ESL teachers provide language experiences in the ESL classroom that will be required in content classes, such as explicitly teaching about asking questions and non-verbal communications. She also advised that teachers teach the value and need for active oral participation in content-based lessons by inviting mainstreamed ESL students taking content classes and professors teaching content classes to come and explain the English language expectations of those classes.

As part of her doctoral dissertation, Kim (2007) studied East Asian graduate students’ perceptions of classroom verbal participation in academic courses. The survey findings from 139 students and interviews with 15 students showed that the graduate students felt that asking questions and participating in whole class discussions were the two most expected oral tasks in the classroom. The students reported that leading and participating in class discussions were the most difficult oral activities in the class. However, the East Asian students felt that remaining silent, yet listening attentively was another way of participation. The East Asian students felt it was important for American
professors and American students to come to an understanding of the cultural and linguistic diversity of international students to help share the communication burdens of the international students.

Similarly, Han (2007) interviewed 21 ESL graduate students from various majors (English, business, chemistry, physics, and education) from Japan, Thailand, China, and Korea at a U.S. university to explore possible difficulties in oral class participation. The research questions were: 1) How often do ESL students participate in class discussions? 2) Does the size of the group matter? 3) What personal attributes contributed to the discussions? 4) What were the difficulties in meeting these requirements? 5) What differences existed between L2 and L1 class settings in their oral/aural class participation? The students mentioned how dissatisfied they were with their own infrequent participation in the classroom even when participation was counted as a grade. Only five of the 21 students said they always spoke out in large or small group discussions, and 19 out of 21 said they liked small groups. Han concluded that cultural backgrounds inhibited class discussion participation, which affected L2 performance in class, and that the resulting inhibitions “serve[d] as a block to new information and profitable interaction with the western culture and its educational learning styles” (p. 17). Insufficient content knowledge was another key issue that inhibited L2 students from actively participating in class discussions. Han suggested that L2 students' participation in difficult class discussions should be achieved through self-motivation and that continued participation was the only way to get over the inhibitions. She also said that L2 students needed to realize that they are in a different education system.
Liu (2001) studied 20 graduate students from China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan in content classes. He identified 110 factors related to the students’ classroom participation patterns, which he then categorized as cognitive, pedagogical, affective, sociocultural, and linguistic. The factors within these categories were termed facilitative, debilitating, and neutral. Fifty-three percent of the factors were found to be debilitating. Out of those debilitating factors, the most dominant category was sociocultural, at 27%. Liu said that the beliefs, values, and norms of the home culture with respect to classroom behavior were the main contributors to Asian students’ behavior in American classrooms. However, other categories such as affective and cognitive followed closely, with 23% each. Therefore, Liu (2001) said it is wrong to say that linguistic ability alone determines classroom participation or that Asians are passive and reticent. Students’ behaviors depend on a combination of factors, although sociocultural was the most dominant category for Asian students’ behavior in the American classrooms Liu studied.

Using a language socialization perspective similar to Duff’s (2001, 2002), Morita (2000) conducted a qualitative study of six non-native graduate students (two from China and four from Japan) in a TESL course engaged in oral communication activities with 15 native speakers to study the process by which both groups (native and non-native) acquired oral presentation skills in a Canadian university. The data were collected through video tapes, transcripts of student oral presentations, class observations, interviews with students and instructors, and questionnaires. Both groups reported experiencing difficulties with oral communication in the classroom. The non-native group’s difficulties were linguistic, cultural, and psychological. Linguistic difficulties
stemmed from limited English proficiency, including specific problems such as
grammar/vocabulary or overall fluency. Sociocultural issues included the different
classroom cultures of Canada and the students’ native countries of Japan and China. Even
though the students realized what was expected in the new classroom culture, some
Japanese students were hesitant to ask or had difficulties posing questions to the teachers
or immediately answering the teacher’s questions. Another student mentioned not having
had much critical thinking practice in China. Psychological barriers included feeling a
lack of confidence or an inferiority complex. Morita concluded that acquiring oral
academic discourse is not a simple process, but a complex and conflicting processes of
negotiations involving different identities and expertise of the students.

**Studies on Korean graduate students in the US.** Lee (2009) conducted a
qualitative study of six Korean graduate (master’s and doctoral) students’ classroom oral
participation in a large university in the US. She posed these two questions: 1) What
primary factors influence oral classroom participation of Korean students in U.S.
graduate seminars? 2) In what ways do these factors impact Korean students’ verbal
interaction in class discussions? Data were collected over the course of one semester
through formal/informal interviews, classroom observations, and small group
audiotaping.

Students were generally attentive, establishing eye contact but rarely speaking.
These six Korean students had similar cultural traits to other East Asian students such as
indirectness and formality, but they also reflected the unique Korean cultural feature of
hierarchy, especially the male students who had served in the compulsory Korean army.
Almost all of the students felt their English proficiency was deficient even though it met the class requirements. They felt that during discussions, they needed to translate back and forth between Korean and English, losing their chance to speak at the right time before the topic changed. Regardless of lengths of stay in the US, all students felt challenged by whole class discussions. The students retained Korean classroom expectations, valuing teacher responses/comments over other students,’ and maintaining the belief that instructors and classmates were evaluators of their knowledge and ability.

Lee concluded that several interwoven factors influence oral classroom participation: language proficiency, differences in sociocultural values and educational practices between Korea and the US, individual personality differences, and classroom environment. Lee suggests that universities provide instruction for international students in classroom discourse, including class objectives, expected participant roles, and strategies such as turn taking and paraphrasing.

**Studies on EFL students’ oral participation in Korea.** Yin (2009) completed a semester-long qualitative study of the factors affecting Korean graduate students' participation in discussion-based graduate seminars at a university in Seoul. Her analysis of interviews with eight Korean students in two graduate seminars from different departments showed that even though students were initially worried about English, their actual performance in class was not solely determined by their English proficiency. Their poor discussion skills and lack of content knowledge (due to an inability to fully comprehend the required readings) contributed to their reticence in the classroom.

Bang (1999), in her dissertation, studied 15 Korean freshmen EFL students’ risk-
taking behaviors in English classes through their diaries, class observations, and personal
data questionnaires. She concluded that risk-taking behavior with English is a complex
topic involving four variables: personal, affective, socio-cultural, and course-related
problems. The students were anxious when speaking English because they considered
oral participation as an L2 competence that was subject to peer and teacher evaluation.
The teacher’s attitude was a factor that could encourage or discourage students’
willingness to actively participate in the classroom. The large class size did not encourage
participation, but small groups created intimate atmospheres where the students felt more
comfortable. The cultural variable was the fear of losing face (chaemyun, in Korean),
which could permanently damage their honor in the shame culture of Korean society
where reticence is seen as indicative of deep wisdom, whereas oral activeness is viewed
as pretentious. Typically, female students felt more inhibitions than male students. Some
of Bang’s recommendations to encourage students’ risk-taking behaviors in the classroom
include teachers giving students reading materials before class, making oral participations
part of the syllabus, having students practice more English inside and outside the
classroom, and correcting the students’ speech in a positive way.

Shame culture. Yu (2007), in her dissertation, studied the shame culture of six
Koreans students in a U.S. university. She said that throughout Korean history,
Confucianism has used shame to maintain a collective Korean society. Yu said that
Koreans commonly shared feelings of shame when speaking English. Confucianist
culture has had negative effects on Koreans speaking English in and out of class. The six
interviewees (in PhD., master’s, and undergraduate studies) in her study all said that they
had never been free from feeling shame in speaking English regardless of their age, gender, level of education, major, personality, or whether they were in Korea or in America. They felt shame when speaking English in front of other Koreans because they felt they could not rise to their expectations or felt others criticizing them. They felt shame before Americans because Americans spoke standard English (the highest form of English from the students’ perspective), and they belonged to a powerful country. They felt shame before American teachers because they sensed the teachers were critical of their English. However, they felt no shame when they got to know Korean classmates, or felt Americans (including the professors) were understanding and accepting of them. Shame has a dual character: on the positive side, it is considered a virtuous emotion for social harmony; on the negative side, it is considered disgraceful, but it can make Koreans work harder to erase that disgrace.

Not culture? Cheng (2000) states that it is an over-generalization to say that East Asian ESL/EFL students are reticent due to their home culture. Cheng, with 10 years of English language teaching (ELT) experience in China, felt that many of her students were “extremely active and even aggressive” (p.438). She conducted an informal survey of other teachers’ perceptions of students’ alleged reticence and passivity on TESL-L (a world-wide email discussion forum for ESL teachers). Eight out of 10 replies challenged the allegations and even gave descriptions of their students who were not reticent. The quiet ones are quiet depending on situation-specific causes that could include teaching methods and lack of language proficiency rather than culture. Cheng asserts that allegations that Asian students are reticent in the classroom are due to the impressions of
a small number of professors in small-scale surveys, many of which were conducted outside Asia.

Littlewood, a professor of TESOL and applied linguistics in Hong Kong (2000), completed a survey of 2,307 students in high school and university from eight Asian countries. The study was a 12 item questionnaire, but for his 2000 article, he focused on three statements: 1) “I see the teacher as somebody whose authority should not be questioned.” 2) “I see knowledge as something that the teacher should pass onto me rather than something that I should discover myself.” and 3) “I expect the teacher (rather than me) to be responsible for evaluating how much I have learnt.” For 344 students, the mean answer to question 1 was 2.41 with 5 being Strongly Agree. For question 2, the mean answer was 2.04 and for question 3, it was 3.10. The survey also asked the same questions of students from three European countries. A comparison of responses indicated that there were fewer differences in attitudes toward learning between Asian and European countries than between individuals within each country. This study indicated that most of the Asian students in this sample did not want to be spoon-fed knowledge from the all-knowing teachers and did want to learn with classmates in a friendly environment.

Summary of Part III

This literature review examined studies of classroom oral participation of East Asian students, some of which included Koreans (Duff, 2001; Han, 2007; Jackson, 2003; Kim, 2006, 2007; Lai, 1994; Liu, 2001; Mak, 2011; Morita, 2000) and Korean students by themselves (Bang, 1999; Finch, 2008; Horwitz, 1988; Lee, 2009; Truitt, 1995; Yu,
Some studies were related to EFL students studying English in their own countries such as Hong Kong (Jackson, 2003; Lai, 1994; Mak, 2011) and Korea (Bang, 1999; Finch, 2008; Truitt, 1995; Yin, 2009), while others were about ESL students studying English in the US (Han, 2007; Kim, 2006, 2007; Lee, 2009; Liu, 2001; Yu, 2007) and in Canada (Duff, 2001; Morita, 2000).

Another way to categorize these studies is by the age of the participants. Some were high school students (Duff, 2001; Lai, 1994) while others included undergraduate students (Bang, 1999; Finch, 2008; Jackson, 2003; Mak, 2011; Truitt, 1995; Yu, 2007), and graduate students (Han, 2007; Kim, 2006, 2007; Lee, 2009; Liu, 2001; Morita, 2000; Yin, 2009).

There were many explanations given in these studies to explain Asian and Korean students’ reticence or difficulties with oral participation in the English classroom. The two most frequently cited difficulties were language anxiety and sociocultural factors. Language anxiety included fear of failure, low self-confidence, and fear of others’ criticism (Bang, 1999; Lai, 1994; Lee, 2009; Liu, 2001; Mak, 2011; Morita, 2000; Truitt, 1995; Yu, 2007). Sociocultural factors that inhibited students from speaking English included a sense of modesty before other Chinese students (Jackson, 2003) and transfer of home countries’ classroom culture into the English classroom (Bang, 1999; Han, 2007; Lee, 2009; Liu, 2001; Morita, 2001; Yu, 2007). For instance, Japanese students found it difficult to answer the teacher immediately (Morita, 2001). A Chinese student mentioned that she had not had discussion-type classes in her country (Morita, 2001). For Koreans,
sociocultural factors included being afraid of losing face (chaemyun), which equated with losing honor (Bang, 1999), a culture of shame about being criticized by other Koreans and by Americans (Yu, 2007), and being careful not to step over the hierarchical structure in the classroom, especially among male students who have experienced compulsory military life (Lee, 2009).

Other reasons found in these studies for reticence in the English classroom included linguistic factors such as lack of fluency and knowledge of grammar (Lee, 2009; Morita, 2000) and classroom environments that influenced students’ learning outcomes (Cheng, 2000; Finch, 2008; Horwitz, 1988; Lee, 2009). In the classroom environment, insufficient content knowledge was included (Bang, 1999; Han, 2007; Liu, 2001; Yin, 2009). Student personality was another factor that influenced student participation (Bang, 1999; Lee, 2009). Many graduate students in content classes found that discussions in whole class and small groups were difficult (Kim, 2006, 2007; Lee, 2009; Yin, 2009). Additionally, in the mainstream classes of Canadian high school ESL students, Duff (2001, 2002) found that ESL students were not actively engaged in discussions because they were unfamiliar with the discourse of the local Canadian community.

As illustrated by the various findings, classroom participation is a complex issue (Bang, 1999; Lee, 2009; Morita, 2000). Because studies of Korean international students’ classroom participation are rare, especially for undergraduate students, my study will add to the knowledge of this specific population as well as to the issue of Asian reticence.

**Summary of the Literature Review**

The first part of the literature review illustrated how I discovered the topic of
Korean ESL/EFL students’ reticence to speak in my English classes. I experienced many quiet Korean students in my ESL classes in the US and then, when I went to Korea to teach EFL, I found a very similar situation. This phenomenon concerned me deeply, and I tried various methods to help encourage students to speak more in my classes.

The second part of the literature review focused on exploring research on the value of speaking to improve second language fluency. Speaking the second language helps the learner to improve language proficiency and cognitive abilities, to establish status and power in school and the outside world, and to achieve practical goals, such as finding a job. By saying words and sentences in the second language in interactions with native speakers who “push” them to use the language correctly, students may improve their language output (Swain, 2005). According to Vygotsky (1986), a person’s consciousness is formed by interacting with his society using language. Further, it is vital that second language learners speak the language in order not to be ‘silenced’ (Freire, 1968/1970) and deemed powerless. By speaking the language of the dominant culture, especially as an ESL student, second language learners can establish their power and status in the classroom. Lastly, Korean students have to learn to speak English to increase their chances of being accepted into universities and of being hired, both of which are critically important for Koreans in Korea (Park, 2009). These are some of the theoretical and practical bases related to the importance of speaking in the second language for the Korean English learner.

The third part of the literature review covered the state of Korean education in general and English education in particular. Korea’s literacy level is 99%, one of the
highest compared to countries at a similar level of economic development. The present reality is that the entire educational system seems to be shaped by the concept of getting into top universities to succeed in society: job, marriage, social status, and income. Therefore, goals from very early in children’s lives include being admitted into the best schools, the key to one’s success in life. This education fervor has as part of its origin Confucianism, which praises education in the name of the gentleman scholar and the all-knowing teacher who imparts knowledge to students who show the same filial piety to the teachers as they do to their parents and rulers. These beliefs and this cultural context encourage quiet students who prove their abilities through rote memorization, which is then tested in the culminating and most important test, the CSAT. Excelling on the CSAT requires proficiency in English as it is one of the three most important subjects, along with Korean language and math, on this test. However, the national government of Korea in its effort to produce students and businesspeople who can communicate in English and to be more globally competitive as a nation has promoted a communicative curriculum of English. These two goals of producing communicative English speakers and performing well on the CSAT cannot necessarily be accomplished by a single curriculum. In addition, there were many problems related to providing communicative English programs in public schools with the realities of teachers with their low oral proficiencies, the high number of students in the classrooms, and the culminating test that does not test for oral proficiency. This is the current status of English education and general education in Korea, and the situation is getting more and more competitive.

The last part of the literature review examined classroom oral participation of East
Asian students; some studies included Koreans and other nationalities, and some studies included only Korean students. Some studies looked at EFL students studying English in their own countries while others focused on ESL students studying English in the US and in Canada. Another categorization is by the age of the participants: high school students, undergraduate students, and graduate students.

Researchers offer many explanations for the reticence of these Asian and Korean students’ to speak in the English classroom. The major reason was cultural inhibition, which included seeking group harmony through silence (Jackson, 2003), lacking the discourse culture of English (Duff, 2001) such as discussion skills that were not taught or used in their home countries’ classrooms (Bang, 1999; Han, 2007; Kim, 2006; Kim, 2007; Lee, 2009; Morita, 2000), and the shame culture of Korea (Yu, 2007). The three most frequently cited reasons were language anxiety such as fear of failure, low self-confidence, and fear of criticism. For Koreans, sociocultural factors included being afraid of losing face (chaemyun), which equated with losing honor (Bang, 1999), a culture of shame about being criticized by other Koreans and by Americans (Yu, 2007), and being careful not to step over the hierarchical structure in the classroom, especially among male students who have experienced compulsory military life (Lee, 2009). Other reasons for classroom reticence included affective factors such as language anxiety such as fear of failure, low self-confidence and fear of criticism (Bang, 1999; Lai, 1994; Lee, 2009; Morita, 2000), lack of content knowledge (Bang, 1999; Han, 2007; Liu, 2001; Yin, 2009), lack of language proficiency (Morita, 2000), unfriendly classroom atmospheres created by teachers and classmates and large numbers of students that were not conducive to
active participation (Bang, 1999; Lee, 2009), and personality types (Bang, 1999; Lee, 2009). As illustrated by the various conclusions above for why these Asian and Korean students are quiet in the English classrooms, this topic of classroom participation is a very complex issue (Bang, 1999; Lee, 2009; Morita 2000).

The justifications for my study include the following reasons. First, not many studies focus solely on the classroom behavior of Korean international students in the US in a way that would allow studying the specifics of Korean culture that inhibit Koreans from speaking English, traits that differ from the culture and behaviors of other East Asians.

Second, few studies concentrate on college level ESL students before they are mainstreamed into regular courses. The unique experiences of these ESL students, whose English proficiency is usually lower than that of mainstreamed students, may involve different perceptions and behaviors; this missing piece will add to our overall understanding of the ESL student in the classroom.

Third, the participants in this study are 10 students who were unsuccessful in learning English in Korea. Even though I did not set out to recruit such students, the results of this study will add to the knowledge about students who have had major difficulties with English learning even in Korea. The knowledge base from this population of students could be compared to studies about students who have had an easier time learning English, leading to an understanding of why some groups learn English more easily than others.

Finally, my study encompasses students in and out of the classroom, first in
Korea and then in the US, making it a holistic study of these 10 students, covering their English journey from when they were first exposed to it in Korea until their life in the US as ESL students. My study is a four-faceted conglomeration of previous studies that dealt with only one aspect of East Asian and Korean ESL—either classroom behavior, or student lives outside of the classroom, or studies of EFL students in Korea, classroom and outside life in English. My rationale for combining these four aspects was to see the connections between English experiences in Korea to English behaviors in the US (EFL to ESL progressions) and also to see the connections between classroom behaviors in English to outside behaviors in English. My study will add to the knowledge of this specific population and to the issue of Asian reticence in general by drawing a wide yet detailed picture of the multi-faceted lives of Korean ESL students as they live and study in the second language.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions on learning English, especially that of speaking English, of 10 Korean English as a Second Language students with intermediate and advanced level oral proficiencies in an American university’s English language institute (see Table 1 for detailed information on the 10 students).

Research Questions

1. Why did these 10 Korean ESL students come to the United States?

2. What are the students’ perceptions of their English speaking and learning in Korea, in class and out of class?

3. What are the students’ perceptions of their English speaking and learning in the United States, in class and out of class?

4. What do the ESL students think they could do—what would help them—to improve English speaking in the United States?

5. How have their culture and experiences influenced their learning of English?
### The Sample

#### Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Pseudonyms)</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Class Level</th>
<th>Time in the States at 1st interview</th>
<th>Degrees/Certificates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nari F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 yr, 1 month</td>
<td>2 yr graphic design certification program—Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sukae F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>BA in International Affairs, Beijing U, China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sungho M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 yr</td>
<td>HS Diploma, Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyeri F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5-6 months</td>
<td>BA in Viola Performance, Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minjoo F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>1 yr in Art Business Administration in Kookmin University, Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youngchun M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10 months</td>
<td>HS Diploma, China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jongsoo M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>HS Diploma, Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youshin F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10 months</td>
<td>Some college in Choral Conducting, Argentina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byungin M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>PhD in Sports Marketing and MBA, Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unjung F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 yr</td>
<td>BS in Trade, Korea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 10 university ESL students interviewed for this study were international students from South Korea attending an English language institute affiliated with a state university in northern Virginia. In this institute, the proficiency levels of students are divided into five levels: 1) high-beginner, 2) low-intermediate, 3) intermediate, 4) high-intermediate, and 5) advanced. Students’ levels are decided either by a placement test called The Comprehensive English Language Test (CELT) or the Test of English as a
Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores. The students interviewed were from levels 3 (intermediate), 4 (high intermediate), or 5 (advanced) classes to ensure that the students had at least an intermediate level oral proficiency, to rule out low oral proficiency as a possible reason for not speaking/participating in the classroom.

Recruiting the 10 students took several steps. First, I emailed the English language institute’s director for permission to contact and visit communications classes to recruit and interview Korean ESL students for my research. He gave me the names of several communications class teachers to whom I sent emails. After several emails, four out of seven teachers responded positively to my visiting their classes. However, most of them had only two or three Korean students, except for one teacher who had six Koreans total in two different classes. I visited all four of these teachers’ classes to recruit enough students for this study.

I visited the classes to meet all the potential interviewees and get a feel for each student. My initial plan was to visit the classes more than once to situate myself as a non-participating observer in the corner and to get a feel for the students in their interactions with the classmates and the teacher. But, as a result of all but one of the teachers expressing reluctance for more than one visit, I felt rushed and unwelcome. Therefore, in order not to lose my chance to recruit interviewees, I approached the students at the end of my first class visit. In one class, the teacher gave me a few minutes at the beginning of the class to briefly introduce myself. But in other classes, I just remained as a quiet observer to see the class and the students in as natural a setting as possible. During the class, I took notes of what interactions I could observe of the potential interviewees. At
the end of the class, I approached the students with a recruiting flyer. Thankfully, a total of 10 students consented to the interviews. I told the students who responded positively to the interview request to wait for my emails for a definite time and place.

Ideally, to get a variety of perceptions and experiences in English, I would have liked a range of ages as well as both men and women. My interviewees were about equally divided into male and female, but I did not get much variety in age since most of the students were undergraduates. The students were all from South Korea (which meant they probably had had similar English experiences in South Korean schools as the country has a national curriculum) with a range of speaking abilities from intermediate to advanced.

**Data Collection**

**Observations**

On my first and only visit to the classes, I tried to get a feel for the students and the classroom atmosphere.

As a non-participant observer in the class, I situated myself in a corner and observed the interactions between the Korean students and the teacher and between the Korean students and their classmates, both Koreans and other nationalities. I noted, mostly, how actively the Korean students spoke English during the activities. However, on the days I visited these classes, the activities were either grammar exercise review where the teacher called out correct answers and the students asked clarification questions or students giving individual presentations that seemed like recitations of memorized pieces (at least, for my Korean students). None of the classes had the kind of
authentic speaking interactions such as small group or whole class discussions that I had hoped to see.

I took notes as I observed and tried to remember who said and did what because, at the time of the class, I did not know who was going to interview with me. At home, I tried to remember the faces of those people, using my notes, as I reflected on how the class went and what it would all mean for the study. These notes would later help me organize my observation data to reach a better understanding of the Korean ESL students as members of the English speaking classes. These notes would serve as one more piece of information to be compiled and analyzed and later to be triangulated with other data such as the interviews and student journals.

In addition to observing the students, I planned to ask the ESL teachers for any information they wanted to share about the Korean students; however, as only one of the four teachers seemed open and willing to cooperate, this source was rather limited. The teacher who did talk to me about the students gave me generic descriptions of the Korean students, such as that they were good students who were quiet but conscientious about work. These comments, though not long or specific, from that one teacher would serve as confirmation/triangulation of what the three students from her class said in the interviews and how they behaved in class according to my observations.

Interviews

I interviewed each of the 10 students individually (See Appendix for interview questions) on two separate occasions (each interview lasted about an hour, totaling about two hours for each student). Ideally, I would have liked to meet with these Korean
students until I approached even a tiny semblance of “saturation of information” (Seidman, 1998, p. 48), but realistically, I, a total stranger to them, could not ask them to give me more than two hours to share their stories and thoughts about English.

For the interviews, I spoke Korean since I could feel that the students would not feel comfortable speaking to a complete stranger in English. Even though my formal Korean is not as fluent or proficient as my formal English, I wanted to accommodate the interviewees so that they would feel comfortable enough to express themselves fully.

**Student Journals**

In addition to the interviews, I asked the interviewees to write weekly journals on their English perceptions/production for one month (the time between the two interviews). The students were to write down their ideas about English: when and with whom they used it; who they wanted to talk to; how the conversations went; their feelings during, after, and before speaking; how English speaking was developing in their lives at the moment; specific ways they studied English outside of class; specific goals for English during ESL classes (how many times they spoke); speaking time with American friends; time with international students from ESL class; church; other times they used English; if they created scenarios to “force” themselves to use English; what extra studying they did to improve their speaking—conversation partners, books, audiotapes, movies, and so on. These journals did not have specific topics, aside from these general suggested areas to think about, as long as entries concerned the students’ thoughts and their use of English, especially English speaking during each week in the month between the two interviews. By giving them broad guidelines without specific topics, I hoped to get a variety of
stories from each student that was unique and interesting.

To help the students remember to write these journals, I sent them weekly reminder emails. However, it was difficult to get the students to do this additional activity for a complete stranger. I had to remind them often without seeming to pester, which could have disengaged them even before the second interviews started. Some students tried to send me one or two entries when they remembered, and others sent several all at once in a note form. I was thankful for whatever they sent.

I had wanted these students to become more aware of what English meant to them through this experience of writing about their English perceptions/productions. Another advantage of this method of data collection was that the students would not be interrupted in their flow of thoughts or choice of topic by my interview questions or comments. I hoped they would share spontaneous, self-generated ideas to serve as rich data to draw pictures of each student as they lived daily in English.

**Data Analysis**

As soon as the first set of interviews (over 10 hours) of the 10 students was finished, I had the tape recordings transcribed as soon as possible into Korean, the language of the interviews, by college students I knew in Korea. Later, I translated the Korean transcript segments quoted in the data section of Chapter 4 into English. I had the transcriptions done immediately to keep up with the pace of production of these long interviews (eventually totaling a little over 20 hours, two hours per student) and so that I could use the themes that emerged in the first interviews to guide and adjust the questions for the second interviews.
Even before the interviews began, I had a group of pre-set categories in mind. This is not to say that I went into the interviews with deterministic or biased views that would bar me from discovering new truths. However, as an ESL/EFL teacher of Koreans for many years (see Researcher Identity, Chapter 2), I have seen and experienced over and over again certain student characteristics and behaviors. These repeated truths became my knowledge of Korean ESL/EFL students’ behaviors in the classroom. It is this knowledge about Koreans’ English learning (and the gaps in it) that led me to this study in the first place, helping me formulate the interview questions that originated from the five research questions.

During the interviews, I realized that a lot of what the interviewees told me was a confirmation of the truths that I already knew and had even expected. Nonetheless, I tried very hard to remain objective and open so that I could notice and collect all the new answers that I had never thought of or seen before, by being attentive to every little word and nuance in the students’ answers. At the same time, some of my pre-set categories of knowledge also remained open for data to fall into.

During the actual interviews, as I asked questions and listened to the students’ answers, my broad and crude analysis started. Some answers fell into my previously mentioned pre-set categories, while other, new answers floated in my head as clumps of “new information,” in a broad category of their own.

After the interviews were finished, but before the transcriptions were completed, I listened to the audiotapes over and over to relive the interviews so that I could retain the feel and the atmosphere of the exact moments when certain chunks of data were produced,
especially the parts that made the strongest imprints in my memory. After the Korean transcriptions were completed, I read them and re-read them until I had almost memorized them. By this process of listening to the interviews and reading the transcripts multiple times, big chunks of categories emerged in my head even before I physically started marking them on the paper transcriptions. I did not use a qualitative data program such as Ethnograph or NVivo to organize and code the transcripts. Instead, I organized the data by hand to feel closer to it. I felt confident about keeping the data relatively organized and intact because I have lived this research topic for about 16 years. Further, I had conducted two mini pilot studies related to this topic (one in 2006 and the other in 2007), so I came into this study with significant knowledge of the topic.

When reading the transcripts, I started by reading each student’s interviews individually, to get a sense of each person. Then I read all 10 together, cross-sectionally, and examined the codes within each transcript against one another, to look for general themes and patterns across all participants, and not as separate entities or “ wholes” (Mason, 2002, p. 167). Many of these students’ school experiences with English in Korea reflected the Korean national curriculum.

For analysis purposes, some research questions were easier to answer than others. For instance, Research Question 1—“Why did these 10 Korean ESL students come to the United States?” and Research Question 4—“What do the ESL students think they could do—what would help them—to improve English speaking in the United States?” were easier to analyze because they are very straightforward, requiring one dimensional answers. However, Research Question 2 —“What are the students’ perceptions of their
English speaking and learning in Korea, in class and out of class?” and Research Question 3—“What are the students’ perceptions of their English speaking and learning in the United States, in class and out of class?” were broad, encompassing a lot of data. I chose the wording of these research questions to elicit answers that would draw an overarching picture of what English experiences these students brought with them from Korea as they embarked on ESL studies in the United States. To understand how their ESL studies in the US unfolded as they did, it was vital to know about their EFL studies in Korea. Therefore, Research Question 2 covered all of the students’ English experiences in Korea from when they were first exposed to it, kindergarten for some interviewees and middle school for others. Even so, English experiences from Korea covered at least six years for all 10 interviewees. In addition, the experiences in Korea were divided into two sections, school and outside school, which added to the amount and complexity of the data collected. Research Question 3 covered students’ experience with speaking English in the United States. The length of stay in the US ranged from two months to about one year for the interviewees, so the time was much shorter than in Korea. However, since Research Question 3, covering the students’ English experiences in the US, was the result of their many years of English learning in Korea, the responses had to be analyzed with thorough care and depth. Therefore, the many aspects of the answers to Research Questions 2 and 3 that arose in analysis required several subsections.

Lastly, Research Question 5—“How have their culture and experiences influenced their learning of English?” is the umbrella research question, the culmination of the four previous questions. This question was the core of this research, but the previous four
questions had to be asked first for two reasons. First, this research question is a broad one that requires subsections to get to its answer. Second, I needed to break up the main research question so that I could remain focused, using manageable amounts of data during the initial messy and deep quagmire of the data. However, because Research Questions 1 to 4 were aligned with Research Question 5, I was able to find footing even in the depths of data analysis of those questions. In other words, Research Question 5 was embedded in all four previous Research Questions.

A difficulty in analyzing qualitative data is that the length of responses varies by interviewee, depending on an interviewee’s experiences or thoughts on the question. Since the questions were semi-structured, when interviewees had a lot to say on a topic, I let them answer freely, letting the natural flow and rich, authentic data emerge. As a result, some interviewees barely answered some questions, while others produced lines and lines of data for the same question. This difference in emphasis and resulting amounts of data led to some difficulties in quantifying the data. For instance, when I had determined a particular question was significant enough to become a theme and, therefore, needed to count who said what, sometimes I discovered that not all 10 had said something about the question. Still, for parts that became themes, most students had said something, whether positive, negative, or neutral. This is the problem accompanying quantifying the words and data of qualitative research in the process of trying to clearly delineate major, minor, or no views.

During data analysis, I had to be aware that the activity of coding in itself was not analysis (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). But, during this process, I found Mason’s (2002)
assertion that the boundary between sorting data and building analysis was “blurred” (p. 148) to be true. For instance, when most students mentioned that their elementary English lessons were mostly in the form of games, I could not say that “games in elementary schools” was an analysis of these students’ elementary English lessons. Using that term, I grouped the data. But this piece of information could later be transformed into a theme that was built up in the analysis, “lack of authentic opportunities to speak English” in elementary schools. According to Coffey & Atkinson (1996), coding is a way to help researchers see how they are thinking about the data. Therefore, constantly thinking of different ways to name the codes and combine them showed me the ways that the codes should be organized or named. As I was reading the data, several lines would clump into an idea.

Actually, the interview questions themselves helped with the organization. For example, when students described their English speaking experiences in their Korean high schools, a few mentioned having had some speaking lessons while most said that all they remembered was intensive grammar and reading lessons in preparation for the college entrance exam. Since the majority mentioned not having had speaking lessons, high school English was coded “a preparation for college entrance exam by reading and grammar.” This does not mean that the minority view was not included, but that the main theme from high school English education would be termed “preparation for college entrance exam by reading and grammar.” Like this, codes were combined and became themes. While I was grouping, coding, and combining codes into themes, I never lost sight of the research questions to make sure I was marking what I believed to be the
answers to the research questions. This continuous back and forth reading, thinking, and analyzing from codes to themes and then back to the small codes was a learning experience in sifting through the data to eventually find the answers to the research questions in an honest, objective, analytical method as possible. The constant code to data to code helped to build structures within each student transcript and cross-sectionally among all 10. By this process, I was able to come up with the answers to the five research questions for each of the 10 students individually and as a group.

Clearly, this process was neither linear nor clean. It went in dual directions, from small to big and then from big to small, and I constantly questioned my codes and themes to shake off any preconceptions, mis-readings, or mis-interpreting of what the students had said in answer to the interview questions (to ward off threats to validity). It was a long process of grueling labor dotted with moments of enlightenment and confirmations until the final themes emerged and became conclusions, at least for that moment. In the depths of the data analysis quagmire, reflective memos, both written and in thought, helped me anchor the messiness of data analysis into manageable portions.

The themes that emerged from Research Questions 1 through 4 were then grouped into even larger themes that answered Research Question 5. As mentioned before, the first four Research Questions were subsections of the final, core Research Question 5.

Threats to Validity

Threats to Descriptive Validity

First, I wish I could have visited these ESL communications classes more than once so that I could have drawn a more complete picture of the interviewees in their
spoken English interactions with the teacher and the classmates. Since I did not know during the observation who was going to be my future interviewees, I could not take focused or detailed notes on those students. Additionally, on the day of my observation, authentic verbal interactions that I had hoped to see, such as small group or whole class discussions, did not happen. Still, to the best of my abilities, I tried to take notes of all the Korean students I saw in the classroom. These class observation notes were used as one more means of triangulating what the students told me in the interviews about their classroom behavior and oral participation.

As a second safeguard against descriptive validity threats, I had planned to compile teachers’ perceptions and observations of my interviewees in their classes. This additional input on my interviewees in action could have helped me draw a more complete picture, although as this study was not about these teachers’ perceptions of their students’ learning English, their input was not needed. Still, their perceptions could have been used to validate what I have seen as an ESL teacher myself of non-verbal and non-participating Korean students and what the students told me about what they did in the classroom. However, since only one teacher was cooperative enough to share with me about the Korean students, this part was lacking.

The third tool against the threats to descriptive validity was accurate transcription of the interviews. My Korean transcripts showed almost all the expressions, the exact words, and pauses. After I received the initial transcriptions from the Korean transcribers, I checked and rechecked to make certain the transcriptions were as close to the actual interviews as possible, almost verbatim. In order to get a satisfied version, I had to ask
the transcribers to do the transcriptions by checking the entire transcription (from beginning to end) at least twice. By listening to the tapes again and again, I made sure that the transcriptions they gave me were accurate and to my standard.

**Threats to Theoretical Validity**

I made sure that I was applying the two theories correctly to my study.

**Critical theory.** I made sure that I treated the interviewees with the utmost respect and that I was most willing to listen to their words, exactly as they said them. I tried very hard to remain a neutral researcher who was very curious about what the students had to say in response to my questions. By giving them undivided attention and unbiased responses, I tried to give them a voice with which to express and to take me to where they wanted me to go (emic), within the big circle (the parameters of the research) that I had laid out for them. Actually, the voice was there, and I just happened to be present to hear it.

**Interpretivism.** My purpose was not to confirm my thoughts on this issue with the appropriate words that they said that fit perfectly into my theory, but to find out what their perceptions were without influencing them with my presence. I wanted to minimize “reactivity,” the researcher’s influence due to her being part of the world she studies (the interviews and the observation) (Maxwell, 2005). To stay neutral, I had to remember the ESL teacher stance I could have brought with me to the interviews. But, how could I completely shed my teacher paradigm (so strong because of all those years of teaching and my dominant personality, especially in one-on-one dialogues) to become a completely unbiased researcher who observed and recorded without inputting personal
views? I knew it was impossible because I was the sole research instrument (very human and subjective) through which the reality entered me. But this conscious reminder helped me remain as neutral as possible throughout the interview and during the subsequent analysis.

Since we used Korean, I made sure to translate it correctly, including all the nuances, especially if there were no perfect translations for the terms. I employed the talents of my husband (a professor and a writer), whose Korean skills are that of a professional translator, to help me with the translations.

I also tried to make the interviewees feel comfortable and empowered to share their experiences by showing them how much I valued their opinions, their true thoughts. By establishing rapport with my interviewees early in the first interview, I tried to help them feel safe to tell their story. The older students seemed more verbal and seemed to have thought about these questions, which enabled them to answer without much difficulty or hesitation. However, the younger students seemed lost for words with many of the questions, maybe because they have not had a chance to think about these issues in such depth before.

Threats to Interpretive Validity

The first question I asked in checking interpretive validity was whether my interview questions, by which I collected most of my data, asked correctly about the students’ perceptions of English. To write better questions, I read them over and over to see if my questions would guide the students to give me the data that I needed to answer my five research questions. I had my chair and my committee examine my research
questions and interview questions at the proposal defense (and afterwards, as they evolved into better questions with the analysis) and throughout the study (with my chair) to get feedback. Then, I asked my husband, who is a professor of political science in a Korean university, to read them to see if the questions were the right questions to get to the answers I sought about student perceptions of and philosophy about their English use.

I safeguarded against any validity threat in data interpretation by triangulating the students’ words in the interviews with their behaviors and words in the classroom observation and, then further, with their weekly journals. As mentioned before, I read the transcripts multiple times to make sure I was making valid conclusions. If there were sections in the transcript that did not make sense to me, I went back to the interviewee for clarification in the second interview. Additionally, when reading and analyzing the transcripts, I tried to read and understand as though I were one of the students: why they said what they said, how they said what they said, what they wanted to say but could not articulate, in what direction they were headed, what picture they were drawing as they were talking, and their overall construction of reality in the classroom and outside as retold during the interviews. It was not easy to pretend to be an interviewee, but by imagining reality as shown before their eyes, I could approximate their perceptions more closely and realistically.

Once the transcription was typed, I read it multiple times to get a sense of the picture on different days. But, this opened up doubt in two ways: if I reread too many times, the multiple readings could create a different reality than what was meant during the interview, but, too few readings might have kept me from constructing a sufficiently
complete meaning. This issue of reality construction opened up an ontological can of worms. Can the reality of the moment be captured after that moment is gone? Is the reality after the moment different from that exact, past, moment? That particular moment was a specific experience, so remembering that experience later on can only be a futile effort at constructing a quasi-reality. Likewise, transcribing was an effort to capture that moment as closely as possible, but it could never be the same as that moment because that moment was forever gone. All that was available was a close approximation of that moment. It was so easy to fall into the pitfalls of various validity threats. I am sure it was almost impossible to have complete truths in my research, but the more I was aware of the possible dangers, the more I could prepare myself as I reached out to be as truthful as possible about the research that stood before me.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Research Question I: Why Did These 10 Korean ESL Students Come to the United States?

I asked this question first to find out who these 10 students were, and how they came to be in the US. At first glance, the wording of the question could sound simplistic and obvious, but within this question is the reason that connects Korea to the US, the reason that pushed the students into this new country. This question is, in a way, the connector between Research Question 2 that asked about students’ English experiences in Korea and Research Question 3 that asked about students’ English experiences in the US. The 10 ESL students I interviewed could be divided into three categories in terms of their reasons for coming to the United States (see Table 2 for the 10 students’ reasons for coming to the US):

1. Six hoped to pursue undergraduate degrees in an American university (Sungho, Jongsoo, Nari, Youngchun, Youshin, and Unjung);
2. Two hoped to pursue graduate degrees in an American university (Hyeri and Sukae); and
3. Two intended to attend an American university’s English language program for one year (Minjoo and Byungin) and then return to Korea.
Table 2

*Participants Categorized According to Reason for Coming to United States*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Diplomas</th>
<th>Time in the US (At First Interview)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Undergrad. Degrees</td>
<td>Sungho</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>High school diploma from Korea</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jongsoo</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>High school diploma from Korea</td>
<td>5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nari</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>A 2-year certificate program in graphic design after high school graduation in Korea</td>
<td>1 year 1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Youngchun</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>High school diploma from China</td>
<td>10 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Youshin</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Some college in Choral Conducting from Argentina</td>
<td>10 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unjung</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>B.S. in Trade from Korea</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Graduate Degrees</td>
<td>Hyeri</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>B.A. in Viola from Korea</td>
<td>5-6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sukae</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>BA in International Affairs from Beijing University, China</td>
<td>5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Language Program</td>
<td>Minjoo</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1 yr of Art Business Administration from Korea</td>
<td>6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Byungin</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>PhD in Sports Marketing and MBA from Korea</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First Category

The first category of six students came to the US with the purpose of pursuing an undergraduate degree from a U.S. university. This category has three subcategories: 1) students who came directly from Korea because they were not admitted into the Korean universities of their choice—Sungho, Jongsoo, and Nari; 2) students who previously studied in another country, such as China and Argentina, who then decided to come to the United States to pursue an American undergraduate degree—Youngchun and Youshin; and 3) a student who already had a bachelor’s degree from a Korean university but wanted to pursue another undergraduate major in the United States—Unjung.

First subcategory: for a U.S. undergraduate degree—Sungho, Jongsoo, and Nari. The three students in the first subcategory that came to the US with the goal of being admitted into a U.S. university for an undergraduate degree were Sungho, Jongsoo, and Nari. Their specific reasons for coming to the US are explained below.

