

## Barriers to English Communication at the Korean EFL Adult Level

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This paper is a qualitative and quantitative study. The main purpose of the paper is to diagnose what makes English communication difficult at the Korean EFL adult level. In order to obtain data, this study employed interviews and a questionnaire. We identified thirty three factors blocking pathways to oral communication. Qualitative analysis repeatedly revealed patterns such as lack of grammar, lack of vocabulary, lack of background knowledge, and peer pressure, but quantitative analysis yielded somewhat different results: lack of colloquial expressions, lack of vocabulary, lack of various topics, problems in the educational system, difficulty in using existing knowledge, and lack of grammar. Findings which were common to both qualitative and quantitative analyses suggest that lack of linguistic knowledge and lack of background knowledge are major barriers learners encounter in communication. On the basis of the results, suggestions are made for overcoming these barriers.

[communicative competence/speaking/barriers to communication,  
의사소통능력/말하기/의사소통 저해요소]

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The importance of English communication has been increasing in Korea. In order to meet this social need, Korean EFL educators and researchers have been making constant efforts to help learners develop communicative competence. Despite such efforts, it is observed that a large number of Korean EFL learners still have difficulty in communication. A more serious problem lies in the fact that many learners at the university or higher level do not have a basic level of communicative ability even after at least six years experience of formal English education in middle and high schools. This motivates research on the diagnosis of why Korean EFL adult speakers have communication difficulties.

In L2 research, relatively little attention has been given to exploring what makes communication difficult. Without doubt, diagnosing learner difficulties in communication is a prerequisite to presenting communicative skills and activities. In the communicative classroom, the following questions should be taken into account: Are communicative classrooms managed considering learners' communicative difficulties?; Are communicative activities and skills designed on the basis of diagnosis of learner difficulties?; Are they devised and utilized in such a way to overcome such difficulties? These questions underscore the fundamental importance of the diagnosis of learner difficulties as a starting point for getting closer to the path of progress in communication. Thus, this paper aims to investigate various factors causing communication difficulties among Korean EFL adult learners.

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Since Hymes (1972) coined the notion of communicative competence, enormous energy has been devoted to further developing this notion in several directions: defining and redefining the construct of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Bachman, 1990); expounding on the nature of communicative approaches (Brown, 2001); offering a variety of communicative techniques and activities (Klippel, 1984; Nolasco & Arthur, 2001); exploring communication

strategies (Dornyei, 1995; Jung, 2000); devising communication-oriented syllabi (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983; Wilkins, 1994).

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to detail these elements, there are several studies in Korean EFL settings which are related to the present study. Earlier, Pae (1984) provided a list of factors detrimental to learning speaking: word order difference; the use of English not as a second language, but as a foreign language; teachers' neglect of oral drills; the cultural climate surrounding Korean students, and classmates' intolerance of erroneous expressions; unfavorable educational facilities; vague and narrow goals for speaking skills. Although Pae's ideas are intuitively appealing, they were not based on empirical research, and fail to reflect what learners think.

Kim (1987) explored why Koreans do not speak English well. After diagnosing the poor performance of Korean students, he presented three factors which lead to a poor speaker: lack of experiences using spoken English strategically; the failure to expand learners' psycho-linguistically manageable units up to the stage of connected discourse; the failure to increase to an average of six the number of words in an average breath unit of two words. According to Kim (1987), these three factors are characteristic of the ESL acquisition processes of a successful learner. His study focused solely on psycholinguistic factors at the expense of other possible factors such as sociocultural and affective factors. Because of this, it is harder to draw a well-rounded picture of difficulties of EFL students in communication. It is also important to note that the ESL acquisition process is not always synonymous with the EFL process.

More recently, Ahn (1993) stated that it is not desirable to attribute reasons for difficulties in communication solely to such factors as exam-centered classroom education, large classes, lack of communication-centered textbooks, or teacher's poor communicative competence. Instead he argued that it is important to provide natural input for improving learner communication ability. While his study underlines the importance of input, providing theory-based insights, it does not reflect learner voices as to why they have difficulties in communication.