Sungho. First, why did Sungho come to the US? Sungho was a 19-year-old male student who had been studying in the English language institute for about a year at the time of the first interview. Sungho said he had applied to several universities in Korea but that he was not pleased with the schools that admitted him. Sungho described the prestige levels of the schools that accepted him in Korean standards: “동국대하고... 그 수도권에 바깥쪽에 있는 그런데 있죠.” “Dong Gook University (ranked 20th)... and those colleges outside Seoul.”
He was not pleased with those schools because they were not considered very prestigious by the Korean society, and this lack of prestige would later affect his employment after graduation (Sorensen, 1994). In Korea, a person’s university’s name is very important in helping him get a job with internationally renowned Korean companies such as Samsung, Hyundai, and LG (Lee & Brinton, 1996). Because Sungho did not get into the school that he thought was prestigious enough, he was left with the choice of doing jaesu, studying for the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) again for one more year (the CSAT is offered only once a year). When Korean students do jaesu, they study for the CSAT as neither a high school student nor a college student, but as a jaesu student. To do jaesu, many students rely on hakwons, “tutorial places,” to help them prepare for the exam. In some cases, students live and study in hakwons that provide room and board. But to Sungho, jaesu was not a good idea because there was no guarantee that he could drastically improve his English subject score on the CSAT in one year so as to increase his overall chances of being admitted into a top school in Korea. (On the CSAT, the three most weighted subjects, according to the number of questions allotted to each, are English, Korean, and mathematics). He said his weakness on the CSAT was English. Here he described his lack of English proficiency in Korea:

근데 영어를 엄청 못하는 수준에서 뭐 공부해봤자 뭐 결과 뭐 나쁠 거 같고

뭐 그렇게 의지가 막 엄청 해가지고 막 이렇게 24시간 공부할 수 있는 거
But, I was so bad at English that even if I had studied [during the jaesu year], the results would still be bad. And I didn’t have the will power to study 24 hours a day. So, the reason I came here was to learn English well and to be able to get into a college [in the US].

Sungho said his overall CSAT was low because of his English subject score. So, he thought it would be better to come to the US to learn English or to even enter a U.S. university. Once he was admitted to a U.S. university, he said, he could have the additional advantage of graduating from a U.S. college or even transferring back to a Korean university in the middle (which would probably be much easier to do than if he had tried to enter a Korean university directly after doing jaesu for one year in Korea).

Sungho mentioned his plans to transfer to a prestigious Korean university after being admitted to a university in the United States:

Transfer 하는 게 원만하면 중앙대 위쪽으로, 그 쪽으로 해서 되면은 한 학기 다니고 휴학을 한 다음에 군대를 가야죠. 저는 한국에서 살 생각이니까.

To transfer (to a school in Korea), I would like to go above Chung-Ang University (ranked 10th, 2011 Joongang Daily Newspaper Ranking—Korea). And if I get in, I would attend college for one semester and then take a leave of absence to go to the army because I’m planning on living in Korea.
In Korea, all males without medical problems are required by law to serve in the military for two years and two months. Most men fulfill their military duties soon after they enter a university (because they want to have the guarantee of a college to return to after they finish their military service). Due to this mandatory military service looming in his immediate future, Sungho had to think about what could happen if he did not get admitted into an American university in the spring of 2010, the semester after the interview:

So, if I don’t get into a university next spring, I have to go to the [Korean] army. I would be giving up on an American university. Giving up on going to college here and going to the army and then later attending a Korean university.

Sungho’s most important reason for being in the United States was for college and for improving his English, so he said:

In my case, you know how it’s really difficult to do jaesu. But if I came here, I would be practically doing jaesu and learning English thoroughly, so I chose this path.
Sungho eventually wanted to pursue a business career, so he realized how important English would be for him. His case is unusual because most Korean international students either go straight to college or graduate school without entering a language program first. Sungho described how special his case was in comparison to most Korean international students: “저같이 이제 재수 아니면 이렇게 해서 ELI 먼저 어학연수를 하고 이렇게 여기 오는 경우는 별로 그닥 없죠.” “It is rare for people to come first to a language institute for jaesu as I’m doing.”

Korean parents often feel that they have to think of ways for their children to have other options when their children’s goal of entering a good university in Korea is not possible. Limited choices led Sungho’s father to consider sending him abroad to solve his English problem. Being proficient in English is clearly a priority for young Koreans, even after college. Companies require more and more speaking skills from their applicants, which is illustrated when they conduct part of each job interview in English (Sorensen, 1994). Sungho’s case shows how important parents and students believe English is for young Koreans who want to succeed in Korean society. Sungho described what made young Koreans flock to the United States: “미래가 막 불안정하거나 그러면 여기 많이 오는 거 같아요.” “Many who are nervous about their future seem to be coming here [to the US].”

So, Sungho came to the US for dual purposes: to study and learn English fluently and also to get into an American university.
**Jongsoo.** The second person in this subcategory is Jongsoo. Jongsoo’s and Sungho’s stories are very similar because they both came to the United States after they were denied admission to their dream universities in Korea. But Jongsoo seemed a little different than Sungho in that Sungho’s main problem was just English on the CSAT, while Jongsoo’s problem seemed to have been an overall lack of preparations for the whole CSAT. He said because he did not focus on academics for about three years from freshman year to junior year in high school, he did not have enough time to prepare for the CSAT, which he took as a senior in high school. Jongsoo described why he came to the US:

그때는 제가 공부를 못해 갖고, 아빠가 건대 이상만 가면은 유학을 나중에 보내준다고 했는데, 봤는데, 제가 건대를 약간 떨어지는 수준이 되어갖고.

At that time (in high school), I wasn’t a good student, so my dad said that if I could at least get into Konkuk University (ranked 17th, 2011 Joongang Daily Newspaper Ranking—Korea), then he would let me go later to study abroad. I took the test [CSAT], but my score wasn’t high enough [to be accepted at Konkuk University].

Jongsoo explained which schools were considered prestigious enough by most people in Korea:

다 좋다고 하는데 서울에 있는 대학만 가면, 그러면 서울에 있는 대학을 가더라도 그렇게 좋은 대학이 아니면은 좀 힘들죠. 졸업하고 나서도
People say if you can get into a university within Seoul, it would be good. But even if the schools are located in Seoul, if they are not that good, then it would be difficult after graduating. In Korea, a school’s name is very important, very powerful. It will negatively affect getting a job later on.

Because Jongsoo’s own father had already experienced the cruel reality of needing a prestigious university name for a successful career in Korea, he wanted Jongsoo to have a better opportunity. Jongsoo told his father’s story:


Interviewer: 누가 시기를 해요 아빠를?

Jongsoo: 밑에 사람들도 그렇게 엽에, 아무튼 직장에 사람들이

Interviewer: 아빠를 시기를 한다고요? 그 자리를 잡고 있으니까
Jongsoo: My dad went to a university in the country [not in Seoul] because his family was poor. But he worked really hard and established himself in a company by becoming the second in position. And because he was able to hold onto his high position ever since he was quite young, even though he did not come from a good school, there was jealousy.

Interviewer: Who was jealous of your father?
Jongsoo: People under him and around him, in his work place.

Interviewer: They were jealous of him because he had that position?
Jongsoo: Yes. Because he was higher than them even though his school’s name value was lower than theirs. There was that problem. So, when my dad was
around 33 or 34, when I was in elementary school, he entered Seoul National University graduate school (ranked #1) because of that problem of school name. Interviewer: And after that, the problem… Jongsoo: was solved. Interviewer: Because your father knows how important school’s name is, he wants to send his son to a good school? Jongsoo: He wants to send me to a good school. So, Jongsoo came to the US to find another route to enter a good university. But, for Jongsoo, coming to the US to study has always seemed to have been an option; it was only a matter of when. From his words, it seemed that he chose his path after listening to the advice of those around him, including his father and his friends, who advised him on which way he should go.
When I was young, I just wanted to come to America. Not to live, but to study. When I was in middle school. . .a few friends went to America. And, Korea, as you know, is too competitive. I just wondered what it would be like to study and graduate in America. I thought like that when I was young, but I changed my mind in the middle. And I didn’t want to come to America anymore, because when I was a senior in high school, my high school upper classmen who went to college told me that I should experience the Korean university culture. . .that it was different. So my original plan was to study hard the rest of my senior year and get into a Korean university, and then transfer to America. . . . But that did not happen.

Jongsoo seemed to have put a lot of emphasis on friendships in Korea, spending considerable time with friends even during the crucial years of preparing for the CSAT. This choice to spend time with friends may have resulted in rejections from the schools he had hoped to attend. Even in the US, he said he relied on his Korean friends to help him study for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). He seemed to navigate toward his goals by relying on their advice.

In summary, Jongsoo’s story for coming to the US was very similar to Sungho’s. But Jongsoo said he did not study much for the CSAT, unlike Sungho who said his only problem was the English subject on the CSAT. One reason Jongsoo said he did not study hard in Korea was that he spent too much time with his friends when he should have been studying. So, he came to the US to learn English and to be admitted into an American university.
Nari. Student number three in this first subcategory of students who had never attended a Korean college was Nari. Her story was similar to that of Sungho’s and Jongsoo’s except that in her case, there were more years after high school graduation without her being able to enter a university. She said that in high school, she had been stubborn about what she wanted to do, going against the advice of her teachers. She attended a high quality high school provided to employees’ children by Posco, the largest steel company in the world, located in Pohang in southeastern Korea. In high school, she said she knew what she had to do to get into a university. But, she said that she did not study very hard and that she did not want to go along with the system [of entering a prestigious university] and just did it her way. As she had predicted, she did not get into a prestigious university in Korea.
I studied somewhat. But when I think back to that time (in high school), I trusted myself too much. Even when I studied just a little, my grades were pretty good, so I didn’t study that hard. And I only studied the subjects that I liked. So, when I took the CSAT, my score wasn’t very good. I applied to colleges, ignoring the advice of my teachers [who would know what scores would match what schools and majors] and just applied only to those schools I wanted. I hated the fact that I had to apply to schools according to my CSAT score. You know, the Korean educational system is like that. So, I just applied in my way, and knew I wouldn’t get in. And, I didn’t get in. But I didn’t care because I knew that was going to happen when I applied.

So, her journey after high school was that of someone who failed in the Korean university entrance system. She entered a certificate program that lasted for two years and then reapplied to Korean universities. But, the certificate program did not help her get into a university. She was still on the bottom of the waiting list of the universities she applied to, even after she built up her credentials for two years in the certificate program. While she was in this situation, she went on a trip to Australia. While there, she realized that she wanted to study abroad. So, she chose to leave Korea and come to the US to start afresh.
1 학년 마치고 겨울에 1달 동안 호주로 유학간 적이 있어요 ...

모나시대학이라고 ... 거기 디자인 과장 저희 학교방 자매결연을 맺어서 한
달 동안 학생 열 몇 명이랑 저랑 갔어요.. 슬직히 거의 노는 것을 목적으로
다른 나라에 살아보고 싶고. 그때가 처음 경험이었어요. 여행을 고등학교
때 간 적은 있는데 직접 제가 혼자 가서 산 거는 처음이었기 때문에 거기
가서 인제 영어수업도 들고, 디자인 수업도 같이 병행하면서 들었습니다
거기서 배우면서 아 내가 한국에서 이렇게 디자인만 공부하는 것이 아니라
밖에 나가서도 공부하고 싶다는 생각이 들었어요. 그래서 이걸 하려면
영어를 배워야겠다는 생각도 그때 든거예요. 그래서 거기 갔다 와서 학교
2 학년 마치고, 계속 부모님께 유학 보내달라고 했는데 허락을 해주시지
않았어요. 그래서 한국에 있는 서울에 있는 미대로 편입하기로 결정하고
1 년 동안 그냥 그림공부 했어요 실기. 했는데 그런데 결과가 그렇게 좋지
않았어요.. 그러면서 저는 예비 2 번, 3 번 4 번, 5 번, waiting list. 이렇게 된
거예요. 들어갈 확률이 없거든요. 그래서 저는 단념을 하고 다시 재수를
한번을 더하면 들어갈 수 있다는 자신이 있었어요. 왜냐하면 한번 경험을
After finishing one year in the certificate program, for one month during winter break, I went to Australia to study at Monash University. That school’s design department and my school [the certificate program] had a sister relationship, so for one month, about 10 students and I went there. Honestly, I went there with the purpose of playing and experiencing living in another country. It was my first experience. I had traveled to Australia in high school, but it was my first time to go alone and to live. I took English classes and design classes. As I was studying there, I realized that I wanted to study abroad, and not just study in Korea. And in order to do that, I thought I needed to know English. After that trip, I finished my second year in the certificate program and constantly begged my parents to let me go study abroad, but they wouldn’t allow it. So, I decided to try to transfer to an art college in Seoul and prepared by studying art for one year. But the result wasn’t good. . . . I was either second, third, fourth, fifth on the waiting list. There was no chance for me to get into the art college. So, I gave up and thought if I did jaesu [studying for one more year to take the CSAT] again, that I could get in because I have already experienced it. And I was thinking like that when my dad suggested that I study abroad. I loved that idea because I had wanted to go. So I told him I would leave right away.
Nari said she felt really behind, because all her friends had graduated from college at this point and were working as interns in companies. This rush for time was a motivator for Nari to study harder, to pursue her dream of becoming an art therapist. She knew clearly what she had to do to make her dream come true. So, those three years that she had spent outside of a university really may not have been a waste of time in the long run. Nari’s story showed the limited options left for those who do not get admissions from colleges in Korea. Some of them, like Nari, chose to come to the US to enter college more easily, even though ironically, they had to study in another language in order to enter a college.

Second subcategory: students from China and Argentina pursuing an undergraduate degree in the US.

Youngchun—from China. The second subcategory of students pursuing undergraduate degrees in the US is different than the first subcategory because these students came to the United States after they had already experienced studying in foreign countries outside of Korea. Two students, Youngchun and Youshin, fit into this subcategory. Youngchun was a 19-year-old male student who had attended all three years of high school in China. His father sent him to China because he was not doing well academically in his Korean middle school. Additionally, he wanted Youngchun to learn to speak Chinese for the future when he would take over his father’s company that did business with China. After graduating from high school in China, Youngchun applied and was accepted by a Chinese university. When he was about to enter that Chinese university, his father suddenly told him to go to an American university saying, “What
will you do with a degree from China?” So Youngchun was in the United States, but he was discovering that his experiences in America were not what he envisioned them to be before he had arrived here. Youngchun described his expectations before coming to America:

Before coming to America, I thought [once I came to the US], I could play and drink with Americans and become fluent in English. . . . Thought it could be like that once I came there. . . . Thought I would have many chances to meet Americans and to drink with them and use a lot of English in the process. . . . Once I came, I found that there were many Koreans, and I got to spend time with them, and not many chances to meet Americans as I had expected. . . . Youngchun’s story illustrated what Korean parents, if they were financially able, could choose to do for their children when the children did not do well in Korean schools. Youngchun left for China at a fairly young age, right after ninth grade, because he was not doing well academically in Korea as noted above. But even when he was in Korea, his mother manipulated their address so that he could attend a prestigious middle school
in another district where, she hoped, he would be motivated to study harder. Youngchun described this manipulation of his home address: “그냥, 이렇게 주소를 엄마가 초등학교 졸업할 때, 중학교 입학할 때 그 쪽 아파트쪽을 주소로 해가지고 아시는 분으로 해가지고 이쪽으로 이렇게.” “My mom, when I was about to graduate from elementary school and enter middle school, wrote down as our address the address of someone she knew.”

When Youngchun did not do well, despite their efforts, his parents decided to send him to China. Youngchun described how this decision was influenced by his inability to go onto a regular high school in Korea because of his low grades in middle school (60 to 70 percent of middle school children go on to regular high schools):

Youngchun: 성적이 안 좋으니까 중학교 성적이 안 좋아서 그 인문계를 못 갔어요…아, 실업계가면은 인생이 좀 그렇잖아요. 기술 배우면 뭐 얼마나 벌라고.

Interviewer: 그래도 중국 가서 중국말을 배워야 된다는 거....

Youngchun: 새로운 도전 해보자 해서.

Youngchun: Because my grades, my middle schools grades, weren’t good, I couldn’t go to a regular high school. But if I went to an alternative high school,
my life would, you know. . . . How much could I earn after graduating from such a school?

Interviewer: But you had to learn Chinese if you wanted to study in China.

Youngchun: I decided to take up the new challenge.

His father took a chance on his son’s future by having him go to another country to learn the language and get motivated to do better academically than he had done in Korea. The results were positive: Youngchun studied hard in China. He described how fast he became proficient in Chinese:

중국어 시험이나 3급부터 11급까지 있는데 6급을 따면은 복경대를 지원할 수 있어요...학교 그 조건이 6급을 따면은 그쪽 한쪽 반에 들어주겠다. 중국인 반에. 반 년 만에 똑딱 따바봤네.

The Chinese proficiency test had levels from 3 to 11. If I got a level 6, I could apply to Beijing University (#1 ranked university in China). . . . My high school’s requirement was that if I got a level 6, I could go to an all-Chinese class. I achieved level 6 after only six months.

He even succeeded in entering the third ranked university in China, Inmin University. But, Youngchun’s father questioned the value of that accomplishment for Korean society, saying (according to Youngchun), “What can you do [in Korea] after graduating from that school [the Chinese university]?” Even though Youngchun’s Chinese improved sufficiently to gain him admission into the third ranking Chinese university in the country, it was not a good enough result to guarantee future success in
Korea. Youngchan explained his reaction after his father’s sudden phone call telling him to go to America:

At first, I was taken aback. I was getting ready to go to a Chinese university, all prepared, and he [Dad] tells me to go to America to an American university. . . . But when I thought about it carefully, there was nothing I could do [in Korea] after graduating from a Chinese university. . . . What could I do? All I knew was how to speak Chinese. . . . But, English had to be the basis. But I couldn’t speak English at that time.

A successful life in Korea required English, so Youngchun came to the United States. He went from Korea to China and from China to the US. It was the path of a student who had not succeeded in the Korean system, and who wanted to be accepted in Korea by detouring to a foreign country. Maybe his father saw that and wanted to try an alternate route, China, but then decided learning Chinese was not sufficient for success by Korean standards; English was required. As a businessman, the owner of a company that did business with China, Youngchun’s father probably knew the importance of
Chinese proficiency. But it was great as a backup only after English was in place. To succeed within Korea, English was a must.

**Youshin—from Argentina.** The other student in this subcategory of undergraduate students from abroad was Youshin. She was a 27-year old woman whose family immigrated to Argentina from Korea when she was in 11th grade. But even after having lived in Argentina for 10 years, Youshin said she did not feel at home in Argentina and wanted to go back to study and live in Korea. But, ironically, in her visits to Korea, she realized the unquestionable importance of knowing English for having a comfortable life in Korea, so she came to the United States to learn English. She described how she came to the United States:

I had to live in Argentina, but I couldn’t settle down there the whole time. Because I wanted to return to Korea, I looked into transferring to a Korean university or taking an entrance exam. I realized that English had become such a
vital subject in Korea. The tests that I had to take were about English and related things. So, I told myself, “Oh, I have to learn English first. . . .” I suddenly asked my parents [in Argentina] to let me go and they did. So I’m learning English.

Youshin’s story was that of a Korean who could not forget Korea, even after she had left it for 10 years. Her family left the country around the time of the IMF (International Monetary Fund) Crisis when the Korean government suffered from debts to other countries and the IMF had to step in to help the country solve its financial problems. During this time, many Koreans left the country. It is not clear exactly why Youshin’s family moved to Argentina at this time, but according to Youshin, she remained mostly within Korean society among her family and her Korean church:

“Because I was with my family and the Korean church, I lived in the Korean culture.”

She did get into an Argentinian university, but she did not complete her degree. She wanted to go back to Korea either to live or to go to school there. But while researching how to attain this goal, she realized that English was needed foremost for success in Korea. She explained:

대학을 아르헨티나에서 좀 다니다가, 그리고.. 좀 어려운 것도 있고, 자꾸 스트레스 받고 하니까 한국에 대한 미련을 못 버리고. 그런데 찾아가 보니까 한국도 영어가 필요하더라 구요… 아르헨티나에서 계속 살아야 되는데,

저는 마음을 못 붙여야 계속. 한국을 가고 싶어서 한국 대학을 편입을
I attended some college in Argentina, and there were some difficulties. I kept getting stressed, so I couldn’t forget Korea. And I researched and found out that I needed English if I wanted to be in Korea. . . . I had to live in Argentina, but I couldn’t settle down. I wanted to go to Korea, so I thought about transferring to Korea or to take a test, and I found out how important English had become in Korea. All the exams I needed to take were in English. So, I told myself I should learn English first.

Youshin’s case showed clearly what she felt was needed in Korea: English. As a person coming back to Korea, Youshin realized how important English was for getting a job and going to a university in Korea. Thus, she had to detour and come to America to learn English so she could return and have a successful life in Korea. Youshin’s case was similar to Youngchun’s because they had each decided to come to America to further their goal of finally settling down in Korea. These two Koreans learned English in order to go back to Korea.

**Third subcategory: pursuing a second undergraduate degree in the US—Unjung from Pusan.**

The third and last subcategory in this first category of students pursuing undergraduate degrees in the US was that of students who had already received
bachelor’s degrees from Korea. There was only one student in this subcategory: Unjung, a 23-year old woman who graduated with a major in trade from a university in Pusan, the second largest city in Korea. Now, she was here in the US with the intent of studying another undergraduate major, finance. She wanted to go back to undergraduate studies because she did not feel her English was good enough for her to pursue an MBA at that time. If possible, Unjung said she would like to get a job and live in the United States. In her quest to learn English, she described the difficulties meeting native speakers and making native speaker friends in her dormitory:

Unjung: 그녀 미국 애들이 조금 와서 놀란 게 너무 개인적인 것 같아요.

개인적인 이게 좀 많다 보니까.

Interviewer: 그러니까 한국사람 비해서 그런 것 같아요?

Unjung: 예. 많이요. 제가 처음에는 오면은 한국 사람들하고 절대 안 어울리고 미국 친구 만들어서 맨날 같이 다녀야지했는데, 미국인 친구 만들고 싶어 가지고 roommate 한테 처음에는 오자마자 말 많이 시켰거든요.

Interviewer: 그런데 대꾸를 안 해요?
Unjung: When I came to America, I was a little shocked by how very selfish American kids were. They are very selfish.

Interviewer: Compared to Koreans?

Unjung: Yes. A lot. . . . At first, I had told myself, “In America, I would never hang out with Koreans and I would make American friends and hang out with them every day.” Because I wanted friends, I talked to my roommate a lot, as soon as I came.

Interviewer: But she wouldn’t respond?

Unjung: She just answered and did her own things and didn’t talk when we were together in the room. So, I got tired after a while. Because I couldn’t continue to talk just by myself.”

At first, Unjung’s plan was to come to the US solely for an English language program. However, she changed her mind once she had arrived:

저는 원래는 여학연수만 하고 갈려고 했거든요. 말만 하고 듣는 것만 조금.

그냥 왔는데, 좀 더 배우고 싶은 거예요. 왜냐면 숙직히 ELI에서 배울 수 있는 게 한계가 있거든요.
At first, I came here just for the English language program and then to return to Korea. I needed to learn speaking and listening. I came, but then I wanted to learn more because, honestly, learning through the language institute was a bit limited. She said she liked America, and that she enjoyed meeting people of diverse cultures. By the time I interviewed her, she wanted to live in America and was making plans to go back to college and eventually to graduate school. This was her plan:

I am trying to transfer to an undergraduate program, with a different major, I want to transfer. . . . My hope is to get a job here in the US] . . . I just like America. I had never left home before and was really scared when I first came. But America doesn’t only have Americans, there are diverse races—it was really cool at first. Since I arrived, I’ve realized how small Korea is. It’s really exciting to experience
new cultures and they don’t just have to be Americans. . . I want to live in America.

As noted above, to study in an American university, she felt she needed to earn another undergraduate degree because her proficiency in English was not yet adequate for her to succeed at graduate studies. She said:

Honesty, I want to go to a graduate school in America. I’m not good at English, so if I went directly to graduate school, would I be able to keep up with the
classes? . . . People say it’s harder to take regular classes than ELI (English Language Institute) classes, so without good English proficiency, it would be hard to go to graduate classes and write papers. It’s even hard for American kids to get into graduate schools, right? GRE and GMAT are difficult even for Americans. . . for now, I want to go to a college. People ask me why I am not going to graduate school, but for me to prepare for the GRE, I would have to attend hakwon [tutorial places], but it is too difficult to do all by myself.

Of the 10 interviewees, this student seemed the most enthusiastic about the differences between American and other cultures and her own. She followed through on her enthusiasm for learning about different cultures and ways of doing things by making constant efforts to meet foreigners and make foreign friends. Her motivation to learn English in order to live in the US differed from the other Korean students in this study in terms of wanting to learn English in order to live in the US, rather than as something to take back with her to Korea.

In summary, this first category of students included those who came to the US to earn an undergraduate degree. Their differences are captured in three subcategories. The first subcategory includes three students who had never studied in a university, even in Korea: 1) Sungho came to the US to study English and to attend an American university because he had failed to get admitted to a university of his choice in Korea because of his low English score on the CSAT. 2) Jongsoo came because he said he had not studied very hard in Korea and could not get into the university he wanted to attend. 3) Nari came
because she had run out of options for college in Korea after trying different routes for three years after her high school graduation.

The second subcategory included two students who came to the US to earn an undergraduate degree after having lived and studied in a country other than Korea: 1) Youngchun came to America from China where he went to high school because both he and his father thought that a college degree from China would not be very advantageous in Korea. He realized that he needed English to succeed in Korea. 2) Youshin had immigrated to Argentina with her family when she was in high school, but she wanted to return to Korea as she had never felt at home in Argentina. After discovering that she needed to be proficient in English to attend a Korean university and live in Korea, she decided to come to the US to learn English.

The third subcategory was for students who wanted to earn an undergraduate degree in the US even though they already had one from Korea. Unjung, the only student in this subcategory, came to the US after graduating from a college in Korea to study English at a language institute. Her goals changed and she decided to stay longer to become more proficient in English.

Second Category: Pursuing a Graduate Degree in the US

Hyeri—violist. The second category of students included students pursuing a graduate degree in the United States: Hyeri and Sukae. Hyeri is a violist who graduated from a music college in Korea. This 23-year old has played the viola for 10 years. She came to the United States to get a master’s degree in viola performance and wanted to be part of an orchestra after she finished her degree. She said she loved the majestic nature
of America, with its tall trees and spacious land, and wanted to live here if possible. She said she left Korea to pursue a different kind of music in America:

Interviewer: 그리고 미국에서 사실 생각으로 오신 거고?

Hyeri: 네.

Interviewer: 그럼 여기서 지금 뭐 하려고 오신 거에요?

Hyeri: 지금 학교 들어가려고. . . 지금 transfer 하려고 생각 중이에요. 조금 장학금 주는 데 들어가 가지고. 하고 있다가. . . job 구하는 데 까지.

Interviewer: 어떤 job 을 원하시는 데요?

Hyeri: 오케스트라. . .

Interviewer: And, you came with the purpose of living in America?

Hyeri: Yes.

Interviewer: And what do you want to do here [in America]?

Hyeri: I'm trying to go to school. . . . Trying to transfer now to a place that would give me a scholarship and to study there. . . until I get a job.

Interviewer: What kind of job do you want?

Hyeri: Orchestra.

Hyeri described what she liked about America. She seemed to have formed a good impression overall of America in her three previous trips for music camps.
America was fun. . . Yes. . . The freedom. . . And there are so many forests with trees. I love that. . . Korea really doesn’t have any. . . Therefore, Koreans are dried up (emotionally). . . Busy and no time to think. . . And do you know that nature shapes people’s personality?

From her descriptions, it appears Hyeri believed Korea stifled her and her music. She did not really like the way music was taught, or rather, not taught, in Korea. She kept mentioning how music could not be enjoyed in Korea and that she felt she had to play music that she did not like. She described how she had felt in Korea:

Hyeri: 그냥 대학원 가는 거. 그 학교 대학원. 제가 시험도 왔어요 대학원.

선생님이 보라고 해 가지고, 제가 합격을 했거든요. 당연히 되죠 저희

학교였는데, 근데 안 갔어요. . . 그게 짜증났어요 저는. 한국이라는 그 세계가.

음악 세계가. . . 많이 닫았어요.
Interviewer: 좀 나는 그게 이해가 안 가요? 한번 설명 좀 해보세요. 왜
답답한지. 선생님들이 되게 권위적이에요?

Hyeri: 네

Interviewer: 막 연습도 이렇게 해라 이렇게 해라?

Hyeri: 네. 연습 하는 건 당연한 거죠. 당연한 건데, 어떻게 하는 지를 안
가르쳐 줄요.

Interviewer: 그럼 어떻게 배워요?

Hyeri: 그러니까 뭐라고 그러지? ...말약에 도레미파솔이 있잖아. 그러면
도레미파솔을 내라고 해요. 그러면 당연히 저는 해야 되잖아. 그거를, 근데
도레미파솔을 어떻게 내는지는 안 가르쳐 줄요. 대학교 들어가면 ...그런데
대학교 들어가면 그냥 시험을 위해서 한다고 해야 하나 레슨을? ...근데
잘하기만 하면 돼요 실기 는 그냥 이론이 아니니까. 그냥 완벽하게 하기만
하면 돼요 음악을 ...그냥 재미가 없었어요. 저는 더 나아가고 싶은데. 저는
월 더 배우고 싶은데.
Hyeri: I applied to graduate school, my university’s graduate school. I even took the admissions test because my professor told me to. I got in. Of course I did, since it was my [undergraduate] university. But, I didn’t go. . . . It was annoying to me. A world called Korea, Korea’s music world. . . . It was very stifling.

Interviewer: I don’t understand what you mean. Could you explain to me why it was stifling to you? Were the professors very authoritarian?

Hyeri: Yes.

Interviewer: They told you to practice like this and that?

Hyeri: Yes. Of course, practicing is a given. Of course I should practice, but they don’t teach me how to play.

Interviewer: Then, how could you learn?

Hyeri: So, how should I put this? Let’s say there are C, D, E, F, G. They tell me to play C, D, E, F, G, then of course I should play those notes. But they don’t tell me how to play those notes. When you are in music college, in music college, it’s like you get lessons to prepare for the exams. . . .all you have to do is to do well on the tests, because they are performance tests, not theory. Just play the music perfectly. . . . But, it wasn’t fun. I wanted to go forward, to learn something more.

So, she came to the United States, with the hope of playing the music of her choice. She hoped to work for an orchestra and live in America. Her reason for learning English was to play music here. It may be hard for her to learn English in order to study music in the US because she had stopped taking English classes after eighth grade as she
had not needed English for her music studies in high school and music college in Korea, so starting up again might have been challenging for her.

**Sukae—from Beijing University.** The second student who came to the United States to earn a graduate degree was Sukae. Her story was a little different from Hyeri’s. Sukae attended a foreign language high school in Daejeon, the fourth largest city in Korea, which indicates that she had done very well academically in middle school as foreign language high schools in Korea have very competitive admissions criteria. However, she did not do very well on the CSAT. In Korea, CSAT scores dictate which majors students may pursue and at which universities. Thus, Sukae had to settle for a college and a major, Japanese education, which were not her first choice. (In Korea, students apply to specific majors within specific universities, matching their CSAT scores). Therefore, she only attended her college for one year and then left for China to learn Chinese. Initially, this was only to be a break from the Korean college she did not want to continue to attend; however, about a year and half after arriving in China, she was admitted to Beijing University where she studied international affairs, her dream major. Now, with an undergraduate degree from China, she was in the US trying to pursue an MBA. She described her feelings when she left for China because of her disappointment and maladjustment in her college in Korea:

제가 좀 이렇게 자존심이 상한 거죠. 친구들은 다 좋은데 갈는데 나는 못 갓으니까요. 저는 원래 제 목표가 서울대 외교학과였어요.... 원래 모의고사보고 이랬을 때는 항상 갈 수 있는 성적이 나왔는데, 수능 당일 날
My pride was hurt because all my friends went to good schools except for me. My original goal was to get into Seoul National University’s (ranked #1 in Korea) Foreign Affairs major. . . . During mock [practice tests taken before the actual CSAT] CSAT tests, my scores were always good enough to make it in, but on the day of the actual CSAT, I wasn’t feeling well. But that’s all an excuse. Anyway, I didn’t do well on the exam. So, I didn’t want to continue in the college that I got into, because it wasn’t the school that I had wanted. But my parents wouldn’t allow me to do jaesu [taking the CSAT again the following year after studying for a year] because they thought it wouldn’t be good for a girl especially, or whatever. So they told me to go study a foreign language abroad. I’m sure they thought I
would study English, but I told them I wanted to study Chinese because I have always found it interesting. Then they said, “Yes, just for one year. And come back and study again in your college.” So I went for one year and just loved it.

At first, Sukae came to America to pursue a graduate degree. But then, she changed her mind and decided she wanted to live here with her husband who was trying to open a business. Sukae’s story resembles Youngchun’s, the middle schooler who went to China to study, except that she went to China as an older student. She went to China because she could not settle down in her college in Korea. In fact, she hated her school and major. She decided to go to China to study Chinese because she had loved studying Chinese characters ever since she was young when she studied under her father’s tutelage.

But while in China, she went beyond Chinese language study and applied to and was accepted at Beijing University. As noted above, she was then able to pursue her dream major, international affairs. Then, at her parents’ request, she returned to Korea and worked for about three years in a Chinese textbook publishing company. She had not, however, lost her desire to continue her schooling. This was what she said about how she came to America:

한국 들어가면서부터 계속 일했어요…. 중국어 교재를 쓰는 일을 했고… 그 일을 하면서 뭐 여러 가지 홍보팀 역에서… 대학원 옥심은 계속 못 버렸고요, 한국에서 회사를 다니면서 내내 알아봤어요. 근데 한국 대학원 굉장히 비싸요. 근데 그렇게 한국에서 장학금 받기는 더 어려워요.
Upon returning to Korea, I continued working. . . . I wrote Chinese textbooks for a company. . . . And in addition, I did some marketing work, also. . . I couldn’t give up on graduate school. So I kept researching schools while working in Korea. But, Korean graduate schools are really expensive. And, it’s harder to get scholarships in Korea. Then, I met my husband in my company. . . . His dream was to go to America. . . . So we got married, and I told him that I wanted to study, but that I didn’t have any money because I had used up all my savings in Korea. Then he said he would pay for my education, except that I should go to America, and not to China, to study.

She said any country was OK as long as it was not Korea. She was like an immigrant to the US, trying to establish a new life in this country. She tried to apply to a graduate program since she had always wanted to study more and wanted to be more marketable when applying for jobs in the US. This was what she said about Korea:

저는 한국만 아니면 되요. 저는 한국 별로 안 좋아해요.. 담담해요 좀 한국에 있으면. . .죽으라고 일 해도 돈도 많이 못 벌고 많이 번다고 벌었는데 그게
보면 낸 것도 없고 또 하루가 너무 피곤해요 아침부터 저녁까지...야근도 많다고...중국에서도 오히려 학교에서도 다니고 회사에도 다녀 왔는데

중국도 미국이랑 비슷해요 아침에 출근하고 끝 하면 퇴근하고 야근 없어요.

그러면 저는 테니스 치거나 수영하러 가거나, 친구들 만나기도 하고, 근데 한국에서는 전혀 불가능해요...여기 생활은 이제 영어만 좀 잘하면 편할 것 같아요. 저는 여기서 생각이 대학원을 그냥 바로 갈까, 영어공부만 우선 많이 한 다음에 회사를 다지고 싶거든요. 근데 이제 외국인 신분으로 제가 회사를 들어가려면 영어를 정말 잘 하고 중국어를 좀 하니까 조금 merit가 있지 않을까라는 생각으로 직장생활을 하고 싶어요 미국에서. 그러면서 직장생활이 안정이 될 때쯤 한 6 개월 정도는 어느정도 적응을 하니까...한 다음에 대학원을 이제 그 때 다시 공부를 할까 지금 약간 궤도를 바꾸고 있어요... 근데 여기서는 그렇다고 막 오랜기간 막... 일을 하거나 이런건 아니죠아요 회사를 잘 들어가고 나서 부터는 자기 시간도 있을 수 있고.

I’m OK as long as it’s not Korea. I really don’t like Korea. It’s a little suffocating in Korea... You work to death, but you can’t earn much money. And even if
you think you have earned some money, nothing is left, and every day is too tiring from morning to night. . .many night shifts. . . . In China, I went to school and also worked, but China is like America. You go to work in the morning and leave work at the same time with no night shifts. Then I would go play tennis or go swimming and meet friends. But in Korea, that was impossible to do. . . . The life here [in America] would become comfortable once I become good at English. I am thinking whether I should go straight to graduate school or start working after studying English hard. If I want to start working as a foreigner, I would need to be really good at English and since I know Chinese, it would be an asset to me. And once I settle down at work, maybe after about six months. . . . I want to go to graduate school. I’m changing my plans. . . . Here [in the US], you don’t have to work long hours once you go into a good company and you get to have time to yourself.

In summary, the students who came to the US for graduate degrees, Hyeri and Sukae, chose the US because they said they felt stifled in Korea. Hyeri wanted to study music differently than in Korea. Sukae wanted to study more and also settle down in the US so that she could have time to enjoy her personal life even after starting her career.

Third Category: Completing a One-Year Language Program

The third and last category included students who came to the US to attend a year of intensive language training at a university. Minjoo and Byungin fall into this category.

Minjoo—confident world traveler. Minjoo is a 19 year-old woman with a major in art business administration in a university in Korea. She came to the United States to
“experience America.” Realizing that it was impossible to master a foreign language in merely one year, she said she came to see “how this country was run.” After finishing the one-year language program, she planned to return to Korea and graduate. She said she would return to the United States for a graduate degree in art business administration.

The following quote illustrates how Minjoo learned to be confident of her English skills:

In speaking and listening, confidence is the most important. Just think that you’re not wrong when you make a mistake. Just that you are great. It may sound funny,
but just think that you are great. That’s hard to do. And because you can’t think you are great, you become shy. When they [Americans] don’t understand your [English], it’s embarrassing. But when they don’t understand you, just think, “Why don’t they get it?” If you think like that, at first I couldn’t do it either, but if you keep thinking in that way, there’s nothing to be shy about, really. “That girl is a native speaker and good at English. . . . Why doesn’t she get it [my English]?” That thinking will change you. That’s how I overcame my shyness. . . . It’s rather interesting.

Minjoo said she came to America to learn about this country, but not to live here. She said that she did not really come to master the language in one year, which she realized was impossible to do, but just to experience the country. Minjoo had ambitions to establish an art business in Korea. Since her field would involve communicating with foreign buyers, she realized she needed to be fluent in English. She said she felt it was possible to learn English in Korea, if one had the determination to do so. She said it would be easier and faster to learn English in America, but that it could also be done in Korea. She wanted to add the US to the long list of countries she had traveled in and experienced. She said she did need a degree from America because it was a must, to do well in Korea, and she had a plan for earning this degree. She would finish her undergraduate degree in Korea and return to America for a master’s, after she has learned her major well in her Korean college. Her reason for coming to America was so clear that she had no difficulties articulating her plans. She often said “use” and “tool” to illustrate
what America and English meant to her, a tool for her to climb the ladder of success in Korea. She described her career plans:

지금 한국은 미술시장이 그렇게 크게 발달 되지도 않았고, 크게 발달

되지도 않았고, 또 그 영어라는 게, 제 직업상 필요한 거고, 또 요즘에 또 제
직업이 유학파를 많이 선호하는 추세라 다시 여기 올 거 같아요. 그리고

여기에도 한국은 아직 그 미술경영이라는 그 이론이 베이스가 아직 되게

약해요. 그래서 공부하는 것도 그렇고, 모든 면에서 오는 게 다 좋을 것

가라서...왜냐면 제가 타이틀이 필요한 거같아요. 유학으로 온다는 것

자체가..., 대학원을 어디로 가느냐가 또 중요하잡아요, 한국 에서는,

그래서 좋은 대학원에 갈려면 또 점수가 높아야 되잡아요. 그래서 여기에서

다시 들어가려는 거에요. 다시 졸업을 하고 어느 정도 제가, 솔직히 대학교,

제가 대학교, 대학공부가 마다 대학공부지 힘들잡아요. ..아에 불가능할 것

가라서 제가 볼 때, 왜냐하면 한 과목만 듣는 것도 아니고 이제 막 네 과목

막 이렇게 들을 텐데 오면, 그게 감당이 안될 것 같아서, 어느 정도 지식을

쌓아서 오는 게 난을 것 같아서.
The Korean art market is not very developed, not very developed, and English is something I need for my career because my [future] career prefers those who have studied abroad. So, I will come back to America. And in Korea, the theory base of art business administration is very weak. So for studying and for other aspects, coming back to America would be better… What I need is a diploma, the proof that I came to study in a foreign country. . . . It’s important what [American] graduate school I get into, for Korea. And in order to get in, my scores have to be high. So that is why I’m trying to come back to America, after graduating from college from Korea. Honestly, studying in college [in America] is really difficult. . . . I think it would be impossible, because I wouldn’t be just taking one class but, like, four classes. I don’t think I could handle that, so it would be better to come back [to America] after accumulating knowledge [in Korea].

Minjoo also articulated what English meant to her, as a Korean of this generation:

저희 세대부터는 이제 job 이 한국 그 속에서만 있는 job 이 아니잖아아요.

어느 정도 이제, 어느 정도 인재 솔직히 자기가 안 해도 슈퍼마켓 이런 거 하는 거 아닌 이상은… contact 을 많이 하잖아아요, 외국이랑, 그러니가 영어를 한다는 것 자체는 솔직히 이제 저희가 job 을 잡는 것 있어서는 기본인 거에요….이제는 대기업이라는 이제 어느 정도 꾸준한 회사를 들어간다는 거 자체에서는요, 제가, 제가 아는 분이 삼성 쪽으로
For my generation [of Koreans], our job is not only a job within Korea. To some extent, unless you work in a supermarket...you come into frequent contact with foreigners. So, speaking English in itself is a minimal requirement for getting a job...in going to a big corporation or a good company. I know someone who got hired by Samsung, and that person knows how to speak English and German.

When you look at people coming to job interviews [of those companies], honestly,
English is basic. English is the minimal requirement. Now, French or German. Many speak French. Or Chinese and Japanese. You have to be able to do that much in order to have plus points. Just knowing English is not enough these days. And those who get hired have perfect TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) and TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) scores, so knowing some English is not enough. Kids these days are good at speaking English. When we had the IMF Crisis [in 1997], many people left the country. And now those who have studied abroad are returning to Korea.