Research reflecting learner voices concerning difficulties in oral interaction was carried out extensively by Park (2004a, 2004b). His participants nominated

sociocultural, institutional, psychological, and linguistic factors as hampering their current learning process. His major finding throughout several studies revealed that sociocultural factors are the greatest obstacles to oral interaction. His studies had methodological advances over the previous studies in that he employed qualitative research tools, Nvivo 2 and NUD\*IST 4, which facilitate data analysis, especially for capturing repeated patterns in the data. His research basically used a qualitative approach. Cohen (1996) emphasized the importance of a multimethod approach, noting that “any one method would not assess the entirety of the behavior in question” (p. 390). Hence, the present study employs not only a qualitative approach but also a quantitative approach in an effort to capture a more complete picture of learner difficulties in communication.

### III. METHOD

#### 1. Subjects

##### 1) Interview Subjects

The interview respondents totaled 11 (3 males; 8 females). Most were enrolled at a private language institute to take English conversation classes. Since the classes aimed at the adult level, all attendants were at the university level or above.

Table 1 provides a profile of the 11 learners who responded to the interview. Their ages and majors vary, ranging from 19 to 54 on the one hand and ranging from English to engineering on the other. Some were students, while others already had jobs. Only two of them had been to English speaking countries. Seven of them had opportunities to speak with native speakers of English on a weekly basis. As far as their proficiency is concerned, the interview participants responded that their perceived proficiency level was relatively low (a mean of 2.1 out of 5). Only one (#11 CSM<sup>1)</sup>) obtained a high score of 620 on the TOEFL test.

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1) Throughout this paper, the number and the abbreviated letters indicate the identification of the interview participant.

**TABLE 1**  
**Background of Interview Participants**

Informants	Sex	Age	Major	Occupation	Length	Length	Frequency/ speaking per week
					1 year	2 month	
1 KMH	F	34	English	clerk	15		3 3
2 JTY	M	28	Engineering	student	8		1 1
3 JES	M	41	Engineering	office worker	10		1 1
4 LJH	F	40	French	office worker	8	9	4 none
5 BHN	F	20	English	student	6		2 1
6 AHW	F	28	History	student	17		3 1
7 KKA	F	41	Education	office worker	8		2 1
8 HJA	F	19	English	student	6		2 2
9 LSJ	F	54	Sociology	businessman	10		1 none
10 WOJ	F	38	Education	office worker	8		1 none
11 CSM	M	47	Sociology	teacher	20	10	4 none

Length 1: Length of English study

Length 2: Length of stay in English speaking countries

Frequency/speaking: Frequency of speaking with L2 speakers

## 2) Questionnaire Survey Subjects

Unlike the qualitative approach, the quantitative approach required a large number of subjects. A total of 132 participated in the survey, females (83; 63%) outnumbering males (49; 37%). Age averaged 23, since many were university students. The vast majority were English majors (118; 89.4%), non-English majors being 14 (10.6%). The average length of English study was a little more than 9 years. They did not have many chances to speak English with native speakers (less than 1 hour per week).

## 2. Data Collection

### 1) Interview Data

Interviews were conducted individually out of class. They were conducted in Korean because the learners' imperfect English might have limited the information they intended to provide. The interview began with their current state of English communication: their attitude, the frequency and amount of time spent in contacts with native speakers, their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with communication classes.

The interviews were semi-structured. We prepared some structured questions: 'Do you think you are active or passive in communication?'; 'Do you feel it is difficult or easy to communicate in English?'; 'What makes English communication difficult in your case?'; 'What do you usually do when you have a communication problem?', etc. We used the earlier interviews to generate new interview questions and provide directions for subsequent ones (Li, 1998). However, we never confined ourselves to such ready-made questions but rather "had sufficient freedom to digress and probe far beyond the answers to the prepared standardized questions" (Berg, 1989, p. 17). As the interviews became more self-disclosing, we began a more in-depth approach in which we asked specific questions to the interviewee's responses in order to elicit more detailed information. Whenever interviewees were passive in the interviews, we went one step further to employ a kind of retrospective approach: They were encouraged to look back on communication classes or experiences they had had before and tell what they spoke, acted, felt, or experienced during communicative interactions. In the process of the interviews, we neither interrupted nor stopped them mainly because we believed it important to listen to what learners think, not to orient them toward what we think.

### 2) Questionnaire Data

The questionnaires (see Appendix) were distributed to about 200 learners, but 132 copies were finally collected because many did not return the completed questionnaire. The survey was administered not only in class with cooperation

of the instructors, but also out of class, visiting and meeting adult-level learners.