**Byungin—adjunct professor from Korea.** The only other language program student was Byungin. He had worked as an adjunct professor in Korea for several years. However, in order to get a tenure track job in Korea, he felt he needed to list “good English skills” on his resume. But since he received his PhD in sports marketing in Korea, his English skills were not at the level required of professors by Korean universities. For some time, this problem had weighed heavily on him, making him debate whether he should come to the US to study English or not. He finally decided to come to the US because he had failed to get a job for which he had been a finalist because of his lack of English skills. He made this difficult decision even though it meant leaving behind his one- and two-year old daughters and his wife for an entire year. He felt rushed to learn English, especially the presentation type English that professors needed in Korea for conferences. His goal of attaining a tenure track faculty job seemed to have literally forced him out of Korea to participate in this one-year program, which would enable him to become more competitive. He described his situation:
저는 학교에서 강의하는 거 자체에 대해서 영어가 부족하다고 해서 학생들한테 내가 알고 있는 지식을 전달하는 데 무리가 없다고 항상 생각했던 사람인데, 그리고 물론 정보를 얻을 때는 영어권에서 좋은 정보들이 많기 때문에 그거를 제가 수집을 해서 transfer 해 가지고 하면 되거든요, 해석해서 의미를 알고 그것을 main topic 만 제가 딱 뿌아내면 그러면 충분히 제가 설명할 수 있는 거거든요. 아 이게 어떤 거를 의미하는 구나 하면 우리나라에서는 이와 관련된 정보가 뭐가 있다 하면 그런 것이 mix 해서 학생들한테 제공해 주면 그거만큼 더 좋은 게 없다고 생각을 해왔고, 또 그렇게 해왔고요. 그랬는데 어느 순간 영어로 말을 못하고 듣는 거를 바로 이해를 못하고 그러에 대한 게 저도 모르게 부담으로 계속 작용이 되더라도요. 그래서 아 이거는 꽤 해야 되는 부분이니까 지금 조금 부족하더라도 어느 정도라도 조금이라도 지금보다는 조금이라도 업그레이드 해서 와야겠다라는 생각으로 미국을 옮 거예요.

I have never thought that I had problems lecturing, transferring my knowledge, to my students [in Korean] just because my English wasn’t good. Of course, when I
needed to get information, I would get it from English sources because there is a
lot of good information in English, and gather them and translate them for my
students. After translating and understanding the meaning and the main topic, I
could fully explain to the students. “Ah, this is what it means.” And I would
combine it with the related information written in Korean and give it to my
students, thinking that it was the best. And I did that. But, I don’t know when, but
I started to become burdened that I couldn’t speak or understand English when I
heard it. This is an area that I have to work on, even though I’m weak at it, at least
improve a little more than what I have now, so that is why I’m here [in America].
Byungin also described the kind of English he felt that he needed to learn in the
US:

그러니까 좀 presentation 같은 거 그거는 이제 어차피 저 혼자 발표를 하는
거지만 그것도 하나의 기술이니까... 그래서 좀 그런 부분을 조금 더 익히고
싫어요. 그러니까 저는 약간 더 기술적인 부분, 어떻게 보면, 영어로
그러니까 일상적인 얘기하는 것도 당연히 익히는 거지만 약간 더 공식적인
자리에서 얘기할 때 약간 좀 음. 문법이 약간 틀리더라도 내가 편안하게,
그러니까 내가 하고 싶은 말 다 할 수 있을 정도, 어느 정도, 그러니까 내가,
내가 원하는 의미를 제대로 막 impact 하게 우선 전달할 수 있는 정도의
Presentations are something I’d be doing by myself, but it is still a kind of skill. . . . So, I want to improve that part, I mean the more technical part, in a way. Speaking daily life English is also an improvement, but when speaking in more formal places. . . even though the grammar may be wrong, I want to be able to express everything that I want to say, with ease, somewhat, my meaning with an impact, want to learn to do that, and I know I’m being over ambitious. To learn that in a short time is too ambitious, but even in this short time, I want to experience that more.

In summary, the last category of students comprised those who came for one year of English language training. Minjoo came to “feel” America and to learn English. Byungin came because he needed to learn presentation type English so that he could show his potential employers (universities) that he could speak English, the one thing keeping him from getting a tenure position in Korea. These two students came to the US with specific goals to accomplish in one year.

All 10 students came to the US to learn English. Even though they pursued different degrees or programs, they all had the common goal of wanting to learn English speaking to accomplish either their academic degrees or other future goals.
Understanding students’ perceptions of English has to start by asking them what led them here and where they want to go from here.

**Research Question 2: What Are the Students’ Perceptions of Their English Speaking and Learning in Korea, in Class and out of Class?**

I asked the second research to find out what kind of English speaking and learning experiences the 10 interviewees thought they had had in Korea. This question was broad with the purpose of including what actual English experiences the students had had at school and outside of school, how they felt about their English experiences, and how they viewed the overall emphasis Korean society put on learning English.

In Korea, the 10 interviewees started learning English either in third or seventh grade depending on how old they were in 1997, when the Korean Ministry of Education made English lessons mandatory for all public schools starting in third grade. Therefore, these students (except for those who had left Korea before or after high school) had had English lessons at school for either six years or 10 years before they entered college. Further, for the most part, almost all the students had had either private tutoring and/or attended hakwons (tutorial academies) to supplement their English education at school. Even after college, they needed to continue English lessons at hakwons or language programs abroad to prepare for employment.

**In School**

**Elementary curriculum: exposure to English.** I expected the school experiences with English to be similar for these 10 interviewees, except for minor differences based on the region of Korea where they attended school or on the type of school (i.e., foreign
language high schools or schools for employees’ family built by large companies). Korea has a national curriculum, so students who attend public schools throughout the country have similar lessons at a similar pace. In elementary school, all 10 students had English lessons, described below, geared towards exposure and a slow start.

Native speaker teachers. Some students attended elementary schools with native speaker teachers from the United States, Canada, or Australia in addition to regular Korean homeroom teachers to teach English. For example, Nari who attended an independent school that Posco, the world’s largest steel company, built for its employees said, “원어민 선생님이 있었던 것 같아요. 한 명.” “I think there was one native speaker teacher.”

Similarly, Jongsoo who attended school in Kangnam, the richest and the most academically intensive school district of Seoul, had a native English speaker teacher, and English time meant fun time with the teacher:

Jongsoo: 학교에서 그냥 교과서 읽고..

Interviewer: 미국 사람? 한국 사람?

Jongsoo: 별 다…

Interviewer: 그럼 외국 분은 될 가르쳤어요?

Jongsoo: 가르치는 건 없고 그냥 노는 거죠. 그 수업시간 한 시간 동안….영어로 노는 거죠…그러니까 뭐 기본적인 대화 같은 거 가르쳐주고
Interviewer: 그럼 친구들하고도 영어를 하고? 그 반에 있을 때는?

Jongsoo: 다 한국말 써요 애들은.

Jongsoo: At school, we read our textbook…

Interviewer: American or Korean teacher?

Jongsoo: Both…

Interviewer: What did the American teacher teach you guys?

Jongsoo: Not really teaching, but we just played for that one hour of class in English. . . . He taught us basic dialogs and as we said them, we played games.

Interviewer: Then, your classmates spoke English in class?

Jongsoo: All the kids spoke Korean [with each other].

*Easy English.* Elementary English seemed to have been easy and fun with games and songs. Nari said her elementary English was easy: “근데 거의 쉬운 것만 했죠.”

“We just did easy things.”

Youngchun said his school had an English room where he could listen to songs and play games: “영어 방 같은 데가 있거든요. 거기 가 가지고 영어 담여 같은 걸로 게임도 하고 막 팝송도 많이 들려주고.” “There was an English room, and we went there to do games with English vocabulary and to listen to pop songs.”

Minjoo also implied that English was easy, noting that they did not have tests: “시험은
Really, I don’t think we had English tests in elementary school.”

Middle school English—grammar/reading based. In middle school, English became more difficult with grammar and reading lessons from textbooks that were tested on midterms and finals. Starting from middle school, students became used to the concept of English tests that would culminate in the most important exam of their academic life at the end of high school, the CSAT, that would determine, in large part, what college they could attend.

The interviewees remembered middle school English lessons as being made up mostly of grammar, reading, and listening exercises.

Youngchun said he studied grammar in all three years of middle school: “‘학교에서는 그냥 문법 배웠는데 잘 생각은 안나요…제가 중1때부터 중3때까지.’ ‘At school, we just learned grammar, but I don’t really remember. . . . From seventh to ninth grade.’”

Unjung said the focus of English lessons was doing well on tests:

It was almost all grammar, vocabulary, almost all reading. We did study listening
too and took tests, but it was almost all reading…Honestly, it was all to take tests well. So in other words, we had to do well on midterms and finals from the beginning.

Jongsoo mentioned how listening exercises were practice for doing well on the exam: “중학교에서는 문법도 하고 listening도 하고. 듣기가 이제 이런 미국에서 대화 그런 듣기가 아니구요 다 시험용 듣기 그런거에요, 시험을 잘 풀기 위한 듣기.”

“In middle school, we did grammar and listening. But not the conversations we listen to in the United States. They were all for tests, to do well on listening tests.”

Many students remembered having memorized the English textbooks, including the problem types and the passages, to perform well on the tests.

Sukae said her middle school English teacher taught English really intensively, so she had to memorize all her English lessons:

“ 굉장히 하드하게 가르쳐 주셨는데, 책을 다 외우라고 하셨어요… 예를 들어서 how are you? I’m fine thank you, and you? 그렇게 쭉…. 선생님이 이거 여기부터 여기까지 내일 외워와, 그러면 그 다음날 되잡아요? 그러면 누구 막 김선경 막 일어나면은 그날 막 서가지고 처음부터 끝까지 그날 외워야 되요. … 무슨 뜻인지 몰라요 그냥 다 외워야 되요…. 발음은 그 전날 속재를 내주기 전날 선생님이랑 한번 읽어봐요… 그리고 나서 그거에 대한 뜻을”
The teacher was really tough and had us memorize the whole book. . . . For example, “How are you? I’m fine, thank you, and you?” Like that. . . . The teacher said, ‘Memorize from here to there by tomorrow.’ And when tomorrow came, he would call on me, “Kim, Sukae.” Then I had to stand up and recite from beginning to end. . . . I didn’t know what it meant, but I just had to recite it. . . . He read the passage aloud for pronunciation help the day before he gave it to us for homework. . . . After that, he would explain what the passage meant. That was the way the lessons went and it was really hard.

Unjung also remembered memorizing grammar rules and test problems to do well on the tests. The test questions were like formulas the students had to memorize even if they did not fully understand the material:

People who were really good at English, like native speakers, or those who had been to America could understand and answer without having to study a lot. But
since we weren’t like that, we usually memorized the text. For example, to know what prepositions and conjunctions went in the parenthesis [blanks], we had to memorize it all.

Sungho, who said he did not have a good English base compared to other interviewees because he had barely had any extra English lessons outside of school since elementary school, seemed to have memorized the most:

I just memorized the whole textbook. Yes, I memorized all the questions to get high scores, even though I was bad at English. I just memorized from the beginning to the end of the part to be tested. In seventh grade, my English grade was good. But, it started getting hard in ninth grade... It started to get tedious.
because there was no end to the memorizing. I memorized, looking up every single thing. But it was no use. Because I forgot what I’d memorized after time passed. So I memorized until the test and then forgot it all. . . . And then I stopped studying English. I tried to get back to studying English from time to time, but I lost interest in English. And my English grade became really low.

**High school English—CSAT preparations.** All English lessons from elementary school through high school culminated in the final and most important test for all Korean students—the CSAT. Because English was one of the three most important subjects on the CSAT (English, Korean, and math), training for a high score on the English portion involved intensive grammar lessons throughout all three years of high school.

However, at some special schools, such as Sukae’s foreign language high school, Nari’s independent school system created for Posco employees, Minjoo’s and Jongsoo’s Kangnam schools (Korea’s most intensive school district), there were classes focusing on English speaking classes even within high school. But according to the student interviews, large class sizes did not provide much speaking practice for individual students.

Sukae’s overall English lessons were very intensive at her foreign language high school where students were required to take English as their second foreign language to be studied no matter what foreign language students selected as their first. As part of the English class, students had to record dialogues with partners for the teacher to grade:

요구사항을 굉장히 높게 잡았어요. 저희는 사전도 영한 사전은 못 쓰게 했어요….무슨 대학교에서 가르치는 reading 복 같은 거를 대학교 영어
The school demanded a lot of the students. We couldn’t even use an English-Korean dictionary. . . And they taught us English reading using a college reading book. . . We even had speaking. An American teacher came into the class and just spoke English. . . And when we recorded [our dialogues] in the conversation room. . . the teacher evaluated our pronunciation and sentence structure.

Additionally, in Nari’s private Posco High School, there were conversation classes with native speaker teachers, but the large classes made it difficult for individual students to have much opportunity to speak:

Nari: 고등학교 때 있었죠 잠깐 1주일에 한번? 그냥 원어민과 얘기하는 거.

Interviewer: 그러면 한 클래스에는 몇 명쯤 있었어요?

Nari: 서른 몇 명?

Interviewer: 그러면 그 선생님이랑 one-on-one으로 얘기하는 못했겠네요. 그렇게?

Nari: 그렇게. 그리고 저는 주로 가만히 있었어요.

Nari: In high school, we had speaking time with a native speaker teacher once a
week.

Interviewer: How many students were in one class?

Nari: Thirty something?

Interviewer: Then, it wasn’t possible to have one-on-one time with the teacher, right?

Nari: Right. I usually just said nothing.

Minjoo experienced a similar situation in her school because the English speaking class was too big to have one-on-one conversations with the teacher. In addition, Minjoo’s English conversation classes had tests, so there was really no time for free talk where students could practice speaking in English:

Nari: Conversation 시간이 있었어요 저희는...그러니까 솔직히

40명이잖아요. Conversation을 할 수가 없죠. 그냥 listening 시간 그냥

테이프만 종일 들어놓고 그 정도?

Interviewer: 그런데 그 선생님이 아이돌한테 얘기하고 그런 방식으로는 안 하시고

Nari: 그런 식으로는 할 수 없죠. 애들이 너무 많아서...또 한국이 진도

위주지 이렇게 try하는 그런 게 아니잖아요 사실. 영어 회화시간, 그 시간 조차도 그 과목이 시험에 있기 때문에, 그러니까 mid-term이나 그런 때
Nari: We had conversation classes. . . . But since there were 40 students, we couldn’t talk. . . . During listening class, we just turned on the cassette tapes all the time.

Interviewer: So the teacher couldn’t really talk to the students?

Nari: No, we couldn’t do that because there were too many students. . . . And Korean education is pace oriented, not for giving students time to try talking in English. Even English conversation time was a subject that was tested. For midterm and other tests, there were general English and English conversations. So they had to cover all the material in order to test the students.

Also for Youngchun, who spent his high school years in China, getting English speaking practice in class was rare because of the teacher-to-student ratio:

[In China], they taught English in high school. A foreign teacher came into the
class and taught us using games. . . . But it wasn’t that helpful because there were too many students. If each student asked a question, a lot of the class time would be gone. . . . There were about twenty some students. . . . Each student could say about three to four sentences. But the American teacher had to proceed with his lesson plans.

Despite these speaking classes in some schools, the main focus of high school English in Korea was grammar lessons and preparations for the CSAT.

At Jongsoo’s Kangnam school, speaking lessons were offered, but only through 10th grade: “2학년 때부터 없어져요 고1때까지는 원어민 수업하고.” “From 11th grade, [speaking lessons] disappeared. We had speaking lessons with a native speaker teacher until 10th grade.”

Unjung, who went to school in Pusan, the second largest city in Korea, said she did not have any speaking lessons in high school: “[I am] not good at speaking. First, the English curriculum in Korea is reading and grammar, so speaking and listening were not emphasized much. . . . We didn’t do speaking.”

Unjung felt that, without the speaking component, high school English felt like a subject to be tested on and not a language to be learned for communication: “하나의
Really, English is important. But middle school and high school English were almost completely a subject to be studied to get into college.”

Youshin who also went to school outside of Seoul said that English was a subject to be tested in high school: “하나의 언어가 아니라 과목… speaking은 거의 책 보고 읽는 것은 시켰는데, 따로 speaking을 시킨 적은 없는 것 같아요.” “It wasn’t a language but a school subject. . . . For speaking, we were taught to read the textbook aloud, but we didn’t have a separate class for speaking.”

Byungin, the oldest interviewee, said his high school English lessons involved teachers translating the passages in the textbooks into Korean for the students:

저희때는 교과서가 있으니까. 교과서를 먼저 아우나 시켜요 그래서

읽어보라고 하고 그걸 그냥 해석해보라고 하고 그 다음에 그거와 관련된 문법들을 칠판에 적으시면서 설명을 해 주시고 거의 그랬던 것 같아요.

항상 그런 스타일로 수업이 이루어지니까요.

When I went to high school, we had a textbook for English. The teacher just called on anyone to read aloud from the textbook and then to explain what it meant. And then, he wrote on the blackboard all the grammar rules related to the text and explained them to us. Our lessons went like that, almost always.
High school lessons were geared towards the CSAT.

Jongsoo said: “네 거의 다 수능을 해요..고등학교는 완전 수능 식으로 시험을 채요.” “Yes, we almost always studied for the CSAT. . . High school tests were totally like the CSAT.”

Youshin agreed, saying: “고등학교 때는 대입을 위해서 공부하는? 꼭 그런 시험을 보기 위해서.” “High school was preparation to enter college, to take the college entrance exam.”

Nari said: “수능 위주로 한 거죠. 거의 수능 모의고사 풀고 reading하고 문제 풀고, 그런 식으로 밖에는 안 해요.” “We just studied for the CSAT. We took mock tests and did reading problems for the CSAT. That’s all we did.”

However, among the interviewees, there was an exception to the rule of English study focused on the CSAT in high school: Hyeri, the violist who attended a music high school. Because Hyeri knew she did not have to take the CSAT to go to the music college of her choice, English did not mean much to her, compared to the other nine interviewees. In fact, she said she literally slept through her English classes in high school:

“잡아요. 그냥 잡아.. 영어시간에. 선생님이 뭐라고 안 해요…아니 그냥, 영어 노래 부르는 거 밖에 생각이 안 나오. 있잖아요? 팍송. 그게 제일 재미있었어요. 네. 문법 했겠죠 당연히. 주어 동사 이렇게 했겠죠. 저는
I slept, just slept during English class. The teacher didn’t say anything. . . . I just remember singing English songs, you know, pop songs. That was the most fun.

Yes, I’m sure we studied grammar, like subject and verb. But I didn’t study. . . . I’m weird, right? I’m sure the others all said they studied [English].

Another interesting thing to note about these interviewees’ English experience in high school is that no matter what the schools tried to teach by the lessons they gave to the students, students still found their own methods for learning. For example, Minjoo said she learned to guess what sentences felt correct or incorrect, not by memorizing grammar rules, but by the way the sentences sounded:

Minjoo: 그날 제가 문법을 사실, 문법에 악해요, 그래가지고 문법정립이 아직도 안 되요. 그래서 문법이라는 것 보다는 그러니까 영어공부를 하다 보면 느낌대로 제가 찍는 스타일이에요...문법이 어떻게 돌아가는지 잘 이해가 안 가더라도요...저는 hearing이나 listening 그런 걸로 배우는 걸 되게 좋아하고요. conversation이나. 그래서 그런 거 하다 보면 이제 어느 정도 느낌이 있잖아요. 시험을 볼 때, 아 이거 맞죠. 다른 건 말이 안 된다. 이렇게. 그렇게 미국 애들이 문법을 모르는 것처럼...왜냐면 제가 문법을 완전 아예 빼있어요. 그러니까 자꾸 영어를 공부할 때 문법으로 공부하는
Minjoo: I’m just, really weak at grammar. So, I still don’t get grammar. So instead of using grammar, when I studied English, I just guessed by the way it [the sentence] sounded. . . . I couldn’t understand how grammar worked. . . . I really liked learning by listening or by conversations. When you do it [listening or practicing conversations], you could kind of feel it [what was correct]. When I took tests, “This is right. Others don’t make sense,” like the way American kids don’t know grammar. . . because I totally gave up on grammar. So when I studied English, I didn’t study grammar, but studied the sentences. After a while, you know what makes sense or not.

Interviewer: Did you learn Japanese like that too? By the way it sounded, by feel?

Minjoo: Yes. I learned Japanese through dramas, since I often watched them.

College English—basic courses in speaking, reading, listening, and writing.

In college, even after the CSAT had been taken, students still had to continue taking English courses. But only three of the interviewees, Minjoo, Unjung, and Byungin, went to university in Korea. Hyeri went to a music college, but she did not mention if her
school required English courses or not. The other six students did not attend Korean universities, either because they were not admitted to their dream schools or because they were abroad in China or Argentina.

For those who did attend university in Korea, English classes in college seemed to have been easier than in high school.

Unjung said activities in her college English class were similar to what she had done in high school in terms of tests and grammar, but there was a speaking component, unlike her high school class in Pusan:

그것도 뭐 거의 시험치기...뭐 거의 비슷했어요. 시험을 치기 위한

공부하고..speaking 하는 그런 그게 있었는데 그런 외국 사람이었고요. 2학년
diddleware 영어를 계속 하는데 2학년은 또 문법이에요. 그때는

한국선생님이 가르쳤어요.

[College English] was all for test taking. . .similar to high school. Studying for tests. . . Our speaking class was taught by foreign teachers. As a sophomore, I continued taking English classes, which was grammar. And that was taught by Korean professors.

Byungin and Minjoo (who, by the way, attended the same university but at different times) thought that the English classes were too easy. Byungin said his university required English classes for graduation but that the classes were very basic. Did the students feel that the classes were basic because they no longer had to worry
about the CSAT, or were they really a review of what they had already learned in high school? Byungin described his university English classes: “근데 그냥 그때는 정말 기본적인 것들이죠. 그러니까 제가 봤을 때는 hearing하고 하는 것도 되게 쉬운 것, 정말 기본적인 것들. 그래서 그다지 뭐 어렵게 아, 이거 힘들어서 못하겠다 라고 생각한 적은 없고요. 어떻게 보면 시간 낭비인 것 같은 느낌.” “But, it was all basic things. In my opinion, the listening comprehension was all very easy, really basic material. I never thought any of it was really that hard. It felt like a waste of time.”

Minjoo said almost the same thing:

Minjoo: 외국인 선생님이 가르쳐주시는데 굉장히 basic한

Interviewer: 막 a.b.c 막 그 정도에요?

Minjoo: 그 정도는 아닌 데 책을 봐도 솔직히 이거는 고등학교 수준 보다 떨어지는 것 같아요. 책 같은 걸 봐도. 배우는 게 배운다는 걸 봐도 되게 기본적인 문장이 쓰여져 있고, 그런 정도?

Interviewer: 왜 그렇게 쉽게 했을까요? 학교가 고등학교 중학교 6년은 했을텐데?

Minjoo: 근데, 고등학교 수준에서 벗어나질 못해요.
Interviewer: 왜요?

Minjoo: 애들이, speaking을 해 본적이 있다. 그러니깐 선생님, 외국인이.
선생님들도 speaking도 많이 시키고 싶은데 애들이 수준이 안 따라 오니까 어쩔 수가 없는 것 같아요.

Minjoo: The foreign teacher taught us really basic things.

Interviewer: Like A, B, C?

Minjoo: Not that easy, but it was easier than high school English, even the books, which had really basic level sentences.

Interviewer: Why do you think they made college English so easy when the students had already had six years of English in middle and high schools?

Minjoo: But, they couldn’t go beyond high school level.

Interviewer: Why not?

Minjoo: Because the kids never had speaking before. So, even if the foreign teachers wanted to make the students do a lot of speaking, the kids’ level was so low. So, the teachers couldn’t do anything about it.

According to this student, then, the easy English lessons were a result of what the Korean college students could not do, speak English, even after all those years of English classes. In this vein, Minjoo mentioned a newspaper article she had read about classes conducted in English at Seoul National University (SNU), Korea’s most prestigious university. She described how SNU students, who got into that school either by getting a
perfect score or by getting only one question wrong on the CSAT English test, could not
understand the professor, and the professor could not fully express himself in English.

You know how there was a lot of talk about Seoul National University conducting
classes in English? But in the class [according to the article], the professor
couldn’t speak English and the students couldn’t understand English. When I read
that article, I thought it was so funny. Those kids got perfect scores on the English
part of the CSAT, either perfect or one wrong. They got in with perfect scores. But

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they couldn’t do the class in English. They couldn’t understand and nothing was working. The professor told them in English, to do some homework, but only a few did it or did it wrong. They missed the point of the homework. I read an interesting article about that. But when I came to college, it was really like that.

In summary, English lessons in Korea start in elementary school and continue through college. For Korean students, English is a reality for at least eight years of their school life. According to these participants, in the elementary years, English was taught slowly and in a fun way, creating an opportunity for the students to be exposed to the foreign language. In the middle school years, English became grammar and reading exercises that were tested on midterms and finals. During high school, the grammar- and reading-based English reached its greatest level of intenseness as students prepared for the culminating test of their English knowledge, the CSAT, required for admission to college. Once they had entered college, the stress of preparing for the CSAT was no longer there and English instruction became a balance of basic reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The pressure, however, was still on as the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) loomed large as a prerequisite for working in Korean companies. In short, English up until college was preparation for grammar tests; during and after college, suddenly there was a need to master speaking to respond to Korean society’s demands on its elite.

**Outside of School**

Students in elementary school until college supplemented their school classes with English at hakwons (tutorial academies) or through private tutoring. This meant that
for many Korean students, including the 10 interviewees who participated in this study, English education happened in and out of school, in a parallel path, for many years.

**English activities at home before and during elementary school.** Even before starting these supplemental classes, usually around the age of six, some of the interviewees mentioned having been exposed to English through videos and cassette tapes at home.

For example, Nari remembered watching Disney videos in English at home that her father brought back from trips to the US when she was in kindergarten:

그 전에도 솔직히 말하면, 아버지가 해외에 왔다 갔다 하시니까,

한국에서는 그때 당시에 없었는데, 영어로 된 무슨 스티커 붓이는 그런 거 약간 애들 유아들을 위한 뭐 그런 그림북 뭐 그런 거 있어요. 그런 거 가지고 놀고. 어렸을 적에는 디즈니 시리즈였어요. 디즈니 영화 그거 우리집에 다 있거든요. 영화가 집에 다 있거든요. 영어로 들고, 영어로 자막이 나와요.

한국 자막은 없고 완전 영어. 그냥 봤어요. 그냥 제가 좋아했으니까.

애니메이션 좋아해서 되게 많이 봤어요. 그냥 좋아서 봤어요.

Before [elementary school], because my dad had business trips abroad, he got me these sticker books in English, the kind for little kids. Korea didn’t have them at the time, picture books like that. I played with those and when I was young, I had all the Disney videos, all the cartoon movies. I listened to the English, and saw the
English subtitles. There were no Korean subtitles. All were in English. I just
watched them because I liked them. Because I liked animation, I just saw them
many times, because I liked them.

Minjoo remembered starting to learn English when she was a kindergartener
because her mom was avid about providing the best education for her daughter.
Byungin remembered listening to cassette tapes of American children’s songs such as
“Old McDonald Had a Farm” at home when he was elementary school age: “근데 그
전에는 어머니가 cassette tape 노래 있고 이런 것들 있잖아요? 그런 거 이렇게 혼자
d 듣고…. 동물농장 노래 그런 노래들, 그랬던 것 기억 나고...” “Before, my mom had
these cassette tapes with songs on them. I used to listen to them by myself. . . those “Old
McDonald Had a Farm” songs. I remember that. . . .”

_Hakwons—elementary school years._ For the most part, students described
having started extra English classes outside of school when they were elementary school
students. Even though English in the elementary school seemed to have been taught
slowly with the purpose of exposing the students to a foreign language, many students
attended extra classes outside of school to learn English faster. Since most Korean
children took these extra classes, others felt compelled to do the same. Many students
learned extra English either by attending hakwons (tutorial academies) or by getting
private tutoring at home.

Sukae first started English hakwon during winter break right before she entered
middle school, because for her, English instruction began in middle school:
중학교 들어가기 전에 끝나고 나면 방학이 길잡아요. 그때 엄마가 학원을
보냈죠. 영어 공부하라고, 영어랑 수학공부 하라고. 왜 우리나라에서는
영어랑 수학을 제일 중요하다고 생각하시니까. 교제, 그림 많은 교제 지금
여기 와서 보면 그 뭐 유치원생들이 보는 그런 거, 그런 거 가지고
단어외우는 위주였어요 그때는.

Before entering middle school, winter break is long. At that time, my mom sent
me to hakwon to study English and math, because in Korea, English and math are
considered the most important subjects. The books, when I think about them now,
were the kind that kindergarteners now read. We read them and studied the
vocabulary.

Sungho tried to attend English hakwon in his elementary years, but there were
problems:

3, 4, 5학년 때 좀? 그때 갔는데 제가 같은 학원에 수학하고 영어 학원을
다녔어요. 수학은 잘 따라가면서 했는데 영어 학원이 이제 망했어요.

영어학원이 망해서 그 영어 클래스는 없어졌어요. 근데 이제 또 다른데
다녀야 되는데 이제 귀찮으니까 막 그날 영어학원은 별로 안 찾고 그냥
수학만 잘하면 되겠지 뭐 이런 생각으로 초등학교 때쯤에 영어를
Third, fourth, or fifth grade in elementary? At that time, I attended hakwon for math and English. I did well in math, but my English hakwon closed down due to bankruptcy. So my English class was gone. So, I had to find another place, but it was tedious to find another English hakwon, so I didn’t look very hard. I thought it would be OK to just be good at math. . .I looked a little and didn’t really go. I didn’t even look for one. I think I attended about two to three months of English hakwon. I didn’t think it was important. I did almost no English.

A different form of hakwon is “Hak seup ji” (Teachers visiting students once a week with professionally published lesson booklets). One of the popular Hak seup ji’s was called “Yoon Sunsaeng,” meaning “Teacher Yoon” or “Mr. Yoon.” Many students opted for Hak seup ji’s instead of going to hakwons because they were less expensive and required less intensive work for students. Unjung, from Pusan, and Hyeri, the violist, both remembered having studied using this method. Unjung said: “윤선생…일단은 선생님한 분이 오셔 가지고 친구들하고 이렇게 과외 식으로 하는 건데 일단은 그 수업에서는 speaking을 위주로 받음 교정..한국사람…제 생각에는 섞어서 쓰신 것 같아요.” “Yoon Sunsaeng teacher visited me and my friends, like a tutoring group. We
studied speaking, pronunciation. . . It was a Korean teacher. . . I think she mixed English and Korean to teach us.”

Jongsoo participated in another “Hak seup ji” called Kumon: “많이니까 또.
학습지 같은 거를 시켰는데. 수학이랑 한자랑 영어 국어. 다 구문 했어요…. 쪽 하다가 중학교 때 그만둔 것 같아요.” “Because I was the oldest in my family, I did “Hak seup ji” in math, Chinese characters, English, and Korean, all in Kumon. . . I did it all throughout elementary school and quit when I entered middle school.”

**Private tutoring during elementary school years.** In addition to Kumon, Jongsoo’s parents had a private tutor come teach him and his friends for about two years:

“처음 영어 학원보다는 그냥 과외식으로 했는데, 친구랑 모여 갖고 제가 처음 영어 학원보다는 그냥 과외식으로 했는데, 친구랑 모여 갖고 친구 세 명이랑 영어선생님한 명이랑 이렇게 3학년 때요…읽는 거랑 쓰는 거. 단어 몇 개랑. 일 주일에 두 번이기 세 번. 그게 읽는 거에 도움이 많이 됐어요… 그거를 2년동안 했나 4학년때까지?

At first, instead of going to hakwon, I was tutored with several friends, about four of us with one English teacher. It was in third grade. We read, wrote, and studied a few vocabulary words about two to three times a week. That helped me with reading a lot. . . I think I did it for two years until fourth grade.

**Hakwons during middle school years.** In middle school years, many students attended hakwons for extra grammar lessons with the goal of scoring higher on midterms
and finals at school. However, speaking was often not included. For example, Youngchun remembered: “한국인이... 회화는 안 했어요...학생들 방... 훨씬 큰 방에 모아 갖고, 쪽 모아 가지고 이렇게 강의했어요”. “The teacher was Korean... and we didn’t study speaking... The students were all gathered in a big room and were lectured to.”

Similarly, Jongsoo recalled: “그 중학교 때, 중학교 입학하면서 어린학원 들어갔는데요... 한국인이요. 외국인도 한 명 있고.... 주로 문법이요.” “In middle school, when I entered middle school, I went to this hakwon... The teachers were Korean and one foreigner... We studied mostly grammar.”

Youshin said she attended some hakwon to do well on a high school entrance exam, which was required in the province where she lived.

For a little while, I attended hakwon when I had to prepare for the high school entrance exam, when I was in ninth grade. Because everyone else was going, I did too... They [the instructors] guessed the possible test questions and told us strategies to do well on the exam.

Although most of the interviewees’ hakwon experiences during middle school were grammar related, Nari, from Posco, mentioned speaking classes:
I did go to a hakwon for English speaking in middle school. We studied with a foreigner, a native speaker. There were about 10 or so students, but not very many. . . . We talked and had some homework. The book, was it from Cambridge Publishers? It had color and pictures. I thought it was fun at the time.

**Private tutoring during middle school years.** Youngchun was the only interviewee who remembered having had private tutoring in middle school. His teacher was an American soldier who taught him and a few other students for free for several years:

- 중1때부터 초등학교 영어선생님이 소개로 주한미군 사령관, 장군 총 감독.

- 그 미국인을 만났어요. 그룹형식으로 해 갖고 말하기...제가 중1때부터

- 중3때까지 그리고 중국 가서도 방학 나올 때마다. 중국 갔다 와서 볼때는 자주 안보고요. 돈 내는 게 아니니까 그냥. 제가 심심할 때 토요일마다.
In seventh grade, through my elementary school English teacher, I met an American general. In a group, we studied speaking. . . from seventh grade until ninth grade. Even when I went to China, during vacations, I went to some classes, but not very often once I had gone to China. But since I didn’t have to pay, I went whenever I was bored on Saturdays. . . . There were about four people. . . . Using a book, he had us read the sentences and study words. . . sometimes [we] played games and [he] showed us DVDs . . . . But even with such classes, because I didn’t study very hard, I couldn’t really improve. I didn’t try very hard. . . . We met for one and half to two hours.

**Hakwons during high school years.** In high school, three students said they attended hakwons for English. Jongsoo said: “영어학원 그냥 일주일에 두 번.”

“I attended English hakwon about twice a week.”

Sungho said the hakwons were a waste of money for him because he did not apply himself. “다니긴 다녔죠. 다녀도 그거는 돈 낭비였죠. 시간낭비. 돈 낭비.

다른 애들 다 다니니까 따라 다니고.” “I did go to hakwon, but it was a waste of money. Waste of time and money. I just went because other kids were going.”
Hyeri, the violist, also attended grammar hakwon with the hope of improving her GPA, even though she attended a music high school where the CSAT was not required: “성문영어. 성문기본영어. 문법. 학교 시험 때문에. 내신 때문에. 내신.” “I did Sungmoon English, Sungmoon Basic English. I studied grammar for school exams, for my high school GPA.”

No hakwons—taught by siblings at home during high school. Some of the students did not attend hakwons in high school. Byungin said he did not attend hakwon for English. Youshin noted that she could not think of taking extra English classes at hakwons because doing well in school was hard enough for her:

Everyone said we needed to study some English. Kids my age went to hakwons to get into college, to get good scores on the test. Some attended speaking classes as well, but I couldn’t even think about that because I was having a hard time doing well on school exams, so I couldn’t think of taking speaking classes.

As Sukae did not like going to hakwon, her older brother helped her with English

**Private tutoring during high school years.** The only one who had a private English tutor was Minjoo: “과외로 배웠어요. 고등학교 때 올라와서, 네 배웠어요." 그날 단어 외우고 문법은 공부하는 데, 문법은 잘 머리 속에 안 들어오고, 그러니까 문제 줄이 식으로 배웠던 것 같아요. 과외 2,3학년 때요.” “I had a tutor in high school.

I memorized words and studied grammar. But grammar was hard to learn. I think I learned by solving problems, in 11th and 12th grade.”

**Hakwons during college years.** In college, three students said they took extra English classes in addition to their college classes. All of them had either TOEIC classes or conversation classes. Unjung attended some classes during winter break before she entered college:

Speaking을 따로 배운 적이 있어요. 언제냐면은 대학 수능 끝나고 이제 대학 들어가고 term 방학 때 TOEIC 공부도 하면서 speaking 학원도 다녔어요…level test를 봤는데. 만약에 제가 영어를 잘한다면 하면은 미국 반
I did learn English speaking in the winter vacation after the CSAT. Before I entered college, I studied for the TOEIC and also speaking... I took a diagnostic test, and if I did well, I could go to the American teacher’s class, and if I didn’t do so well, then I was to get a Korean teacher... It’s very much like the language institute here in America. We sat around in a circle and talked to the teacher in English.

Nari also attended TOEIC classes and remembered having to work very hard to keep up with all the homework:

- 되게 hardworking 시키니까 한국 스타일이 되게 거의 보면 저도 토익 학원 다닐 때 숙제를 받잖아요. 학원 갈 때마다. 거의 보면 하루에 한 6시간은 숙제를 해야 할 정도로 그렇게 많이 내줘요. 영어 숙제를. 제가 대학교 때 다녔을 적에는 그런 식으로 막 되게 많이 내줬어요. 거의 얘기하는 게 항상 하루 종일 영어를 접하고, 접하고, 하루 종일 영어 읽고, listening 하고, 거의 여기랑 똑같죠, 거의 그날 영어를 많이 접해라. 그런 식으로 숙제도 많이
The hakwon made us work really hard. Korean style is like that. When I went to the TOEIC hakwon, I got homework from every class, almost six hours of English homework every time. When I was in college, I got that much homework from hakwons. What they told us to do was to surround ourselves with English. All day, read and listen in English. Just like what they tell us here [at the language institute in America]. Just to be exposed to as much English as possible. That’s how much homework they gave us, but some did it and some didn’t.

Youshin agreed that Korean hakwons were good at teaching strategies for the TOEIC and the TOEFL:

The TOEFL has a speaking component. They have speaking and listening. I heard that in Korea, they have strategies that they teach. To do well on the TOEFL in Korea, people say to go to hakwons. They say it’s the fastest way to raise scores in a short time. They give students different problem types and teach them to say
it like this when the problems are like this and to say it like that when the problems are like that.

**Private tutoring during college years.** Byungin had an American conversation tutor for about two years. During this time, he said he was able to get rid of his fear of talking to foreigners:

그 저희 부모님이서 tutor를 붙여주셨어요 외국인. 그래서 그때 한 2년 정도를 거의 매주 이렇게 했는데. … 책을 선택을 Side by Side라고 그 책을 기초부터 마지막 advanced 책 까지 다 했거든요. 다하고. 그거 끝내고 나서 이제 TV AFKN을 녹화를 해서 그걸 들으라고 하세요. 그리고 써보라고. 들리는 대로 쓰라고. 그래서 다음에 오시면 그걸 꺼 얘기할

하시는 거예요. 어떻게 들렸냐? 그래서 쓴 걸 보고 이거는 이게 아니라, 이렇게 수정을 해 주시고. 그리고 Time지 잊어 잊어요, 그걸 가지고 하나 article을 정해서 주세요. 그럼 그걸 공부해 가지고 와서 그거 가지고. 그런 식으로 했었어요…그때 그 하는 동안은 귀가 조금 끓린다고 해야 하나요?

왜냐하면 계속 영어로만 얘기할 하시고, 전화를 하셔도 영어로만 얘기할 하시니까 전화로 듣는 게 더 힘들잡아요. 그러다 보니까 조금 끓였었어요
My parents found me a foreign tutor and I studied with him every week for two years. . . . He chose a book called *Side by Side*, and we finished Book 1 all the way to Advanced. After that, he had me record sections from AFKN (the U.S. Army TV channel in Korea) and listen to them. And he told me to take notes on what I was hearing. And in the next class, he would ask me how much I understood and go over my notes and correct them. And he assigned me an article from *TIME* magazine and we would study that. . . . At that time, should I say that my ears were opened? Because he only spoke to me in English, and even talked to me on the phone in English. You know it’s more difficult to understand phone English. So, I began to understand English. I could express myself using easy words. That class was really fun.

**Hakwons after college.** Hyeri, the violist, was the only one who attended an English hakwon after college to prepare for a language program in the US.:
Before coming to America, I attended a hakwon for two to three months. It was a famous hakwon. They taught me grammar, and I also had speaking for a month. . . . They had us read books and explained some things to us, and told us to talk. And they started teaching in Korean, because I was in the lower level class, because I didn’t know how to speak English. But if you go up levels, you get classes with foreign teachers.

**Summary for English outside of school.** As these stories illustrate, for many Korean students, learning English in school and out of school went together. They learned English out of school to get better grades on exams at school, on the CSAT, and on the TOEIC, or to improve general speaking skills. So, for students who studied English in this dual path, it was as if their years of English learning were doubled.

In many ways, the English lessons outside of school mirrored what was happening in the schools. Hakwons and tutoring were meant to supplement what was taught in school so that students could excel in their English classes. Elementary English in hakwons covered basic reading and speaking just as in the schools. Starting in middle school, hakwons emphasized grammar (as the schools did). In high school, hakwons provided more grammar learning and practice in preparation for the CSAT, just as in the schools. For college students, hakwons offered preparation for the TOEIC and the TOEFL tests that would help students get jobs after graduation.

**Students’ Perceptions of Their Learning of English in Korea**

After the students described what kind of English curriculum they experienced in
their elementary, middle, high schools and college, in and out of school, I asked how they 
felt about their performance in English during all those years. The 10 students all seemed 
to have had problems with English in Korea. They thought English was hard because 
their efforts did not lead to the results they expected.

**Did not study English very hard in Korea.** All the interviewees said that 
English was a very difficult subject for them in Korea. For example, Jongsoo said for 
about three years in middle and high schools, he barely studied:

중학교 되면서 또, 또 친구들 만나고, 다른 친구들, 놀다 보니까 점점 그런 
길로 가게 되더라구요. 그러다가 고등학교 2학년 때까지 계속 그러다가.

그냥 학교에서 놀고 수업시간에 자기 막 그랬죠 고 3되니까… 다 공부를 
하는 거에요. 그래서 해야겠다. 하는데 갑자기 공부가 안되잖아요. …하다,
계속 할려고 노력하다가 모의고사를 봤는데 제가 반에서 이과인데 25명
있었어요 반에. 제가 20등을 했어요.

When I entered middle school, I met friends, different friends. And as I hung out 
with them, I kept going in that direction [away from studying hard]. So I was like 
that until I entered 11th grade. During school, I played and slept during classes.