The questionnaire was written in Korean to avoid possible confusion. It is important to note at this point that the themes and coding categories in the questionnaire emerged from an examination of the interview data rather than being determined beforehand and imposed on the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

The finally constructed questionnaire consisted of two parts: part I, with 10 demographic questions; part II, with 34 questions involving potential obstacles to communication. All questions except for the last involved five-point Likert scale where the participants were asked to choose one: 1 strongly disagree; 2 disagree; 3 neutral; 4 agree; 5 strongly agree. The last question was an open-ended question where the informants were invited to write additional comments on any inhibitors to communication other than those provided in the questionnaire.

### 3. Data Analysis

All the interviews were taped and transcribed. We read and reread the interview transcripts to draw a picture of the learner responses. In this process, we “identified and noted recurrent themes and salient comments” (Li, 1998, p. 685) in regard to the detrimental factors to oral interaction. These themes were then subsumed under overall categories with many sub-categories.

For the questionnaire survey, on the other hand, mean scores were calculated after the count of all the factors according to the categories.

## IV. RESULTS

### 1. Qualitative Analysis

From the qualitative analysis six domains were identified: linguistic, schematic, cognitive, affective, and interactional domains, and each domain subsumes several sub-categories, as presented in Table 2.

**TABLE 2**  
**Frequency of Factors Inhibiting Communication**  
**Identified from the Interviews**

Domain	Individual Items	Frequency
Linguistic	1. lack of grammar	15
Domain	2. word order	14
	3. lack of vocabulary	16
	4. lack of colloquial expressions	6
	5. poor pronunciation	4
	6. L2 speakers don't understand L1's speaking	11
	7. L1 speakers don't understand L2's speaking	9
	8. speaking speed	6
	Schematic	9. lack of various topics
Domain	10. lack of knowledge about a topic	13
	11. lack of L2 culture	6
	12. cultural differences between L1 and L2	3
Cognitive	13. thinking in L1 and speaking in L2	9
Domain	14. cognitive differences between L1 & L2	6
	15. difficulty in using existing knowledge	11
	16. thinking too much	7
	17. adult's abstract thinking process	4
Affective	18. introversion	4
Domain	19. lack of risk-taking	8
	20. anxiety	6
	21. self-esteem	2
	22. lack of motivation	6
Interactional	23. few chances to speak with L2 speakers	8
Domain	24. speaking in class vs. out of class	8
	25. speaking with L1 vs. L2 speakers	4
	26. being overwhelmed by proficient learners	8
	27. teacher's evaluation	13
	28. peer's evaluation	14
	29. making mistakes	10
	30. frequent error corrections	2
	Others	31. lack of time and money
	32. problems in the educational system	7
	33. lack of early English education	3



The frequency in the table indicates the number of situations the participants mentioned involving the individual items. It was observed that some participants mentioned one or more of these items, and some items more than once. Since a qualitative analysis pays attention to repeated patterns (Park, 2003), our discussion focuses on three major domains, linguistic, schematic, and interactional, which subsume very frequently occurring items from the interviews.

### 1) Linguistic Domain

The linguistic domain involves learners' communication difficulties resulting from deficiency in grammatical competence according to Bachman's (1990) notion. All the participants except for CSM talked about word order difference, lack of grammar, and lack of vocabulary, as manifested in the following comments:

- (1) When I speak in English, I have to think about how I should put many words together because English word order is different from Korean word order.<sup>2)</sup> (#4 LJH)
- (2) I have many cases where I give up speaking because I don't know particular words. I don't know words which can be used in daily conversation. (#6 AHW)
- (3) I feel frustrated because I lack basic grammar knowledge. Because of this, I cannot improve my English including speaking, reading, etc. (#1 KMH)

These respondents felt that vocabulary and grammar, including word order, considerably influence their process of communication. In particular, AHW complained that her English classes focused heavily on words for reading skills. JES went a step further to ask the researcher how to improve basic grammar in English, saying that grammar is a really hard nut to crack. It was also observed, though less frequently, that the participants except for KKA were struggling hard with listening problems. These observations taken together

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2) Throughout this paper we literally translated what the participants uttered in Korean into the English version without making their expressions better.

indicate that the learners felt the barrier of linguistic knowledge very high in their communicative interactions.