When I became a senior. . .all my classmates were studying hard for the CSAT, so 
I decided to study as well. But, it didn’t work. . . . I kept trying and took a mock 
CSAT. In my science track class [in Korea, high school students follow either a
humanities or a science track], there were 25 students. I got 20th place on the exam.

Sungho said he pretended to study hard but that he did not really study. He said he frequently could not concentrate:

제가 봤을 때는 네. 한다고는 정말, 그러니까 하는 척을 했죠 많이. 제가 봤을 때 야아는 있는데 항상 만 생각을 하던가 집중을 못하고. 고3때 정말 공부할려고 해도 잘 안되니까. 뭐 집중력 그런 것도 별로 없는 상태였고. 막 게임 그때 제가 좋아하고 막 그랬으니까.

In my opinion, I did try, or at least, looked like I was trying to study hard. I was always sitting at a desk, but I was daydreaming and couldn’t concentrate. I tried really hard to study when I was a senior, but it didn’t really work. I didn’t have much concentration power because at that time, I really loved to play [computer] games.

Hyeri, the violist, said she had not learned to study hard in middle and high schools like most other Korean students had because she was concentrating on playing the viola. Since she went to a music high school and did not need to take the CSAT for her prospective music college, she did not try hard to study English:

공부도 안 했지. 제가 공부하는 사람도 아니고. 솔직히 공부하는 그런 게 없어요 제가. 공부할려는 의지가 없어요...공부는 안 해 버릇 하니까 안...
I didn’t study. I was never the type to study hard. Honestly, I didn’t study at all. Didn’t have the will power to study. . . . Because I wasn’t used to studying, it didn’t work. . . . And the most important reason, and it is very important, is that we don’t need English in Korea. . . . And I didn’t have to take the CSAT. . . . So, I didn’t study at all at that time, almost none. I only studied for school exams. You know, studying for exams doesn’t help [one to learn English]. You know what they study at school, sentences like “I am a boy” in middle school. It didn’t really touch me.

**Disliked English as a school subject.** Out of the 10 students, nine said that they disliked English as a subject when they were learning it in Korea because, as it was hard and did not seem relevant, it was uninteresting.

For example, Sukae, who attended the foreign language high school, said she felt burdened by English because her English grade did not match her efforts:
저는 영어에 대한 부담감이 굉장히 컸어요. 어렸을 적부터 못했기 때문에.

영어를 싫어했어요. 영어가 너무 어려웠어요 저한테는 보통

여자애들이랑은 약간 다른 성격이라서 영어나 국어 이런 건 잘 못하고요.

...잘 하고 싶은데 그만 좀 잘 안 했던 것 같아요. 다른 거는 노력하면 했는데,

이건 노력해도 잘 안 했었어요. 되게...잘 안 들어 왔어요 머릿속에.

I had a big burden about English because I hadn’t been good at it ever since I was young. I used to hate English because it was so hard for me. Unlike other girls, I wasn’t good at English or Korean. . . . I wanted to be good, but I couldn’t become good. In other subjects, my efforts paid off, but this didn’t work even when I tried. . . . I couldn’t get it [English].

Byungin, the professor, also said he tried to like English, but sometimes depending on his schedule, it became a low priority and made it more difficult:

어느 순간부터 이게 영어가 재미가 없어져서요...선생님이 말씀하시는 걸 이해를 못했던 것 같아요. 근데 그 문법이라던지 이런 거에 대한 게 너무나 복잡했어요. 중 3때 조금 정신 차리고 했어요... 수업 끝나가고 예습 복습하고. 막 누사한테 영어를 좀 배웠고요. 그래서 그 때 조금 많이 좋아졌다가 고2 때쯤 되면서 이제 운동을 많이 하다 보니깐, 이것저것 하다 보니까 조금
From one moment, I lost interest in English. . . I don’t think I could understand what the teacher was saying. Grammar was really confusing. In ninth grade, I tried hard to study. . . . Tried to understand the lessons and previewed and reviewed, and my older sister helped me. So, they [my English skills] became pretty good, but in 11th grade as I played many sports [to prepare for a P. E. major in college], I lost interest again and drifted away from it. My English grade was always one of my worries. And so, later, I just gave up on it. . . . It was never a fun subject. I’m sure almost nobody my age thought English was a fun subject. . . . It was always one of the hardest subjects.

Another reason English was difficult was that it felt irrelevant. Youngchun said he did not like English because he did not think it was necessary for his life:

Another reason English was difficult was that it felt irrelevant. Youngchun said he did not like English because he did not think it was necessary for his life:

제가.... 뭐 안 좋아했구요. 제가 놀았어요.... 영어에 대한 생각? 나한테 쓸데 없는 것. 듣기 싫어서. 아니 뭐, 중요하다는 건 아는데, 그냥 지하고
I didn’t like (English). I played. . . . My thoughts about English [at that time]? A useless thing to me, because I didn’t want to try hard to study it. I knew it was important, but I didn’t really want to study hard for it. . . . For one, it was hard, the grammar and the pronunciation.

Sungho, from Kangnam, said his classmates were good at English while he was not, so he lost interest in it:

I wasn’t good at English while other kids were. I hated English class the most. . . because I wasn’t good. Even when I tried, when you don’t have the basic foundation, all you can do is to memorize. Memorize and forget, memorize and forget; that’s what happens.

Minjoo did not like English because of bad memories of learning it in kindergarten. She said that her mom forced her to learn English even when her Korean was not fully established, and she resisted learning English:

저는 영어를 굉장히 싫어했어요. 제가 어렸을 때, 기억은 잘 안 나는데, 영어를 되게 안 좋게 배운 기억이 있어서 가지고. 그러니까. …그래도
I used to really hate English. . .when I was young [in kindergarten]. I don’t really remember, but I have a very negative memory of learning English. I mean. . .my Korean wasn’t even well established. . .While I was still learning Korean, and [my mom] to add on English, it was difficult. . .It was really difficult for me to accept English. . .So I quit.

Hyeri, too, had a bad memory of her English class:

All I remember during English class is being hit. You get hit when you’re not good at English. How should I say it? You know how they ask you questions suddenly in class? I don’t really remember well, because I’m not the type to remember things. But the English teacher hit me; that’s why I didn’t like English.
Only one student, Unjung, said she liked English because she said it was not stressful when she first started learning it in elementary school: “일단은 처음에는 처음으로 배운 외국 말이고 그리고 그때는 이렇게 막 스트레스 받아가면서 공부 안 하잡아요….저는 좋아한 편이예요.” “For one, it was my very first foreign language to learn. And at that time, I didn’t have to learn it while being stressed. . . . I like English.”

Another reason the students did not enjoy English was that they had other favorite subjects in Korea, mostly math. Sungho, Nari, Youshin, Sukae, and Jongsoo all mentioned having liked math.

Sungho said he was very good at math, but he felt English was something completely unrelated to him:

수학은 정말 잘했어요. 문과 치고 수학을 제일 잘했어요…외국어는 거의 생각을. 멀리 봤죠 외국은. 내가 같길이 아니다. 아예 상관이 없는 나라라고 생각했죠.?… 영어 빼고는 성적이 다 좋았어요…국어. 국어 좋아했어요.

I was really good at math. For a humanities track student, I was best at math. . . . I felt English was far away from me. “It’s not my way.” I thought it [the US] was a country that had nothing to do with me. . . . Except for English, my grades in all other subjects were good. . . .Korean language, I was really good at Korean language.

**Students’ views on the way English was taught in Korea.** I next asked the
students if they ever felt the need to learn speaking instead of just grammar and reading. The four students who talked about this topic all answered that they did not. They said that when they were in high school in Korea, they had no time to think about what they were not getting when they had to master what they were taught to perform well on the CSAT.

Both Sukae and Jongsoo said that whatever English could prepare them to do well on the CSAT was the best kind of English they could get. Sukae said,

I just did it [my English lessons] because I was told to. I’m sure kids these days would rebel if they were taught English the way I learned it, “What kind of English is this?” But, I didn’t know what English really was and thought the best kind of English was the kind that would prepare us well for the CSAT.

Unjung also said that she thought her English classes were the way they were supposed to be and that she studied because she was told to:
We just had to do it at the time, so we couldn’t even think of complaining. . . we just had to do it and it was a subject like other subjects. We just had to learn, so we did that. But when I think about it now, kids from other countries speak. . .

Honestly, when I look at international students, not American students, who are here for language programs, Koreans are the worst at speaking.

Youshin said she did not think much about the kind of English she was learning:

“학교 다닐 때는 그런 생각은 안 했던 것 같아요. 그런것도 있겠지만 중요성을 그다지 못 느꼈던 것 같아요.. 하나의 과목으로 중요한 거지, 언어로서 중요한 것은…” “I didn’t think about that when I was going to school. And, I didn’t sense the importance of [English] speaking. . . It was only important as a school subject, not as a language.”

**Summary of students’ perceptions of English experiences.** The 10 interviewees all had a difficult time with English in one way or another. This difficulty led to poor scores on the CSAT, which kept them from attending their first-choice Korean colleges. Some students entered lower tier Korean colleges. One student could not stand it and moved to China to enter a Chinese university. Others decided to come to the United States to prepare for and enter a U.S. university without even entering the second tier universities in Korea that they were accepted to. Some graduated from second tier
schools and had to suffer from the low name value of their schools. This group of 10 interviewees was unique in that everyone mentioned having had problems with English. This study would have been different had it included students who had been successful learning English in Korea. Nevertheless, this study is useful in that it draws a picture of what English experiences were like for those who had problems with English.

**Travels abroad.** I asked the students if they had had experiences with English in addition to those in school and at hakwons. For almost all of them, travels, camps, and studies abroad seemed to have been feasible and fairly common. These opportunities to visit other countries may indicate that these 10 students come from middle class families, at the very least, that were able to support such experiences. They either traveled with family, friends, or alone. Some were purely travels while others were language programs.

Two students, Sukae and Youngchun, studied for several years in China, one for high school and the other for university.

Some students had gone abroad to camps in English speaking countries. Both Jongsoo and Nari went to Australia for language programs. Jongsoo went after completing eighth grade for a two-month program:

호주 갔다왔어요. 중 2 겨울방학 때. 그냥 영어 배우려고 그 때. 2개월 정도

3개월 받인가? 그냥 놀았죠, 그러니까 한국인끼리 모여서 가는 건데요.

여행이죠. 거기서 어떤 약간 되게 조그만 대학이 있는데요, 거기서

기숙하고 거기서 수업 받고 거기 선생님들한테 ELI처럼 수업 받고, 오전
I went to Australia during winter break after eighth grade. I went to learn English for about two to three and a half months. I just played there. A group of Koreans went there together. It was a trip. There was a small college there, with dorms. We took classes, like at the language institute now, but only in the mornings. In the afternoons, we played. The chaperones had us play in the afternoons and took us home to rest. Classes, playing, and resting... It was the first time I went abroad alone [without parents].

Like Jongsoo, Nari went to Australia too, but as an older student. After this experience, she decided to come to the US to study:

1학년 마치고 겨울에 1달 동안 호주로 유학간 적이 있었어요. 학교에서 모나시대학교라고. 세계 33위인가 30 몇 위에요. 거기 디자인 과량 저희 학교량 자매결연을 맺어서 한 달 동안 학생 열 몇 명이량 저량 갔어요...

솔직히 거의 노는 것을 목적으로 다른 나라에 살아보고 싶고. 그때가 처음 경험이었어요. 여행을 고등학교 때 간 적은 있는데 직접 제가 혼자 가서 산
After one year of college, I went to Australia for one month during winter vacation. The school was called Monash College, ranked 30th or 33rd in the world. The design department of that school and my college had a sister relationship, so about 10 students and I went there. Honestly, I just went there for fun and to experience living abroad. It was my first time. I had visited Australia when I was in high school, but it was my first time to actually go and live for some time.

While I was taking English and design classes, I thought, “I shouldn’t just study in Korea. How about going abroad to study?” And to do that, I realized, at that time, that I needed to learn English. So, after returning to Korea, I finished my second year in college. Then, I kept begging my parents to let me go abroad [to the US], but they wouldn’t say yes [until later].

Hyeri went to the US three different times for viola music camps:

제가 대학교 들어와서 미국을 많이 왔었어요. 왜냐하면 그 캠프 있잖아요.
After entering college, I visited America many times. I came many times for music camps with friends and teachers from my college. . . . I came to New York City three times before coming here [to the language institute], about three times. We played instruments, played quartets, learned music, and took lessons from teachers for about two weeks.

Jongsoo, whose father was a vice president of a company, was one of the most travelled of the 10 students:

With my family, I’ve been to New York, Miami, San Francisco. . .mostly when I was young. I went to Hawaii once, with family, and Japan, China, and Phuket. When I was really young, we went to Chejudo [island off of Korea] a lot, and
later went abroad. In Europe, we traveled through England and France.

Minjoo, who came to the US for a one-year language program, was the most traveled out of the 10 students. Sometimes she travelled with family, sometimes by herself:

I’ve been to LA, the western part of America. And I’ve been to England, Canada, Japan, China, Singapore, Australia, France, Germany, Switzerland. Oh, I’ve been to France two times, England and France two times, and Italy once. I like to stay in one place for a long time, to see different parts of a country, so I usually stay about 10 days in one place.

On the other extreme, however, Sungho said going abroad was something unheard of in his family. His only trip abroad was to China for a school field trip: “수학여행으로 고등학교 때 중국을 갔다 왔는데 배타가 갔었고. 비행기는 여기 오면서 처음으로
For a high school field trip, I went to China by boat. When I came to America, it was my first trip on an airplane because for my family, going abroad was unimaginable. But I have three aunts in America.”

One interviewee mentioned that going abroad to study was a very common practice for Korean students. Hyeri said that many music students thought about going abroad to study more, either to the US or to Germany:

Interviewer: 근데 한국에 있으면 음악을 배우려면 외국으로 가야 된다 생각을 하시나요?

Hyeri: 네. 많이 해요.

Interviewer: 어느 나라로?

Hyeri: 독일 많이 하고. 왜냐면 독일은 토플 같은 거 안 해도 되니까. 전 토플을 해야 되거든요.

Interviewer: Do musicians in Korea feel that they need to go abroad to study more?

Hyeri: Yes, many think like that.

Interviewer: To which country do they want to go?

Hyeri: Many think of going to Germany because the TOEFL is not required. I have to take the TOEFL.
**Pen pals.** Another out-of-class English experience was writing to pen pals. Only two of these students mentioned doing so. Sukae said her pen pal relationship lasted only two months due to logistical problems:

I had a pen pal in Australia for two months when I was in middle school. Writing letters was so hard. So in the beginning, I looked up words in the dictionary. Because there was no Internet, I had to rely on the dictionary. It was really hard. The second reason was that in order to send international letters, I had to go to a post office, so for a young girl, that was hard.

However, Minjoo, the most well-traveled interviewee, continued writing letters with her two pen pals whom she met in her travels, for about five years:

Minjoo: Pen pal을 했어요….고등학교 2학년 때 까진 했었는데…중학교 1학년, 되게 오래된 친구네. Japan에 한 명 있었고요, 영국 쪽에 한 명 있었고.
Interviewer: 그림면 Japan 그 학생하고는 어떻게, 영어로 아니면?

Minjoo: 영어로 해야죠. 제가 한문을 또 못하니까, 영어 이렇게 말을 하는 거지, 한문은 힘들어요.

Interviewer: 그래도 그 친구들 하고 5년? 5년을 계속 왔다 갔다 했으면 편지 써야 됐잖아?

Minjoo: 여행에서 만난 친구들이에요. 여행 하다가 거기서 마음 만나가지고 그런 친구여서 그쪽 프랑스 갈을 때 만났었어요. 그쪽에는 기차만 타고 다니면 되니까 거기서 멈ирующ는데, 다 해어지고 이제 다 영어로, 이메일로 2주일에 한두 번?...그냥 뭐 이런 일 있었다...편지가 와도, 내가 문법을 사실, 영국 애가 보내도 솔직히 거의 맞긴 하겠지만 개도 틀리잖아요;

그러니까 솔직히 그런 걸로 문법을 따져서 이해하는 게 아니라 그냥 단어 추출해서 그냥 아 이거구나, 그렇게 guess를 하는 거지, 그때 정확히 막 나는 뭐 이렇게 받아들인 게 아니라

Interviewer: 그래서 여기서 애들 언어 배우는 것처럼? 그러면 그 일본 아이도 영어 잘 했어요?
Minjoo: I had pen pals. . .from seventh grade until 11th grade. Really old friends, one from Japan and the other from England.

Interviewer: Then, how did you communicate with the Japanese friend, in English?

Minjoo: In English, because I wasn’t very good at Chinese characters. Chinese characters were really hard.

Interviewer: For five years, you guys wrote letters for five years?

Minjoo: We met while traveling. We got close while traveling in France. There, we met on a train, and after we returned to our countries, we wrote emails in English, about once or twice every two weeks?. . .Just wrote, “This and this happened.”. . .Even when the letters came from the British friend, her grammar, of course, was almost all correct. But she did make some grammar mistakes. So, I didn’t understand her letters by studying the grammar, but by guessing from context, “Ah, this is what she means.” I guessed like that, not by accurately
understanding every single grammar rule.

Interviewer: Just like the way American kids learn English? Then, was the Japanese friend also good at English?

Minjoo: She was pretty good. She was good enough to come [to Europe] alone. She was pretty good. And unique for a Japanese, her English pronunciation was good. You know Japanese people are not very good at English pronunciation? But she was really good, a very unique case.

Interviewer: Did you get to meet your pen pals of five years some time?

Minjoo: No, we couldn’t. That’s why I think it stopped.

Another special circumstance that formed a link with English for some of the interviewees was having parents who spoke English. Jongsoo’s father lived and worked in the Philippines for several years and learned to speak English there.

Even though the 10 Korean students did not need to use English other than in school and in hakwons, they were able to experience other cultures, mostly through travel. Of course, these students did not only travel to English speaking countries, but it was common for nine out of these 10 students to travel abroad.

**English as a tool for social/economic advancement after college.** Once the students had completed college, the next goal was to get a good job by scoring well on the TOEIC and the TOEFL. Youshin said: “수능이 목적이고 졸업하고 나니까 토익과 토플이 목적이니까.” “CSAT is the goal, and after graduating from high school, TOEIC and TOEFL become the goals.”
At this stage, the students needed to learn to *speak* English, rather than the grammar and reading comprehension needed for the CSAT, to be hired by companies. The interviewees mentioned how necessary English speaking was for employment.

Nari described how speaking English meant earning a lot of money by working for a good company:

아니 고등학교 때 까지는 그냥 수능만 잘 보면 되니까 그렇게 하고.

대학가서 이제 그때 이제 취업하고 인재 영어의 필요성을 느끼면, 이제 해외에도 나가고 그때가서 speaking도 배우고 그런 것 같아요. 거의 뭐 보면 취업위주죠….영어하면서 한국에서 좋아하니까…. 영어를 다른 사람들 보다 영어를 잘 한다는 게 advantage가 있으니까 이익이 있으니까.. 필요해서, 사는데 필요하니까. 왜냐하면…그게다 돈을 많이 벌려고 하니까.

돈을 많이 벌려면 좋은 직장을 들어가야 하는데, 좋은 직장에서는 영어를 요구하고, 그러면 영어를 해야 되고. 뭐 이런 거?

In high school, all that is needed is to do well on the CSAT. And after that, in college, when students need to find jobs and feel the need to learn English, they go abroad or start taking speaking classes. It’s all for getting jobs. . . because Korea likes people who know how to speak English. . . Because there is an advantage in being better at English than other people, for that extra benefit. . .
Because it’s necessary to live...to make lots of money. In order to make lots of money, they need to get good jobs. And good jobs require English, so they have to learn English. It goes like that.

Sukae, who became very fluent in Chinese after studying in China for many years, shared how knowing Chinese was inadequate to guarantee a good life in Korea:

저는 개인적으로 그렇게 생각하는데, 그 이유는 중국어를 하지만도 중국어만 잘 해가지고는 이 세상을 살아가기가 힘들어요...한국의 모든 업마들이 원하는 게 내 아들같이 일류대학을 가고 좋은 기업에 들어가서, 아니면 공무원이 되서, 잘 살길 원하잡아요?...근데 그거의 바탕을 위해서는 영어를 배워야 된다는 게, 저도 회사를 다녀보고 대학을 다녔지만 어떤 회사들 간에 큰 회사일수록 외국어를 요구해요. 왜냐면 그쪽으로 방면으로 공부를 많이 해야되니까. 그 사람들이라도 많이 discussion 이라던가 비즈니스를 해야 하려면 그게 필요하니까.

In my opinion, that is the reality. The reason is, even though I can speak Chinese, with just Chinese, it’s difficult to live a [successful] life [in Korea]. . . . All the mothers in Korea want their children to have a good life by getting into top universities and getting jobs with top companies or the government. . . . But in
order to achieve that, English has to be the foundation. I have attended college and worked in companies, but the bigger the company, the more foreign languages are required. It’s because they have to be prepared in that field [of foreign languages] to have discussions with foreigners and to do business with them.

Unjung mentioned how necessary speaking English was for getting a good job, but, in addition, she believed this skill was also required because Korea was very dependent on the United States:

한국 애들 공부 방식이. 중 고등학교 때 학교 공부를 해 가지고 문법을
다지고 이렇게 시험을 위한 공부를 하잡아요. 그렇게 하고 난 다음에
대학에 들어간 다음에 영어를 덤 수가 없어요. 아무리 영어를 싫어한다고
해도 왜냐면 취업 때문에. TOEIC 공부를 어뤘든 해야 되는 거잡아요… 학원
다니면서 TOEIC 공부를 해야 돼요. 하다못해 어떤 학교는 TOECI 몇 점이
안되면 졸업 하기 힘들다고. 필수로 그러니까 TOEIC 몇 점 돼야지.
졸업요건중의 하나라고 하더라도요…제 생각에는. 좋아서 배우는 사람도
있지만. 거의 어쩔 수 없어서 배우는 경우가 많은 것 같아요…. 일단은
영어를 피할 수 없죠. 없는 것 같아요. 제 생각에는 일단, 일단은 국제화
This is the way Korean students study English. In middle and high school, they study grammar to prepare for the CSAT. After that, in college, they cannot quit English even if they hate it because of jobs. They have to study for the TOEIC. . . . By attending hakwons, they have to study for the TOEIC. Some colleges even demand a certain TOEIC score as a graduation requirement. . . . In my opinion, some people learn English because they like it, but many do it because they have no choice. . . . They can’t avoid it. First, this is a global age, and English is a universal language, so businesses and jobs need it because they have lots of interactions with companies of different nations. . . . Honestly, Japan doesn’t rely that much on America because it is a developed nation. But we are not, so we rely a lot on America. . . so we have to speak more English. We have more relationships with America than Japan does.

Youngchun said he needed to learn English even though he already knew Chinese

시대고 영어가 공통 영어고 그러고 비즈니스 취업 같은 거 해도 영어가 필요한 게 인재 기업들끼리 국제간의 교류도 많이 활발하고...솔직히
말하면 일본은 미국 그렇게 많이 의존 안 하잖아요. 일단은 일본은 선진국이고. 근데 저희는 선진국 아니고 미국에 의존도 많이 하고 있고 약간....더 해야 되는. 우리가 더 오히려 관계가 조금 더 미국이랑 많은 것 같아요.
because it would make a difference in his earnings:

Youngchun: 글쎄.. 영어가 나중에 제가 직업 찾는데도 도움이 될거고. 좀 더 나은 미래를 위해... 제가 중국어를 하는데 영어를 하고 못하고에 따라 저의 월급이 틀려지죠... 당연히. 그럴까면, 안 나면은 내가 중국어만 했지.

Interviewer: 그러니까 기업 들어갈 수 있는 choice가 많아진다는 거죠.

Youngchun: 그쵸.

Youngchun: English will help me find a job later on, and for a better future. . . . I speak Chinese, but my pay will be different based on my English proficiency. . . .

And if there weren’t any difference, I would have just studied Chinese.

Interviewer: Are you saying knowing English will give you more chances to enter companies?

Youngchun: Of course.

Youshin said: “한국에서 살려면 지금은 필수가 되어버렸어요...필요해서.”

“In order to live in Korea, (English) has become a must. . .a necessity.”

Hyeri said that Koreans learned to speak English if necessary:

시키면 해, 근데 또 한국 사람들. 원지 아세요? 시키면 해. 공부로 해야죠.

한국 사람들은. 근데 필요성을 느껴야 될 것 같아요 그거를...만약에 면접

때 영어 회화가 필요하다고요, 그러면 해요 사람들이. 한국 사람들은 해요.
Koreans do it [learn English] when they have to, do you know what I mean? They do it when they have to. They have to study it [English] as a subject. But they have to feel the need to learn English. . . . If they need to speak English for a job interview, then they would do it. Koreans are like that. They do it to earn money. They are doing that even now. I didn’t have to be in that situation, so I didn’t study English. But, if I had to get a job, I would have learned English too.

**No need for English in everyday life in Korea.** But with the reality of having to learn English speaking in order to get good jobs, there was also another reality of not needing English to live daily life in Korea. Koreans learned to speak English to find employment with prestigious global companies like Samsung, Hyundai, and LG. This English, however, was completely unnecessary for living and functioning in Korea.

Nari mentioned how Koreans viewed English as important, but that, at the same time, there were no opportunities for using English in Korea:

 중요한다고 생각했지만 그런 기회가 없죠. 영어를 쓰기회가. 아니

친구들이란 무슨 영어로 대화를 해요?... 영어에 대해 필요성을 느끼고

공부를 하는 사람도 있는가 하는 반면에 아닌 사람들도 되게 많아요.

영어에 대한 필요성을 모르는 사람도 되게 많거든요.
Korean people think English is important, but there are no chances to use English. I mean, who speaks English with friends? . . . There are people who feel that English is important and study it, but there are also many people who don’t feel the need. . . . to know English.

Sungho described how easy it was to lose his English once he went back to Korea for two weeks, after having been in the United States for a year, because he did not have to use it:

Really, English isn’t necessary in Korea. After one year in America, I visited Korea for two weeks to extend my visa. But, there was nowhere to use English.
So, for people like me who have learned English as an adult, not using it for a week makes it really awkward. After not hearing any English for one week, I saw *Friends* and it felt so awkward. . . . Just after one week. And speaking English felt really weird too. So I thought I would forget all my English once I returned permanently to Korea. Continuous speaking will improve and retain my speaking abilities because if I don’t, it would be awkward and make me lose it.

Hyeri explained that many people in Korea were not crazy about English. She mentioned that many around her were “allergic” to English:

저는 그런 사람들 많이 봤어요. 영어가 필요 없다고 안 하는 사람들 많이 봤어요. 영어 올림픽 아세요? 제가가이는 많이 있었어요… 한국에 있으면 한국 말밖에 안 해요 솔직히 필요성을 못 느껴요 토익 때문에 하는 거에요 토익.

I saw many people like that, people who say English is not necessary in Korea. Do you know about being allergic to English? There are many like that around me. . . . In Korea, Koreans only speak Korean. They really don’t feel the need. They do it for the TOEIC, or for the TOEFL.

Also, this fad for English was much stronger in Seoul, especially among the well off, than in the country.

Nari said the fervor for education was much higher in specific parts of Seoul:

제 생각에는 서울에 살면, 서울에 살면서 강남 쪽이나 약간 학구열 높은
In my opinion, mothers in Seoul, in [districts like] Kangnam and Mokdong [another very academically intensive school district in Seoul], will do anything to get the best education for their children. So, those kids are used to that and study hard, but in the country, it’s a different story.

Nari also said those who went abroad were mostly those who could afford it:

“ нужны деньги, чтобы уехать, потому что без них вы не сможете уехать где угодно, поэтому те, кто может себе это позволить, уезжали. ”

“ Sokchikhe heaw nagaerem dondo ieyo reyo go, gagehangeum anmeryo mot naagag, 
그냥 한국에서 stay하는 거죠. 뭐 어쩔 수 없죠 뭐 그런 건 어떡해…주로 여건 되는 사람들이 나오고. ”

“To go abroad, you need to have money. If your family can’t support you, then you can’t go and you just have to stay in Korea. What can you do about that? . . .Mostly, those who can afford it go abroad.”

Jongsoo described how he spent his childhood in Kangnam in Seoul: “ 마날 어릴 때 뭐 잘 못 놀고 학원 때문에, 좀 갇혀 살았어요 집에서. 갇혀 살고 마날 학원가고 바쁘고 답담하고 친구랑도 놀지도 못하고 그러니깐. ”

“Every day, I couldn’t play because of hakwons. I felt my life was trapped at home. Always having to go to hakwons, being busy, and not being able to play with friends. It felt suffocating.”
Regrets about English in Korea. Several students wished they had studied English harder when they were in Korea. If they had, they felt they would not have been having a hard time in the US trying to learn as older college students.

Both Nari and Youngchun regretted not having studied hard. Specifically Nari commented: “이걸 빨리 알았으면 빨리 했을 텐데, 되게…” “If I had known this [how hard learning English would be later in life] before, I would have studied earlier..”

Both Jongsoo and Sungho mentioned that if they had applied themselves to English when they were younger, they would not be in the United States now. Sungho said:

If I had learned English when I was younger, I could have done better in Korea. I could have gone the easier course in Korea, like other people. I would be a college student in Korea now and be living a normal life like other people. I’m a special case. . . . If I had learned English like I’m learning it now, and if I could be
a middle school student again with the English ability I have now, I would be
living a different life. I’m really regretting it now.

These students, clearly, realized how important English was for them, not only for
going into good colleges, but also for finding good employment. The interviewees, like
so many other Koreans, were in the United States to study English for their future success
back in Korea.

Students’ perceptions of Korea’s passion for English. After the students talked
about their own English experiences in Korea, they shared their views on the English fad
prevalent in Korea, especially among parents. The 10 interviewees had varying views,
with some thinking it was too much, while others approved of the English fervor.

It is too much. Sukae was among those who said the passion for English was too
much: “너무 어렸을 적부터 엄마들이 난리를 피고 이런 건 저는 마음에는 안 들죠.

너무 사교육에 돈을 쏟는 거에는. 학교에서만 배우는 걸로도 충분히 할 수 있어요.”

“I’m against mothers going crazy to teach English to such young kids, using too much
money on private hakwons. It’s enough to learn English at school.”

Youngchun also felt that teaching English to young children was not right:

Youngchun: 좀 아니죠…좀 이건 배우는 단계 너무너무 좀 지나치죠. 지나칠

정도로 영어에 미쳐있죠.

Interviewer: 왜 그런 것 같아요?
Youngchun: It’s way overboard. . . . It’s just too much. They [parents] are too crazy about English.

Interviewer: Why do you think that is?

Youngchun: How can they teach English from elementary school years? At a time when kids need to play. . . . Early education [teaching things to very young children] is useless because kids don’t remember anything they learn at that age. . . . That is just too much. It’s just crazy. . . . It’s not late to teach them from seventh grade.

Byungin was of a similar mind to Sukae and Youngchun:

저는 그렇게 크게 찬성은 안 해요. 너무 지금 과열되어 있어서. 그러니까 영어가 분명히 필요한 부분인 것은 맞아요…어떤 회사를 들어가서 해외 buyer들이라는 의사소통을 해야 되고 물건을 팔아야 한다거나, 아니면 저같이 선생님을 할려고 하는 사람들 같은 경우에는 어디 conference 같은데 가서도 최소한 기본적인 대화는 할 줄 알아야 된다고 생각을 하거든요.

근데 그게 그 정도 수준이 아니라 지금 한국은 영어를 거의 모국어처럼
I don’t really agree because [the English fad] is too heated up now. It’s true that English is necessary. . . . After entering a company, you have to be able to communicate with foreign buyers and sell things. Or people who want to be professors like me have to know how to give basic talks at conferences. But it’s not at that level in Korea now. I don’t know when it started, but Koreans started to feel that they have to be able to speak English like a native language. Especially parents of small children feel that if their children do not learn English, their children will get behind, and not be smart, and be treated as dumb.

He was also resentful of how universities were pushing professors to lecture in English:
Not only that, universities even recommend lecturing in English. . . . In my opinion, the most important issue in a lecture in English is how much English students can understand and how naturally the lectures can be expressed in English. To have that level of proficiency [to be able to lecture in English], it’s not enough to have gotten a master’s and a PhD in America. Studying and teaching skills are totally different. . . . Even if professors could lecture well in English, the students are not prepared to totally understand it at this time. If they don’t use English in their daily life, just by using English in the classroom, could they really get 100% of the lectures? I don’t think so. Even when I lecture in Korean and hope that they get 100% of what I’m saying, basically, students get 70% at the
This was his answer to the question of why Korea as a whole society has become so obsessed with English:

In my opinion, our educational system over-emphasized grammar, when what was really necessary was listening and speaking. So they realized that and tried to change the situation by getting hakwons to teach speaking and getting professors...
to lecture in English. . . If our country were rich in natural resources, we
wouldn’t have been like this. But because our only resource is manpower, we
became like that, very competitive. . . We have this pressure about learning many
foreign languages. . .and it has become too extreme. So, to put it bluntly, if a
person has gone abroad to study, even if he didn’t study hard and just played in
that country and barely graduated, then they go, “Oh, he’s from abroad? Good,”
and give him more credit. That is why so many people go abroad, to get that
special recognition.

This societal pressure for English that universities put on professors finally drove
Byungin out of Korea in an effort to improve his English:

저는 학교에서 강의하는 거 자체에 대해서 영어가 부족하다고 해서
학생들한테 내가 알고 있는 지식을 전달하는 데 무리가 없다고 했상
생각했던 사람인데, 그리고 물론 정보를 얻을 때는 영어권에서 좋은
정보들이 많기 때문에 그거를 제가 수집을 해서 transfer 해 가지고 하면
되거든요, 해석해서 의미를 알고 그것을 main topic만 제가 짜 뽑아내면
그러면 충분히 제가 설명할 수 있는 거거든요...우리나라에서는 이와
관련된 정보가 뭐가 있다 하면 그걸 같이 mix해서 학생들한테 제공해 주면
그거만큼 더 좋은 게 없다고 생각을 해왔고, 또 그렇게 해왔고요. 그랬는데
When I was teaching in my university, I never thought that my deficiency in English in any way interfered with my ability to impart knowledge to my students. And when I needed to gather more information, I would go to the English sources where there was ample information. I would choose the main points that I needed and translate that into Korean. And if there was related information in Korean, I would mix the two and felt that there was no better way to prepare my lectures. But, I don’t know when, I started to feel a big burden about not being able to speak and understand English right away. So, I came to America because I felt that this was an area that I needed to work on and even upgrade a little bit.

*Neutral—feels that everyone has to follow society.* Some students thought that it was a given for Koreans to follow the societal fad. Sungho said:

*어느 순간 영어로 말을 못하고 듣는 거를 바로 이해를 못하고 그거에 대한 제도 모르게 부담으로 계속 적용이 되더라도 그래서 이거는 꼭 해야 되는 부분이니까 지금 조금 부족하더라도 어느 정도라도 조금이라도 지금보다는 조금이라도 업그레이드 해서 와야겠다라는 생각으로 미국을 온 거예요.*
As a Korean, it's a given... I mean, it has already become an “English, English” society. Even little kids are better at English than me, and they read English fairy tales to babies. If everyone is good at English but me, then, I have to catch up... They are looking into the future, and don’t think that they will just live trapped inside Korea. They think doing business in Korea is like doing business with the world—that’s the way the business world thinks. In Korean society, you can’t bypass English. You have to be able to speak English like you speak Korean, or even more. That’s how important this subject has become. Not a school subject, but a language.

Some of the interviewees thought English would mean power to those who had it.

Hyeri said:
영어, 영어하는 거? 배울 필요가 있다고 생각해요...우리 나라 사람 똑똑한
건 알지만... 책이라던지 그런 게 다 영어로 되어있잖아요...그러니까
책이라던지 써 놓은 거를 다 번역을 해야 되니까 잘 모르잖아요 그게 다
지식이잖아요, 한국 사람들이 그 쪽을 알았으면 좋겠어요.... 그거 다 독
되는 거잖아요 애들한테. 나중에 커서 감사하다고 해야 되지 그거를...
그리고 영어 많이 배우면 한국인 중 널리 알릴 수 있을 것 같아요
한국을...그러니까 언어가 중요한 것 같아요. 여러 사람들 만날 수있잖아요
일단 영어를 하면.

What do I think about being so crazy about English? I think it’s necessary to learn
English. . . I know Koreans are smart. . . But many books and things are in
English. . . so all these books have to be translated because they [Koreans] don’t
know [English] well. It’s all knowledge. I hope Koreans can be good at
English. . . . It would all be a benefit to the kids. They should thank their parents
for it when they grow up. . . . And if Koreans are good at English, they could let
other countries know about Korea. . . . That’s why language is important. You can
meet many people if you know English.

Minjoo agreed that the English fad was good for Korea:

전 되게, 좋은 현상이라고 생각해요...이제 저희 어머니 세대까지는
I think it’s a really good phenomenon. . .not for my mother’s generation, but for my generation. A job in Korea is not only a job in Korea. . . Now, you have to know German, French, Chinese, or Japanese to have merit. It’s not enough to just have English now. . . people who apply to companies come with perfect scores on the TOEIC and the TOEFL, so just knowing English is not enough. . . English, I don’t know about socially, but for jobs, it is the basic requirement. . . In Korea,
English is not a second official language, right? We have to use English as a society, but it’s not happening. . . . Since I have come to America, I get to speak English because I use it in my daily life. And the words I had memorized in the past, I get to remember them because I keep using them. That’s the only way.

Clearly, English is important in Korea for students and their parents. Not all 10 interviewees, however, approved of how important it has become. Reactions seemed to vary based on interviewees’ experiences so far with English and their goals with English.

**Summary of students’ English experiences in Korea.** The second research question asked “What are the students’ perceptions of their English speaking and learning in Korea, in class and out of class?”

The participants reported that their English lessons in elementary school had been mostly fun and geared towards exposure to the foreign language. In middle school, they learned and were tested on English grammar, reading, and listening. In high school, the focus was on English grammar and reading as students prepared for the CSAT. In college, students continued to work on test preparation, taking TOEIC and TOEFL classes in an attempt to get the high scores required by the most prestigious employers.

Many Korean students took supplementary English lessons outside of school in hakwons or had a private tutor, with the goal of improving grades at school and CSAT and TOEIC scores or developing better speaking skills. Thus, for many Koreans, there were parallel paths to learning English—in school and outside of school.

All 10 interviewees remembered having had a difficult time with English in one way or another. Nine students said they did not like English for various reasons: it was
hard, it seemed irrelevant, or they had other favorite subjects. In one case, a participant’s main memory of learning the language was having been hit by her English teacher. Eventually, lack of proficiency in English caused serious problems, such as keeping some participants from being admitted into their colleges of choice in Korea. Some students entered lower tier schools in Korea, one went to China, and others chose to come to the US for college. They regretted not having studied harder in Korea, because it was now very clear to them that they had to master English to achieve their goals.

In addition to formal study of English, many of these students had travelled to English speaking countries and two had written to pen pals in English.

The students discussed how important the ability to speak English has become to getting a good job in Korea. Many have studied for the TOEIC and gone abroad for language programs that they wanted to include on their resumes. The students also discussed the fervor for English in Korea. Some thought it was too much, others remained neutral, and some thought it was good that Koreans were trying to become more global and competitive.

I used this research question to gather information about the interviewees’ background in and experiences with English in Korea and their views of the language to try to understand how this part of their life affected their present English speaking experiences and perceptions in the US.

**Research Question 3: What Are the Students’ Perceptions of Their English Speaking and Learning in the United States, in Class and out of Class?**

The purpose of this research question was to find out what kind of English
experiences the 10 ESL students were having in the US, in and outside of their English classes.

**In Class**

The 10 students I interviewed were in different level ESL classes at the language institute, which meant that some students were in TOEFL classes, some in higher level pre-academic classes (the last classes before they graduate from the ESL program), or lower level oral communications classes. According to the students, it was rare for them to have much speaking practice in these classes. In TOEFL classes, most of the speaking practice came through formal speaking exercises that had definite answers. In pre-academic classes, writing was more emphasized than speaking, so the students did not have many chances to talk. For example, Sungho said of his Advanced Communications class: “이제 교실 수업에 들어가면 이제 선생님만 거의 말하고.” “When I go to class, the teacher does most of the talking.”

Even in oral communication classes, most speaking practice was in small groups or pairs of students, with the teacher circulating to observe. Though called oral communication classes, because of class logistics, students apparently rarely had one-on-one conversation time with the teacher for correct modeling.

Sukae described in detail the situation in her class:

제가 **low advanced**를 하는데...선생님이 들어와요. 무슨 책 퍼, 몇 **page** 퍼 자 누구 어디 거기 읽어봐. 쪽 읽어요, 자 다음, 그 읽어봐, 읽어요... 이
I’m in a low advanced-level class. . . . The teacher comes in. She says, “Turn to
the book on this page and somebody read it.” Somebody reads it. Then, “Next
student, read it.” That person reads it. . . . This teacher teaches like this. . . . Then
she explains a little, “This means this.” And if there are questions, she tells us to
get into groups and discuss them. That’s how the class goes. . . . My teacher from
another semester was similar. If there were dialogues in the book, she told us to
get into pairs with one person reading Part A and the other reading Part B. And
after reading that, she would give us some discussion topics.

The 10 interviewees were asked if they talked a lot in class; most said they did not.

Did not talk much in class. Six of 10 interviewees said that they did not say
much during class for various reasons. Youshin described her reasons: “들는 것만 해도
There are many times when it is OK to just listen. I think to myself that it won’t be good to express an opposing view.”

Jongsoo said he just did not talk much in class. Youngchun said: “제가 좀 부끄러움을 좀...한국에서도 뜻 하라고 하면 좀 그랬어요.” “I am kind of shy. . .

Even in Korea, I was shy when told to do something [in front of people].”

Unjung said that she felt “burdened” being heard by many people and that there was always someone else who spoke better, so she wondered why she should stutter and try to answer. Sungho said he talked when he knew the answers, but only when he could do so without interrupting the flow of the class. Minjoo mentioned how she just answered the teacher when called on, even though it [answering the teacher] felt tedious for her.

Youshin said she was changing: “많이 하는 편은 아니는데, 제가 말.. 처음에 왔을 때는 정말 한마디 안하고 수업만 들었는데, 그래도 이제는 한마디씩 일단 가끔씩 던지고.” “I don’t talk very much. But when I first came, I really didn’t say anything and just sat quietly in the class. But now, I say a thing or two sometimes.”