## 2) Schematic Domain

The schematic domain refers to background knowledge ranging from a topic based on prior experiences through cultural knowledge. This domain was found to be another major area of concern impeding communicative interaction. This is especially true for advanced learners who already have relatively good linguistic knowledge, as stated by CSM below.

- (4) I do not worry much about grammar or vocabulary, but I don't have anything to talk about. A long time ago, I had an opportunity to talk to a native speaker about the Olympic Games. At that time I did not have many things to say about the Olympic Games because I do not like sports. I could not maintain the topic and thus changed topics. In particular, when native speakers talk about science, it's boring and I say nothing, simply listening to them. (#11 CSM)

CSM obtained a high score of 620 on the TOEFL test. His dilemma seems to reflect what most of the higher-level speakers face. Since they do not have much background knowledge, they cannot get into in-depth discussion, even though they are well equipped with linguistic knowledge.

## 3) Interactional Domain

The interactional domain covers many different contexts, some more interrelated than others. However, underlying all of these factors is interaction with others, specifically, influences from outside. Table 2 reveals that teacher pressure (item 27)<sup>3)</sup> and peer pressure (item 28 plus item 26)<sup>4)</sup> are the most

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3) While item 27 involves teacher pressure, other items such as frequent error corrections are indirectly related to teacher pressure.

4) While items 28 and 26 involve peer pressure, other items such as speaking in class vs. out of class, and making mistakes are indirectly related to peer pressure.

frequently recurrent patterns. These can be considered as socio-cultural factors. Brown (2000) stated that “culturally, American society differs considerably from a number of other societies where it is improper to speak out extensively in the classroom” (p. 155). This is especially true in Korean culture in which it is traditionally considered impolite to speak out in front of old people, including the teacher. Even worse, a Korean teacher’s authoritative attitude is likely to prevent learners from speaking out in the process of learning.

More serious than teacher pressure is learners’ awareness of their peers, as HJA, a young university student, stated:

- (5) When someone speaks in class, I look at him or her. Likewise, other students will look at me and listen to me when I speak in English in class. In particular, many female students do not like someone who speaks a lot in class, finding fault with his or her speaking skills, attitudes, errors, etc. This is more serious in a large-size class where female students are predominant. (#8 HJA)

HJA seems to be influenced in one way or another by the way other classmates think and speak and behave. Given the fact that she expressed her hatred of female students’ gossip, it seems that she was recognizing female peers as foes, not friends, to oral interaction. Peer pressure of this kind that the young student encounters is in some sense unlike what older adult-level learners experience. Compare HJA’s comments with those of LSJ, at the age of 54, who runs a small trading company.

- (6) I am always conscious of other students. I wonder how they think about what I speak. So I think twice before I speak in English, trying to be fluent without making grammatical errors. I try to be better and be a good model in my class because I am much older than my classmates. I sometimes feel ashamed of myself because I am learning English with young university students similar in age to my children. (#9 LSJ)

Unlike HJA, LSJ puts much importance on ‘face-saving’. When she speaks in English in front of young university students, she seems to have an emotional

burden, thinking that a good command of English is important in not losing face. The tendency to save face in Korean culture is more evident in the case of older learners, like LSJ, than younger students. This socio-cultural factor throws the learners into reserved or hesitating situations in the communication class.

## 2. Quantitative Analysis

As already noted, the construction of the questionnaire was based on the interview data. Thus, the categories on the questionnaire are similar to those of the interviews. The questionnaire involved five-point Likert scale: 1 strongly disagree; 2 disagree; 3 neutral; 4 agree; 5 strongly agree. Table 3 reports the results of the questionnaire according to overall categories.

**TABLE 3**  
**Results of the Questionnaire According to Overall Categories**

	Ling	Sche	Cog	Affec	Inter	Others
Mean	3.33	3.20	3.20	3.01	2.97	3.12

Ling = Linguistic Domain; Sche = Schematic Domain; Cog = Cognitive Domain  
Affec = Affective Domain; Inter = Interactional Domain

The linguistic domain (M=3.33) is the most serious barrier to communication followed by the schematic and cognitive domains, whereas the interactional domain (M=2.97) is the least serious. Learners seem to think that they do not have enough linguistic knowledge for communication. This finding is congruent with the interview results shown earlier. However, the finding of the interviews that peer pressure (item 28 plus item 26) was a strong inhibitor is not in line with the results of the questionnaire. The table also shows that learners have relatively high degree of difficulty in most of the domains including the linguistic, schematic, and cognitive domains.

On the other hand, the six overall domains can be reconsidered in terms of each individual item. The results are tabulated in Table 4.

**TABLE 4**  
**Mean Scores of the Individual Items on the Questionnaire**

Domain	Individual Items	Mean
Linguistic	1. lack of grammar	3.51
Domain	2. word order	3.26
	3. lack of vocabulary	3.61
	4. lack of colloquial expressions	3.76
	5. poor pronunciation	2.85
	6. L2 speakers don't understand L1's speaking	3.03
	7. L1 speakers don't understand L2's speaking	3.17
	8. speaking speed	3.46
	Schematic	9. lack of various topics
Domain	10. lack of knowledge about a topic	3.42
	11. lack of L2 culture	3.05
	12. cultural differences between L1 and L2	2.76
Cognitive	13. thinking in L1 and speaking in L2	3.48
Domain	14. cognitive differences between L1 & L2	2.73
	15. difficulty in using existing knowledge	3.52
	16. thinking too much	3.26
	17. adult's abstract thinking process	3.05
Affective	18. introversion	3.12
Domain	19. lack of risk-taking	3.39
	20. anxiety	2.99
	21. self-esteem	2.45
	22. lack of motivation	3.11
Interactional	23. few chances to speak with L2 speakers	3.38
Domain	24. speaking in class vs. out of class	2.64
	25. speaking with L1 vs. L2 speakers	2.61
	26. being overwhelmed by proficient learners	3.24
	27. teacher's evaluation	3.20
	28. peer's evaluation	3.20
	29. making mistakes	3.45
	30. frequent error corrections	2.06
	Others	31. lack of time and money
	32. problems in the educational system	3.55
	33. lack of early English education	3.27

The following is the order of some major factors according to degree of

obstacles perceived by the learners: lack of colloquial expressions > lack of vocabulary > lack of various topics > problems in the educational system > difficulty in using existing knowledge > lack of grammar. Among the top six obstacles, three were linguistic, one schematic, and one institutional. Lack of colloquial expressions (M=3.76) carried the greatest weight of difficulties. In contrast, the opposite result was true in the interview data.

The next major barrier to communication was lack of vocabulary (M=3.61), which is confirmed by the same trend in the qualitative approach shown earlier. This finding can be interpreted in two ways. First, though learners have a large reading vocabulary, their communications vocabulary is much smaller. Second, they fail to utilize the words they know at the appropriate time for producing new information, and thus they feel as if they lack lexical competence. Indeed, communication breakdown occurs in many cases when learners do not know an appropriate word at the appropriate time (Jung, 2000) or when they cannot utilize the words inherent in their cognitive structure for conveying new messages. The latter interpretation is partially supported by another major barrier to communication: difficulty in using existing knowledge (M=3.52). This trouble occurs probably because Korean learners have been trained by rote learning (Jung & Kang, 2005). Thus, it seems clear that many Korean learners have a certain amount of knowledge, but most have difficulty using existing knowledge for producing new information.

Similar interpretation is also true for the learners' perceptions about the lack of grammar (M=3.51). The adult learners had been trained under the grammar translation method (Li, 1998), which is heavily focused on much grammar and vocabulary. Thus, they might have been oriented toward unusable grammar rules and vocabulary. The results indicate either that some may not have enough grammar knowledge to communicate or perhaps that others may fail to utilize relevant grammatical structures in their cognitive structure at the appropriate time, hesitating in the oral interactions.

Another area of concern very frequently mentioned by the learners is a general lack of various topics (M=3.58). This is corroborated by the results of the qualitative analysis. This makes clear that learners have trouble reconciling their background knowledge with linguistic knowledge. Since linguistic knowledge itself does not carry meaning, effective communication "depends on

the efficient interaction between linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world” (Brown, 2001, p. 300).

In addition to the factors mentioned in Table 4, some learners gave responses to the open-ended question. Some comments are summarized below.