Minjoo said that discussions and presentations were really difficult for Koreans:

“그러니까 그렇게 토론이 안되죠.. 프레젠테이션 할 때 굉장히 스트레스를 많이 받고요, 그러니까 프레젠테이션 자체도 힘든 데 영어로 하라고 그러니까, 되게 한국
Participation has declined. Two students mentioned how they were active participants in the past, but had stopped due to a change in teacher. Hyeri, the violist, mentioned how she used to talk a lot in class when she had a “good teacher,” a teacher who was friendly, encouraging, fun, fair, and wise. When that teacher could not continue teaching due to personal reasons, Hyeri stopped talking and ended up quitting the institute after she could not adjust to the new teacher. She said: “Before, I participated a lot and was a good student. I kept talking, just me.”

Similarly, Sukae, the student with a diploma from Beijing University in China, mentioned that she used to talk a lot in class when she felt comfortable with the teacher. But now, she did not participate actively because she felt intimidated by the present teacher who, she felt, had a cranky and irritating voice.

Active participation. Only Byungin, the adjunct professor, said he participated actively in class. He described how he first started participating in class:

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Active participation. Only Byungin, the adjunct professor, said he participated actively in class. He described how he first started participating in class:
I started to talk, for example, during discussions or when answering questions, even when I wasn’t called on. And the response [from the teacher] was positive. She would say things like, “OK. Good.” So I thought, “Oh, this is how I should do it. . . .” Before, because I was thinking only about grammar and sentence structure, I lost my chance to talk. But now, I just say it and if it’s wrong, she revises it for me immediately. So I thought, “Oh, this is the way to do it.”

Byungin who seemed to be the most active participant stated that class was the only chance he had, to practice speaking English: “I’m dependent on the class, almost 80 to 90%.”

In addition, Byungin only planned to stay in the US for a year, so he may have felt a time pressure that the others did not.

**Asking questions.** Although, as discussed above, most of the students were reluctant to respond to the teacher’s questions or express an opinion, five of the 10 said they had no problems asking the teacher questions. They all said that they asked
questions whenever necessary and were not at all conscious of others when they had to ask these questions. In fact, they wondered why they should be conscious of others when they had a question for which they needed answers. In this sense, it seemed that these 10 Korean students did not view asking questions as something to refrain from or to be embarrassed about. Even Youngchun, who has described himself as being very shy and hating to talk in front of people, said that he had no problems asking questions. Perhaps these students viewed asking questions as part of the learning process, different from orally participating in class by offering their opinions in discussions. Hyeri, who said she was no longer active in class because she did not like the new teacher, said she had challenged the new teacher, after class, about a method of teaching she felt did not match the curriculum. This illustrates that one-on-one, students could be brave in expressing themselves and that they thought that asking questions is different from orally participating by giving their opinions.

In summary, the interviewees indicated that they did not have whole class discussions and that they did not participate very much in class. Their responses revealed that they viewed asking questions quite differently from other forms of speaking. They seemed to view asking the teacher questions about things they did not know as a normal part of the learning process. These students did not, however, seem to feel the need to offer their views on discussion topics.

**Relationship with Koreans in the class.** The interviewees were asked about their relationships with other Korean students in class. For example, did they do class projects with other Koreans? For the most part, the students said interactions were minimal. Some
said they tried not to talk to Koreans in the class. Unjung said:

일단은... 그분들도 한국사람 많이 알려고 하지 않는것 같구요, 그리고 저도

굳이 알려고 하지도 않아요. 알게되면, 어떻게 하다가 알게되면은, 그냥 알게

되는 건데 제가 뭐 가서 ‘아, 한국분이시죠?’ 이렇게 하진 않아요.

[Korean classmates] don’t try to get to know [other] Korean students, and neither do I. If we get to know each other, somehow, then we get to know each other, but I don’t go around and ask them, “Are you Korean?”

Similarly, Youngchun said: “거기서는 제가 한국사람들은 안 만났어요….아예

그냥 안 만났어요.” “I didn’t try to get to know Koreans [in class]. . . . I just didn’t try
to get to know Koreans.”

In addition, Hyeri described how she felt when Korean classmates spoke Korean
in ESL class: “한국말 하는 사람. 정말 짜증나요... class 안에서...그냥 한국말을

해요. 그게 너무 싫어요. 한국말 제가 해야 되잖아요...정신이 나간 거 같아요.”

“I get so annoyed by those who speak Korean in class. They just speak Korean. I hate it
because I have to respond to them in Korean. . . . I think they are crazy.”

Byungin described how things typically worked in a discussion group which
included Korean classmates: “영어로 하다가 답답하면 한국말로 하고.

수업시간에서는.... 예, 가급적이면 영어를 쓰죠. 그리고 다른 예를 들어, 다른 국가
“We spoke in English until it got frustrating and then started speaking Korean. During class, as much as possible, I use English. And, for instance, if there are students from other countries, I have to use English.”

**Being conscious of Koreans.** I asked the interviewees about their relationship with other Koreans in the classroom because some research says that Koreans are very conscious of each other’s English skills, and this tendency bars them from speaking in front of each other (Bang, 1999; Lee, 2009; Park, 2009; Yu, 2007). Some interviewees said they had been conscious of their Korean classmates, but no longer were. For example, Byungin said he used to be conscious of Korean classmates when he spoke English because of his age and his academic degrees just as Lee (2009) mentioned in her article:

아, 그리고 제가 또 나이가 있으니까 그런 것들이 또 야, 학교에서 제가
학생들 가르치고 왔으니까 그렇 아니까... 흉시라도 야, 선생님이 이것도
저것도 모름까라는 얘기 들을까봐 저나이에 저것도, 저 단어도 몰라? 저거
그렇게밖에 말 못해?라는 얘기 들을까봐 처음에는 좀 조심했었는데, 언제는
한 한달? 정도 딸 지나니까 지금은 별 신경안써...

Since I’m older and they [Korean classmates] know that I used to teach college students in Korea. . .maybe, they might say, “A teacher only knows that much? At that age, he doesn’t even know that word? He can only speak like that?” At first, I was careful,
but now that one month has passed, I don’t really care.

Youshin described a similar evolution: “이젠 맨 처음에는 한국 사람들도 신경 쓰였는데, 지금은 뭐 그런 것도 덜 신경 쓰고, 너나 나나 레벨이 비교하니까 같은 클래스에 있는 거고.” “At first, I was conscious of Koreans, but now, not as much. I think that we must be in the same class because our levels are similar.”

Some interviewees said that they were still conscious of their Korean classmates when they spoke English in front of them. Youngchun said he wondered what other Koreans thought of him.

Sungho said he was conscious of speaking English in front of Koreans because he wanted to look good to them: “이제 같은 한국 사람들이면은 ‘애는 엄청 이정도 하고 어느 애는 이정도 하는구나’ 그렇게 아니 кино 이제 잘 해 보이고, 더 잘하려고 하고, 더 잘 해보이고 싶고 그런 거죠. 자기 이미지를 더 좋게 보이고 싶고.” “Koreans know how they do in comparison to each other, so they want to look good, to be better, to look good. To make one’s image look better.”

Sungho also mentioned how conscious he was of his pronunciation: “저는 발음 엄청 중요하다고 생각해요…한국인들끼리 들으면 저건 정말 한국 발음이다. 저도 정말 한국 발음이고 이런 소리 딱 들으면 기분 나쁘고.” “English pronunciation is very important to me. . . . When we Koreans hear other Koreans speak, we can hear the
Korean accent. I have a Korean accent, but I hate for someone to say that I have a Korean accent.”

In summary, all 10 interviewees seemed somewhat uncomfortable in their relationships with other Koreans in their classes. First, they said they did not pursue getting to know Korean classmates. But, if put in the same small groups for discussions with other Koreans, most tried to use English for discussions until the communication became frustrating, making them resort to Korean. Overall, they felt uncomfortable using English in front of other Koreans for fear of being judged as mediocre speakers of English.

**Participants’ views on Korean character traits and speaking English.** I asked interviewees why they thought their Korean classmates or Koreans in general behaved the way they did in ESL classes.

**Koreans are shy.** When asked whether they thought Koreans spoke a lot in class, six students, Sungho, Unjung, Nari, Hyeri, Sukae, and Jongsoo, said many Koreans were quiet in class. Nari and Hyeri said some were just shy by nature. Similarly, Sukae said: “부끄럽도 많고 사람들이 자기 허물 누구한테 보이는 거 좀 안 좋아하고… 내 성격이기도 하지만. 제가 보기에는 대부분의 한국 사람들이 약간 그런게 있어요 좀, 아닌 사람들도 있겠지만.” “Korean people are shy and don’t like to show their weaknesses before others. . .it’s also my personality, but in my view, most Koreans are like that, even though there may be people who are not like that.”
Jongsoo pointed out another trait: “많할 때 소심한 사람이 많아요. 해야 한다면
어쩔 수 없이 하는데, 꼭 안 해도 되는 상황이면 안 해도 괜찮을…필요 없으면 안
하는 데.” “Many [Koreans] are passive when speaking. They speak when they have to,
but if it’s not necessary, they don’t.”

Youshin said of her experience in ESL classes: “수업시간에서는 하는 애만
해요. 주로 남자애들이 그냥 해요.” “During class, just the same kids do all the talking,
mostly boys.”

Minjoo said Koreans were really conscious of getting their grammar perfect when
they spoke English:

지금은 많이 좋아졌는데, 몇 년 전 까지 해도 말을 자꾸 문법에 딱 해서
말하려고 해요 애들이. 완벽하게, 문법에 딱 맞게 말하려고 하는 그런 성향이
강해요… 한국은 발표 문화가 아니라, 발표하거나 이말을 한다는 것 자체가
애들이 조금만 실수를 하면 ashamed하고 shy하고 그러니깐 애들이 자기
문장이 perfect하지 않으면 상대방이 잘 못 알아 듣거나, 되게 웃긴다고
생각을 하거나 그런다고 생각을 해요…제가 그런 사람들을 되게 많이
봤어요…그럼엔 그냥 조금 틀려도 되잖아요. 상대방이 솔직이 catch
It’s gotten better these days, but even several years ago, Korean kids tried to speak with perfect grammar. They have a strong tendency to want to speak with perfect grammar. . . . Korea doesn’t have a participatory culture, so just in saying things, if they make even a few mistakes, kids become really ashamed or shy and think that others won’t be able to understand them or will make fun of them. . . . I have met so many people who think like that. . . . Even when they make a few mistakes, native English speakers can still understand them, but Koreans kids worry so much about that. . . even to the littlest details when they speak. . . . It’s because of the way Koreans schools were. Because Korean society puts a lot of emphasis on grammar and when we learned English, we did not learn speaking. We are very awkward at it and obsessed with grammar.

Hyeri said Koreans were quiet in class because they feared being seen as showing
So, being shy is the Korean personality. Not being active, being a little shy, even if it was something they were confident in. They feel that they shouldn’t be actively participating. That has become their personality already, do you understand? As they grew up . . . in class in Korea, let’s say I know something.

<But if you say it?> Then I become a show-off. Here [in the United States], if you know the answer, you just say it, right? Isn’t that being perfectly normal? But [in Korea], that’s the way it is, as I understand it.

Other students, however, said that some Koreans participated actively in class.

Sungho said differences in class participation were due to personality differences, not to being Korean. Sukae talked about the Koreans she had met in the US:

지금 제가 여기 와서 보면은, 많이 달라요, 요즘 애들은...아주 다르죠....
When I see the [Korean] kids here [in the United States], they are very different, kids these days. . .very different. . . . They ask a lot of questions, and they know a lot already. . . . Because they have been exposed to American culture, they are not very surprised. . . . They are not as quiet as before. But some kids by nature are very quiet. Except for those kids, most are pretty active.

Nari agreed: “제 생각에는 이제 다 사람 차이에요, 진짜. …성격 차이인 것 같아요. “ “I think it’s a matter of differences in people, really. . . . It’s a personality difference.”

Youshin also said, “반반 인 것 같아요. active한 사람도 있고.” “I think it’s half half, with some people being active.”

Jongsoo speculated that Koreans changed after they had been in the United States for some time: “자기 체면을 잃지 않기 위해서 잘, 완벽하게 하려고 하고, 하다 보면 말을 많이 못하게 될것같아요…처음 온 사람들은 다 그래요. 처음 온 사람들은,
In order not to lose face, they [Koreans] try to do [speak English] perfectly. Then, they won’t be able to talk very much. People who just arrive are like that. But after a while, they get better.”

**Korean pride.** Students also mentioned that Koreans were quiet in class due to a mixture of pride, consciousness of others, and competitiveness. Interviewees particularly pointed to pride as an important Korean trait. For example, Nari said Koreans did not volunteer answers if they did not know the exact answer. Jongsoo said many Koreans thought that Americans would look down on them if their English was not good enough. Sukae said that Koreans did not like to show their weaknesses before others. Jongsoo said that Koreans would still have problems speaking even after working on their spoken English in America because they were perfectionists: “Because they are Koreans, because they want to do everything perfectly. I think it’s a Korean characteristic.”

He added that this perfectionist tendency made Koreans lose opportunities to talk in class during fast-paced discussions: “Because they want to speak perfectly they have to think a lot. . . . And while they are thinking, the chance to speak has passed. . . .either somebody else is talking or the topic has changed.”
Sungho mentioned Koreans’ reluctance to speak in front of other Koreans:

“한국 사람끼리는 영어 안 씨요. 영어를 못하면은 여기서는 굉장히 자존심이
깨어지는 것 같은 그런 거. 그러니까 같은 민족 한국 사람들끼리 못하면은 굉장히
자존심이 깨어지는 건데.” “Koreans don’t use English with each other. If you’re bad at
English, it’s a very embarrassing thing. If you’re bad at English among Koreans, it’s a
very shameful thing.”

**Being conscious of other Koreans.** Pride mixed with consciousness of other
Koreans and a sense of competitiveness seemed to silence Koreans in class. Many
students mentioned that Koreans were conscious of others and that they always
compared/ranked each other. Nari said Koreans were afraid that others might criticize
them and laugh at them when they were wrong. Youngchun also said he himself was
afraid that others might make fun of him because he was not as good as they were.

Minjoo noted:

제일 안 좋은 게 주위 사람들 의식하는 거에요… 심하죠… 저도 어렸을 때는
있었어요. 고등학교 때까지 있었어요… 고등학교 때는 애들이랑 워낙에
같이 살다시피 학교에서 그러니까 이게 의식할 수밖에 없어요

The worst characteristic of Koreans is being conscious of others. . .it’s pretty
serious. . . I was like that too when I was younger, all throughout high school. . .
In high school, I practically lived with my classmates in school, so I naturally
became conscious of them.

Sungho mentioned that Koreans silently ranked each other. Sungho also said that Koreana formed perfect sentences in their heads, before they started speaking, to look good in front of others. Unjung said she was afraid to speak before those who spoke better than she did. Both Sungho and Sukae said Korean children were constantly being compared, from the youngest age; consequently, Korean students were very conscious of others. Sungho also mentioned gossip as part of Korean culture:

“그게 한국 문화요. 틀답화. 한국에서 한국 문화요. 어렵 수 없어요.
그러니까 그것도 무서워하는 사람들은 그렇게 피하고. 그렇게 되는 거죠.” “Talking about people is Korean culture. You can’t help that. So, those who are afraid of that, avoid that. That’s how it goes.”

*Korean competitiveness.* Korean pride is closely linked to Korean competitiveness, which is encouraged by the child’s mother. From birth, the mother does everything possible to make her child excel and be better than other children (“Most Kids Under 3 Sent to Private Crammers”, 2012).

Youngchun explained that Korean mothers sent their children to the best hakwons to make them more competitive for the best universities.

Youngchun: 만약에 열집에 사는, 열집 사는 그 아들이 그, 영어 학원 다니면 그 엄마도 우리 아들이 입시 떨어지면 안되니가 우리 아들도 영어학원에 보내야겠다. 내 자식이나 뭐 남들보다 떨어지면 안되니가. 우리아들만 못날
수 없으니까. 남들 다 하는데. 우리가 못하면 안되잖아요. … 명문대 빼면은 시체니까…뭐 그냥 서울대 뭐 스카이대 빼면 그냥 대학으로도 안쳐주고.

Interviewer: 공부 못하면 손직히

Youngchun: 아주 죽어야 되는데.

Youngchun: If the kid next door, the neighbor’s son, attended an English hakwon, then this mother had to send her son also, because he could not fail in getting into a university. Because her son couldn’t fall behind other kids, her son could not lose the race. Since everyone was doing it, we couldn’t be the only ones not doing well. . . Only the best universities counted. . . Only Seoul National University or S.K.Y. [Seoul National University (ranked #1), Korea University (ranked #3), and Yonsei University (ranked #2)] counted as universities.

Interviewer: If you weren’t a good student. . .

Youngchun: . . . you weren’t considered a human being.

Sukae expressed similar views:

가장 큰 이유가, 틀릴까봐, 비교되니까…만약에 그 친구가 이걸 얘기를 했어요 근데 맞았어요. 근데 저는 몰라요. 아 그러면 제는 나보다 많이 아는구나. 아 다음부터 재 앞에서 말을 조금 조심해야겠다… 한국 사람들은 비교하는 거 굉장히 좋아해야요. 그 말도 많고, 어떻게 얘기하면 이렇게
The biggest reason [Koreans don’t talk] is that they are afraid to be wrong, to be compared. . . . Let’s say this person gave the right answer, but I didn’t know the right answer, then I would start to think that that person knows a lot, and tell myself to be careful not to make mistakes in front of that person. . . . Koreans love to compare. They talk a lot about people, and maybe I shouldn’t say this, but they like to say bad things about people. . . . They are very wary of each other. . . . If you ask ESL kids here [in the United States], they will all hate to find out that the class they signed up for has a lot of Koreans in it. . . . They think that their chances to speak English in class will be decreased because there are so many
Koreans . . . They compete with each other. They will all return to Korea and become competitors with each other, even though they could also be friends, so that’s all they could see.

Youshin, who had lived in Argentina for 10 years, explained what she thought was the biggest barrier for Koreans as they learned to speak English:

부끄러움도 많이 타고. 소심한 것도 있고 남하고 비교해서도 그런 것 같아요.

남하고 비교해서 내가 채보다 잘해야 되고, 채보다 못하는 것 같으면 말 안 해요... 10명 중에 다 외국 사람이면 되든 안되든 말을 해요 한국 사람들이.

근데 그 중에 한국 사람이 하나 있으면 한국 사람 멀찍이서는 애길 하는데 그 사람 앞에서는 애길 잘 못해요... 내가 잘 못하는 걸 아니까. 그래도 아, 내가 못하면 채가 뭐라고 옥할 것 같은데 놀릴 것 같은데 하는 이런 잠재의식이 있는 것 같아요....제가 저도 여러 사람 만나서 얘기를 해봤는데, 스페인어 배울 때도 그렇게 영어를 배울 때도 그렇게 처음 배운 사람들이 한국 사람 앞에서는 말을 더 못해요. 처음배우는 사람은요. 제일 방해되는 벽이에요.

한국 사람들이 영어 배우는. 그렇게 남과 비교해봤고 나보다 높으면 내리...

잡아 끌어내리고 그런 게 있고, 그래야 자기가 올라가니까.

Koreans are shy, somewhat passive, and compare themselves to each other. They
have to be better than others and if they are not as good, they won’t talk. . . . If all
people out of [a group of] 10 are foreigners, the Koreans [will] attempt to speak in
English, whether they are good or not. But if there is even one Korean in the
group, they would talk far away from the Korean but not in front of the
Korean. . . . Because they know they are not good, they have this idea
subconsciously that the other Korean would talk and make fun of them. . . . I have
talked to many people about this issue, but whether they are learning Spanish or
English, [Korean] beginners especially cannot talk in front of other Koreans;
beginners are like that. It’s the biggest barrier to Koreans learning English. They
compare themselves to others and if the other people are better, they try to bring
them down, in order to make themselves go up.

Byungin discussed Koreans competing with each other in a similar vein:

제일 큰 거는 제가 봤을 때 창피해 하는 것. 누구랑 얘기하는 것 자체가. 내가
영어를 했을 때 예를 들어서 들娱乐城 그러면 “누가 옥하는 거 아냐?” “재
저것도 몰라?” 이런 말 들을까봐 그래서 더 못해요. 그게 어떻게 보면
유교적인 부분들 그레이니가 옛날 선비들이 남 시선 의식해서 더워도 맨날
이렇게 옷 입고 있고 옷도 못 벗고 그랬던 것처럼. 한국인들이 쪽 내려왔던
나름대로의 몸에 배어있는 약간의 습관인 것 같아요. 남보다 못하면 기도 못
퍼고 항상 기회보고 있다가 남보다 조금 더 잘 되려고 노력하고. 어떻게 보면
The biggest reason that they [Koreans] do not talk is that they are shy. They can’t speak more because people might criticize them when they make mistakes, saying, “He doesn’t even know that?” It’s like Confucianism. Gentlemen scholars of the old days could not take off their outer jackets even in hot weather because they were conscious of other people’s eyes. . . . I think this is a Korean habit that has been passed down for many years. Koreans get really discouraged when they are not as good as others and look for chances to try to become more successful than others. In a way, they have to step on others to become more successful, to be better than others. . . . Our only goal until high school is to go to a university, so the idea that we have to win over others is ingrained in our heads. So, we are very conscious of what others might say about our little mistakes. . . . It’s educational, historical, and cultural. . . . Should I say Koreans are very proud?

Jongsoo explained how this consciousness before others was at play in Korea too.
He said that in English classes in Korea, all Korean students pretended to be bad at English on purpose. This observation is mentioned in findings of Park (2009). Jongsoo described how they deliberately spoke English with a strong Korean accent: “그니까 일부러 잘하는 데도 숨길려고 하고…괜히 그런걸 믿망해 해요…발음 막 굴리고 이런 거를 믿망해 해요 한국 애들이.. 그래서 일부러 막 더 못하는 척 하고…. 근데 애들 다 그래요.” “So, even though they were good [at using correct pronunciation], they tried to hide it. . . They were embarrassed to [pronounce like Americans] . . . rolling their tongue and things like that. . . so they pretended to be worse than they really were. . . but all kids did that.”

Hyeri described how some Koreans viewed other Koreans who spoke English in Korea:

Hyeri: 영어 막 쓰면 읽라고 그러는 거 있잖아요 좀. 영어 쓰면 읽라고 그러는 거 있어요 애들끼리. 만약에 읽 이렇게 얘기하다가 제가 갔다 오잖아요? 유학을 갔다가 들어가잖아요? 한국으로. 그러면 당연히 영어가 조금 섞일 거 아니예요. 데 그거 가지고 읽라고 해. 여긴 한국인데 왜 영어 쓰냐고… 약간 창난도 있고. 약간 아는 거에 대한 부려움 이런 것도 있고. 질투, 조금 질투… 근데 저희 언니가 뉴욕에 살다 온 언니가 있거든요, 그
Hyeri: When you use English in Korea, there is this, when you use English in Korea among the kids. Let’s say I’m talking, and if I have studied in the United States, I would mix in a few words of English, right? Koreans would say something about that, “Why do you use English even though this is Korea?” Half jokingly and also with a little envy about your speaking English. Jealousy, a little jealousy. . . . My older sister has a really good friend who used to live in New York. She said it’s really irritating when her friend uses English.

Interviewer: Like this, “Does she have to show that she’s been to America?” Do you feel that way also? Let’s say in Korea, someone who’s been to America spoke English to you.

Hyeri: I wouldn’t feel like that because I know this now.

Interviewer: If it had happened before?

Hyeri: If it had happened in the past, the situation would have been funny.
Youshin, who had lived in Argentina for 10 years, also described this jealousy among Korean students over who had the best English, tying it in with the competitiveness born of trying to survive in a small country:

잘하는 애들 영어 발표 대회 이런데 나가는 애들 있잖아아. 발음 괜찮고 맛,

그런 애들 보면 부럽다라는 생각도 들고. 아, 좋겠다 라는 생각도 드는데,

그런 애들은 꺼 뒤에서 우도 같이 먹거든요. 애들한테. 부러움을 그렇게 표현하는 것 같아요. 일단 발음하고 이렇게 되니까. 주로 어렸을 때 애들이 학생들 하는 어. 재수없이, 왜 헛을 굴려? 하는 이런. 이제 와서 보면 너무

부러우니까 질투가 나니까 그렇게 표현을 했던 것 같아요. 어렸을 때는. 귀데 이변에도 한국에 가서 이제 여기에서 있다 보니까 한국에 있을 때 컴퓨터 컴퓨터 하다가 여기에서는 컴퓨터 이러잖아아? 얘기하다가 저도 모르게 컴퓨터 하면은 오. 미국에서 왔다 이거지? 맛 이런 식으로 반응이 나와요.

한국은...나보다 잘하는 사람을 보면은 누르는 그런 게 있잖아아. 경쟁

의식이 심해서 그런 것 같아요...제가 그냥 나와서 보고 느낀 거는

아르헨티나나 미국은 사회가 커요. 땅이 넓고 나라가 크고 또 한가지만 잘해도 이 사람이 뭐든지 할 수가 있어요. 미국같은 경우는.. 만약에 정말
You know there are those kids who are good at English and get to go to those English speech contests because they have good pronunciation? When we see them, we are envious, but they are also bad-mouthed by kids too. I think the kids express their envy in such a way because the others are good at English pronunciation. The kids say, “They make me sick! Why do they roll their tongue so much [an expression that means that the students are trying to copy English pronunciation as closely as they can]?” When I think about it now, I think the kids expressed their envy and jealousy like that when they were young. When I visited Korea, you know how in Korea, they pronounce computer as com- pu- ter? But since I have been here, I pronounced com- pu- rer unconsciously and they derided
me, “Oh, so you’ve been to America?” Koreans have a tendency to step on those who are better than them because they are so competitive. What I have realized since I left Korea is that Argentina and the United States are both large societies with a lot of land. Therefore, if a person is good at one thing, he can succeed. In the case of the United States, if a person is good at economics or computers, he can make something of it. But in Korea, the land is so small with a lot of people, so if you are not good at everything, you cannot go forward. And at the same time, there are many kids who are not especially good at one thing. They are OK at lots of little things. All the girls wear their make-up in the same way and get the same plastic surgery. I have felt this [about Koreans] since I’ve been away from Korea. Koreans, if they are in the same field, feel that they have to step on others in order to go up, so they step on, step on, and step on, and they have become naturally competitive so it can’t be changed. I think it’s their struggle to continue surviving on a small piece of land.

**Korean educational experiences.** The participants also felt Korean students were quiet in ESL class due to their educational experiences in Korea. Coming from lecture-style classes where the teacher provided all information, Koreans students faced a new and different class culture in the United States. Additionally, they were accustomed to a national curriculum where students all over the country learned the same things at similar paces. Especially in high schools, teachers were pressured to cover all the material outlined by the curriculum before the CSAT. Byungin commented: “너무 기계적이고
“Classes were] too mechanistic and had to fit the schedule so perfectly.” Therefore, Korean students were not used to time wasted by interruptions of student comments and questions during class.”

Unjung explained this tendency of Koreans to want lectures to be uninterrupted:

[Koreans students are] usually quiet in class, and when the teacher explains, they are to understand on their own. But other kids, kids from other countries, when they know something, they have to express it. So, they have to say even unnecessary things. Then, Koreans say that they get really annoyed. . .so some kids had a fight during class, Arabs and Koreans.

Sungho and Minjoo mentioned how they were careful not to interrupt the class themselves, even when they had questions. Sungho said: “수업 중에 맨 이렇게 맨 맨

끝고 이렇게 뭐 물어보고 싶은 거나 그런 거 안하고, 뭐 할 말 선생님이 다 끝났을 때

question있으면은 하라고 해요 선생님이. 그것은 하고 아니면 수업 끝나고 하고.”
“I don’t interrupt the flow of the lecture by asking questions I have, but when the teacher is finished talking and asks if we have questions, I ask at that time or after class.”

Minjoo also mentioned being aware of class atmosphere when she asked questions: “어느 정도 분위기는 맞춰줘야조.” “I try to adjust to the class atmosphere.”

Unjung further explained why Koreans tended to be quiet: “근데 한국사람들은 이런 문화가요, 안 익숙 한 것 같애요.” “Koreans are not used to this classroom culture [participatory culture of American classrooms].”

Byungin also said that Koreans were not used to expressing their opinions in class:

이미 저희 머릿속에는 한국에서 배웠던 교육이 머리에 잡혀 있기 때문에 이런 말하기방, 듣고 말하고 하는 부분들은…. 그게 (discussions)안 된다는 거죠. 그러니까 영어가 아니더래도 다른 수업 자체…. 이거에 대해서 질문했으면 대답이 나오고 그거에 대해서 다시 질문하고 이런 과정이 거의 없으니까. 저는 그걸 배운 게 석사 때 배운거예요 솔직히. 대학교에서도 그런, 별로 없어요. 아시겠지만 우리나라 대학에서 그런 경우가 그렇게 많지가 않거든요. 저두 대학생들 가리키지만 그런거를 유도할려고 질문을 던지면 다 가만히 있어요. 눈 피하고.

Already ingrained in our heads, we have that Korean educational pattern. So,
speaking, listening, and talking. Discussions don’t work. Not only in English classes but in other classes too. Asking questions on a topic and getting the answers and asking questions again, that whole process is barely there. Honestly, I learned to discuss in my master’s program. Even in college [in Korea], there aren’t many chances, as you may well know. I teach college kids [in Korea], but when I try to get them to discuss by throwing out questions, they are silent and avoid my eyes.

Nari also thought the Korean education made students passive:

Korean education has been like this. During class, only the teacher talks and when he’s done, then kids could ask questions. Nobody talks during class. And if I said
something, I would be thinking, “What if it’s wrong? If this is not the answer, and
the other kids know the answer, won’t they laugh at me?” We would think like
this. . .I don’t, but most people think like that and don’t like to get up in front of
people to talk. They think that others would give the answer, so they don’t have to.
Youshin also spoke about the effect of the Korean education system on students:
외국에서는 주로 얘기하게끔 자기 의견을 막 얘기하게끔 하잡아요. 그래서
창조적인 것도 만들고…이런 자기의 생각을 얘기해서 좀 다르게 가는 것
가봐도 인정을 해주잡아요… 근데 한국은 무슨 생각할 거리를 줄도 정답이
있어요. 네 군이 토론시간도 솔직히 거의 없다고 생각하면 되고요…그래서
잘 표현을 못해요 자기 생각을. 그나마 요즘 어린 애들은 자꾸 이기적으로
자기 개인주의로 바꿔보니까 그래도 자기 생각을 표현을 하는데…또
한국 그런 유교사상도 있는 것 같아요. 어른이 얘기하면 무조건 들어야 되고,
선생님이 말씀하시면 무조건 들어야 되는 거. 선생님이 잘못됐어요, 어, 내
생각은 그게 아니는데, 하지만 제가 내 의견을 이야기 하면, 너 왜 반항 해?
따라와. 그러면 그 때부터 찍히는 거에요 그 선생님한테는. 그러면 학교
생활이 힘들어져요. 그러니깐 선생님이, 내 생각과는 달라도 선생님께서
In America, they allow students to talk, to give their opinions. So they become creative. . . . And even if their ideas are different, they are still accepted. . . . But in Korea, even when they give us topics to think about, there are definite answers. And there is almost no time for discussions. . . . So Koreans are not good at expressing their ideas. But young kids these days are selfish and individualistic, so they express their ideas. . . . But I think Korea has Confucianism. You have to absolutely obey adults, and we have to obey teachers absolutely. Let’s say the teacher is wrong, and my idea is different from his. But if I give my opinion, the teacher would say, “Why are you rebellious? See me later!” And from there, the teacher puts you on the black list, and school life becomes difficult. So even if I disagree with the teacher, I have to say “Yes, yes, sir!” It’s difficult to persuade people by insisting on my ideas.

Minjoo agreed that Korean students felt inhibited about speaking up in class because of their experiences in Korean schools when they were young:
I think it’s [the silence in class] because of the way they were taught from a young age. There were no discussions, and the kids had to be quiet during class, could not make any noise. . . . My major [in Korea] was art business management. We had many discussions about how the art market was doing and what could be done to fix it and stuff. We had many discussions, but it was always the same kids who spoke. Most didn’t talk. . . . They didn’t know how to talk, because they had not done it. Because they had not learned it, they didn’t know how to speak in a logical way, and how to speak so that others would understand them. Because they hadn’t done it. Those who talked were either really active kids or those who’d experienced talking before.

Sukae offered a different reason for Korean students’ passivity in class:
I think it’s because of how teachers and parents treated the students. . . . A person’s family background and teachers decide a person’s value system. . . . Let’s say there was a test. “Mom, I got this grade on this test.” And, Mom says critically, “Why did you miss this question?” Then the student thinks, “Oh, it’s really bad that I missed this. . . .” and becomes very protective and defensive from then on. . . . And teachers only like smart kids and dismiss those who don’t do so well. That’s how it became like this, by who the teacher is. That’s what I think.

Other participants noted that sometimes Koreans did not say much in class because they were bored. For example, Jongsoo said of his oral communications class:

“Class가 재미가 없어요. 저는 그냥 Class가 재미 없어요. 그리고 지겨워요. 수업에
Class is not fun. I just find the class not fun, and it’s boring. I don’t completely pay attention and talk to the Arab kids next to me. Some days are fun, but mostly not.”

In summary, the interviewees had a lot to say about Korean character traits and the experiences that influenced their English speaking. The interviewees said that many Koreans were shy, especially in front of large groups. Additionally, they said that Koreans’ strong pride intermingled with their competitiveness and consciousness of other’s opinions. Their pride meant that they hated to lose; their competitiveness made them constantly aware of how others were doing and how others would rate them. These traits, together, produced seemingly passive students who remained quiet out of fear of making mistakes when they talked. Finally, their educational backgrounds in Korea, in quiet classrooms with only the teacher lecturing, contributed to their silence in class in the United States.

**Learning English speaking within versus outside of a class.** Some interviewees believed that learning to speak did not really happen inside the classroom. As noted earlier, their only conversation partners were other international students whose levels were similar to theirs. The teacher was the only one who could help them improve, but she being only one person could not help all the students practice one-on-one. Unjung thought that English improved by meeting and talking to American students outside of class:
Some may improve by talking a lot in class. At first, I also thought I could improve by just using a lot of English, by making many friends in addition to Americans. It helps to a point, using English continuously, making it part of daily routine and not using Korean. If I use English with Americans... I could hear and learn a lot. But with international students, the words we use are similar, so there is not much improvement. I would rather watch movies [to improve English].

Nari added: “근데 선생님은 저랑 1:1로 계속 이야기 하는 게 아니잖아요.
그래서, 그런 것도 아니고.” “The teacher doesn’t talk one-on-one with me.”

Sungho said, “저도 그렇게 생각해요....친구들하고는 많이 해요. 많이 할려고
I think so [that students could learn a lot of English by speaking a lot outside of class]. . . . They talk a lot with friends, and many try to, also.”

Nari believed that speaking had to happen outside the class first, before it could happen in class: “그러니까 말하는, 근데 그런 거 speaking을 하려면 그런 거 discussion 시간에 하고 싶으면 그거 하기 전에 사람들이랑 대화 할 때 자연스럽게 나와야 되잖아요. 왜냐하면 그런 게 평상시에도 자연스럽게 안 나오는데 discussion 할 때 당연히 안 나오죠, 그 말이.” “So, speaking, in order to speak during discussions, you have to be able to talk naturally with people. Because, if it doesn’t come out naturally in everyday life, it won’t come out during class discussions.”

In summary, in general, the interviewees did not put much emphasis on learning English speaking in class. They thought that English speaking could be learned mostly outside of class, by talking naturally with native English speakers. This belief may have influenced how little the students participated in class.

Outside of Class

The students’ responses to my questions about English use outside of class indicated that, in general, they spoke very little. For example, many said they uttered a few words in public places like the shopping mall and in restaurants, but those places provided no real chance to practice conversations. In this section, I will discuss: 1) where these students used English (jobs, church, university clubs, and dorms), 2) their difficulties meeting Americans, and 3) their relationships with Koreans.
**Places and people for English outside of class.** Some of the places where students used English were at jobs, church, clubs, and dorms in the university.

**Use of English at jobs.** Students with jobs had unique opportunities to use English, even for a short time, and had opportunities to learn about people’s English accents and behavior patterns. Minjoo and Hyeri were the only interviewees who had jobs, working part time at a mall, where they served food at a Chinese eatery. Hyeri noted: “애들도 다르고 어른도 다르고. 다 달라요. 말 하는 것까지 다 달라요. 다 달라요. 말 안 하는 애들도 있어요. 그냥. 그리고 연령대 따라 쓰는 언어가 달라요. 주로.” “The kids and the adults are all different at talking. Some kids don’t even say anything [when ordering food]. By age, the ways people speak are all different.”

**Use of English at church.** Eight out of the 10 interviewees attended either a Korean American or an American church. Youshin started teaching Sunday school to second grade Korean American children. She wrote in her journal that her students corrected her English for her:

물론 한국말로 가르쳐줬지만 틀림없이 영어단어를 섞어서 애길해 았고...

그리고 역시 아이들은 영어로 질문하고 영어로만 대화하기 시작했습니다. 또한 pray를 play로 발음하고 있던 저에게 발음이 틀렸다며 고쳐주기까지 했습니다….또한 예전같았으면 아이에게 발음고정을 받는다면 너무 씁쓸하고 부끄러워 어쩔줄 몰랐을텐데. 오히려 고맙다며
Of course, I taught [Sunday school] in Korean, but from time to time, I had to mix in English. . . . And of course, the kids asked questions in English and spoke only in English. And they told me my pronunciation of “pray” and “play” was wrong. . . . If this had happened in the past, I would have been so embarrassed and not have known what to do, to be corrected by children. But, I was a little surprised at myself for thanking them and for correcting my mistake right away.

Nari and Sukae attended Korean language worship services at Korean American churches, so they did not have any chance to practice English at church. However, Sukae said she brought home English translation tapes of Korean sermons to study listening and vocabulary at home. Minjoo said she attended a Korean American church with English language worship services, but even there, she said she gravitated towards Koreans and not Korean Americans. Sungho said he used to attend an American church with a Korean friend but stopped going after his friend went back to Korea. Unjung said she used to attend an American church but stopped because she had no way to get there. Sungho and Jongsoo mentioned how difficult it was to understand English sermons in comparison to classroom lectures.

For these students, it seems church could have been one main place to use and learn English because there native English speakers were available, especially in English worship services, but only one student, Youshin, said she used English at church.

A club sponsored by the language institute. The language institute organized a club to provide opportunities for ESL students to connect with Americans from a local
church. Many of the interviewees mentioned having tried out this club, but the only positive comment concerned meeting people who later became friends outside of the club.

The overall negative feedback related to the large number of Koreans compared to Americans, how boring the games were, and how loud the meeting place was. For example, Youngchun said, “그냥 뭐 왜자지껄하고 별로 제 취미는 아니라서…. 그냥 한 번 가고 별로다 해서 안 갔어요.” “It was just too loud and not my style…So I went once and didn’t go back because it wasn’t that fun.”

Youshin said:

한국 사람들이 너무 많아가지고, 가서 한국 사람을 서로 알아오는 그렇게 많아요. . . . ELI 애들이 너무 많이 가니까, 서로. 그냥 같이 게임도 하고, 먹기도 하고 뭐 이런… 처음 항상, 처음 하다가 이렇게 한국 사람을 더 많이 만나게 되니까, 중간에 다 포기를 하게 되고, 안 가게 되고, 시험 있으면 안 가게 되고, 귀찮으면 안 가게 되고.

There were too many Koreans, and many chances to get to meet Koreans. . . .

Because many ELI [English Language Institute] students came [in comparison to native English speakers]. We just played games and ate. . . . At first I went, and I got to meet too many Koreans, so I gave up going in the middle and didn’t go, and didn’t go when I had exams and it got tedious.
But Nari met a friend through the club: “저도 가 봤어요. 재미가 없는 거예요. 게임도 재미 없고, 그래서 한두 번만가 세번 가고 안 갔는데, 처음 갔을 때 친구를 만나서 저는 계속 만나고 연락 하고 그래요.” “I have been there, but the games weren’t fun. So, I went about two or three times, but I made an American friend in the first meeting, so I continue to meet her and keep in touch.”

Knowledge/use of university clubs. Almost all the students lacked knowledge about university clubs, which they thought were not open to ELI students. Unjung was the only one who went to a club, a campus Bible study that she attended to continue a friendship with an American Christian friend. Unjung said:

그러서 개를 보러 개량 얘기하고 친해지고 싶어서 뭐, 일주일에 한 번씩 bible study가 학교 안에 있어요. 저는 Christian이 아니거든요. 근데 영어 공부 하러 개량 얘기하고 친해질려고 일부러 나가요. 일주일에 한번씩요.

So, in order to see her and get to know her better, I went to a Bible study on campus. I am not a Christian, but in order to study English, I go there, to get to know her [the American friend] better and to talk to her. Once a week.

Dorm/housing situations. The students lived in four different housing arrangements: dorms, relatives’ houses, home stays, and shared apartments. The students who lived in dorms had more opportunities to meet American students than those in other types of housing. Relatives’ houses, home stays, and rooming with friends all meant
living with Koreans. Only one student, Jongsoo, seemed to have frequent interactions with Americans. He described how different American dorm parties were from Korean drinking parties: “한국인끼리 노는 게 훨씬 재밌어요. 한국인 술 마시면 다 모여 갖고 마시면서 게임하고 막 다같이 하잡아요. 근데 애네는 천에는 같이 마시다가 다 따로따로 놀아요. 근데 한국 식이 더 좋아요 다같이 하니까.” “It’s so much more fun to socialize with Koreans. When Koreans drink, they drink and play games all together. But, Americans drink together at first and then later hang out separately. I like the Korean way because we do it together.”

One other student who lived in a dorm, Unjung, mentioned having tried to approach American roommates and suitemates to make friends, but failing. She mentioned how difficult it was to get to know Americans: “미국 친구가 한 명 있는데, 그 분은 보통 자기 방에서 잘 안 나와요. 뭐 먹을 때 말곤 잘 안 나와요. 그래서 애기를 잘 안해요. 얘기 하고 싶어도 방문이 잡겨 있으니 얘기 할 수도 없고. 방문을 두드려가면서.” “There is this American suitemate I know, but she doesn’t come out of her room very much, except to eat something. So, we don’t talk very much. Even if I wanted to talk to her, her room is locked, so I can’t talk to her. I can’t go knocking on her door.”