- (7) Because other people speak Korean, I alone cannot speak English.
- (8) There are not enough well-qualified teachers for teaching communication.
- (9) There are no appropriate textbooks for communication.
- (10) There are students with multiple proficiency levels in the same class.

## V. DISCUSSION

The qualitative and quantitative approaches revealed some interesting similarities and differences. Similarities existed in the linguistic influence across the two approaches, but such is not the case with the influence of peer pressure. The differences may stem largely from different samplings: The qualitative approach includes many older learners as well as university students, whereas the quantitative approach focused primarily on young university learners. Those who had graduated, and those who had not, manifested somewhat different sorts of dilemmas in the process of communication. This is understandable given the fact that there is a gap between the older and younger generations in the way they think, the way they speak, and the amount they have learned and experienced, which may influence their perceptions of communication difficulties.

Park (2003) mentioned that qualitative and quantitative approaches have different goals: the former aims to describe just as what is, to uncover patterns or theories that help explain a phenomenon, whereas the latter aims to determine whether the predictive generalizations of a theory hold true. In our discussion it seems reasonable to focus on the findings which are common in both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Among the common findings is the learner perception that lack of vocabulary is a major trouble-maker in their communications. Researchers, including Thornbury (2002), recommended a core vocabulary of 2,000 to 3,000 high frequency words except for more specialized

needs. If so, Korean adult learners have already learned more than 3,000 words since middle school. This suggests the possibility that they have the misconception that knowing a huge amount of words is a key to success in communication. As mentioned earlier, they might have learned words by a rote-learning strategy in which entities are not organized in the cognitive structure. Thus, they have much lexical knowledge, but most have difficulty using that existing knowledge for producing new information.

In order to cope with this difficulty, it seems first necessary for the teacher to guide students to change that misconception, if they are deceived by it. The fact that students reported great difficulties in using their existing knowledge suggests that teachers should encourage them to make effective use of words they already know for facilitating communication. For this, teachers should capitalize on vocabulary strategy training. For instance, if students cannot think of particular words while communicating, they can use a paraphrasing or an approximation strategy by using alternative terms they already know, to express the target term as closely as possible. In response to the learner comment that Korean EFL classes rely heavily on reading-based vocabulary, teachers should be attuned to the importance of a well-rounded selection of vocabulary as between the literary and communicative needs of students.

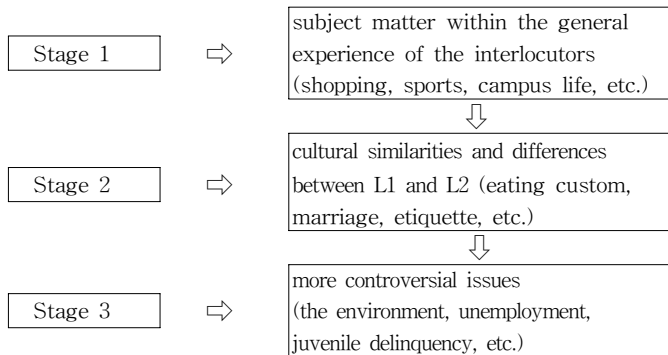
A similar problem lies in the fact that the learners assessed lack of grammar, particularly word order difference, as one of the greatest barriers to communication. This view is a little surprising because it is not in accordance with many researchers' views (Celce-Murcia, 1991) that grammar does not play a major role in speaking. Nor is it congruent with the general belief that Korean EFL learners have relatively much grammar knowledge. For some learners, more grammar knowledge may be required for effective communication, but for many others, more important may be utilizing for communication what they already have in their memories. The role of the teacher in this case is to diagnose how much grammar knowledge their learners have and how much they are oriented toward grammar which serves a basis for communication. One way of enhancing communicative grammar is to analyze native speakers' conversations, focusing on what structures are widely used in their communication. On the basis of that analysis, teachers should give students guidelines and practice on how to utilize grammar structures in particular



contexts to convey their intended meaning. This can be facilitated through role playing using different situations where different structures are potentially used.

It was also shown that many learners attributed their poor communication performance to lack of background knowledge. In fact, the importance of background knowledge has been emphasized in Korean EFL research on listening (Park, 2001) and on reading (Park, 2004), but not on speaking. In the present study the learners perceived a lack of background knowledge as negatively influencing communication. In order to overcome this difficulty, teachers should provide a variety of possible topics the interlocutors can talk about. Figure 1 presents steps for activating background knowledge.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Steps for Activating Background Knowledge**



Once the learners have a particular topic to discuss, they should be equipped with as much information as possible to make the dialogue transactional, exchanging detailed information. In this case, the Internet is at the cutting edge for enriching background knowledge. Sufficient background knowledge enables students to get into in-depth discussion, sustaining the topic.

While the discussion so far has focused on these findings which are common in both qualitative and quantitative approaches, it may also be worthwhile to make some helpful suggestions about two influential factors: cognitive factors shown from the quantitative approach and interactional factors shown from the

qualitative approach. In order to overcome cognitive factors, it seems first necessary for the learners to move from rote learning to meaningful learning. Specifically, they should practice how to utilize what they have in their cognitive structure for producing new information. What is as important as this is that learners should try to think and speak using the target language as their communication ability increases. The following activities would be helpful: reading materials written in English, understanding native users' ways of thinking, and watching TV programs and movies showing native speakers' ways of thinking. In particular, it is important to pay attention to the differences in ways of thinking between native speakers and Korean learners, or to English expressions which reflect cognitive differences between the two different speaking groups.

It was shown from the qualitative analysis that peer pressure is a strong communication inhibitor. This finding is in line with Park's qualitative studies (2004a, 2004b). In order to reduce peer pressure, it is important to enhance rapport or solidarity between interlocutors. One way to do this is to activate pair work and group work, because group work, as Brown (2001) pointed out, will generate interactive language and offer an embracing affective climate. These will be more effective in large size classrooms. Since Korean learners have been trained under a teacher-centered approach (Li, 1998), they are not accustomed to cooperative learning with their peers. The learners conscious of their peers should recognize that they can get help from them through cooperative learning. As pointed out earlier, peers should be considered as partners, not as enemies.

## **V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

This study identified thirty three factors which block pathways to effective communication at the adult level. While the learners' opinions varied as to the relative difficulty of those factors, some patterns which emerged consistently from both the qualitative and quantitative data included lack of vocabulary, grammar, and background knowledge as detrimental to active participation in communication. A teacher's role in coping with such difficulties is to test

whether the learners really have such a low level of vocabulary and grammar knowledge that they fail to communicate. If they do, the teacher should orient them toward practical vocabulary and grammar. If they do not, the teacher should convince them that much vocabulary and grammar are not a panacea for remedying all cases of communication breakdown.

Going back to earlier points, diagnosis of learner difficulties in communication should serve as a good underpinning for devising communicative syllabi, methods, skills, and techniques. Only when the diagnosis of learner difficulties including those identified in this study serves as a good basis can teachers tailor these classroom activities to the needs of their students.

This study did not consider such variables as gender, proficiency, major, or students' stay in English speaking countries. In future studies, it may be worthwhile to investigate how these variables influence learner difficulties in oral interactions.

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## APPENDIX

### Questionnaire

#### I. 일반적 질문

1. 성별: (남 / 여)    2. 연령: \_\_\_\_\_    3. 전공: \_\_\_\_\_
4. 당신은 지금까지 영어를 몇 년 동안 공부했습니까? \_\_\_\_\_
5. 당신은 영어권 나라에 체류한 적이 있습니까?     YES     NO  
있다면 얼마나 체류했습니까? \_\_\_\_\_
6. 영어회화의 향상을 위해 학원에 다닌 적이 있습니까?     YES     NO  
있다면 얼마나 다녔습니까? \_\_\_\_\_
7. 공인된 외국어능력시험을 본 적이 있습니까?     YES     NO  
있다면 어떤 시험을 봤습니까?  
TOEIC: \_\_\_\_\_점    TOEFL: \_\_\_\_\_점    TEPS: \_\_\_\_\_점
8. 당신의 영어회화 수준은 어느 정도 된다고 생각하십니까?  
① 매우 낮다    ② 약간 낮다    ③ 보통이다    ④ 약간 높다    ⑤ 매우 높다
9. 당신은 요즘 원어민과 영어로 대화를 나누고 있습니까?     YES     NO
10. 원어민과 대화를 나누고 있다면, 주당 대화 회수와 시간을 구체적으로 써 주십시오. (주당: \_\_\_\_\_ 회)    (주당 총 시간: \_\_\_\_\_)