Unjung, a 23 year old female, thought it was easier for Korean boys to make American friends:
오히려 남자는 남자끼리 친해지기 쉬운 것 같아요. 그러니깐 남자 애들은요.

미국 남자애들하고 친해지기가 쉬운 것 같아요…여자애들은 여자들끼리 친해지기가 힘들어요. 롱메끼리 여자애들이 잡아요? 여자애들은 여자애들 잘 안 좋아하는 것 같아요.

It’s easier for boys to become friends, for boys to make American friends. . . . It’s difficult for girls, for girl suitemates, to become friends. I don’t think [American] girls like [Korean] girls.

On the other hand, Jongsoo mentioned a positive interaction, stating that Americans had been patient as he tried to speak English: “제가 더듬더듬 말해도 다…. 진짜 미국 애들… 그냥 다 친절하게 얘기해줘요. 제가 못 알아들으면 천천히 말해주고 그래요.” “Even when I stuttered… Americans.. were all very nice when talking to me. When I didn’t understand them, they spoke slowly.”

While the Korean students who lived in dorms did not seem to have much interaction with American students, they did interact with other international students. Nari and Youshin, young women who lived in dorms, mentioned, for example, cooking and shopping with other international students.

The remaining interviewees lived with Korean roommates, Korean host families, or with a Korean relative. Clearly, for these students, there were fewer chances to meet and make friends with American students. Byungin, who lived at his older brother’s
house, had a chance to practice English with his Korean American sister-in-law who was an ESL teacher, but he said it was uncomfortable to use English with her even though he had come with that very plan. In Korean culture, especially in more conservative families, the relationship between the husband’s younger brother (the brother-in-law) and the wife (the sister-in-law) can be very formal. These two people use honorifics to show respect and formality to each other. Byungin seemed to be very formal and probably felt uncomfortable to show his low English proficiency to his sister-in-law, an English teacher.

In summary, responses to where and with whom the interviewees used English outside of class showed how difficult it was for these students to find opportunities to speak English with Americans. Even when there was an opportunity to use English, such as for Byungin with his sister-in-law, the English teacher, the students did not take full advantage of that situation because of chaemyun (face saving). The students’ lives seemed limited to basically going to class and then home. For most of these students, participating in extra-curricular activities, like clubs, seemed to be a novelty. Therefore, they were limited to class and spending free time with either international friends in the dorms, for those who lived in dorms, or other Korean friends. Even though they were in the United States, some said there were not many more opportunities here for meeting Americans than in Korea.

**Difficulty meeting Americans.** Korean ESL students seemed to have difficulty meeting Americans for two reasons, both of which are explained in details below: 1) According to the students, American roommates or suitemates did not seem to be friendly or open toward Korean students. 2) The Korean students did not actively pursue
Americans either.

With regard to the approachability of Americans, Unjung commented: “미국
애들이, 조금 와서 놀란 게, 너무 개인적인 것 같아요. 개인적인 이에 좀 많다 보니까”

“When I came to America, I was shocked to discover that Americans were so
individualistic. They are very individualistic.”

Nari mentioned that she felt that Americans had a “superiority complex.” She said,

“그냥 자기네들 여기서 살고, 다른 나라에 관심 있는 사람들도 별로 없는 것 같고.

그냥 지들끼리 자기네들 우월주의 약간 그런 거? 몇몇은 아시아에 관심 있는
애들도 있고 한데, 뭐 별로 드문 것 같아요.” “Americans live here, and I don’t think
many are interested in people from other countries. They seem to have some superiority
complex toward other races. A few are interested in Asia, but it’s rare.”

Nari also mentioned how difficult it was to approach Americans when the
Americans did not make the first move:

그런데 막 이렇게 친하게 지내고 이런 건 없는 것 같아요. 그러니까 막 제가

다가서 막 친구를 만들려고 해야 되잖아요. … 왜냐면 저 쪽에서는 안다가

오거든요 당연히. 친해들끼리 잘 노는 데 저한테 뭐가 궁금하다고 오겠어요?

… 좀 같이 어울릴 수 있는 그런 게 많을 줄 알았는데, 다 각자 할일 바쁘고,
I don’t really have close American friends. I have to approach them and try to be their friends. . . because obviously they don’t approach me. Why would they be interested in me when they are fine by themselves? . . I thought I would have many opportunities to hang out with them, but everyone is busy. Even the ones around my dorm all work and go to school and have different schedules, so there aren’t many opportunities to meet. When we see each other, all we say is, “How are you? How is it going?” and that’s it. So, we don’t really talk.

Sungho also mentioned how individualistic he thought Americans were:

“Many Americans are individualistic. They have definite boundaries between themselves and others. . . Americans do not like for others to intrude into their space.”

He went on to say that they were very calculating: “They help you conditionally, when they can
get something back after giving. They are very definite about that and very formal and direct.”

He also saw no reason why Americans should be interested in foreigners:

접할 기회도 없고. 미국 사람들이 만약 이렇게 저희가 한국에서 저희가 외국인 대하는 거랑 똑같죠. 여기서 외국인들이 저희를 외국인으로 보고.

영어를 못하면 말 느릿느릿하고 틀리고. 여기서 계속 들다 보면.

피곤하고… 이해도죠.

There aren’t many chances to meet them [Americans]. They probably view us as we in Korea view foreigners. Here, we are foreigners. If we don’t speak English well, and say everything slowly and wrong, it would be tiring for them to listen to us. . . . I understand them.

Other interviewees were at a stage where they were just wondering if Americans would be interested in them. For example, Youngchun said, “제가, 모르는 사람이, 이렇게 막 찾아서 join할 수 없잖아요…. 그 사람들이 저한테 관심을 보이면.”

“I, who don’t even know them, can’t just go and join them. . . but only if they showed interest in me.”

Sungho said Americans didn’t approach him at all:

기회를 만들려고 해도 어디서 만들어요? 만들, 뭐, 다 이렇게 지나가는
I want to make opportunities [to meet Americans], but how do I make them? I can’t just stop people passing by and start talking to them. I can’t ask them to help me, after setting up scenarios, and get close to them. . . . They don’t approach me at all.

Youshin mentioned her fear of approaching Americans:

At school, I try to find opportunities to meet Americans, but once I see them, I don’t know what to say and go, “What do I do? Oh, no!” and become scared. And because I’m afraid, I have to withdraw.

While waiting for opportunities to make American friends, Koreans socialized with international friends. Youshin said, “우선 다른 나라 사람들로 시작해서 거기서 이제 연습을 하고 같이 이렇게 나가면서, 그러다 보면 미국 사람도 만나게 되면 더 쉽게 이야기를 하고 할 수 있지 않을까?... 외국인 친구하고 좀 많이 어울리려고
“First, I want to practice speaking English with people from other countries, and after doing that for a while, wouldn’t it become easier to talk to Americans after meeting [them]? . . . I’m trying to spend more time with international friends.”

**Predictions for meeting native speakers in the future.** Most of them predicted that it would be much easier to meet Americans and make friends once they had moved to regular academic classes away from the language institute where they were isolated and only encountered other international students. Sungho said:

If I get to take regular academic classes with Americans, I will have many chances [to get to know them]. So, while waiting for that moment, I’m studying, to prepare myself to be able to take academic classes. . . . We will get close because we will be in the same class, and by talking, we will get closer. The fact that we are in the same class, learning the same things, will be big.

Not being able to practice English speaking seemed to be one of the biggest disappointments for these international students. Eight of the ten students had envisioned
themselves talking with American students as soon as they came to the United States, but became disillusioned when this did not happen as planned. They then began to wait for the time when they could take academic classes, thinking that the problem of not being able to meet Americans and make friends would then be solved.

**Other efforts to learn English.** In addition to their ESL classes and their attempts to meet Americans, these interviewees made other efforts to improve their overall English skills. For example, to practice listening and pronunciation, some students mentioned watching movies and TV. Youngchun said:

그 자막 없죠. 자막 없애고 보는 거에요 그낭. 좀 긴 거나 어려운 단어 들어간 거는 못 알아듣고요. 그냥 간단한 거. 그래서 대충 이렇게 보고 무슨 뜻이겠죠 하고서 한 번 더 봐요. 다 보고 자막 넘고 한 번 보고. 아 오런 뜻이구나.

I watch movies without subtitles. I don’t understand long sentences and difficult words, only simple ones. And after I watch the movie and guess what the movie was about, I watch it one more time, with subtitles, and get the full meaning.

Other students attended academies (hakwons) or worked with private tutors to supplement their English lessons at school, just as they had in Korea. Minjoo had an American tutor to help her with conversations and another tutor for writing and grammar. Youngchun had a Korean tutor helping him with English grammar for his classes and TOEFL preparation. Sungho also had a tutor for SAT math. Hyeri attended a Korean
TOEFL academy, explaining that:

그게 그 foreign 그거잡아요. 제 생각에 test 잡아요. foreigner. ,그래서 그냥

미국 사람들 배우면 좀 이상한 거같아요. 잘 모르는 게 있는 거같아요. 학교
수업을 들어봐도…. 좀 성의가 없다고 하나.

That test [TOEFL] is for foreigners, so I think it’s weird to learn it from
Americans. I feel that they don’t know the test well, and I feel that even when I
took TOEFL classes at school. . .should I say that they [American teachers] don’t
do their very best to teach?

Sukae used English when she chatted online with friends. Jongsoo said he studied
for the TOEFL with a Korean study group. Minjoo studied vocabulary on her own, and
Sungho said he studied all day almost every day for the TOEFL and the SAT. But, Hyeri
said that she did nothing even though she knew she should study. Even though she
attended a TOEFL academy, she said she did not study when she came home. Hyeri said,

“제가 stress가 없어요. 잘할려고 그러지 않는 것 같아요. 도전적으로 막 할려고
그러는 게. 있기는 있는데 노력은 많이 안 해요. 해야 되요. 하다 보면 그냥
되더라고요 조금.” “I don’t get stressed. I don’t think I try to challenge myself. I do, but
I don’t try that hard. I should. When I do study, it does work a little.”

For several students, not studying hard seemed to be related to general feelings of
loneliness For example, Hyeri said she could not get herself out of the slump she was in.
She had recently broken up with her boyfriend and said she was trying to get her daily routine together. Nari and Youshin also mentioned falling into depression. Nari said:

저도 가끔 슬럼프가 있어요… 공부 좀 안 하다가 또 부모님이랑 통화하다가 또 이런 저런 이야기 하다 보면 또 다시 마음 잡고 하게 되고, 왜 내가, 왜 여기 미국에 지금 왜 와 있는지 그런 거 다 기억하고, 그렇게 하면 공부를 다시 또 하게 되고 그런 것 같아요.

I get depressed from time to time. . . . I don’t study and then I call my parents and talk about this and that. Then, I become encouraged and remember why I’m here in America. That gets me studying again, it’s like that.

Youshin described how she wanted to change her passive personality after she experienced depression:

한국적인 성격 조차도 바꾸려고 하다가 보니까 이게 같이 움직이는 것 같아요.

영어로도 그날 예전 같으면 저게 왜 틀려? 왜 틀리지 혼자 생각하고 있거나, 아니면 나중에 끝나고 선생님한테 가서 물어보고 했는데, 지금은 그런 것 없이 좀 더 당당하게 자신감을 갖자라는 생각을 하기로 했어요. 요즘에는.

그러니까, 이번 여름학기가 시작하기 전에 조금 우울증이었어요. 우울증이 와 가지고 정말 방에만 들어박혀 있었는데, 어 이대로는 알 될 것 같아서 한,
I’m trying to change my Korean personality, and it’s all related to English too.

Before, when I said something wrong in English, I would just wonder, “Why is that wrong?” or go ask the teacher after class. But now, I tell myself to be more confident. Right before summer started, I was depressed. I just stayed alone in my room for about a month or two. It was hard on my friends, and I didn’t want to face people as time passed. So I thought to myself, “This can’t continue. This is just trapping myself. I have to overcome this.” So, I’m trying to change myself, so that I don’t get depressed again.

In summary, these interviewees were supplementing their formal ESL classes with private tutors and academies outside of class, in part to prepare for tests needed for college admission. Their extra lessons resembled the hakwon system they had all been through in Korea.

**Feelings about English.** Interviewees were asked to share how they felt about English as ESL students in the US. Many said they felt closer to being able to understand
English than they had in Korea. Byungin said, “한국에서 느꼈던 경우는 아, 이거는
매달 이렇게 미뤘었던 땐 그런데 지금은 그, 내가 잡을 수 있겠다라는 느낌은
있어요. 그래서 홍미가 생긴건 사실인데…” “In Korea, I kept procrastinating studying
English, but now, I feel that I can grasp it. So, it’s become more interesting to me. . . .”

Many expressed how “neat it was” to be speaking English. Many mentioned how
much they have had improved since they first arrived in the States, and how bad their
English had been in Korea. Sukae, Jongsoo, Unjung, Hyeri, Minjoo, and Sungho all said
being able to speak English was “neat.”

At the same time, the students expressed frustration over not improving as quickly
as they had expected. They attributed their slow pace to not being able to make American
friends as they had imagined they would. Seven out of the 10 thought they would
improve as soon as they came to America. It was amazing how similar their expectations
were. Jongsoo said,

이상 보였어요 영어 밖에 안 쓰니까 긁방 긁방 늘 줄 알았는데 막상 오니까
한국 사람 엄청 많고, 편하긴 편한데 원가 이제 대학 가야 되니까 걱정도
되고.

I thought I could improve [English] fast if I just used it to hang out with
Americans, but when I came, there were so many Koreans. It’s really convenient
[that there are many Koreans], but I’m worried because I have to get into college.
I thought I would only hang out with American friends once I came to America. . . . I thought, “If I lived in the dorm, I would make many American friends.” And just hang out with Americans and talk to them, but I had no idea it was going to be this hard to make American friends. . . . I had never heard that it was hard to make American friends. . . . Never imagined it was going to be like this. . . .

Minjoo said:

미국 오면 금방 영어를 잘 할 것 같다...그냥 좀 어느 정도 이제 사람들이라도 자유롭게 얘기할 수 있고...그럼 존. 그렇게 생각을 했는데 막상 와보니까 어느정도 일년 좀 지나가면 이제 본격을 들을 수 있는 수준이 될 것 같다.

이런 생각 하고 왔는데 전혀 아니에요..

I thought I would be good at English soon after coming to America. . .and talk
freely with people. . . . I thought I would be able to take regular academic classes after about a year, but when I actually came, that wasn’t the case at all.

Youngchun said:

미국 오기 전에는 미국 가면은 막 미국인들과하고 놀고 술 먹고 내가 막 미국 영어 막 쓰면서 유창하게 될 줄 알았는데….그냥 가면 그렇게 되겠다고 생각을…. 막 미국인들과하고 만날 chance도 많을 것 같고 술자리도 많을 것 같고. 그러면서 영어 잘 쓰 줄 알았는데. 와보니까 한국인들이 많고 한국인들과 많이 어울리게 되고. 생각보다 미국인들과 만날 chance는 없고.

Before coming to America, I thought once I had gone to America, I would hang out and drink with Americans and become fluent in English. . . . Just thought it would be like that. . . with many chances to meet Americans and drink with them, and get to speak a lot of English. But once I came, there were many Koreans, and I got to hang out with Koreans, and not many chances to meet Americans.

Nari said, “그냥 친구, 미국 친구 만나서 놀고, 그냥 영어 공부 열심히 하면 나는다고 생각 했는데. 또 그게 아니었던 거에요. 와보니까 그런 게 아니라. 시간이 필요한 거죠 저도. 욕심을 너무 낮겨가야요.” “I thought if I hung out with American friends and studied English really hard, that I would improve, but it wasn’t like that when I came. I needed more time. I realize that I’ve been too impatient.”
Sungho said:

I was a little disappointed when I came. When I was in Korea, I thought in America, I would just speak English with Americans and use a lot of English. This image of America was really strong. . . But when I came, it wasn’t that different from Korea. . . with many Koreans [living here].

The students also mentioned what they did to build their confidence when speaking English. Youshin and Hyeri said they kept repeating their sentences when people did not understand them. Youshin said she learned not to feel embarrassed:

At first, it was really embarrassing, when they [Americans] tried to explain more
easily, and I tried to repeat what I wanted to say, even though it was perfectly natural that I couldn’t speak English well. It was embarrassing and I didn’t like it, so I didn’t talk and avoided people. When someone talked to me, I said, “It’s OK,” and left. But now, I ask again.

Two students said they just spoke, and that they did not have time to be shy or to wait for confidence to come to them. Byungin said he spoke even when he knew he was making mistakes. And Nari said she did not have time to think about having confidence before she spoke English: “외국인이랑 얘기할때 안 부끄럽고 막, shy해 지고 막.

그랬는데… 지금은 없어요. 그냥 얘기 하는 거죠. 아니 한국 말 하는 것처럼 영어 그냥 하는 거죠. 언어니까 그냥.” “I used to be really shy when I talked to Americans…But not anymore. I just talk. I speak English like I speak Korean, since it’s just a language.”

Minjoo said she started thinking in a different light about why she should be embarrassed when she was not good at English. In fact, it was normal that she was not yet good at her second language. This thinking helped her overcome her shyness about speaking English, somewhat. Minjoo discussed a situation where she had been in a store and had had a communication deadlock with a cashier:

제가 모르는데 어떻게요. 이 상황을 어떻게든 탈피해야지. 재는 왜 못 알아듣는 거야. 도대체 처음에 제가 한국말로 그랬어요. 생각으로 한 게
What could I do when I didn’t know how to explain in English? I had to get out of that situation. “Why doesn’t she understand me?” I said that out loud in Korean, because it was frustrating. “Why doesn’t she understand me?” But when I thought about it, it was really my problem, since I didn’t know how to speak English very well. But I also thought, “She is a native speaker and she should be good at English. Is she pretending not to understand me? Does she really not understand me?” I doubted it at first. “Why doesn’t she get it?” Then my thinking changed. That’s how I overcame my shyness.

Four students, Sungho, Youngchun, Unjung, and Sukae said they did not currently have much confidence in their English.

Thoughts about culture. I asked the students whether they felt they had to assimilate into American culture to learn English well. All replied that they wanted to retain their Korean culture while learning English.
Sukae believed that she could learn about American culture by watching TV or by talking to Americans, without actually living like Americans: “그냥 생활 같은 거를 하면서 글쎄요, 뭐 미국의 TV를 보면서 그리고 보 tong 미국 그 시대의 가장 유명한 드라마를 보면 그 시대의 그 나라의 분위기를 알 수가 있어요. ““By living here, and by watching American TV, the most popular TV programs at the moment, you can find out about the country’s atmosphere.”

Sungho wanted to keep his Korean cultural uniqueness and use his exposure to American culture as a way to improve his English:

영어 문화를, 아니 미국 문화를 받아들여야지 영어도.. 뭐 미국 음악을 듣든 미국 영화를 보든 많은 문화들을 많이 접해야지 뭐 언어도 이렇게 쉽게 배우겠죠? 제가 믿고 있는 게, 그렇게 믿고 있는 거예요. 똑같이 사는 것보다는 많이 접하는 게, 자기만의 개성을 맛 갖고 있고... 그게 더 좋은 거죠.

By being exposed to . . . American culture, listening to music or watching American movies, by being exposed to a lot of culture, wouldn’t that make learning the language a lot easier? That’s what I believe. Instead of living exactly like them [Americans], being exposed to the culture, while keeping one’s unique identity. . . is better.

Youngchun believed he had to interact with Americans to improve his English:
“미국 사람 같이 살아야죠. 같이 좀 행동을 해야지 좀늘 거같아요.” “You have to live like Americans, hang out with them to improve English.”

Hyeri, the violist, believed that she could assimilate into American culture by means of her music: “저는 괴찮을 거 같아요. 특별 전공이 있으니까. 그거를 자신감을 가지고 있어요.” “I think I will be OK, since I have my special major. I have confidence in that.”

Jongsoo believed that he could live in two cultures: “미국인이랑 있을 때는 미국처럼…한국인이랑 있을 때는 한국처럼…평상시에는 한국처럼…50-60%? 근데 완전히 한국 문화는 이렇게 저버리지 않고.” “I can be like Americans when I am with Americans. . .be like Koreans with Koreans. . .and usually live as a Korean. . .about 50-60%? Not totally abandoning my Korean culture.”

Learning English in a new country was a difficult process for these ten interviewees. The reality of the United States was not the same as they had hoped it to be, before they came. But, at the same time, they experienced the little joys of improvement in their English proficiency. They also found ways to deal with difficult situations that arose from living in a new country and, in the process, naturally thought about culture and language. They all wanted to retain their Korean identities while learning English. Not one wanted to fully assimilate into American culture to acquire the language. They wanted to be good at English, and speaking to Americans would help them improve faster,
but they did not want to be completely immersed in American culture and abandon their Korean identity.

**Korean characteristics and English speaking.** When I asked the students how interactions with fellow Korean international students affected their English speaking, most thought that spending time with other Koreans interfered with improving their English speaking.

**Love to socialize together.** The majority of the Koreans in the language institute were language students who came with the stated purpose of learning English for a few months to about a year. However, according to the interviewees, many of these students were here to “play.” Sungho said:

그런 분들은 거의 같은 기숙사에 살고 있던 분이거나 뭐 이렇게 놀기

 좋아하는 분? 놀러 오신 분? 그러니까 그냥 어학연수 겪? 어학연수 겪,

 그렇게 엄청 진지하게 생각 안하고 영어 대충 배우면서 놀러 온 분도 있고

그러다 보니까 뭐.

Those people [in the Korean group] live in dorms or are the ones who love to socialize. The ones who came to America to play and are just here for the language program. They are not that serious. They are here to learn some English and to play.

Nari said the same thing:

그러니까 저 같은 경우는 공부하러 왔잡아요. 학교에 들어가려면 빨리빨리
I came here to study. And in order to get into a university; I have to hurry up and study, so I don’t want to hang out with Koreans. But those who are here for one year or six months...most are people like that, than those trying to get degrees, so...they are here just to have fun.

Unjung and Nari thought it was pathetic how those language students returned to Korea without much improvement in their English skills. Unjung said:

When I see them, when they are together, they are always going to Annandale [Korean Town] together. Even when I drink, I prefer American bars to Annandale, but Koreans always socialize and drink in Annandale and with each other. And Koreans don’t seem to feel the need to meet Americans.
Youshin seemed to understand the dilemma of these Korean students: “생각들은 다 그렇게 많이 하는 것 같아요. 생각만. 그런데 생각을 행동으로 옮기시는 분들은 별로 없고.” “They all think that they should meet Americans, but not many actually put [this thought] into action.”

However, the interviewees acknowledged that socializing with the people of one’s own nationality was not only a Korean problem. Unjung said other nationalities also spent a lot of time with each other, and Youshin specifically noted that Arabs (on campus) only socialized with each other.

Interviewees said that Koreans loved being together. Youngchun said, “그렇게 뭉치기 좋아하니까. 어쩔 수 없는 거 같아요. 그냥 자연스럽게 어쩌다 보니까 그렇게 되는 것 같아요.” “They [Koreans] love to be together, and that can’t be helped. Naturally, they just get to be together.”

When Koreans were together, they loved to have fun together. Sungho said, “한국 사람들끼리 뭉치면 놀러, 모든지 놀아야 되고, 한국말을 쓰게 되고 그런 것들.” “When Koreans are together, they have to play and they get to speak Korean.”

According to Jongsoo, Koreans never used English with each other: “한국인 사람이랑 있으면 거의 노니, 노는데.” “When Koreans are together, they almost always hang out and have fun.”
Sukae described what Koreans did when they were together: “술하고, 또 봉딩도 가고, 노래방 가고 그런거.” “They go drinking, bowling, and to the karaoke bar, things like that.”

Sukae said these students were wasting their parents’ hard earned money, playing instead of studying as they should. Sukae, one of the older interviewees, described how hard it was to make money in Korea:

저는 제가 직장 생활을 맨 처음 하면서 되게 눈물이 난던 적이 있어요. 우리 상사가 아빠, 우리 아빠 나이였는데, 그 위에 있는 사람한테 정말 온갖 모욕 다 들으면서 막 혼나더라고요. 그러면서 자식들을 위해서 돈을 벌고 있는 거잖아요. 애네들은 그런 돈을 받고 와가지고 이렇게 놀고 있는 거잖아요.

When I first started working [in Korea], I cried once. My boss was about my father’s age, and he was being lashed out at by his superior. He was taking all that humiliation to earn money for his children. These kids [Korean international students] are using up that kind of money.

Some participants felt that Korean students who socialized too much wasted a lot of time. Jongsoo said, “한국 애들 놀면은 시간을 좀 많이 빼어가니까.” “When Koreans play together, they waste a lot of time.”

Unjung said, “필요 이상으로 더 많이 다니는 것 같애요.” “I think they hang
out too much, more than is necessary.”

Nari said, “한국 사람들 만나면요? 술 먹고, 당연히, 맨날 보면 술먹고 어제도 술 먹고.” “What do Koreans do when they are together? Of course, they drink. They drink every day. Yesterday, too.”

According to Sukae, some students could not control themselves from socializing with other Koreans, even though they were old enough to know better:

나이가 어린 애들도 있지만, 나이가 찻 사람들도 있어요. 술직히 여자나이 24 정도면 이미 알거 다 알고, 자기가 컨트를 할 수 있어요. 17,18살이다

아니잡아요. 저는 그렇게 생각 하거든요. 남자랑 여자랑 또 다르고.

남자애들도 군대 안 갔다 왔으면 그러려니 하겠는데 군대 갔다 왔으면 컨트를 할 수 있어요 지가 스스로를…. 스스로 못 하는 거죠. 맨날 뭐라고 해요. 그래도 뭐, 뭐 안 듣는데 어떻게 해.

There are some really young kids, but some are pretty old. Honestly, if a girl is 24, she knows everything and should be able to control herself. She is not 17, 18. I think like that. Boys and girls are different. If boys haven’t been to the army, I understand, but if they have, they should be able to control themselves on their own. . .but they can’t control themselves. What can I say to them? They don’t listen to me.
Some interviewees felt similarly to Jongsoo, who said, “그게 어려워요. 그리고 또 한국 사람 노는 게 재밌어요.” “It’s hard [not to be with Koreans]. And it’s fun to spend time with Koreans.”

Unless one was really determined not to be with Koreans, it seemed really difficult. Sungho said,

“한국사람, 미국에 왔으면 한국 사람을 많이 접하면 안 되는 거죠. 그게 힘들지 진짜…. 그렇게 하려고 하는 사람도, 옛날에 말했듯이 그렇게 할려고 하는 사람들도 있긴 한데. 그냥 뭐 평범하게 생활하고 이렇게 하는 사람들은 그런 게 안 되죠.” “Koreans, once they’re in America, you shouldn’t hang out with Koreans, but it’s really hard. . . . There are those, like I told you before, who try not to hang out with Koreans. But normal people can’t do that.”

Why did many Korean students in the language institute try to spend so much time with each other? First of all, it was fun. Nari said, “그냥 한국 사람들끼리 있으면 편하고, 또 재미있잖아요 한국 사람들끼리 있으면 그러다 보니까 자꾸 만나게 되고. 쓸데 없이. 공부에 도움도 안 되게.” “When you’re with Koreans, it feels comfortable and it’s fun to be with Koreans. So they keep meeting, unnecessarily, which doesn’t help with studying.”

Jongsoo said it was lonely in America. So did Youshin:
It’s so much more comfortable, especially in terms of language. Honestly, when you’re out in a foreign land all alone, it’s very lonely. You get eating disorders. Then, you want to meet with people you can communicate with, not those foreigners who you can only say basic things to. Then, you can’t get rid of that stress on the inside, because you can’t express what’s on your mind. “Even if I said it, I don’t think she could have understood.” It’s like that.

Jongsoo said it was hard to be really close to Americans:

It’s really lonely not to hang out with Koreans. I have American friends, but it’s hard to be close to them, really close. I have some close friends, but I can’t get
that close with them as fast as I can with Koreans. . .because my English isn’t that good.

The Korean idea of the “group.” Some students mentioned that wanting to be in a group is a Korean characteristic. Hyeri said, “민족성인 거같아요. 전 정말 싫어해야.”

“I think it’s Korean national character (to want to be together). I really hate it.”

Similarly, Jongsoo noted, “일단 한국인이라면 좋아해야요. 그냥 괜히 뭉치는 것 갈아요 한국인끼리. 단결력 있게 그러는 것 갈아요.” “If they are Koreans, they [Koreans] like them. Koreans just have to be together, for solidarity.”

Nari said this group-ism can be seen even in restaurants in Korea:

한국에서 보면 다 몰려다니고 혼자 사는 사람 거의 없고. 식당가면 혼자 먹는 사람이 누가 있어요? 여기는 혼자 먹는 사람 많거든요. 저 한 번 먹 한 번 먹어 본적 있어요 혼자. 스무 몇 살 때 너무 배가 고파가지고 학원 끝나고 혼자 식당 가서, 그것도 작은 걸 시켜 먹으면 되는데 혼자 큰걸 시켜 먹었거든요 너무 배 고파서 근데 다 먹다. 먹다가 주위를 다 돌려 보니깐 다 커플인 거에요. 그런데 저는 그냥, 그냥 배가프면 혼자 먹는 건데 아무렇지도 않은데 혹시 저 사람들은 재 왜 혼자서 저걸 먹을까 생각을 분명히 할 거란 말이에요. 왜냐면 다 이렇게 신경 쓰잖아요 한국 사람들은, 왜 재 혼자 먹지? 왜 혼자
In Korea, people go around in groups and nobody really eats alone. Who eats alone in a restaurant? Here [in the US], many people eat alone. Once, I ate by myself [in Korea] when I was 20, because I was so hungry after hakwon. I went to a restaurant and I ordered a big dish because I was so hungry. And as I was eating, I looked around me, and everybody was couples. I was hungry, so I was eating alone, but I knew they were wondering, “Why is she eating alone?”

Because Koreans care about other people’s business. “Why is she eating alone? Why is she eating so much food when she is all by herself?” Like that. Americans don’t care whether people eat alone or not.

Nari also said Koreans seemed to be guided by a mob psychology:

They go in groups, mostly. . . they go together. When you watched the World Cup [2002], they went together. When they go to demonstrations, they go in groups.

Even for the impeachment of the president [President Roh Moo Hyun was almost
impeached in 2004], they go in big crowds. And after a few months, the fervor
dies down. I really hate that.

Byungin elaborated on the Korean love of group activities:

Byungin: 여기 와서 느낀 건데요 한국인들끼리 몰려다니는 것. 아무래도

민족이라는 한민족이라는 그런 게 너무 강해서. 그래서 일부러 저도 좀 피해

다니려고 하는데…우리나라 사람들이 본위기에 헐쑥리는. 우리 뭐 이거

하자. 그러면 네 하고 막 쫓아가고. 그러니까 예를 들어서 야 우리 오늘 술

마시러 가자. 예 그래요.

Interviewer: No 하면 어떻게 되요?

Byungin: 재밌어 보러나 그런. 한국 문화 자체가.

Interviewer: 볼로서기가 좀 힘든가요? 그러니까 그룹이 하자는 대로 다 하게

되나요?

Byungin: 아무래도 그거에 어쩔 수 없이 쫓아가는 경우도 있고, 물론 좋아서

하는 경우가 많지만, 내가 하기 싫어도 쫓아 해야 되는 그렇게 안 하면 예의

없어 보이고…되게 이기적이고 이렇게 보이는. 물론 영어 하는 거랑은 좀

다른 얘기지만 문화 자체가 그런 게 되게 강해서 한국이.
Byungin: After coming to the United States, I realized that Koreans hang out in groups. I guess it’s because of the idea of being one people, one blood, is so strong. So I’ve tried to avoid them on purpose. . . . Koreans are very weak in “spur of the moment” impulses. If somebody says, “Let’s do this,” then everyone says, “Ok!” and they all go. For example, if they say, “Let’s go drinking,” then, everyone says, “Ok! Let’s go!”

Interviewer: What happens if somebody says, “No”?

Byungin: Then, they would say, “Why is he like that?” Korean culture is like that.

Interviewer: Is it difficult to do things as individuals? Does everyone have to follow the group?

Byungin: Some people follow the group even if they don’t want to, even though they don’t like to do group things most of the time. If I didn’t follow the group, I would look rude. . . and very selfish. This is a different issue than speaking English, but this group culture of Korea is very strong.

Minjoo said this group-ism was related to being conscious of what others were doing:

그니까 자기 제일 안 좋은 게 주위 사람들 의식하는 거에요. 심하죠. 저도 어렸을 때는 있었어요. 고등학교 때까지 있었어요…. 왜냐면 많이 느꼈던 게 고등학교 때는 애들이랑 워낙에 같이 살다시피 학교에서 그러니까 이게 의식할 수밖에 없어요.
So the worst characteristic of Koreans is that they are too conscious of other people. It’s pretty serious. I was like that when I was young, all throughout high school. . . . Because in high school, I practically lived with my classmates in school, so that can’t be helped.

Nari said:

신경을 되게 많이 쓰죠…. 되게 많은 것 같아요. 저는 안 그렇지만 관심이 많아요 사람들….그런 것 같아요. 다른 사람 좀 독립성이 좀 떨어지죠. 혼자 원가 하려고 하고 그런 게 별로 없었던 것 같아요. 다 어울리고.

Koreans care a lot about how others view them. . . . Very much. I’m not like that, but other people are so interested in other people. . . . They are like that. They are not very independent. They don’t really try to do much on their own, always hanging out together.

Sukae said, “한국 사람들처럼 뒤에 가서 이거이거 안 해요. 이거 이거 안 해요, 한국 사람들처럼.” “Chinese people don’t talk behind your back like Koreans do. They don’t do that, like Koreans do.”

Jongsoo said Koreans were curious about those who did not join the group:

“뭐라고 하지는 않고요 그냥 재는 뭐할까 그냥 궁금해해요.” “They don’t talk about you [if you do not join the group], but just wonder what you’re doing.”

There is, however, a positive aspect of being with Koreans; Jongsoo said Koreans
who are a few years older than him take good care of him, studying with him and taking him out to eat. Sungho also said that Koreans are generous, especially with sharing information. Sungho said:

이제 좋은 부분은 이제 많이 많은 자료 같은 것들도 서로 공유하고 한국 사람들끼리... 바로 이렇게 그냥 뭐 거리낌없이 주니까... 뭐 Note 같은 거나 뭐 그런 거는 거리낌 없이 주니까. 뭐 복습, 책이 책 같은 거 복사 좀 해야겠다

그러면 뭐 거리낌 없이 도와주고.

The good part is that they share a lot of resources and materials with each other, with Koreans. . . . They give it to you without any hesitation. . . . They give you class notes, without any hesitation. If I need to make copies of some books, they give them to me and help me.

Hyeri explained another positive quality: “우리나라 사람들 좋은 점이 있고.

하면 한다는 거? 한국 사람들이 좀? 그런 있어요. 마음을 바꿔서 잘 하면 또 잘 해요.”

“There are good qualities to Koreans. Their determination, that Koreans are determined.

When they decide to do something, they are very good at it.”

In summary, the interviewees discussed typical out-of-class behavior, noting that for the most part, Koreans who came to the institute for short-term language programs did not study very hard. They were in the US for exposure to English and for experience living in America for a few months. Therefore, they tended to spend a lot of time with
other Koreans drinking and socializing. The strong tendency of Koreans to go with the
group appeared to influence many Koreans to do things together. This behavior may have
wasted time that would otherwise have been used to study English.

*Interviewees and other Koreans.* Among the 10 interviewees, there were two
types in the way they approached socializing with other Koreans: those who avoided
them and those who balanced making Korean and American (foreign) friends.

Unjung, Nari, Hyeri, Sukae, and Youngchun seemed to belong to the first group.
Hyeri and Nari both said that they were atypical Koreans—disliking the group and
preferring independence. Youngchun said of his Korean friends: “나중에 물어봤는데
‘좀 건방지다’ 생각하더라구요.” “I later asked them [what they thought of me before
they got to know me], and they said they thought I was rude.”

Youngchun said the reason he did not spend time with Koreans was that when he
was by himself, he did not have to speak Korean, even if he did not use English either.

Youngchun and Nari both said they did not care too much about what other
Koreans said about them. Nari said:

별로 신경 안 써요 저는 왜, 난 이리는데 재네들이 무슨 상관이지 이렇게
생각하기 때문에 저는. 그러니까 좀 약간 사람들이 하는 말이 제가 저도 제
자신이 그러니까 제가 원하는 데로 다 하잖아요. 다른 사람, 그러니까…

눈치 안 봐요. 눈치 볼게 없다고 생각 하거던요. 눈치 볼 필요가 없거든요.
I don’t really care about what they say. Because I’m like, “Why should I care what they think of what I do?” So, people say that I do what I want. Other people . . . I don’t care about what they think. I don’t think I need to be aware of them. But other people, they are aware of other people and are wishy washy.

Youngchun, Nari, and Hyeri all said they were not lonely in America. Hyeri said, “I am not lonely. When I get lonely . . . I practice the viola.”

Sukae, who recently got married, also said, “As students studying in a foreign country, what serious topics do we even have to talk about? That’s what I think.”

The first group shared how they felt about the “big Korean group.” Youngchun said he felt burdened when somebody in the group was better than him. Nari said a Korean told her to have a great life by herself because she did not spend time with them.

Out of the interviewees who said they avoided Koreans, two specifically expressed disliking Korea. Sukae said she did not want to live in Korea:

저는 한국만 아니면 되요. 저는 한국 별로 안 좋아해요. 담담해요 좀 한국에 있으면. 죽으라고 일 해도 돈도 많이 못 벌고 많이 떨리고 벌었는데 그게 보면 남는 것도 없고 또 하루가 너무 피곤해요 아침부터 저녁까지. 야근도
It’s OK [where I live] as long as it’s not Korea. I don’t really like Korea. It’s stifling, in Korea. You work to death, but you don’t earn much money, and you think you’ve earned some, but nothing is left. And every day is so tiring from morning to night. There are many nights you have to work, and it was really difficult. In China, I went to school and also worked, but China and America are similar. You go to work and you leave work at the same time, without having to work nights. Then, I could go to play tennis or go swimming and meet friends. But in Korea, that was impossible.

Hyeri also said she did not like Korea:

별로 안 좋아해야. 안 좋아했어요. 한국에서도 별로... 지겨워. 한국이 좀 지겨웠어요. 빈하기도 하고 재미도 없고 너무 여유도 없고 사람들이 그냥 빌딩안에서 일만 하잖아. 그게 너무 싫어요. 근데 저는 음악을 하니까 또.

왜 음악을 굳이 한국에서 가만히 앉아서 해야 되는 건지 잘 모르겠고. 그냥 좀 더 배우고 싶었고. 많이. 한국은 나와보자 해서 그냥 나와봤어요.
I don’t really like, didn’t like [Korea]. In Korea, I didn’t really like [the Korean group culture]. . . . I was sick of it. Korea was boring. It was the same and wasn’t fun, with no room to breathe. People just worked inside buildings. I hated that. But since I played viola, I didn’t know why I had to play viola in Korea. I wanted to learn more, a lot. That’s why I decided to leave Korea.

To summarize, these Korean-avoiding interviewees did not like groups and did not understand those who looked for Korean company even though they were in America to learn English, and did not care what others thought about their staying away from the Korean groups. Nonetheless, their closest friends were Koreans. Unjung said:

“We [she and her friends] were similar in that we thought that we should hang out only with Americans, and told ourselves that we would not get to know any more Koreans, and [we would] practice talking to Americans as much as possible.”

Minjoo, Byungin, Sungho, Youshin, and Jongsoo, in the second group, had a more balanced view about spending time with Koreans. Perhaps because Minjoo, Byungin, and Sungho were all thinking of returning to Korea after finishing either their language program or degrees, they did not avoid the Korean group. Minjoo said outright that she thought knowing Koreans would help the students in the future:
I don’t want to tell them to come out of the group, because all the students who come here come from good backgrounds, really. . . . The kids here are from rich and good families, mostly. . . . I don’t want to tell them to end the relationships. They should just, like I am doing, get American tutors and expand relationships. The problem is that those people settle down in that group, but I don’t want to tell them to come out of the group. They should belong to the group and do other things as well.

Byungin believed that the only way to learn English was by including international students with Korean students. He said:

근데 이제 그 친구들을, 인연을 끊는다는 얘기기는 아니고 그러니까 병행을 해야죠…외국인 애들을 데리고 와서 같이만 가면, 그러면 얘기를 할 때
I’m not saying I should stop being their [Koreans’] friends, but I should do it together. . . . If I include foreigners, then when we talk, we have to use English. And if they [foreign friends] don’t understand, I have to explain it to them, right? Then, I would have to use English. These days, those situations arise. We have Arab friends and other international students. When we Koreans talk together, they ask what we are saying. Then I start explaining in English.

Jongsoo seemed the most fully immersed in a Korean group even though he did have interactions with international and American friends, mostly at parties. He was in study groups with Koreans and talked a lot about how much time he spent with Koreans.

In summary, the interviewees seemed to fall into categories based on how much time they spent with Koreans. Some were anti-Korean because they wanted to get to know Americans and to learn English; that was why they were in the US. Others tried to balance their time as they realized that they could not completely avoid relationships with fellow Koreans. Depending on their future plans, these interviewees’ perceptions of spending time with other Koreans varied. Those who were returning to Korea socialized
with other Koreans; those who were adamant about learning English speaking and who wanted to live in the United States were willing to limit time spent with other Koreans.

This was a broad research question, designed to find out about the experiences and thoughts of these Korean ESL students in the United States. In class, the students did not speak much English for different reasons: shyness, feeling no need to share opinions, not wanting to interrupt the class, or not believing speaking could be learned in class. However, they did not feel that asking questions was a problem.

Outside the class, the students did not have many places or people with whom to use English. Only two had part-time jobs, but these jobs did not require much speaking. Some went to church to meet American friends, but lack of rides or friends to go with made continuous attendance a problem. A few students went to clubs organized by the English Language Institute for them, but even that activity was not very fruitful. All students mentioned how difficult it was to make American friends, mainly because they had few opportunities to meet any Americans or any way to start a conversation, and how disappointed they were that they couldn’t. They found Americans to be very individualistic and uninterested in them. Lacking opportunities to use English with Americans, the students resorted to other methods of learning English: taking supplemental English classes such as conversation, grammar, or TOEFL preparation or watching American TV or reading books. Due to the lack of interaction with Americans, they were constantly tempted to go to the Korean group for moral support and entertainment. Some students, especially those that had plans to return to Korea, did not think it was a bad idea to keep meeting with Korean students. On the other end of the
spectrum, some were against spending time with Koreans because it was a waste of precious time that could be spent on studying and on using English. Even though they had come to the US with the hope of improving their English speaking, many barriers left them feeling frustrated with their lack of progress.

**Research Question 4: What Do the ESL Students Think They Could Do—What Would Help Them—to Improve English Speaking in the United States?**

**What the Students Could Do**

Research Question 4 looked at both what the students thought they could do for themselves to improve English speaking, and what they thought the schools and teachers could do to help them in this endeavor. Some of their thoughts about what they could do for themselves include: results are up to individual students’ efforts, having positive attitudes, studying on their own, expanding their spheres of activities, and talking to Americans. As to teachers, they described good teachers as those who helped them feel comfortable and encouraged them to talk in class. Finally, for the schools, almost all the students mentioned programs that would bring native speakers as conversation partners into ESL classes.

**Up to the individual student.** In response to what the ESL students could do to improve their English speaking, the first answer was that results depended on each individual student’s determination and efforts. Sukae said:

“언어라는 게, 언어는 자기가 노력 하지 않으면 절대 안 늘어요.” “One cannot improve in foreign languages without one’s own efforts.”
Nari also said that no one else could do the studying for the person learning the new language:

제가 알아서 해야지 누가 막 저를 그렇게 만들 수는 없는 거잖아요… 다른 사람들도 각자 자기들이 알아서 해야 되요. 누가 어떻게 해 줄 수가 있는 거 아니에요. 원래 모든 건 누가 해 줄 수는 없어요. 그러나 누군가의 뭐 선생님이 필요하면 뭐 학교를 다니고, 학원을 다니고 그럼으로써 그런 거 필요한 걸 습득하고 또 따로 공부를 제가 알아서 혼자 하고. 뭐 사람들만 만나고 싶으면 뭐 자기가 클럽을 조인해서 뭐 어울리다 돼요.

I have to know to do it [studying] on my own, and no one can make me do it. . .others have to do things on their own too. No one can do it for you.

Everything has to be done by the person. So, if you need a teacher, you should go to school. And by attending hakwons, you can learn what you need to, and you can study on your own. If you want to meet people, you could join clubs and hang out with them [Americans].

Youshin said that each individual student had to try to meet Americans to learn English speaking, but acknowledged the difficulties:

Youshin: 본인한테 달린 거긴 한데. 솔직하게 기회가 별로 없어요. 다들 똑같이 생각해요. 내가 왜 미국 땅까지 와서 한국 사람들 하고 이렇게 놀고
Youshin: It is up to each individual, but honestly, there aren’t many chances. Everybody thinks the same on this problem. Most ask themselves, “Why am I socializing with Koreans even when I am in America?” But there aren’t opportunities. And it’s so difficult to meet Americans. And because it is so hard, I come back to Koreans. And trying to separate myself from Koreans makes me really lonely.

Interviewer: Do you think those Koreans really did try hard [to meet Americans] or just thought about it and gave up?

Youshin: I think many people just think about it without putting it [the idea] into action.

**Holding certain attitudes.** The students also felt that holding certain attitudes as they approached Americans to talk with them was important. One such attitude was to
have shamelessness, according to Youshin: “ 좀 뻔뻔해져야 되는 것 같아요. 생각을 좀 많이 바꿔야 되는 것 같아요. 한국 사람들은. 너무 둘에 박힌 생활을 해 왔고 그런 환경적으로 문화적으로. 보는 눈을 좀 넓혀야 한다고 생각해야.” “I think they need to be a little shameless. Koreans need to change the way they think. They have lived such sheltered lives, in terms of their surroundings and cultures. I think they need to broaden their perspectives.”

Youshin described a situation where she herself had behaved “shamelessly” by volunteering to go first for a presentation in an ESL class:

지난주에 presentation이 있었습니다. 선생님께서 다른 걸 가르치시면서 시간을 허비하시고...결국 10분이 남았어요. 다음 시간에 하자고 하셨지만 그걸로 받는 스트레스로 몇몇은 하기로 하고 누가 첫 할 거냐에 서로 눈치보고 있음 때...같이 눈치 보다가 벌떡 일어나 나갔어요. 준비도 제대로 하진 않았지만 어디서 그런 용기가 났는데...전엔 제일 마지막으로 하려고 계속 좋이만 보고 있었을 텐데...준비한 내용을 조금 빠먹고 혼자 주절리 떠들다 들어왔지만. 스스로 좀 놀랬어요...어디서 그런 뻔뻔함이...ㅋㅋ 그래도 기본은 좋았어요. 물론 발표를 끝내서 편안함도 있었지만. 그냥...
Last week, our class had to do oral presentations. But the teacher wasted time teaching other things...and there were only 10 minutes of class left. She said, “Let’s do it in the next class,” but due to the stress that comes from having to wait to do a presentation, a few students wanted to get it done. Everyone was looking at each other to see who would go first, but I suddenly got up and went to the front. I wasn’t that well prepared, but I don’t know where the courage came from... In the past, I would have been poring over my paper to go last... I forgot some of what I had prepared to say and just mumbled through it, but I was surprised at myself... Where did such shamelessness come from? Ha Ha. Still, I felt good and also relieved because it was over. I thought, “Just...if I just do it, I could do it... I’ve been getting better without knowing it... I have a long way to go, but I could do it.”

Byungin, the adjunct professor, used a different term ‘thick skinned,’ to describe the courage necessary for Korean ESL students to start speaking in English: “그러니까 저번에 말씀하셨죠? 철판을 깔아야 된다 딱 그게 필요한 거에요.” “You’ve mentioned it before, that being thick-skinned was necessary? That is so true!”
Even though they knew what attitudes would help them approach Americans, it was still a daunting task for these ESL students. Youshin explained how she felt caught between having to face Americans when it was so much easier to stay with Koreans:

그런데 그게 (speaking) 좀 한국사람으로서 힘들긴 한데 필요는 해요. 그래서
미국에 왔지만 또 한국 문화가 그 안에 자리를 잡고 있어서. 이겨나가는 방법
박에는 없는 것 같아요. 이겨나가야 되는 것 같아요. 그런 환경에도 무릎쓰고
여기에 왔으니까… 한국 사람을 안 만나고 차라리 그냥 혼자서 다니더라고도
그렇게 해보려고 했고, 근데 그게 안되더라고요. 사람들이 이렇게
오잡아요…그럼 같이 또 네, 이리고 가고. 또 학교에서 정말 native를 만날 수
있는 기회 같은 데 자꾸 찾아서 가려고 하는데 또 가면 말이 막히니까 어, 어,
어, 어쩌지 어쩌지, 하다 보니까 자신감이 없어지는 거에요 자꾸. 괴히
두려우니까 또 한 발짝 물러나게 되고… 처음에는 그때는 누가 말 시켜도
한마디도 못하고 혼자 월 할거라는 걸 생각도 못하고 만일 월 사러 가야 되도
내가 그걸 어떻게 물어보지? 겁나서 아예 포기하버리고. 근데 지금은 그래도
혼자 뭐 은행가서 궁금한 게 있으면 맡이 안되더라도 무슨 배짱인지 혼자
가서 얘기할 하고 오고요.
As a Korean, speaking in English is difficult for me, but it’s necessary. I have to do it because this is why I came to America, but Korean culture is already well established in America. The only way is to overcome it, to overcome it. . . Since I am here, I have to overcome [the lure of] Korean culture. . . . I have tried not to be with Koreans, even if I had to be alone, but it didn’t work. You know how they [Koreans] come to you. . . . Then I would say, “Yes” and go with them. And I really tried to meet native speakers at school by looking for opportunities, but once I faced them, I just panicked, “Oh, oh, what do I do?” Then I lost confidence. Because I was afraid, I stepped back. . . . At first, when someone talked to me, I couldn’t say a thing and couldn’t think of doing anything on my own. If I had to go buy something, I would worry, “How do I ask this?” and gave up because I was afraid. But now, I can go to the bank alone and ask questions, even though I don’t make much sense. I don’t know where my guts are coming from, but I go alone, talk, and come back.

Going one step further than Youshin, Minjoo seemed to have figured out a way to become confident by changing her attitude about the mistakes she made while speaking English. She explained that a convenience store cashier asked her to show her ID when she tried to pay for something with a credit card. Minjoo did not understand why this was necessary and tried to ask the cashier for clarifications. Neither understood the other, and this embarrassing incident drove Minjoo to reach a new understanding of having confidence even in the face of difficulties:
The way I think is, “Why doesn’t she [the cashier] understand me?” Not, “Why can’t I speak?” or “Why can’t I make people understand?” . . . Because she [the cashier] is supposed to be good at English, but I’m not. So, she should understand [my English]. . . . I’m not looking down on Americans, but I think such thinking is necessary. I’m bad at what I’m bad at, but why should I feel embarrassed about what I’m bad at?

**Individual things to study.** The third thing the students said they could do to help themselves improve English speaking was by studying on their own. To improve her speaking, Youshin said she needed to have a solid basis in vocabulary and grammar:
Koreans’ problems [with English] are in listening and speaking, but those seem to be based on grammar and vocabulary. I feel that is true when I see how weak I am in vocabulary. During presentations, while writing essays, and when talking to international students in English, since my vocabulary is limited, I get frustrated when I can’t fully express myself. So, I’m trying to build up my shamelessness and confidence while memorizing many words. The words that I know by sight aren’t comprehensible when I hear them. . . . I will memorize the words by pronouncing them and upgrade my English to the next level.

Sukae and Byungin talked about their reading methods in English. In her journals Sukae described how her reading had changed since her arrival in the United States:

나는 읽는 것을 좋아한다. 그렇다고 막히 면가에 편중되어서 읽는 편도 아니어서 두루두루 읽고 있다. 책과 신문, 경제잡지 등등 이런 읽는 습관이 들어서일때 모르는 단어가 많은 글임에도 읽다 보면 나도 모르게 그냥 숨숨
I like reading. I read a variety of things—books, newspaper, and economic magazines. Because of this habit, even when I read things with many words that I don’t know, I just get to understand them. Of course, if someone were to ask me, “What is the meaning of that word?” I couldn’t answer exactly. I could only say vaguely, “Could it be so and so?” When I compare myself now to when I first came to America, my reading skill hasn’t improved by that much. I have started to look up words for definite meanings. I’m not sure if this new habit has improved my reading skill.

Byungin said reading a lot helped him form the sentences he wanted to say:

책을 많이 봤다고 생각해요. 그러니까 이거는 제 경험상 한국에서도 그랬고, 뭐 최소한......... 전공에 대한 것, 그러니까 자기 major 에 대한 부분을
I think it’s important to read a lot, based on my experiences in Korea, at least. . . books about my major. If I don’t read books and try to talk about my
major based on what I have gathered here and there, there are limitations. So, when I talk, I can’t make my point and I just get to say very general things. If I read a lot, then I can catch really important words and sentences and understand the different views of various scholars. Reading, not just listening to people talk, is different because I can compare things when I read. Here in the United States also, reading is necessary. That’s how I can make an impact with my points. . . .

Then, as I continue to read, I can learn words too. The funny thing here is that I don’t know easy vocabulary words, but I know all the words related to marketing, business administration, and can even explain them. So by reading a lot, making the meaning mine, I can talk in everyday life and express my views in a clear way, I think.

Jongsoo wrote in his journals about the need to prepare for the TOEFL exam, which is needed for admissions to a university:

토픽 공부는 스티디 그룹을 만들어서 하고 있습니다. Reading 같은 건 시간 재서 풀고, 형들이나 누나들이 어떻게 풀면 더 쉽고 정확하게 풀 수 있다는 것을 가르쳐줍니다. 스티디 그룹을 시작한지 얼마 되진 않았지만 저한테 도움이 많이 됩니다. 이제 내년에 대학을 들어가야 되서 ESSAY 준비도 하고 있습니다. 저는 고등학교 성적이 안 좋아서 essay로 커버를 하려고 합니다.

처음엔 이런 거 되게 못 써는데 여기서 배우면서 많이 늘은 거 같습니다.
I am studying TOEFL in a study group. I time myself on reading problems, and my older friends [in the study group] show me how to solve problems more easily and accurately. It hasn’t been that long since the study group started, but it is helping me a lot. Since I have to enter university next year, I’m practicing writing essays. And because my high school GPA isn’t high, I need to do well on the essays. I used to be really bad at writing, but I have improved a lot since I started learning it here [in the United States]. And since my arrival in America, I have lost some Korean while my English isn’t good either, so I’m a little nervous. I’m trying to improve English fast.

In addition to the formal study of vocabulary, grammar, reading, and the TOEFL, some students mentioned improving their English speaking and listening skills by watching American TV or movies. Unjung felt that she could attain a native speaker’s English through these media:
Since I don’t have a car, it’s so difficult to meet American friends. . . . So, if it [my situation] is like that, I think it’s better to just watch lots of movies and TV. . . . It helps with listening and speaking. . . . In movies, if I hear good sentences, I can remember them and use them when I talk to people.

Minjoo, the student who had learned to be confident even in embarrassing situations, used TV similarly as Unjung, learning phrases that native speakers used.

Minjoo talked about a TV drama she enjoyed:

Minjoo: 그리고 애들이랑 하려면 드라마 되게 제가 되게 웃긴 게 되게 재밌어요. 솔직히 제가 거기에서 웃긴 게 많아요. 제가 Grey’s Anatomy 보겨도요. 그게 medical 그거같아요. 그런 거다 제쳐두고 게네들이 되게 웃긴 애기를 많이 해요. 거기 한에서 자기네들이 애들이 자기네들끼리 쓰는 애기. 되게 웃긴 애기도 많이 하고 애네들이 막 이렇게 CSI 처럼 악악한 영어가 아니라. 그게 되게 많이 나와요. 보시면. 그래서 그런 거 보다 보면 아 이런 것도 있었네. 이리면서.

Interviewer: 그럼 미국 친구들 안 사켜도 TV 로 그렇게 배울 수 있을 것 같으세요. 아니면 꺼 미국 사랑하고 꺼 친구를 해야지 그 level 까지 갈 수 있을 것 같으세요?
Minjoo: In order to talk to people, I find dramas really interesting. They have a lot of interesting things. I watch *Grey’s Anatomy*, you know, a medical drama. But aside from that, they really do say a lot of interesting things, the things they say to each other. Many funny phrases, but their English is not formal and stuffy like CSI. They have many very interesting phrases, if you see it. When I watch it, I go, “Oh, there were phrases like that!”

Interviewer: Then you think it’s possible to learn English speaking without having American friends? Or do you think you have to have American friends to reach that [high] level [of proficiency]?

Minjoo: I don’t think I have to have American friends to learn English speaking. Sukae, the student who received her college degree from China, mentioned in her journals how she used to watch American dramas to improve her listening skills before she came to the United States. She also added how her listening skills deteriorated when she started paying too much attention to every single word instead of the overall meaning.
Even before coming to America, I enjoyed watching American dramas. To be exact, ten years ago, I watched American dramas when I was studying in China. I was never the type to like dramas, but I started this habit [of watching American dramas] to improve my poor English skills. Was it due to the dramas? Before coming to America, my listening wasn’t that bad. (I was just a mute who could understand—a frustrated mute.) Even when I went to Phuket, I could understand quite well the Thai natives’ English, an English version that was considered difficult to understand by native English speakers. I could even understand the heavily Chinese accented English pronunciation. But now, my listening has become worse than before. Why is that? Is this related to how my reading has
changed? Like how I am trying to understand each single word instead of trying to understand the whole sentence? Compared to the past, I obsess over each word so much that I lose the whole sentence.

Similarly to Sukae, Byungin used movies to practice listening and word recognition. But unlike her, he said he watched movies with the subtitles on to help him understand accurately which words were being said:

If I listen [to movies] without English subtitles, I can understand. But I get confused about the words, especially when the sounds of different words are mixed when said connectedly [the end sound of the first word blending with the beginning sound of the second word]. So it’s difficult to differentiate between words. But, with subtitles, I can see the words and look them up if I don’t know the definitions. I mean, I get the summary, the big picture, even without looking up words.
Byungin’s desire to learn the exact words when he watched movies was related to the kind of English he wanted to learn during his yearlong English program in the United States. Having been an adjunct professor in Korea, he especially wanted to learn how to give presentations in English, since that skill was required for his academic career in Korea. He said:

기왕이면 기회가 그런 기회가 있을 때 조금 더 뭐라고 할까. 어... 좀, 
그러니까 좀 자세하게 배우고 싶다... 그러니까 좀 presentation 같은 거
그거는 이제 어차피 저 혼자 발표를 하는 거지만 그것도 하나의 기술이니까...
그냥 보통 사람들인가 친구들이랑 얘기하는 거랑 또 틀리잖아요...그런 경우
제가 제 스스로 담당해가지고 막 그럴 때가 많죠. 네, 그래서.. 좀 그런 부분을
조금 더 익히고 싶어요. 그러니까 저는 약간 더 기술적인 부분, 어떻게 보면,
영어로 그러니까 일상적인 얘기하는 것도 당연히 익히는 거지만 약간 더
공식적인 자리에서 얘기할 때 약간 좀 익울.. 문법이 약간 틀리더라도 내가
편안하게, 그러니까 내가 하고 싶은 말 다 할 수 있을 정도, 어느 정도,
그러니까 내가, 내가 원하는 의미를 제대로 막 impact 하게 우선 전달할 수
있는 정도의 기술을 좀 배우고 싶은데 물론 익십니다. 짧은 시간 동안에 그걸
If possible, if those chances ever come to me. . .I want to learn a more detailed English. . .I mean, presentation skills. When I give presentations, even though I do it alone, it’s a skill. . .it’s different from talking to people, to friends. . . . When I give presentations, there are many instances of my getting frustrated at my inability. So. . .I want to learn that part of English. A more technical English. In a way, speaking everyday English is learning in itself. But in more formal settings, when I speak, even though the grammar may be wrong, I want to comfortably express my points. I want to say all that I want to say, my meanings, with impact. I know I’m being greedy for wanting to learn this skill in such a short time, but because it’s such a short time, I want to experience that kind of English more.

**Expanding the sphere of activities.** The fourth answer to what the students could do to learn English speaking was by expanding their area of activities.

Unjung, Youngchun, and Nari mentioned how they could broaden their experiences in daily life to make it easier to meet Americans. Unjung, the friendly student, described how she was going to expand her activities:

독하게 하면 그렇게 되겠죠. 근데 왜냐면은 저도.... 지금요. 약간 미국 친구들 만나서 영어를 하는.... 거를 일단 안되잖아요? 지금 만날 기회도 없고, 일단 근데 저는 학교를 볼으면서 최대한 학교 안에서 활용을 할라고요, 친구들도
If I do it [meeting and using English with Americans] with determination, it can happen. But...now, meeting Americans and speaking English...are not possible, right? Now, there are no chances to meet them. But once I get admitted into a university, I will make the most of my campus life. I will make many friends in my major and, of course, participate in clubs. That is how I will meet many Americans, and when I get a car, I will go to church and expand my area of activities... But, it’s not possible at this time.

Youngchun, the Chinese high school graduate, said he wanted to participate in clubs in his new university:

If they [the college he would attend the following semester] have interesting clubs, I would like to join them. If they have clubs for pool or bowling, because I like
doing active things. Or do they have health clubs? Sports. I think they have all those things. I would like to do them.

Nari also mentioned getting a job as a way to meet people and to use English.

Hyeri went further than these students and mentioned attending church for English purposes, although she was not a Christian:

Hyeri: 일단 교회를 가야 될 것 같아요.

Interviewer: 교회? 종교 없다고 그러셨잖아요?

Hyeri: 일단 갈려고.

Interviewer: 한국 교회 미국 교회?

Hyeri: 한국 교회. 가서 영어를 잘하는 애들을 좀 사귀어봐야겠어요. 원지 아시죠?

Interviewer: 한국 교회 가서 Twinkie 들?

Hyeri: 네.

Hyeri: For one thing, I have to start going to church.

Interviewer: Church? You said you had no religion.

Hyeri: I think I should go.

Interviewer: Korean church or American church?
Hyeri: Korean church. I should go there and make friends with people who are good at English. You know what I mean?

Interviewer: Go to Korean church to meet Korean Americans?

Hyeri: Yes.

**Talking with Americans.** As answer five, ESL students mentioned making friends with Americans and international students as being very important. They felt that talking with Americans as much as possible would solve the problem of learning to speak English.

Youshin believed that she had to keep on talking in addition to studying:

계속 얘기하고, 정말 적었던 것처럼 단어를 더 많이 외어야 될 것 같고요,

이제 얘기도 많이 하고 많이 들고 그래야될것. 생각하는 데로 계속 사람들 앞에서 얘기를 하려고 하고, 자꾸 좀 더 하려고 하면? push 하고 더 열심히 해야죠. 단어도 외우고 이제. 여기 오는 학생들은 대부분 TOFLE 을 생각하고 있으니까 TOFLE 준비하면서 그런 exercise 같은 거 하면.

Keep talking, and as I wrote in the journal, I need to memorize many words. I think I have to talk a lot and listen a lot. Just say what I think in front of many people and keep doing more. I should push myself and do more and study words. Most students who come to America think about taking the TOEFL, so I should prepare for the TOEFL by solving those problems.
Byungin, the adjunct professor, said that ESL students had to live in English daily to improve speaking:

생활화 되야 된다. 근사 그 생활화가 단순히 미국에서 산다고 해서만 되는 것도 아니고 근사. 미국 이민 온 지 몇 십 년 되신 분들도 영어 한마디도 못하시는 분들 많거돈요. 근사. 결국에는 경험이 없어, 그러니까 경험이.

근사. 접촉이 없어서 어떤 누군가와 대화할 경험. 뭐 그런. 글씨를 써 볼 경험,

귀 들을 경험, 이런 게 없으니까 이게 안 봤다고 생각을 하니까 최대한 많이 부딪혀야지 봤다고 생각을 해...그러니까 내가 선택한 해야 되는데 문제는 이런 program 들을 통해서 오는 경우가 아니면 정말 자기가 진짜 독하게 마음먹고 하지 않는 이상은 힘들다....지금 막 체 경험으로는 무조건 외국 사람들이랑 얘기할 해야 될 것 같아요. 되든 안 되든. 뭐 막말로 단어 한마디로 의사소통을 하든. 그러니까 생활 자체가 그렇게 되기 전에는...

오자마자 친해진 친구가 여기 ELI 학생 중에 인도네시아 학생한명이랑 일본인 아저씨 한 분이 계세요 46 살인데 그 분이랑. 그렇게 다 외국 친구들이었어요. 무조건 영어로 해야 되니까 되든 안 되는 막 하는 거에요
English has to become part of daily life. I mean, English becoming part of a person’s daily life doesn’t just happen by living in America. I mean, there are many immigrants who’ve lived here for several decades, and they still can’t speak English. So, they have had no experiences, no exposure to talk, to write, or to listen, because they thought that they couldn’t improve. So, as much as possible, I think they have to face them [situations for using English]. . . . So, the person has to choose, but the problem is that unless he gets exposure [to English] through [ESL] programs like these, he would have to be really, really determined, or else it would be difficult. . . . According to my experiences these days, I have to just talk to Americans, whether I’m good or not, even if I say only one word. So, my daily life has to become like that. . . . As soon as I came to America, I made friends with an Indonesian student and a 46 year old Japanese man. They were all international students. I had to speak English, even for a short time or whether it worked or not. And then, I could figure out what to say when I met them next. Without doing that, I don’t think it’s possible to improve in a short time.

For English to become part of daily life in order to improve speaking, Byungin said that students had to limit the time they spent speaking Korean: “어떻게 보면
It is something the students themselves have to control. They should minimize the time spent on speaking Korean and, as much as possible, try to speak English with international students and native speakers.”

Nari had similar thoughts:

Every day, I have to use English continuously, more than I use Korean. And I should try not to meet Koreans, if possible. . .and make many opportunities to meet Americans. Not Spanish people, but people with accurate English pronunciation. You know how the English that Chinese people and Korean people speak is different, the English with accents. [I should learn] real English, the one that American kids speak. I should be exposed to that, and meet many people.
Unjung saw speaking with Americans as the solution: “제일 어려운 거는... 제일 어려운 거는 외국인 친구 사귀는 거... 외국인 친구... 친해, 정말 친하게 지낼 수 있는 외국인 친구 아니면, 아무튼 외국인 친구 많으면 다 해결 될 것 같아요. 다, 뭐, 해결 되는 게 정답인 것 같아요 져는.” “The hardest thing... the hardest thing is making American friends... American friends... If I could find really close American friends, or have many American friends, everything would be solved. Everything would be solved. I think that is the answer for me.”

Jongsoo offered a variation on this idea:

“그러니까 말하기를 늘리려면은 그 외국인 맛 한 명이랑 한 명이랑 들이 같이 있는 게 제일 좋은 것 같아요... 외국인이랑 붙어 다니기... 아무래도 미국인이랑 하는 게 더 좋은 것 같아요. 미국 애들이랑 얘기하다 보면, 미국 애들만 쓰는 말이 잡아요. slang 같은 거. 그런 것 좀 배우고. 좋을 것 같아요.

To improve speaking, it’s best to hang out with just one American... Always hanging out with him... It’s better to do it [speak English] with Americans so that I can learn the kind of language that they use, such as slang. It would be nice to learn that.
For Youngchun, talking to Americans meant an opportunity to copy and learn correct English pronunciation and the accent of native speakers:


Interviewer: 그래서 그냥 여기 유학 온 다른 나라 외국인하고 말하는 거는 한계가 있나요?

Youngchun: 부족하죠. 개네 들의 발음도 미국인 갈지 않으니까

Youngchun: I will be copying what they are saying, copying. I have to copy their pronunciation and test my listening [to their English].

Interviewer: So, is there a limit to using English with international students?

Youngchun: It’s not enough, since their pronunciation is not like Americans’.

However, Sukae, unlike Unjung, Jongsoo, and Youngchun, preferred to talk to international students to improve her English: because she felt more comfortable with them:

“저 같은 경우는 제가 생각할 때 저는 native 들이랑 이야기를 하는 것 보다는 같이 공부하면서 나보다 수준이 높은 애들이 있답시오. 개네들이랑 이야기를 하는 게 저한테는 좋아요.” “In my case, instead of talking to native speakers, I think I should
study with those international students who are better at English than me. It’s good for me to talk to those students.”

*Going to academic classes.* Many students said that going to regular academic classes after they had finished their ESL program would help them meet American students. For example, Unjung said:

Unjung: 제가 생각하기에는 일단 regular 수업 들으면, 미국 애들 친구들도 사귀지 않을까. 만약 group 토의 같은 거 여기 ELI 처럼 만약에 과제 주고, group 과제 같은 거 주어지면은 미국 친구들 사귀고 그러지 않을까.

그러면은 이제 자연스럽게... 영어 많이 되고.

Interviewer: 그러니깐 친구를 통해서? 그쵸?

Unjung:: 네, 그러고 뭐 인제는 외국 수업도 들으면서 아무래도 ELI 보다는 조끔 더 수준이 있을 거니까 그러니까 ELI 수업을 들을 때 야. 무슨 말인지 모르겠어, 공부 더 해야겠어, 뭐 이런 그런 그런 아동바등 은 없는데 만약에 이제 Academy 수업을 들으면 또 뒤쳐질 거 아니에요? 그러믄은 인제 제가 진짜로 아, 정말 좀 더 발전해야겠다는 거, 좀 더, 이런 게 좀 더, 온 것 같아요.

Unjung: I’m thinking that once I start taking regular academic classes, wouldn’t I make American friends? If there are group discussions, and they give us projects
like in the ELI, wouldn’t I be making American friends? And naturally become good at English?

Interviewer: Through American friends, right?

Unjung: Yeah, and when I take classes, they will be harder than ELI classes. I mean when I take ELI classes, I don’t say, “I don’t get it. I should study more!” and get all worried and panicky, but when I take academic classes, I would get behind. And I would think, “I should improve more!” I think I would be like that.

Hyeri, the violist, also hoped to make American friends in her future music school:

Interviewer: 학교를 바꾸면 미국 사람 만날 수 있을 것 같아요? 음대를 가면?

Hyeri: 네, 그거는 진짜 제가 확신해요.

Interviewer: 어떻게?

Hyeri: 그게. 아 근데 거기서도 한국 애들이 놀래 같은데. 모르겠어요.

Interviewer: When you change schools, do you think you could meet more Americans, when you go to music school?

Hyeri: Yes, I’m sure of that.

Interviewer: How?

Hyeri: Well, but even when I’m there, I think I would play with Koreans. I’m not sure.
Nari, the graphic arts major student, said that people of the same major would have many chances to work together on projects, enabling them to get to know each other better naturally:

Right now in [ESL] classes, there aren’t any Americans, since international students are here to learn English. But when I go to [academic] classes, there will be many Americans, and I will have more chances to meet them than now.
Everybody says that English improves not by ESL classes but by academic
classes, by going to lectures. . . . I don’t know about other majors, but people who
study design, people who study art, even in Korea, get assigned many projects and
work on them together all night. And they do many presentations together too. So,
wouldn’t it be similar in the United States too? If it’s like that, we would hang out
together. And there are specific students who are art majors. Those people are
close and spend a lot of time together. It was like that in Korea, and I think it
would be like that in America as well.
Sungho also said that taking the same classes would bring the students closer
together:

이제 만약 class 를 뜯 이렇게 academic class 를 같이 들으면 이제 그런 기회가
많겠죠. 그러니까 저는 그런 거 그렇게 기회를 지금 기다리면서 그냥 계속 준비,
제가 academic 들을 수 있게 준비를 하는 거죠. 이제 같은 class 니까 같이
조금씩 얘기 하면서 친해지고. 그러니까 같은 거를 배우고 있다는 거 자체가
엄청 큰 거 같아요 서로에게. 저는 그걸 준비하고 있죠. 많이 어렵겠죠…
영어에 대해서 이렇게 제가 SAT 를 공부하고 있다 보니까 이제 reading 하고
문법 writing 그런 거를 할 때는 굉장히 하면서 느는 느낌, 아니, 어렵다고
계속 알수록 어렵다고 느끼기는 하지만 갈수록 나아지고는 있거ennent요 근데
If I took regular academic classes, I would have many opportunities. So, I’m waiting for those opportunities and preparing, so that I can take academic classes. When we are in the same class, we could get to know each other by talking together little by little. The fact that we are learning the same things would be significant for us. I’m preparing for that. It will be difficult... Since I’m studying the SAT Verbal, when I do the reading, grammar, and writing, I feel that it’s really hard but that I’m getting better. But regarding speaking, I feel like I’m walking in place. Nowhere to practice, so I feel like I’m just in the same place or backtracking these days. I should try to talk a lot... Even though I’m good at listening and understand almost everything, if I don’t speak, I can’t speak.

Youngchun, the student who had attended high school in China for three years, was very hopeful that once he had an American roommate, everything would change:

Interviewer: 저절로 될 거 같아요? 지금 생각에?

Youngchun: 네

Interviewer: 자신 있어요?
Youngchun: 중국에서도 그랬고.

Interviewer: 중국에서 그대로 하시면 될 거 같다고

Youngchun: 현지인들과 만나면 저질로 다 되는 거에요.

Interviewer: 아니 근데 중국에서는 그게 좀 더 쉬웠던 거 같은데요. 그죠?

여기서는 다른 학생들 말을 들어보면요. 여기 현지 사람을 만나기 그렇게 힘들에도요?

Youngchun: 가면은 제 roommate가 알아서 다 연결을 시켜주겠죠.

Interviewer: roommate를 통해서?

Youngchun: 개가 어디 간다하면 따라 가고

Interviewer: 많이 귀찮아하면? 안 놀고 싶어하면?

Youngchun: 놀고 싶게끔 만들어야죠.

Interviewer: 어떻게?

Youngchun: 저 하기에 달렸죠.

Interviewer: 그렇게 할 수 있어요?

Youngchun: 노력해 봐야죠.
Interviewer: You think it [learning to speak English] will just happen? That’s how you’re thinking now?

Youngchun: Yes

Interviewer: Are you confident?

Youngchun: It was like that in China.

Interviewer: All you have to do is do what you did in China?

Youngchun: If I meet native speakers, it will all just happen [learning to speak English well].

Interviewer: I think it was easier in China, right? Other students have told me how difficult it is to meet Americans.

Youngchun: When I go [to the university], my roommate will make all the connections for me.

Interviewer: Through your roommate?

Youngchun: I will follow him around.

Interviewer: What if he gets annoyed? What if he doesn’t want to be friends with you?

Youngchun: I will make him want to hang out with me.

Interviewer: How?

Youngchun: It all depends on me.

Interviewer: Can you do that?

Youngchun: I will try.
The students, clearly, had thought about how they themselves could improve their English, so they had many responses to the first part of the research question. The students believed that it was up to them to improve their English speaking. They thought they needed to approach the task of talking to Americans by equipping themselves with certain attitudes, such as shamelessness and a thick-skinned mindset. Thirdly, the students believed that they needed to study other parts of English such as grammar, vocabulary, reading, TOEFL, and listening to help improve their English speaking. Fourth, they felt that they needed to expand their daily activities to give them more opportunities to meet Americans. Fifth, the students said they needed to meet a lot of Americans to practice speaking English. These answers indicate that the students felt there were many steps they could take to help themselves become better English speakers in the United States.

**What the Teachers and Schools Could Do**

The second part of the research question focused on the students’ thoughts about what the teachers and schools could do to facilitate their learning English speaking. Their answers could be divided into two parts - the kind of ESL teachers they wanted and the programs they hoped the schools would create for them.

**Teacher types.** The students mentioned two important qualities in teachers: the ability to make them feel comfortable enough to start talking and the ability to encourage them even if they made mistakes. A negative characteristic some mentioned was criticizing students’ speaking so much that the students stopped talking. Some students did not feel that the teacher type was important.
Approachable teachers. Many students wanted a teacher who made them feel comfortable and at ease so that they could start talking more in class. Minjoo said the teachers should keep talking to them and create a safe class atmosphere for the students:

자꾸 엎에서 try 하게 하고, 말 시키고, 그렇게 말을 상대방이 해도, 자기가 너
그거 틀렸다, 거기서 is 나 are 이나 막 이런 말 안하고 그냥 이렇게 하고,
그렇게 편하게 대해주면…한국 학생들 말 하고 싶어도…그러니까 할 말이
있어도, 그냥 말아야지 그냥. 개인적으로 물어봐야 한국 학생들 대답을 해요.
class 에서 자유롭게 발언을 못 하는 거에요. 지적을 해야 말하는 거지.

Teachers should keep making them [students] try and start talking to them. When the students talk, don’t correct them saying, “You’re wrong. Shouldn’t it be ‘is’ not ‘are’?” Just make them feel comfortable. . . . Korean students, even though they want to talk. . even though they have something to say, just say to themselves, “I just won’t say it.” Korean students answer questions when they are asked one-on-one. They can’t freely share their opinions in the class. They only talk when they are called on.

Unjung’s ideal classroom atmosphere was similar to Minjoo’s. In addition, she thought the students needed time just to practice conversations:

편하게 해 주는 선생님….너무 strict 하지 않는 선생님. 편하고, 수업시간
되게 편한 시간. 애들도 많이 없고. 그러고 애들도 되게 편하고, 서로 다 알고

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Teacher who makes kids feel comfortable. . .a teacher who’s not too strict. Really comfortable, the class should be a comfortable time without too many students.

And the kids should feel comfortable. If everyone knows everyone, then they can talk without hesitation. If the class is new and the teacher is strict, then, it’s difficult to talk. . . . A nice, comfortable teacher. If the teacher mixes in jokes, then the kids could crack jokes too. . . . The teacher should be flexible about teaching what he has to teach and still let the kids have conversations with the teacher.

Sukae provided this description of a kind teacher:

제가 생각할 때는 저 같은 사람들한테는 선생님이 조금 더 kindly 하게 오는 게 되게 좋아요. 친절하게 제가 막 말을 하고 싶은데 말을 못할 경우가 되게 많잖아요. 아 이런 표현, 아 답답하잖아요 그러면 선생님이 와 가지고.
In my idea, to [shy] people like me, I would like for teachers to approach me more kindly. You know, there are many instances where I can’t say anything even though I really want to. I need to think of some specific expressions and words, but I can’t and get frustrated. And if the teacher comes to me and asks, “What word? What expression do you need?” Then even if it’s just words, since I can understand some words, I could ask the teacher, “How do I use this word?” If the teacher helps me, I’d be talking without realizing it. But if the teacher gets frustrated and says, “What, what?” then I won’t be able to say anything and go, “Forget it. I won’t do it.”

Byungin, the adjunct professor, said the teacher has to lead the students to talk, but that the students also have to try to talk.

그러니까 선생님들이 그건 해줘야 되요. 그, 길은 보여줘야 되요. 그러니까 계속 자극은 계속 줄야 뿌다는 거죠. 애네가 반응이 없다고 해서 자극을
취야지 애네들이. 조끔 학. 예를 들어 한 단어라도 얘기할 수밖에. 더 말
한마디라도 얘기 하게끔 답변이 나오게끔 만들면 그게 이제 계속 반복된다.
보면 그 친구들도 자연스럽게 쓰잖아 쓰잖아 늘게 되어 있어요. 제가, 그 제
경험상 말씀 드리는... 그러니까, 예를 들어서 뭐에 대해서 딱 질문했는데
 정말 제 질문과 전혀 상관없는 대답을 했어요. OK. 잘했다. 이런 식으로 하고.
근데 그거보다는 이런 쪽이 더 가까운 답일 거다 라고 제가 다시 이제
revise 를 해주고 그러면 그 친구도 이제 나중에는 자기 의견이 틀리더라도
얘기를 해요. 네. 그런 과정들은, 물론 선생님들에 그 역할이 되게 중요한
거조 어떻게 보면. 근데 문제는 그게에 대해서 내가 겪을 먹고 학생의
입장에서 그걸 겪을 먹고 피하면 한도 끝도 없이 피하게 되니까 좀 아 그래
틀려도 틀리면 어때. 그러니까 저번에 말씀하셨죠? 철판을 깔아야 한다 딱
그게 필요한 거에요. 그러니까 그걸. 영어든 한국어든 뭐 다 상관없이 어떤
class 안에서는 선생님과 학생간에는 그 상황이 꺼 있어야 된다고 저는
생각을 해요. 그러니까 학생들도 그런 마음가짐을 키워야 되고 자기 스스로
Teachers have to show the students the way. They have to keep on stimulating the students [to talk]. Just because the students don’t talk doesn’t mean they shouldn’t be stimulated. For example, they should be made to say a word, to say a sentence, and to answer. If they keep repeating that process, they could improve naturally, little by little. That’s from my own experience [of teaching college in Korea]. So, even if the student’s response is totally irrelevant to my question, I should still say, “Ok, good. But, don’t you think it’s closer to this answer?” and revise it for them. Then later, that student would talk even if his opinion is different. Yes, they should go through that process. So the teacher’s role is very important. But the problem is if the student is scared and avoids talking, that could last a while. Even if they are wrong, they need a [nonchalant] attitude of, “So what if I’m wrong?”

As you mentioned last time, they need to have a thick skin. Whether it’s in English or in Korean in any class, between the teacher and the student, this relationship is very important. The students need to think like that and learn to try harder, and the teachers need to bring the students out of their shells by giving them stimuli.

Sukae also suggested a characteristic: “자꾸 얘기할 수 있는 사람?... 유도를 많이 하고… discussion 보다는 선생님이랑 말을 많이 할 수 있는 기회, 질문
A teacher who makes us talk a lot. . . Someone who draws us to talk. . . Teachers who give us many opportunities to talk, more than discussions. A teacher who lets us ask many questions and lets us talk a lot.”

Youngchun, on the other hand, wanted the teacher to ask a lot of questions:

Youngchun: A teacher who asks many questions, and asks us one more time before he goes on to the next problem.

Interviewer: A teacher who talks a lot?

Youngchun: A teacher who talks a lot would be good.

Encouraging teachers. Many students said that teachers who encouraged them helped them gain confidence. For example, Sungho said:
When the teacher says, “Oh, you’re very good. You have insight,” I get really confident. And when the teacher gives me good comments on the report card, I become confident, “Oh, I did well like that.”

Youshin also wanted teachers who encouraged her:

Youshin: A teacher who boosts my confidence?

Interviewer: What, a teacher who praises a lot?

Youshin: Yes, with praise. Because if she says, “You’re so bad,” I would lose more confidence. I don’t think I could even open my mouth. But if I said something and she said, “Oh, good. That’s right,” and approves of me [it would be nice].
Sukae described how an encouraging teacher’s methods worked in her classroom:

There is a female teacher who is so good at drawing out students to talk, “You know that, you know,” and when the kids say something, she praises them unconditionally. She says everything is good. At first, I wondered why she was like that, but it was her teaching style. She didn’t hurt the students’ feelings and kept trying to boost their confidence. And that worked. It really worked.

Hyeri described her favorite teacher as someone who never criticized the students:

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I liked the teacher who helped us help ourselves. That was really respectful. He was really fun, and I loved only his class. I just have all these good words to describe him—friendly and lovely. You know, he was really good at drawing out the students to talk. He was really good at that. So the kids really tried harder, in order not to disappoint him. Even we adults had that, even though we were not kids. That was big. Not to disappoint the teacher’s expectations of us... It had to feel safe for me to answer when someone asked me a question. That, and the teacher wasn’t critical. He was really optimistic. Whatever we answered, he never said we were wrong. I think that was very important. If we were wrong, he would just say, “Good guess!” without hurting our feelings. That was really nice. Of course, we could be wrong. But if the teacher had said, “No!” then we would have been scared and intimidated. How could I have answered the next time?
Sukae described the effects of a teacher who never criticized her mistakes:

I don’t ask questions from fear of being wrong. Because I might be wrong as I ask the question. I am like that. When I’m not sure that I’m right, I don’t ask. . . Last semester, I asked many questions. . . I knew my questions were asked incorrectly, but the teacher never pointed out my mistakes. She never embarrassed me. I think that she never did. Let’s say I asked a question, then she would correct my mistakes in her response, “This should be like this.” Without my being aware of it, she had already corrected my questions.

As these comments from students show, the encouragement was very important for the students to start and keep talking. Hyeri, the violist, mentioned how she actually started studying to please a teacher:
The teacher was really nice. I used to be a student who didn’t study very much. So, the fact that I studied for a test was a big deal. I studied in order not to disappoint the teacher. . . . But when the teacher left, I hated it. It really depended on the teacher. I hadn’t known that before. The warm atmosphere of the class turned cold [when the replacement teacher came].