II. 아래 각각의 요소들이 당신의 영어회화에 어려움을 초래하는 정도를 해당란에 체크하십시오. 각 문항의 오른쪽에 1 2 3 4 5 는 어려움의 정도를 나타냅니다.

1 매우 그렇지 않다 2 그렇지 않다 3 보통이다 4 그러하다 5 매우 그러하다

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 1. 문법이 약하여 문장구조를 형성하지 못하여 영어회화가 어렵다.                     | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. 한국어와 영어가 어순이 달라서 영어회화가 어렵다.                           | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. 말하려고 하는 어휘를 몰라서 영어회화가 어렵다.                            | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. 영어의 구어적 표현을 몰라서 영어회화가 어렵다.                            | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. 영어 발음이나 강세, 억양에 자신이 없어 영어회화가 어렵다.                     | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. 원어민이 말한 것을 이해할 수 없어서 영어회화가 어렵다.                       | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 7. 내가 하는 말을 원어민이 이해하지 못할 때 영어회화가 어렵다.                    | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. 말의 속도가 너무 빨라서 영어회화가 어렵다.                              | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 9. 영어 회화할 때 다양한 주제가 떠오르지 않아 한계를 느낀다                      | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. 특정한 하나의 주제에 대한 배경지식이 약하여 그 주제에 대해 길게 얘기하지 못한다.       | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 11. 영어권 문화에 대한 지식이 부족하여 영어회화가 어렵다.                       | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 12. 한국과 영어권 문화내용의 차이점에 대한 지식이 약하여 영어회화에 한계를 느낀다.         | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 13. 한국어로 생각하고 난 후 영어로 표현하는 것이 어렵다.                       | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 14. 한국인과 원어민의 사고관 차이로 인해 영어회화가 어렵다.                      | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 15. 머릿속에 들어있는 지식은 많으나 상황마다 활용하여 새로운 표현을 구성하여 옮기는 것이 어렵다. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 16. 지나친 자아의식을 가지고 생각을 많이 하여 하고 싶은 말을 바깥으로 표출하는데 어려움이 있다. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 17. 유년기보다 성인이 되어 더 추상적 사고방식을 가지므로 영어회화에 장해요소가 된다.        | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 18. 소심한 성격으로 인해 영어회화가 어렵다.                               | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 19. 과감한 시도가 부족하여 영어회화에 한계가 있다.                           | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 20. 좌절감, 자기의심 등의 불안, 걱정이 영어회화에 저해가 된다.                   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 21. 자존심이 너무 강하여 영어회화에 방해가 된다.                            | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 22. 동기가 부족하여 영어회화에 진전이 없다.                               | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 23. 원어민과 대화할 기회가 부족해서 영어회화에 한계가 있다.                      | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 24. 원어민을 개인적으로 만나면 회화가 잘 되나 수업때는 잘 안 된다.                 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 25. 한국인 선생님과과는 영어회화가 잘 되지만 원어민과는 잘 안 된다.                 | 1 2 3 4 5 |

26. 한 교실에 말을 잘 하는 사람이 있으면 위축되어 회화가 잘 안된다. 1 2 3 4 5
27. 선생님이 나의 회화실력을 평가한다고 생각하니 회화가 잘 안 된다. 1 2 3 4 5
28. 친구들이 나의 회화실력을 지켜본다고 생각하니 회화가 잘 안된다. 1 2 3 4 5
29. 오류를 범할까봐 자신이 없어 말을 시작하기가 어렵다. 1 2 3 4 5
30. 말을 할 때 원어민이 너무 자주 고쳐줘서 회화에 방해가 된다. 1 2 3 4 5
31. 시간적, 경제적 여유가 부족해서 회화에 장애요소가 된다. 1 2 3 4 5
32. 대학 입시제도와 시험 중점의 학교제도가 회화에 저해요소가 된다. 1 2 3 4 5
33. 좀더 어린 시기에 영어회화를 하지 못해서 한계를 느낀다. 1 2 3 4 5
34. 기타 영어회화를 어렵게 만드는 요소가 있으면 구체적으로 쓰시오

**예시언어 (Examples in): English**

**적용가능 언어(Applicable Languages): English**

**적용가능 수준(Applicable Levels): University or above**

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