*Teachers who were fun and gave lots of work.* Students also had a preference for teachers who were fun and those who gave a lot of work.

Sukae described a fun teacher’s class:

다른 한 분은 수업이 너무너무 재미있어요. 너무너무 재미있는데 이 안에 모든 게 다 들어가 있어요. 재미있으면서 가르칠 건 다 가르치는 거야.

수업을 끝나고 나면 웃다가 끝난 것 같은데 다 들어가 있어요. 남는 게
The other teacher’s class was really, really fun. It was really fun, but it had everything in it. Even though it was fun, he still covered everything that he needed to. When the class was over, I felt like I spent the whole class time laughing, but everything was included in it. I was left with a lot after the class. I don’t know exactly what I’ve learned, and I can’t explain accurately.

Some students mentioned good teachers as those who gave them a lot of homework and writing assignments. Nari said:

She should give us a lot of homework because when we get a lot of homework, we have to do all of it. If we get a lot of homework and essays, then, won’t we get a lot of practice writing? They should give us a lot of comments on papers and a lot of opportunities to do presentations.

Sukae described some of the practices of a good teacher she had had:
I think she’s Korean American, but she’s a great teacher. . . . She teaches us, with an emphasis on grammar and makes us write a lot. And during class, she doesn’t allow us to use the dictionary, almost never. She thinks that if we keep looking up words, then we won’t be able to guess the meaning from context. If she gives us a passage to read, she tells us not to look up the words and to just guess from the context. And later, she explains the words and increases our vocabulary. After
that, she teaches us a little grammar. And after that, she tells us to solve the next problem. And while we are solving the problem, she comes around and helps us.

She gives us a lot of writing homework and corrects all of it. That’s her style.

**Bad teachers.** Likewise, the effects of a bad teacher could have a strong effect on students, which might quash their confidence and willingness to take risks. Sukae explained how a critical teacher affected her performance in class:

Sukae: 근데 지금 제가 수업을 듣는데 다른 선생님한테 듣는데요. 이 선생님한테는 제가 질문을 안 해요.

Interviewer: 왜라 해요? 틀렸다고?

Sukae: 네, 그리고 모든 사람들이 집중을 하게 만들어요 저를, 그리고 바꿔 보라고. 근데 그러면 머릿속이 하얗게 되요. 못하겠어요. 저는 그러면 그 다음부터 그 사람한테는 질문을 안 하게 되요.

Interviewer: 근데, 그 중에서, 그래도 질문을 하는 사람은 있어요?

Sukae: 그래도 하긴 하는데, 그 모든 나라 애들이 다 좋아들어요 질문이.

Sukae: I’m taking another class, but I never ask this teacher any questions.

Interviewer: Does he criticize you and say you’re wrong?
Sukae: Yes. And he makes everyone look at me as he tells me to change the sentence. Then my head blanks out. I can’t do it. And next time, I never get to ask him questions.

Interviewer: But, even in that situation, do some people [in the class] ask questions?

Sukae: Some do, but overall, students from every country ask fewer questions.

Hyeri also had had a bad experience with a teacher who criticized her speaking:

Hyeri: 다음 선생님이 그랬어요. 그거 아니라고.

‘NO.’ 그리고 말할 때 항상 sentence 로 얘기하래요. 그게 잘 안 되잖아요.

Interviewer: 단어를 내뱉으면 안되.

Hyeri: 절대 안 되요.

Interviewer: 근데 얘기 못하는 애들도 있잖아요.

Hyeri: 그러니깐요. 그러니까 자기가 다시 해주면 되잖아요. 그거는 대답이 아닙니다. Sentence 가 아니면은. 그 선생님이 이상했어요. 그래서 제가 교육을 그만 두게 된 가장 큰 요인이예요. 그래서 제가 GMU 지겨워졌어요. 진짜. 그 선생님 때문에.

Hyeri: The next teacher told me, that the answer was wrong, “No!” And he always made us say complete sentences. But you know, that’s difficult.
Interviewer: You weren’t allowed to just utter words?

Hyeri: Never.

Interviewer: But some people cannot speak in sentences.

Hyeri: Right. So he should have helped them. But he said it wasn’t the answer, if it wasn’t in a sentence. That teacher was really weird. That was the biggest reason I quit the program. I got tired of the school because of that teacher.

Neutral about teacher types. Some students felt the teacher did not seem to have much influence on student performance. Nari, for example, said:

아니, 그냥 선생님이 가르치는 대로 잘 따라서가면 되요 정말 선생님이

이상하지만 않으면. 그리고 선생님은 선생님이고 저는 따로 제 공부가 있기

때문에. 따로 하는 거고. 학교 공부는 학교 공부고... 칭찬, 칭찬 하면 당연히

좋죠. 누구나 다 칭찬하면 다 자신감이 생기죠 더 막. 그런 게 있고. 누가 막

뭐라 비난하고 뭐라 하면 더 막 이렇게 되잖아요. 사람들이 수그러들고.

칭찬하면 좋은 데,뭐 굿이 칭찬 안 받아도. 그냥 뭐 essay 제출 했을 때 성적

A. 아 A 받았네 좋네. 좋은 grade 그러니까 키분 좋고 다음에 더 열심히 하게

되고. 만약에 B 나 C 받았어도 아 내가 이제 뭐가 문제일까 왜 내가 C 를

받았을까 B 를 받았을까 생각을 하는 거죠.
I mean, all you have to do is just follow what the teacher says, as long as the
teacher isn’t weird. A teacher is just a teacher, but I have what I have to do, so I
do it. School work is school work. . . . Praise? Of course it’s nice to be praised.
Everybody becomes confident after being praised. When somebody criticizes you,
you become diffident, intimidated. Being praised is good. But even without praise,
when I turn in an essay and I get an A, I say, “A, good.” A good grade makes me
study harder next time. Even if I get a B or C, I ask myself, “What is the problem?
Why did I get a B or a C?”

To recapitulate, students mentioned preferring teachers who made them feel
comfortable and those who encouraged them so that they could speak English in class
without feeling afraid or embarrassed. The students wanted these teachers to create an
atmosphere conducive for risk taking in speaking English. These preferred qualities were
always linked to their desire to be able to talk during class. Other types they preferred
were those who made the class fun and those who gave the students a lot of work.
Related to the preferred teacher types, the bad teacher was someone who criticized
students’ speaking for being less than perfect. For some students, teacher type was not
important to improving English speaking.

What the Schools Could Do for Students. On the question of what the schools
could do to help them improve their English speaking, almost all the students mentioned
programs where ESL students could have access to native speakers to come and talk to
them in ESL classes. They seemed to like this idea because they all had had a hard time
meeting native speakers outside of class.
Nari said native speakers had come to her ESL class and she wanted this program to continue:

If the school wants to help [ESL] students, they should arrange for ESL students to meet American students. Last semester in my speaking class, American students came to class once a week. They came for discussions. It was part of [one of] their classes to come to our class, to meet international students and to
talk about their cultures. They came several times. They came once a week and talked to us and wrote a paper about the experience. It was their homework. So, the ESL class provided a chance for ESL students to meet American students.

Youngchun had similar thoughts:

수업 시간에 2-3 명을 데려와서 group 을 좀 말하기를 좀 시켜보는 게 3-4 명에 외국인 한 명. 3-4 명 이렇게 하고. 그냥 뭐 주저 없이 편안하게 free talk… 선생이 할 수 있는 거. 현지인들 데리고 오는 거 말고. 그 club 으로 field trip 을 가는 건 어떨까요? 한번 견학.

Bring two to three students to [ESL] class and make groups for talking. Three to four ESL students to one American. Three to four, and just doing free talk without hesitation, and with comfort. . . . What the teacher could do is to bring American students. Also, how about going on field trips to different clubs at the university?

Byungin also wanted native speakers to come to class and become conversation partners. He was not satisfied with the interactions with student teachers who sometimes came to his class:

설사 아까 말씀하신 대로 어떤 partner 를 해준다고 해도 그 친구들을 뭐 매일 몇 시간씩 막 매일 보는 것도 아니. 그런 기회라는 거는 정말 생활에서 이렇게 부딪히면서 하는 그런 것들이 필요하다고 생각이 되는데, 그래서
Like you’ve said before, even if we get [speaking] partners, we can’t meet them for hours, every day. The opportunities [to speak] mean being exposed to English
in daily life. It’s necessary to do that. So curriculum-wise, if part of the class time could be having students go around the campus with native speakers, or giving them time to discuss, wouldn’t it be more effective? . . Even now, students in master’s or PhD programs of linguistics come to our class and do student teaching, sometimes. But they are here to teach us, so it’s one directional more than a conversation. It helps when they teach us because the pronunciation and words they use are different. The words they say vary from person to person, so it’s good. But it’s a shame that there aren’t many opportunities [for ESL students] to talk.

Youshin agreed this was what schools should do for students:

자꾸 active를 하게끔 chance를 주는 거 맞고요. 음, 아무래도 지금 저회에서는 같은 나라 사람들이 거의 진짜 뮤 동양인과 아랍인과의 차이 이렇게 나뉘져 있잖아요. 그럼 같은 나라 사람들끼리는 대부분, 돌을 수 있는 데를 피해서 이렇게 배치를 시켜주고. 클래스 안에서도 그렇고, 그리고 자꾸 native speaker들을 자꾸 만나게끔 뜨. 왜냐면 저회가 ELI 선생님들이나 그쪽에서 얘기할 때는 서로 대화가 되요. 근데 native 사람 막 만나면 발음을 정확하게 안 해주고, 말을 굉장히 빨리 하고 slang을 쓰고 이러다 보니깐 못 알아 듣는 것도 많아요. 그러니가 선생님들하고 너무 틀리기
They should give us chances to be actively talking. And since the ESL students in our classes are divided into Asians and Arabs, the teachers should have us sit with other nationalities. And they should help us to meet native speakers. When we talk to teachers, we can have conversations, but when we meet native speakers, their pronunciation is not clear and [they speak] very fast with slang so it’s difficult to understand them. They are so different from the ESL teachers. So they should help us meet native speakers and talk to them. The school should provide big sisters where ESL students could meet regular American students, those students who are interested in foreign students. Those students should apply and form big sisters with ESL students and meet with them. When they meet one-on-
one, the ESL students will learn a lot, and can go into the sphere of the native speakers. It would be nice.

To the question of what the schools could do for the ESL students to help them improve English speaking, all the students who answered this question had the same answer: they all wanted a program where native speakers would come to the ESL classes and have conversation time with them. This desire emphasizes how difficult it was for ESL students to meet native speakers outside of class on their own and how much they felt the need to improve English speaking by interactions with native speakers.

Conclusion

With Research Question 4, I sought the students’ thoughts about what they themselves could do to improve their English speaking and, then, what they thought the ESL teachers and ESL programs could do for them in this endeavor. For self-improvement, the students came up with: 1) acknowledging that improvement was the responsibility of the student; 2) having certain attitudes, for example, shamelessness and a thick-skinned mindset; 3) studying grammar, vocabulary, reading, TOEFL, and listening to help with speaking; 4) expanding their daily activities to create more opportunities to meet Americans; and 5) interacting with many Americans to practice speaking English. As the answers indicated, the students felt that there were many things they could do to help themselves become better English speakers in the United States.

ESL teachers the students preferred were those teachers who made them feel comfortable and those who encouraged them so that they could speak English in the class. The students felt that these kinds of teachers created a safe atmosphere for them to take
risks and start talking. Other types they preferred included fun teachers and those who
gave a lot of work. A bad teacher was someone who criticized students’ speaking. For
some students, teacher type was unimportant.

Although the students were interviewed separately, they all came up with the
same suggestion for what schools could do for the ESL students to help them improve
English speaking: create a program where native speakers would come to the ESL classes
to have conversation time with them. Their answer showed that these ESL students
wanted and felt they needed native speakers to come to their classes because it was
difficult for them to interact with Americans on their own outside of class.

Research Question 5: How Have the Students’ Culture and Experiences Influenced
Their Perceptions of Learning English, Especially Speaking?

This question was the culmination of the four previous Research Questions. Since
this research study covered such a broad topic, the experiences with English and
perceptions concerning the language of 10 Korean ESL students in a U.S. university’s
English language institute starting from the time they started learning English in Korea, I
divided it into several smaller Research Questions:

1. Why did these 10 Korean ESL students come to the United States?

2. What are the students’ perceptions of their English speaking and learning in
   Korea, in class and out of class?

3. What are the students’ perceptions of their English speaking and learning in the
   United States, in class and out of class?

4. What do the ESL students think they could do—what would help them—to
improve English speaking in the United States?

However, the key question, in the form of Research Question 5, could be phrased this way: How have the students’ culture and experiences influenced their perceptions of learning English, especially speaking?

By examining the students’ English experiences in Korea and in the US, in and out of school, I hoped to find the reasons for their speaking difficulties and possible solutions to help them improve speaking in the US. The problems that impeded their English speaking in the US included: very little English speaking experience in Korea, difficulties with English as a school subject in Korea, retaining Korean classroom culture in the American classrooms, not making much effort to meet Americans in the US, and socializing with Koreans that impeded their daily English usage.

**Very Few Speaking Experiences in Korea.**

These 10 ESL students reported that in Korea, they had very few opportunities to learn English speaking. Of course, a few students did mention having had English speaking lessons in and outside school, but not for very long or seriously. Korea’s overall English curriculum in schools and hakwons was driven by grammar and reading tests in multiple-choice type questions. Therefore, to these 10 ESL students, English in Korea seemed to have been a very important school subject where good test scores were important, but not a language to be used for communication.

**Difficulties Mastering English in Korea.**

In addition, all 10 interviewees found English, as noted earlier, to be a very difficult subject, which was a large part of the reason most were studying English in the
US at the time. Compared to other subjects they liked or excelled in, such as math and science, they did not do very well in English. Their low grades in English reflected their limited knowledge of the language and added to a lack of confidence in English.

**English speaking cannot be learned in the classroom/Korean classroom culture was brought to the US**

The students had several explanations for their lack of improvement in the U.S. classroom. They seemed to believe that ESL students simply could not improve English speaking in an ESL classroom for a variety of reasons: there was not enough class time to speak and practice English with the teacher or classmates without interrupting the flow of the class and wasting other students’ precious educational time; many felt their own shyness kept them from expressing opinions or comments in class; and many mentioned being conscious of criticisms of their English proficiency, especially from Korean classmates. The Korean characteristics of competitiveness, pride, and perfectionism seemed to block them from taking risks with speaking because they did not want to be wrong or to be embarrassed in front of others. Further, most of the students felt that they could improve their speaking skills by using English with Americans outside of class; however, this idea was not feasible or realistic for these ESL students because Americans did not approach them, and they had few opportunities to meet Americans, let alone interact with them.

In addition, this Korean classroom culture the students brought with them to the US manifested itself outside of school in the way these students studied English. They continued to study grammar, writing, speaking, and the TOEFL with the help of private
tutors or by going to hakwons. Although they were now in the US, they continued to approach English as a school subject, which was to be studied and tested, and not as a tool for communication.

**Not Much Effort to Meet Americans in the US**

Given the reality that it was nearly impossible to meet American friends because Americans did not approach them first, these Korean ESL students also did not seem to make much effort to approach Americans. They gave many reasons why they could not approach Americans first: they were isolated in ESL classes where all their classmates were foreign students; they did not have the means or conversation topics to use to approach random Americans; Americans seemed reluctant to get to know them or seemed uninterested in Koreans; and Americans seemed to think they were superior to Koreans. The Korean students seemed to rationalize their lack of effort to find American friends with such reasons as above. However, it seems that the students did not take advantage of the opportunities to meet Americans that were presented to them. For instance, when the language institute tried to connect ESL students to mainstream students at the university, the Korean ESL students in this study complained that those meetings were useless or ineffective because there were not enough Americans to match the number of ESL students for conversations to start. The Korean students seemed to be demanding, as if they were waiting for the perfect conditions to be in place before speaking English. Another example that illustrates this Korean-centered mentality is the Korean students’ desire for ESL teachers to be sympathetic to them so that they would then feel secure enough to start speaking in English. The students seemed passive, unable to take the
Too Easy to Live as Koreans in the US

The university the interviewees attended was in a region of the US with large Korean and Korean-American populations; the students felt this fact did not help them use or improve their English speaking. It was difficult to balance meeting Koreans with trying to meet Americans who could help them improve their English speaking. The students had to be really determined to learn English if they wanted to go against the flow of Korean collectivism so prevalent in the US university they were attending. As mentioned above, it was really difficult for these Korean students to meet Americans (whether the fault was Americans’ or Koreans’ or both, notwithstanding). In this scenario, the Korean ESL students had the choice to either remain alone, spend more time with non-Korean international students whose English proficiency was similar to these Korean students, or decide to spend almost all their time with other Korean international or Korean American students. The 10 students varied in with whom they chose to spend their time outside of class, but they all mentioned it was very challenging to be either a full member of the Korean group because it meant they were not improving English speaking just as they had done in Korea, but it was also difficult to ignore Koreans because they felt very lonely. Further, not socializing with Koreans meant that these ESL students had to prepare to be stigmatized and criticized by them as being arrogant and annoying for being anti-Korean.

Summary

In the US, many factors continued to make it difficult for Korean ESL students to
improve their English speaking. First, in Korea, the students had had almost no experience speaking English. Second, the students had brought their Korean classroom culture to American classrooms, which made them behave quietly and passively while they listened to teachers’ lectures, just as they had done in Korean schools. In addition, the Korean characteristics of competitiveness, pride, and perfectionism kept them from taking risks and practicing speaking in the classroom because they did not want to be wrong or embarrassed in front of others, especially Koreans. Third, it was really very difficult for the students to meet Americans because Americans did not seem interested in knowing them, and there were almost no opportunities for meeting Americans in a natural way. Finally, there were many Koreans around them. Loneliness or the Korean habit of collectivism pulled these students into the Korean group, making it almost impossible to speak English all day. However, if they chose to avoid Koreans from the fear of not being able to practice speaking English, they risked being called anti-Korean and arrogant by the Korean group.

In conclusion, this study shows that learning and improving English speaking in the US was a very challenging task for these Korean students. Without consciously making tremendous efforts, these students could not improve their English speaking in the US because of their Korean culture, which did not disappear just because they were in a new country. Additionally, the external factors of unapproachable Americans and the very accessible Korean group did not help these students assimilate into American culture where English speaking can be acquired naturally.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Conclusions

Using five research questions, I sought to find the effects of English learning and experiences in Korea and the US, in and out of school, on 10 Korean ESL students’ English speaking skills in a university’s language institute in the United States. The results showed some similarities with what the literature says about Korean (and, more broadly, East Asian) international students’ English oral communications in and outside classrooms, and provided some new insights as well.

Similarities with Previous Research

In the classroom. The students’ descriptions of their classroom behavior in the United States seemed very similar to their reports of their behavior in English class (and other classes) in Korea. It seemed that they had brought the Korean classroom culture to the United States and continued to study and learn English as they had done in Korea, which is what numerous other studies have found (Choi, 1997; Han, 2007; Lee, 2009; Liu, 2001; Morita, 2000). Liu (2001) said beliefs, values, and norms of the home culture in relation to classroom behavior are the main contributor to Asian students’ behavior in the American classrooms. Morita, in her study of Japanese and Chinese TESOL students’ class presentations, found that the participants were behaving in the Canadian classes as they had behaved in classes in their native countries. For instance, Japanese students
found it difficult to answer the teacher’s questions immediately, because in Japanese classes, students usually took time to think before they answered. Chinese students in the same study mentioned how difficult it was to think critically because they had not learned to do so in China. Han (2007), in her study of East Asian international graduate students, concluded that cultural backgrounds inhibited class discussion participation, which affected L2 performance in class. This inhibition served to block new information and positive interactions with the western culture and its educational styles. Similarly, in this study, the typical Korean classroom behavior of quietly listening while taking notes on the teachers’ lectures did not give the students a chance to practice oral communication in English with their teacher or classmates. Most participants in this study and another focusing on Korean college students conducted by Lee and Carrasquillo (2006) mentioned that they did not speak very much in the ESL communications classes and seemed to want the classes to stay in lecture form. Further, the participants in the latter study did not seem to like many interruptions from students’ comments, similar to students Bang (1999) studied who mentioned that they were concerned about wasting their classmates’ class time by speaking too much. The participants in this study said that they could ask the teacher questions after class. They also seemed frustrated at how much time was wasted with what they viewed as the “irrelevant” or “stupid” questions of their classmates. Related to this behavior was the prevalent belief that it was not possible to learn English speaking in the classroom (Liu, 2000). Maybe students held this belief because they were not used to speaking very much in the classroom, even in Korean schools. Many students mentioned that Korean students did not know how to carry on
discussions in the classroom because they had never learned this skill in Korea (Bang, 1999), even in college. Discussion format classes start in master’s programs in Korea; it is not surprising, then, that these students could not participate in discussions in a second language.

This lack of oral participation in the class seemed to stem partially from Korean students’ consciousness about speaking English in front of Korean classmates (Bang, 1999; Lee, 2009; Yu, 2007). Yu (2007) said Korean students in her study felt shame speaking English in front of other Koreans because they felt they could not rise above the expectations of their fellow Koreans or felt that Koreans were criticizing their English. Many of the participants in this study also thought that their English would be judged and criticized by other Koreans because in Korea, they had been compared based on their midterm and final scores and categorized based on what college they had graduated from (Card, 2005; Seth, 2002; Sorensen, 1994). Many students mentioned how Koreans hated to make mistakes in front of others because of the need for chaemyun (face saving) and being compared. One participant, Byungin, said this fear of mistakes was the effect of the gentleman scholar described in Confucianism who could not show his discomforts in front of others because he always had to stay calm and collected before others. Other students said that Korean students grew up being compared to other children from when they were little. They went to hakwons (after school academies) if neighborhood children went. Mothers exchanged information and got nervous when they felt their children were behind other children in terms of academics or extra-curricular activities (Park & Abelmann, 2004). Mothers caught a “fever” for English for their children as early as
kindergarten. From then on, English was a very competitive school subject, becoming even more stressful when the students did not do well, as all 10 participants shared. In addition, they seemed to lack confidence and tended to underestimate their English proficiency. In Confucianist societies like Korea, where humility is a virtue, people are very sensitive about not appearing to brag. Those who bragged were stigmatized as being shallow (Lee, 2009; Park, 2009). The participants of my study were also attuned to how the teachers viewed them, just like the students in Bang’s (1999) study.

**Outside the classroom.** Outside of class, the participants in this study exhibited Korean classroom behavior and methods of studying English. Instead of approaching English as a language of communication, they continued to view it as a school subject they needed to master for good grades and test scores. Although they hardly spoke English in their daily lives, many participants said that they had hired private tutors or attended hakwons for TOEFL preparation or practice writing, grammar, and speaking to supplement the English lessons at the language institute in the United States. This scenario was very similar to that of Lee’s (2010) group of middle school students from kirogi families (families that separate so the children could be educated in a foreign country, with the mothers accompanying the children while the fathers remain in Korea to work and send money) studying in the US. Lee found that these students continued to be busy after school in the US because of all the extra classes they had to take (e.g., private tutoring in English). Similarly, my participants continued to view English as a school subject even though they had come to the United States to learn to use the language for communication, in a natural setting surrounded by English speakers. In
addition, except for one, all of the students were not actively seeking ways to meet Americans. In addition to hakwons and classes, students tried to learn English by watching American TV as they had done in Korea. In short, little had changed in their approach to studying English although both the countries and the mode of English instruction (from EFL, English as a Foreign Language, to ESL, English as a Second Language) were different.

Another factor that led to difficulties in improving English speaking, the students reported, was that it was almost a near impossibility, especially since they were isolated in ESL classes, to meet native speakers of English who might even eventually become their friends. Schmida’s (2004) study mentioned that ESL students could not shed the image of a group to be dismissed by the mainstream because of the ESL label. This image, they thought, barred them from being approached by Americans. Likewise, the students in my study could not meet Americans when they were isolated and taking classes with other ESL students. As a result, my Korean students reported spending a lot of time with other Koreans like the Koreans in these studies (Hurh & Kim, 1984; Jeong, 2004; Myles & Cheng, 2003). They seemed to seek help from each other for everyday life, such as studying together or giving rides to each other to attend church; they fulfilled their social needs by being with other Koreans for partying, bowling, or going on picnics. This situation is very similar to that described by Myles & Cheng (2003) for a group of international students in Canada who did not really try to meet native speakers and, instead, sought information about the new country from people of the same ethnic group. Jeong (2004) also found that Korean international students tended to stay within their
ethnic group, especially the church, to get information about daily life and for social well-being. Hurh & Kim (1984) studied 615 Korean immigrants and found that Koreans tended to have “strong and pervasive ethnic confinement [that] remained unaffected,” no matter how long the immigrants have lived in the US.”

**Hard to break into American culture.** My findings here are similar to those of Lee (2005) and Duff (2001). Like Lee (2005), I found that students had difficulty interacting with Americans because of cultural distances such as differences in norms for interactions with roommates in dorms, or, as Duff (2001) discusses, lack of common discourse for discussions. Duff’s study (2001) described how East Asian students who had lived for several years in Canada could not participate in content class discussions because they did not have the discourse of Canadian pop culture, even though they spoke English and did well academically. Duff’s (2001) study looked at immigrants. If that population had problems assimilating into Canadian culture, how much more difficult would it be for participants in this study, whose time in the US ranged from two months to one year, to assimilate into the new country? This lack of commonalities or even opportunities to meet and start talking to Americans seemed to have been a problem for the ESL students in this study. They said they had almost no opportunities to meet American students and that they hoped to meet them in the future when they took major classes. In the meanwhile, many students in my study mentioned, as did participants in Lee’s study (2005), that it was easier to interact with other foreign international students in their ESL classes than with Americans. Some of the students preferred to learn English by speaking with Americans who would be able to teach them correct pronunciation and
grammar. However, others felt it was good to speak English with other non-Korean international students, because they felt comfortable being with people in a situation similar to their own. My participants said they could work on fluency with international students and then practice, using their improved English, with Americans later on.

**Preferred teacher types.** As Kim (2007) and Lim (2003) found in their work, many of my interviewees mentioned their ideal teacher types to be kind, empathic teachers who encouraged them to talk in the classroom. This finding was apparent in descriptions of teachers they had encountered who were not kind. Two students, specifically, explained how teachers could bar them from orally participating in class. One student described how she completely lost interest in the class when her original, encouraging, teacher was replaced by another whose behavior discouraged interaction. The second student, Sukae, said she became completely silenced when her teacher embarrassed her by bluntly correcting her or not understanding what she was trying to say. To shy and diffident Korean students, teachers’ roles are very important in either nurturing or stifling future speakers.

**Findings That Go Beyond the Literature**

In addition, I found several new factors not discussed in the literature that impeded these students’ learning English speaking in the United States.

First, because it was very difficult for these 10 participants to meet and approach Americans who might eventually become their friends, they wanted Americans to approach them. Many of the students suggested the ESL program could bring American students into their ESL classes as conversation partners. Even though these students had
said that they did not think they could practice English speaking in the classroom with the teachers because of logistics, they still wanted enough American students to come visit them so that they could have one-on-one discussions with them. Even though the language institute had provided such meetings for ESL students outside of class, the participants did not find the meeting satisfactory or productive because there were not enough Americans for all the ESL students to get equal conversation time. These participants wanted ample time to practice English.

Second, these Korean students seemed to have set up, almost unconsciously, many requirements that had to be met before they would start speaking English: they felt they needed to speak with native speakers, as friends, not in a classroom but in a fun and natural setting such as a party. Some students wanted “higher level” English such as that used for presentations; good pronunciation; and slang that only the native speakers knew. Without seeming to try harder on their own to meet and make American friends, these Korean students seemed to passively wait for things to happen. For instance, about six participants mentioned that they had thought they would become fluent almost as soon as they touched the American soil. All six students envisioned their American lives very similarly. I do not understand where they got this unrealistic picture of speaking fluent English as soon as they arrived in this country. If they could not speak English even after six or more years of English lessons in Korea, albeit in grammar and reading lessons, how could they expect to become fluent after only a few months? Perhaps their unrealistic expectation came from movie descriptions of life in a foreign country, glamorous and exciting. Additionally, some students wanted specific kinds of English
such as that used for presentations. The professor, Byungin, came to improve his English speaking, especially for scholarly presentations in Korea. However, he had no means to learn or practice this presentation type English. All he had available to him were an eight-year-old neighbor or other non-Korean international students in his ESL classes. But with them, he was limited to everyday topics. At his older brother’s home in the US, he had hoped to converse in English with his Korean-American sister-in-law who was an ESL teacher. However, he realized that he felt too embarrassed to use English with her because he felt his English was poor and he was inhibited by the formal relationship of a younger brother-in-law and an older sister-in-law. Because of his chaemyun (face saving), Byungin lost the perfect opportunity to practice English, the very reason for his stay in the US. Other students had similar scenarios where, for example, they wanted good, unaccented, pronunciation before they could start speaking English. With so many prerequisites, it seemed very unlikely that they could ever start talking in English. Such prospects or lack thereof frustrated me, an ESL teacher, and I felt it would be very difficult for these Korean ESL students to start speaking in English.

Third, according to the participants, too many Koreans in and out of the classroom made it difficult for them to speak English even in the US. It was very challenging for these Korean ESL students to use English in daily life because they could not meet Americans who could have provided modeling of correct English. The best options for them at the time were classmates, both Korean and non-Korean. But it was difficult for them to use English with and in front of their Korean classmates because they were embarrassed or frustrated at their inability to fully express themselves in
English. When in small groups with other non-native, non-Korean speakers, the Koreans forced themselves to use English, out of courtesy for the others. However, once they left the classroom, even such short conversations in English were uncommon. Unless they lived in dorms, meeting Americans was rare. The students’ descriptions indicate that they each spent varying amounts of time with Koreans. Some seemed to be with other Koreans all day, studying, partying, or going on picnics. Certainly, it was difficult to avoid Koreans because Koreans, as an ethnic group, are accustomed to doing things together, especially when feeling lonely in a foreign country. If some Koreans did not socialize with them, the big Korean group talked negatively about them as being arrogant.

My participants can be roughly categorized into three types: 1) those who did not seem to care about what other Koreans thought of them, 2) those who felt they had to join the big group because they were lonely by themselves or they did not want the others to talk badly about them, and 3) those who felt it was necessary to keep the Korean link intact because these Koreans were people they could meet again in Korea when they returned after the language program was over. (These students had an ideal plan of how to balance their time between Koreans and Americans, but they seemed to realize the plan would be very difficult to execute.)

Finally, it seemed that for many of the 10 Korean ESL students, the ability to speak English was a skill they seemed to need to take back to Korea. Of course, two students specifically said that they wanted to live in America, but most students mentioned that they needed English to live in Korea, to improve their social status through better jobs and to gain the respect and envy of other Koreans. As Park and
Abelmann (2004) describe, English, in this sense, seemed to have a global and local meaning. In fact, the students seemed to want to learn English, but not necessarily to learn the American culture that came with the language. In her study of Korean EFL students’ beliefs about language learning, Truitt (1995) learned that Korean students wanted to learn English, but not to converse with native speakers; there was a desire to know English but not to know Americans. In my study, in response to questions about living as Americans, no one had plans to assimilate completely as Americans, even the ones who wanted to live in America permanently. They wanted to retain a Korean identity and learn about the American culture. These participants mentioned that most Korean students at the language institute were here to have a good time in America for a few months. They said that they were not serious about learning English. It almost seemed as though they were here in the US to get that language certificate to prove that they had been here. One participant, Minjoo, specifically mentioned that she was here in the US for the certificate and that she realized she could not become fluent in English in one year. Two students, Youngchun and Youshin, specifically said that they had to come to America to be able to live in Korea. Youngchun was about to enter a Chinese university when his father in Korea commanded him to get an American education and English fluency so he could live a successful life in Korea. Youshin, who had come from Argentina, since her family had immigrated to that country, wanted to go live in Korea. However, after researching what she needed to prepare to study and live in Korea, she came to the conclusion that she needed English, which is why she was here in the US. Other participants did not get into the colleges that they wanted in Korea, so they came to
the US to go to college and to learn English. Eight of my participants planned to return to Korea with good English skills. But, this idea of returning to Korea, or needing English for Korea, did not seem to make them desperate enough to learn English for itself. Of course, they did say they wanted to learn English to the best of their abilities, but at the same time, although they needed English for external reasons—to get a good job in Korea—they did not seem to make much effort to learn it. Further, they did mention that English was not needed for everyday life in Korea. In fact, they needed English to get hired by a good company; in this light, English was almost reduced to being an ornament, something to shine on a résumé.

**Limitations**

Limitations of this study include the small number of participants, so the results cannot be generalized to all Korean international students taking ESL classes in a U.S. university. More students in the study would have resulted in more varied answers. Further, all 10 students mentioned having had problems with English as a school subject in Korea. Nine students said they did not like English as a subject in Korea, and they all feared English because it did not bring them good results in school. If the participants had been different, those who enjoyed and were good at English, the results could have been very different.

There were hardly any opportunities to talk to the teachers of these students to hear their views on the students’ behavior in the classrooms. The teachers’ perspective could have been used to compare what the students actually did, to what they said they did. Had I had the opportunity to get to know the teachers, I would have asked them to let
me observe their classes about three times each. These observation notes could have added to richer data and triangulation.

If the ESL communications classes had been discussion-type classes, I would have had the opportunity to see the participants in action or not, in front of Korean classmates and other ethnicities. Because these were ESL communications classes, perhaps the teachers felt the students did not have enough English to make discussions worthwhile. Many teachers approach ESL students from the teachers’ perspective, seeing students without much language ability and also lacking in content, but this is not the case. Students have to be given more chances to use the language because language improves with more practice (Swain, 2005).

More interview time over a longer time frame could have helped to validate or invalidate some of the themes. With more time to talk to the participants, I could have gotten to know the students and their situations better, so that I could have had a clearer grasp of their perceptions and daily scenarios involving English usage.

**Recommendations**

What are some things that an ESL department of a university could do to help Korean (or other East Asian) students speak more English in and outside class? First, the ESL program should incorporate more opportunities for these students to practice English within the classroom because English speaking improves through speaking (Lee, 2005; Murphy, 1991; Swain, 2005). The participants of this study barely had any opportunities to speak English in the classroom or outside, so the ESL program should at least ensure the classroom is one place where students can get some speaking practice every day.
Second, language institutes should facilitate more communication with other areas of the university to help connect ESL students to Americans. For example, American “buddies” could be recruited to shadow and spend time with these international students for at least one semester to a year to help them adjust to the new culture while learning to speak English. As another example, the language institute, in coordination with the university, could help find the right type of roommates (those students who are interested in Korean culture) for these students. Having sympathetic roommates that are interested in diverse cultures could help Korean ESL students learn how to make friends with Americans. Another possibility would be to bring native English speakers from content classes for discussions (content classes such as TESL, multicultural education, history, or sociology would be optimal because those students would be more open to different cultures) with Korean ESL students to share life stories and culture. There should be enough students so that these conversations could be one-on-one because Korean students do not do well in large groups where they often feel neglected. The universities could also help Korean ESL students connect to university clubs, such as Korean-American clubs or religious clubs, since these ESL students are not well aware of how to access the resources. ESL teachers could also incorporate extra-curricular activities into the grading system.

The ESL program could create classes with a specific focus that fit the needs of Korean students, such as: formal academic content presentation-type classes (for professors or other professionals); discussion classes in all sizes and formats (small group or whole class); and speaking exercises such as presentations, speeches, skits, and debates.
What can teachers do for Korean ESL students? Teachers should learn about Korean culture (Lee & Carrasquillo, 2006) and about English education in Korea so that they would be better informed on how to help these students achieve English fluency. Additionally, the teachers should be aware of the students’ goals and whether they will be returning to Korea after a short-term language program or staying longer for degree programs (Seo & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). Students who are in the US for a short-term language program need more help faster to improve their English speaking skills. However, the students who are planning on pursuing a degree after the ESL program have more time and opportunities to acquire English, so the teacher could know which ones to help more and how. By being offered many speaking opportunities, ESL students could benefit (Murphy, 1991). These speaking exercises should be graded so that the students take the work involved more earnestly. In order for students to know how to speak in the class, they should be taught the appropriate rules of discourse used in the US. Further, teachers should know what students expect of them (McCargar, 1993) so that they can create and maintain better teacher-student relationships.

**Future Research**

In the future, it would be useful to study Korean students’ interactions with other Koreans outside or even inside the classroom. Research (Bang, 1999; Yu, 2007) indicates that for many Koreans, other Koreans are a barrier to their endeavors to start speaking English. Specific observations of Koreans interacting with other Koreans could inform research on nonverbal tensions among these different people and perhaps lead to guidance to minimize such tensions so Koreans could get more out of their ESL classes.
Another topic could be observation of Korean students in their interactions with Americans outside of the class (e.g., in university clubs) to study what could help them to start talking with this target population with less fear and embarrassment.

Ideally, a longitudinal study following these 10 Korean ESL students’ English speaking journey would be very informative and fruitful. Observing how their lives as international students (or even as immigrants, for some) unfold over time with respect to their English speaking skills would reveal whether they learn to acculturate or, rather, congeal permanently into the periphery of American society among other Koreans.

Another worthwhile study would be to study Korean international students who have succeeded in learning to speak English fluently in a fairly short time to determine what factors contributed to that accomplishment. A similar study of Korean students who have successfully learned to speak English in Korea (without leaving the country) would also be useful. For many students in Korea, an international education is not financially feasible, so such a study could result in findings that could help them acquire English speaking proficiency in Korea.

Finally, experimental studies of discussions for Korean students would be very informative. What factors can help them start talking in class? For instance, is it useful for teachers to provide help with content preparations by giving students reading and discussion materials before class (Bang, 1999; Han, 2007; Liu, 2001; Yin, 2009)? What might lead to students withdrawing into their shells even if the pre-class materials have been provided? By studying Korean students’ discussion preferences and formats, better programs can be developed to meet the specific needs of this cultural group.
In conclusion, Korean students need to have a good grasp of English grammar and reading to get into college. Towards that goal, the students study English intensively for many years to prepare well for the all-important test, the CSAT. However, after college, this struggle with English is not over because students have to prepare for the next step to success in their lives, employment. Prospective employers, just as the colleges had done, rate college graduates by yet another English criterion: oral communication skills. Therefore, to succeed in finding a good job, college graduates have to start on yet another path to mastering English, the TOEIC or TOEFL. To achieve that goal, many of them go abroad to language programs in English-speaking countries. However, the fact that they are in a different country does not significantly change the way Korean students have been learning English, for at least six years. But if the student, the student’s ESL program, and the ESL teachers could make specific accommodations, detailed in this study, to help the student start speaking English, the student can learn to speak English. The path is not easy, but it is feasible.
Interview Questions

Interview 1 (Day 1)

1. General

- Describe your background (family, education, and hobbies before coming to the United States) (to get a sense of the student as a whole).

2. Experiences with English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Korea

- in schools (elementary, middle, high, and university)

*What methods did your EFL teachers use to teach English in Korea?
*How did the students learn English as a foreign language (What and how were they expected to learn)? (Were they expected to memorize grammar rules and vocabulary? What activities/assignments were commonly used as part of the English lessons?)
*How did the students respond to the EFL methods and requirements?

- Outside of school
- hakwon (How was English taught? Who taught English?)
- private tutoring (How did it go?)
- self teaching (books, TV, movies, newspaper/magazine, cassette tapes)?
- any special circumstances for learning English? (jobs, family situations, foreign friends, pen pals, study abroad, travels?)

3. Korean culture and oral English proficiency
   
   * How do you feel about all the efforts that Koreans put into learning English?
   * Why do you think they want to learn English?
   * As a Korean, why do you want to learn English?

   * How do you think Koreans can learn to speak English most effectively?
   * How do you think the Korean culture and societal norms influence how you develop your oral English proficiency?

Interview 2 (Day 2)

1. Experiences with English in America
   
   - in class
     
     * ESL classes at school
     
     - teachers
     
     - Korean classmates
-foreign classmates

*Any other classes besides ESL?

-outside experiences with English

*when (activities related to classes, social events, daily routines)?

*w/whom (Americans, international students, Korean Americans, Korean international students)?

*where (dorm, church/mosques/temple, clubs, chores, jobs?)

2. Differences in ESL and EFL settings

What are the differences/similarities in how you learned to speak English as a foreign language in Korea compared to how you are learning it now in the US?

-Goals for learning to speak English?

-inside of class (differences between Korean English language teacher methods and expectations vs. U.S. English language teacher)

-outside of class (no oral English practice in Korean EFL settings; surrounded by English in ESL settings)

-What were your expectations about learning to speak English before you came to the US and how are they similar to or different from the current reality?

-What current problems/issues, in the US, do you have in learning to speak
English well?

3. General Ideas about Language Speaking

How do you feel while you are speaking English? In class? Outside of class?

-Confidence

*How would you describe your confidence in English speaking?

*How do you feel when your ESL teacher calls on you in class?

*What helps you to gain confidence in English speaking?

*What kind of identity do you have as an ESL speaker? (a minority student with an insufficient oral English proficiency? Bilingual student who speaks both languages quite well? Bilingual student strong in one, but communicatively competent, in the other? Reluctant English speaker “forced” to learn English because it’s the world’s language? Practical learner of English to use it as a tool to navigate in this global world?)

-Goals (Motivations)

*What motivates you to speak English in class?

*What do you want to accomplish through this ELI program?

*What level of oral proficiency do you want to reach as an English speaker?

*How will you do that?
*What are some issues about English that interest you?

-General thoughts on second language learning

*What do you think it means to know English as a second language? (Is being proficient in reading and writing enough? Is being orally proficient a must?)

*How important is speaking English as a second language to you?

*How do you feel about English?

*Do you think learning to speak English requires you to assimilate into American culture (having American friends, watching American TV, living like other Americans)? Why or why not?

-Tips on improving speaking

*In what ways is learning English hard for you? Why?

*What helps you to learn English? (What could your teacher or classmates do to help you learn to speak better? What can you do to speak more outside of class?)
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BIOGRAPHY

Grace S. Kim graduated from McLean High School, McLean, Virginia, in 1984. She received her Bachelor of Arts in history from University of Virginia in 1988. She worked in Fairfax County as an ESL teacher from 1992 to 1997, and received her Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction from George Mason University in 1994. She worked as an EFL professor in Handong Global University in Pohang, South Korea from 2000 to 2004. She returned to the US and has been teaching college ESL until present.